



Balance • Growth • Awareness

'Sense and Responsibility in an Imperfect World'

Chapter 1 in Responsibility and its Avoidance; essays in public management and governance.

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1. Sense and responsibility in an imperfect world

Looking back through the thoughts and observations that follow through twenty something short chapters I find that there is a common underlying theme. The subject matter is about governance and public management and the curious ways in which these matters are discussed and made manifest in the modern or post-modern era. But a recurring theme is about truth, power and the exercise of responsibility within inevitable imperfection.

As 'citizen' – my principle identity in these essays – I am prone to hope – perhaps to suspend disbelief – that those 'set in authority over us' have a superior ability to decipher truth in the complex world around us and to exercise their power responsibly. This is a comfortable position; a lazy position. It seems that much of the population, much of the time adopts this posture. It takes adverse trends or horrible happenings to prove this to be an illusion.

As '60s Sociologist' – another guise – I learned that power corrupts, disguises itself and often times has to be countered. Change takes place through conflict as well as quiet erosion of once valued norms. Underneath any apparent consensus seethe innumerable schools of disbelief; hid only through exclusion from the media and the corridors of power, occasionally breaking surface, as in the Aldermaston Nuclear Disarmament marches of the 50s and 60s, or the 'Stop the War' campaign of 2003 that failed to cramp the style of Tony Blair. Sometimes also alternative views or ideologies find nurture in institutions of higher education. There, like Milton Friedman and the monetarist economists in the 50s and 60s, they champ at the bit on the sidelines until picked up by some politician looking for a radical sounding programme to assert within the national polity; enter Mrs Thatcher upon the British scene. Who lurks there now? I know not.

'Modern' is a notion of widespread political appeal, in large part because it is defined to mean nothing in particular, except that it is good. 'Modernisation' the process, likewise allows for all sorts of enterprises to be conducted under its spell. Many of my essays were written through the years of New Labour shake up of post W/W2 certainties when one form of modern was confronted with something very different under the same label. The moral enthusiasm of the 'Third Way' advocates set the unstable parameters within which those of us



Balance • Growth • Awareness

who taught or did governance type things – in my case development projects overseas – were supposed to work. Making sense of the contradictions in the trade can be a constant preoccupation. These essays are testament.

Imperfection can be readily accepted as an everyday social reality, recognised in world religions as a normal human weakness; in the Biblical tradition, as resulting in the Fall of Man that followed Adam's transgression with an apple. To accept human imperfection has several practical implications for understanding behaviour within institutions and in management [Chapters 5, 6, 9]. It calls for tolerance. The acceptance of imperfection in self and others also puts people in the position that they must exercise responsibility and not just play a role. This leads to workability; matters of adjustment, compromise but also personal commitment. Denial of imperfection is dangerous. Social life is about exchange and there is no exchange with those who claim perfection.

In post-modern times I have had to come to terms with language and modes of analysis that take the social construction of reality for granted; as philosophically inescapable. The Anthropologist in me, a third identity; emerged in my post-grad studies and has reasserted itself in recent years, finds it relatively easy to recognise that people everywhere have to construct understandings that attempt to make sense of their worlds. Such understandings are imperfect, even those of science, and leave much to be managed socially that that is challenging or even threatening. There are going to be a lot of differing understandings around; some uncomfortable, because experiences differ. Fair enough. I am in favour of pluralism. But, reverting to citizen again, what is more difficult to come to terms with as a UK resident is the slippery nature of the social constructs that we face in our everyday politics and in the ongoing management of public affairs. Truth, it seems, belongs to s/he who constructs it and who can persuade others of its contingent value within the political economy of the day. How do we interpret the results? Do we go with Antonio Gramsci's ponderings from his prison cell [1929-1935], giving new impetus to Marx's idea of false consciousness [Chapter 13]? Might we align with Michel Foucault [1926-1984]? He had ideas - I find them quite disturbing - on the ways in which governments structure their programmes and institutions so that they mould citizens into compliance [Chapter 18].

Many are the guises of truth; so I conclude. Amidst shaky structures and slippery concepts what, if anything, can be trusted by persons of serious commitment to human wellbeing? Nothing, perhaps, save the evidence of serious intent itself. Those who would do good – good for people or good for the planet - must struggle within existing structures and construct anew to achieve their ends.



Balance • Growth • Awareness

Governance

'Governance' is in. The environment lacks good governance and is a source of anxiety as a result. Some countries appear to lack it altogether and are known as 'failed states'. Banks, we know must do it better. Government officials should have their mind-sets expanded to take in the notion and escape the confines of their rather rigid rule books. That ants and bees do it with apparent sophistication, even though they lack central command and control is a cause of wonder. Yet, like many things that we deem to be good, there is huge uncertainty as to what it is and how it is achieved. These accumulated essays come at the matter obliquely. This does not show a lack of concern but rather a realisation that, in an imperfect world, effective, or good, governance is somewhat elusive. It is difficult to define and even more difficult to create. Going straight at it - the world seems full of reform programmes, restructuring exercises and their like [let alone regime changes] - seldom has the outcomes intended. Simple statements of principle - 'transparency', 'accountability', 'decentralisation', or formulaic prescriptions [democratic society, market socialism] disguise more than they reveal. So, in tackling the governance theme I take a reflective route. First I want to see what is. Then perhaps; what might be.

Seeing sounds simple but a philosophical problem must be acknowledged at the start. To see at all; certainly to see anything as abstract as governance institutions, the mind has to be programmed with concepts that can be attached to the things. Men sitting in a semicircle under a tree in an African village are just that, until one notes the rituals that underlie their behaviour towards each other, or to the person who sits at their head; and notes also the subject of their discourse. Then it can be seen as village government. Having noted the semicircle, the separated location and symbolism of headship the same formula can be located with ease in courts and council chambers in many lands [and register the oddity of the UK House of Commons with its confrontational seating pattern]; the beginnings of a mind map onto which to pin the concepts. But another degree of abstraction is necessary to note the inter-relationships between institutions - cabinet, parliament, press, networks - through which power plays and which shape governance outcomes for the nation [Chapter 12]. Students of governance have a lot of mind-mapping to do and, at the end, their view is still constrained by such cartography. I had better say something about my own vision.

So how do I see? To see, at the level of happenings, a number of assumptions must be made:

- People have three types of mental tool for dealing with social control or governance issues; they seek to deal with each other or with the

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institutions in their environment through interaction as individuals, they seek solidarity with or against others, or they seek to establish a position in relation to hierarchy, a matter of subordination or super-ordination. These responses pull in different directions, setting up different social dynamics. They underlie the day-to-day politics of institutions or of public policy.

- Both government and wider forms of responsible governance depend upon basic forms of agreement, contracts and so on, biased towards one or other of the above mental tools, but all are slippery; the more so when manipulated by people in power [Chapter 2].
- Basic governance structures such as the institutions that make up democracy, or bureaucracy, or property, have their histories and rationales but their dynamics come from the ways in which people use them, and through use or misuse, change them. Much then depends upon people, the values that they pursue, the mind-sets they employ and the actions they take within the environments that surround them.

Outcomes of any particular set of interactions in any particular context are not easy to predict. All contexts differ. These essays are reflections upon some situations or happenings; what they share is frameworks of interpretation.

Governance and public management

Governance I have taken to be about some form of social control - or another. There are, of course, innumerable social conditions such as drugs on the streets, or economic circumstances such as collapse of banks, or environmental trends, such as global warming that cry out for better governance, some of which have exercised me in these essays. The use of the word governance rather than government is more than a fashion. It allows that there are many potential ways of achieving social control besides setting up a central body, some of which involve many different agents working together, or in opposition to each other, but still with governance outcomes.

Management is about getting things done, in one way or another. I could say again; there is a lot that could be better managed. The 'how' of it in either case - how govern, how manage - will have something to do with the nature of the task and the characteristics of the context. Both 'task' and 'context' are rather complicated, and, as I have stated above, adding the word modern does not bring clarity.



Balance • Growth • Awareness

I find that I can go further. Theory creeps in. Underlying the observations in the essays are two different sets of ideas or frameworks. One line of thought draws from economics to note the characteristics of 'goods'; a 'public good', such as clean air being, if there at all, available to all regardless and difficult to exclude, a common good, such as village pond or a cooperative society being only achieved if shared but from which non-contributors can be excluded. A private good – economics primers always refer to an apple – is both divisible and individually consumable. These different kinds of goods structure choice in different ways. Many minds have been busy over the last half-century in seeing how these notions fit with or tie into ideas about institutions and forms of governance. Here the game playing, observing, theorising Professor Elinor Ostrom has been my guide.¹ Through elaborate simulation exercises – Axelrod having led the way – competitive individualism was shown to be quite compatible with cooperative strategies, given enough 'plays' to provide for learning. The governed common became recognised as an institutional base. But a problem has since emerged. Given a lot more plays in the real world and a lot more emergent institutional forms – think financial derivatives – and chaotic patterns of de-institutionalisation and distrust spin out of the same process.

I put this economic theorising together with a bit of anthropology – an odd and much contested bit of anthropology, called Cultural Theory, Professor Mary Douglas becoming, if you like, my second academic mentor. Mary Douglas's approach can be contrasted with what the work Ostrom and her Political Economy associates in that she sees social institutions as outcomes of as well as purveyors of deep processes within society; to do with security, anxiety, risk and other human contingencies. Nevertheless, the Douglas schema, like the political economists, accepts that there are basically three ways in which societies achieve necessary coordination; they build hierarchies [sometimes as states], they look for solidarity in groups [communities, civil society organisations] and/or they interact as individuals [through markets or networks or other types of dyadic exchange]. This sounds simple, though the key finding about these modes of coordination is that they build upon quite contradictory sets of values and relationships which do not always fit well together and often leave the conceptual door open to quite irrational, even perverse kinds of social reasoning and behaviour.

These three basic but contrasting principles of coordination in human action underlie grand theories of society, actual constitutions and social structures as

¹ Ostrom, E. (1909). *Governing the Commons*. Cambridge [and innumerable other works from the same pen]



Balance • Growth • Awareness

well as working rules and practices of everyday living. What we have to work with are:

- ◆ rank ordering [as in bureaucracies];
- ◆ cooperating [as in teams, communities or groups];
- ◆ and individualist exchange [evident in markets and networks].

The underlying values are contrasting if not conflicting. I do not claim [as others do] that these are the only principles of coordination in society. But I would point to their recurrence within basic institutions that operate, imperfectly, in any society and that their contradictory logics pervade political ideologies, constitutional structures of all kinds, as well as current management theory and practice.

My focus has therefore been on institutions, seen as 'rules in use', attempting to work out how social purposes are negotiated through them. Institutions are embedded practices that have evolved or been implanted to give people predictable ways of doing business, making peace or waging war, living in communities, resolving conflicts or achieving other social purposes. The principles of hierarchy, or mutuality or individualism intertwine at basic levels and are accepted and used because they enable things to be done; individuals to exchange goods and services relatively unencumbered by social obligation, able to cooperate to achieve tasks that must be shared, willing to subordinate their will to another for the public good. But to recognise these simplicities does not take us far. No institution is a pure type. Indeed, some kind of blend seems to be necessary but one principle will be dominant. For instance, the UK civil service – though now under pressure from an individualist culture – would appear to be dominantly hierarchical but has always featured 'old boy' networks and, in some respects, behaves like a club. Power-play within resulting institutions provides plenty of opportunities for conflicts of purpose and action. Many unforeseen consequences stem from an apparently 'wrong' principle being allowed to dominate; instance a bonus culture invading the civil service [Chapter 12].

Unintended consequences can also be located in the field of management and follow from the first. Three kinds of control technique go with the three kinds of coordination:

- ◆ regulation and target setting, an adjunct of hierarchical 'command and control';
- ◆ mutuality, requiring adherence to team structures and processes and;



Balance • Growth • Awareness

- ◆ personal incentives and bonuses that fit with the individualism of the market.

In this managerialist age techniques become free-floating, detachable from basic questions of motivation and reward, granting managers powers that sometimes completely distort an organisation. Think; centrally dictated quantitative performance measures in academe [Chapter 9]; or market players corrupted by state funding [Chapter 3] or sending big hierarchical military battalions to fight networks of terrorists [Chapter 16]. While the apparent liberalism of New Public Management gave recognition to all three types of motivation and reward, in practice command and control has usually morphed into new forms through central monitoring and accountability measures [Chapters 2 to 5 and passim].

While the essays are mostly about the odd ways in which governance works out in practice – and what this does for attempted responsibility – it is recognised that there are also biases in the ways in which people think as they perform their roles. Practice is a product of mind-set and – in a circular way – mind-set is an outcome of experience with the ups and downs of practice. I attempt to capture these forms of bias through metaphor, finding likenesses in rural landscape and farming, associating:

- ◆ hierarchical thinking with the uniformity evident in monocrop farming;
- ◆ group culture with the conservation practices of a well-tended garden;
- ◆ while at best, individualist thinking opens the way to the diversity and self-regulating characteristics of an English meadow [Chapter 4].

Each type of thinking is manifest in types of social structure and organisation, underlying state, civil society and market. But is also apparent in personal behaviour. The ways in which the UK government views the people that it governs is suggestive. The words consumer, customer and citizen – all used by Whitehall – imply quite different understandings of what the ordinary 'man or woman in the street' might be thinking about their status or responsibility within governance.

- ◆ 'Consumer' is surely a recipient, as of welfare entitlements.
- ◆ 'Customer' is a person with choice, as if in a market.
- ◆ 'Citizen' alone suggests a role of active responsibility – though the texts examined here speak more of entitlements than obligations or responsibilities.



Balance • Growth • Awareness

No doubt most of us can exhibit all three kinds of thinking and are not particularly consistent in our mental habits. But some may also feel themselves to be outsiders, alienated from all forms of thinking, if not quite the 'lumpen prole' that I sometimes take myself to be [Chapter 23, see also Chapter 18].

Human perversity adds to the unintended consequences of purposive action. To develop basic ideas in economics and the social sciences about how and under what circumstances people cooperate it has been necessary to recognise that people are inclined to cheat if they can get away with it. 'Organisation man or woman' spends much time and energy in cajoling, gossiping, praising and otherwise ensuring that people 'pull their weight'. A more insidious tendency is 'moral hazard' which I have expanded from its strict economic interpretation to note, for instance, how an opposition political party will promote an agenda which it could not pursue in power, simply to embarrass the party in power which is obliged to face realities. Moral hazard is about not being obliged to take responsibility for one's actions because someone else apparently is – or claims to be [Chapter 22]. Human coordination has never been easy. Complex governance structures emerge out of struggles to achieve workable, predictable, functionally effective relationships; and don't survive or adapt without constant struggle. They are only really dangerous when failing; when risk goes wrong. Then the mask tends to slip from the face of power and dire things happen [Chapters 13, 14 and 20].

The make-up of institutions

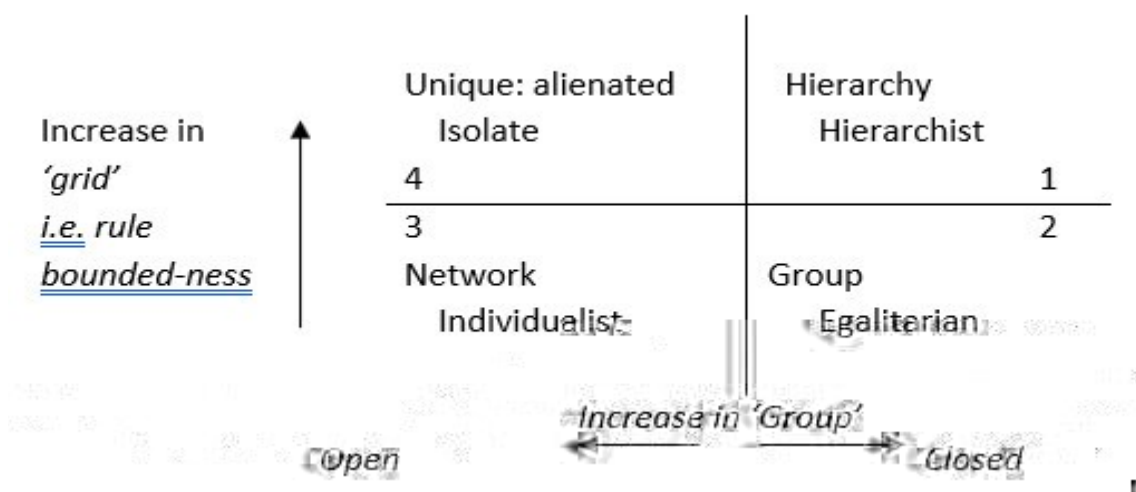
"Writing about cooperation and solidarity means writing at the same time about rejection and mistrust", so begins Mary Douglas in her essay on '*How Institutions Think*'.² As an anthropologist Mary Douglas explores how people – not institutions of course – think in different institutional contexts. Her work has been developed by herself and others for use in a vast range of social contexts.³ This thinking does not reduce to what the modern mind denotes as rational. Douglas thought that the many different kinds of social structure that one finds in society – any society – could usefully be sorted on the basis of two sets of characteristics, namely the degree to which they are open or group based on the one hand and the degree to which they are relatively rule-free or rule-bound on the other. This she termed a 'group/grid' classification. The scheme is presented as a two by two matrix, **Figure 1**, which identifies three types of

2 Douglas, M. (1986). *How institutions Think*. Sage, London; (1992) *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge; (1996) *Thought Styles* Sage, London.

3 Thompson, M., Ellis, R. and Wildavsky, A. (1990). *Cultural Theory*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford; Hood, C. (1998). *The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric and Public Management*, Oxford, Clarendon.

institutional values, hierarchy, mutuality and individualism that guide coordination behaviour in society and a fourth space that she sees as the culture of the isolate or misfit. The latter I interpret as the culture of someone more done unto than doing, and expand to include the notion of alienation. Leaving aside this last box within the Douglas matrix for the moment, we can see that Douglas is thus far treading over ground that many other analysts have reached from other observational or logical starting points.

Figure 1
Douglas's Grid Group system



Economic thinking has long identified state [being hierarchical], club [being group] as well as market [being individualist]. State has been taken as a necessity but is granted a severely limited role in the economic universe. Club, or anything with an element of common good about it was left in the intellectual wilderness until analysts, notably Elinor Ostrom, worked out that cooperation could be achieved if people wanted it enough, tried often enough and tried persistently enough. Market, the sphere within which competition can reign is central to the discipline and has been subject to most elaboration but economic thinking came ultimately to accept that three different kinds of social coordination can be found, live and kicking in the real world that they, and others, seek to understand. Coming at the issue as an experienced manager and management consultant, Charles Handy made similar distinctions in identifying types of management.⁴ He saw hierarchy as a role culture, symbolised as a temple complete with columns and pediment; columns representing divisions,

⁴ Handy, C. (1978). *Gods of Management* [1985 edition Pan Books Reading].



Balance • Growth • Awareness

the pyramid at the top the levels of a unified command. The club he presented as a spider's web, circles of inclusion, all tied to the centre, communicating through the empathy of like minds. His third culture was symbolised by a net. This he saw as a task culture, resources being allocated to particular tasks and people, communications flowing as necessary through the net. [All this was before the World Wide Web facilitated a much wider interest in network thinking].

It is true that there are differences in the way that these and other thinkers, from separate disciplines, put boundaries around these concepts and include or exclude particular patterns of behaviour. Charles Handy's fourth category, one he terms as an 'Existential Culture' and links with the Greek God of Wine, Dionysus, is like Mary Douglas's Isolate culture except that the latter is the culture of the 'put upon' while the former serves to describe the self-assured individualist star; instance the tenured university professor. These are truly different conditions; but my chapter on 'Governing Professors' [Chapter 9] illustrates how the one can become the other very easily.⁵ Handy was a manager keen on management. I was a university based person increasingly subject to hierarchical management and did not think that being managed in this way added value in my life!

The great strength of Ostrom's approach is that it tests organisational strategy against the nature of the problem that is being addressed, namely turning a common problem [or 'bad'], such as flood, or sinking water table or overgrazed pasture, into a managed common, a common good; what she terms a common property resource (c.p.r.). In doing so Ostrom demonstrated that, a rational individual can come to see the benefit of sustained cooperation in achieving ends that cannot be achieved by that individual acting alone, overcoming problems of cheating along the way. Harvey and other management consultants likewise linked organisational strategy to the nature of the management task being undertaken. **Figure 2** represents my attempt to put this understanding of task or purpose into Douglas's matrix. It is an attempt to relate types of culture to the nature of social undertakings.

Figure 2
Types of task and patterns of coordination

⁵ This may be a matter of perspective. Handy states "Dionysian cultures are splendid places to work in. I have worked in one myself, a university. Professionals usually have job security, agreed fee scales, allocated territories..... This is marvellous for them. But not for those who have to lead or organise or manage such people". [p30].

Unique, unknown, threatening challenge			Routine, certain, predictable, tasks that can be managed through division of labour
	4 The alienated isolate [occasional charismatic]	1 Hierarchical chain	
	Individualist Networker 3	Group / Team 2	
Tasks requiring external or unprecedented collaboration			Tasks that require concerted actions, necessarily coordinated

Figure 2 seeks to establish the kinds of social task which hierarchy biased institutions, group biased institutions and individualist biased institutions are – should in principle be – good at undertaking.

In working through the quadrants however it becomes apparent that while institutions may be biased towards one kind of value or another, in the real world one organisational principal usually counterbalanced by others.

Hierarchy, [quadrant 1] as Max Weber classically noted, lends itself to routine, exploiting a disciplined division of labour with clearly specified tasks. Build that into local government, say, and what you get is an institution that tends to be remote from the citizen it serves. Historically UK local government has sought the benefits of large scale, deliverable, professional local services organised on the basis of bureaucratically controlled departments. But hierarchical power needs to be controlled. Public accountability then takes the form of elected representatives sitting on a supervisory council with collective responsibility. This can work well but in recent years the basis of this model has been attacked from two directions. On the one hand national governments of all persuasions have tried to promote the executive 'mayor' as a model - a more individualist



Balance • Growth • Awareness

view of initiative and control. The other thrust has been towards citizen participation. Neither is ideal [Chapter 9].

The individualist, [quadrant 3] prone to networking, comfortable in the market, not comfortable within the constraints of a hierarchy or within the normative commitments of a group, has been beneficiary of most post Thatcher public sector reforms. Advocate of freedom, champion of choice, the individualist is praised [particularly self-praised] for flexibility, adaptability, responsiveness and other qualities that seem to fit a challenged era. An 'On your bike' attitude is indeed a social good. But to know when and how to cooperate with other people is also a social good. Working with others entails **cooperating as a group** [Quadrant 2]. Individualist entrepreneurs sometimes also see the value in market regulation; the imposition of some form of hierarchical control to ensure that competition is fair; 'level playing fields', that sort of thing. When an individualist culture is invited in to a hierarchical organisation such as the civil service or a globally operating bank contradictions can be destructive [Chapters 6 and 15].

Groups share values at some level [Quadrant 2]. In UK local government groups are most obviously found within the political governance of the authority, often party based. Political parties of Left and Right have evolved views of the good life which in principle pass from generation to generation but may not work when challenged by unfamiliar circumstances. Group life is, in any case, not necessarily harmonious. Leadership requires individual initiative and drive but must always be presented in collectivist terms. Factions are common, but a degree of internal discipline is necessary to retain power. Challenges to public authorities often come from the opinions of organised groups outside. Group values are the more easily demonstrated when challenging power rather than exercising power. A group that is self-selecting and voluntary can self-sustain while it remains focused upon its common purpose but breaks down into competitive individualism once its purpose is achieved or appears not achievable.

One value of Cultural Theory as a diagnostic tool is that it also identifies **the alienated** [Quadrant 4]. Isolated or alienated people are a category [not a group] who are done unto rather than doing, subject to power rather than engaged in the social contract through which it is exercised, on the outside of the parties or social groups that seek, struggle and sometimes succeed in shaping the norms and values of society. Most people find themselves outsiders at some time in their lives. It is a dangerous space. Alienated people are, or feel themselves to be, outwith the system, and are open to political adventurers who promote desperate remedies.



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Motivation and reward

The embedded rules of institutions are there to enable people to achieve a purpose. Equally they are about motivation. People will attune themselves to institutional norms if they see that by so doing they can achieve their purpose and be confident that others will also play their part.

- ◆ If you think that you need a boss, then you have to comply with the boss's wish. Your reward; you may be the boss one day; so said Max Weber.
- ◆ If you can only achieve what you want by cooperating with others, then you must play your part and be prepared to put pressure on your partners to do their share.
- ◆ If you can achieve your goal on your own, do so, but remember that you may need help on another occasion and be prepared to reciprocate.

Governing Professors [Chapter 9] includes a discussion of these issues with questions of motivation, rewards and styles of monitoring expressed in a mandala – like diagram. It suggests an ideal. Ideals are seldom manifest in practice.

All approaches to coordination are of course prone to failure; to not achieving the purpose to which the people are aiming. Then what?

Corruption and Failure, Risk and Blame

Institutions evolve as solutions to problems of social needs. They are difficult to create and likewise change only with difficulty. Mary Douglas might almost be taken as a spokesperson for irrationality. Her strength, by contrast to that of Ostrom, is that she shows that cultures – also recognised as 'ways of getting things done' – may come into existence as a response to some socially indicated form of coordination but, once established, tend to persist and can have quite perverse consequences for social action. The first did not need Douglas to identify it; the well-known tendency for power to corrupt.

- ◆ All three cultures [i.e. excluding that of the isolate] evidence the exercise of power, and power corrupts; particularly when it detaches itself from the socially recognised purpose to become power in itself:
 - The hierarchical boss that exploits his/her position for personal advantage and organisational disadvantage [run-away executive pay].



Balance • Growth • Awareness

- The group, intensifying loyalty, turns sect, exercising power that influences other areas of social life [any form of religious or indeed secular, fundamentalism].
 - The individual, deep into a network of exchanges with others, abuses power to monopolise resources or exploit others in his network [any Russian oligarch].
- ◆ A frequent response to the failure of an established culture to produce the goods is to reinforce that culture and blame others:
- failure of hierarchical control leads to tighter controls, blaming the weak or vulnerable for the failure [the normal government explanation of benefit fraud];
 - failure of a group strategy leads to intensifying group values and the discovery of deviant insiders who supposedly caused the failure or threatening outsiders who do not share group interests;
 - failure of a personal venture leads to 'try and try and try again' commitment, blame attributed to 'the fall of the dice'.
- ◆ An established regime, exercising control over significant social resources, lulls most people into a supine avoidance of responsibility. Stakeholders can take to counter valance; they get organised to express a counter view. The counterview may, or may not be a view that they would adopt if they were facing actual responsibility for raising the necessary social resources.

It is this last feature, as much as any, that tends to lock in an institutional regime. However, apparently 'failing' their regime, the holders of power redouble their efforts to demonstrate their own competence while those on the outside of power have little incentive to give realistic thought to the ways in which power might be more competently exercised. In a democratic system the constant temptation open to those in political opposition is to find fault with the schemes and programmes of those in power and to make promises that are not tested against the constraints of political possibility.

Figure 3 summarises some of these responses. The challenges of the normal, messy world are seldom such as to encourage simple compliance with the dictates of hierarchy, or the mutuality of the group response, or indeed the individualistic thrust and dyadic exchange of the entrepreneur. Incentives are often skewed. That which people hope to achieve through following their chosen strategy will often not be achieved. Instance UK, 2014:



Balance • Growth • Awareness

- ◆ When the government's grand plan for economic recovery appears 'iffy' at best. Think of another strategy? No, blame the immigrant.
- ◆ When the opposition contemplates inheriting the 'mess' that their predecessors [including themselves] have left behind their promise to fix it will be vague but their promise to reduce the price of gas to the customer [voter] is specific.

Figure 3
Coordination, failure, risk and blame

'All for the worst in this worst of all possible worlds' Everything is against us. But a 'special one', with a message of redemption, could take us to a 'promised land'. 4	Isolate; the alienated	Hierarchy	Authority shapes information and interprets events to its own advantage. Control failure leads to tighter controls. Risk must be absorbed by the subjects, particularly the poor and powerless. Blame is preferably allocated to foreigner 1
Business failure is bad luck. To protect against bad luck, I must have friends. The friend who fails me becomes my enemy. Government interference is to blame for market failures. 3	Individualist	Group	Failure leads to redoubled efforts rather than adapting rules of the game. Persistent misfortune leads to purging of supposed deviants. For groups or communities, threats come from beyond their boundaries; individuals or governments are to blame. 2

Let us move from these rather abstract ideas to questions of application.

Commitment, in constant tussle with avoidance



Balance • Growth • Awareness

This sub-head objectifies two conditions and externalises them from the person; as is so often the case in the discourses of social science. What I really mean is that you, me and other people are often aware of the need to take responsibility and commit to the solution of a problem but chose to avoid the commitment. Lots of committed people equals 'social capital'. Lots of avoidance leads to social deficit and alienation. Social deficit and alienation are all too common conditions.

Cultural Theory suggests that each form of commitment carries with it implications for behaviour and for ways of viewing the world. When individuals approach the need for collaboration they may carry a personal or temperamental bias towards one form of relationship or another. They may or may not understand that to achieve benefits from a course of action there may be obligations:

- ◆ To support hierarchy implies acceptance of prior commitments and compliance with the resultant classifications, structures and processes.
- ◆ To share obligations on an egalitarian basis is to commit to the formula that underlies the sharing, giving as well as taking, and being willing to sanction deviants who break the rules.
- ◆ To take the individualistic line is to buy insurance, build a moat around your castle, close your curtains at night, engage in deals but be prepared to face the obligations of reciprocation.

'Commitment' and taking responsibility, might imply that there is some objective personal assessment of benefits and risks in all this; thinking through the 'upsides and downsides' of particular courses of action. Most of us, most of the time, don't. We follow convention; do what we have done before or what we think significant other people do, or are thought to be doing. As individuals we face choices but are surrounded by agents of state, market and civil society that tempt, assure or persuade. Mostly we take what is on offer in society, whether we are personally 'comfortable' with the codes on offer or not.

Avoidance often necessitates passing blame to some other party. If risk goes wrong, blame is rapidly displaced from the implicated party to some other party. Flood illustrates the theme; the winter of 2013-14 providing an instance. Property holders in the Somerset Levels found the waters rising around them. Fields became lakes; roads became rivers; water backs up in the drains and comes in the front door. The Levels, though partially below sea level, had historically been kept dry-ish by pumping operations that were sustained by a number of trusts as well as a government agency. Local organisations, representing farmers and other landed interests, then had responsibilities for

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maintaining the rivers and ditches in the interests of those same farmers and others. They could raise charges upon themselves as property holders to support the common interest. But, over time, government gradually came to play the dominant role and hence was there to be blamed when policies being pursued led to outcomes that most parties deemed disastrous.

The deluge of the early months of 2014 may or may not have been early evidence of global warming. The number of storms and the levels of rainfall experienced in the Southern parts of Britain were certainly exceptional. The consequence was that drainage systems and coastal defences that had been built up over many decades to cope with 'worst case' scenarios as perceived by the concerned authorities were overcome in many places. The worst case; 'once in a hundred years' or some such, turned out to be not the worst. God was not apparently there to speak and there was no Noah to follow his command. Lacking words from an authoritative figure on high, press, media, politicians and welly-clad citizens engaged in a continuous, unedifying, flow of accusation and recrimination.

Agents and functions

The early years of the Twentieth Century in Britain, as in many other Western nations, saw the full development of state agency, pushed on by the contingent requirements of two World Wars. We got used to bureaucracy. Ration cards only disappeared in 1954. The administration of the Welfare State, a post WW2 development, came to reinforce the bureaucratic trend. Resources had to be planned, activities had to be funded, and people administered. And then, in the doing of state led administration, contradictions began to emerge. What Shakespeare had centuries earlier labelled "the insolence of office" achieved full maturity; "the law's delay" not far behind it. ⁶ People began to turn against it.

Towards the end of that century a more individualistic culture – the neo-liberal trend – came to dominate political discourse in many countries – pushed along by Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in America. It was associated with privatisation and, supposedly, a constrained role for the state. Whether the state has actually pulled in its horns or simply changed its style from bureaucratic to 'steering not rowing' is contested [Chapters 3 and 17].

What does seem to be the case through these stages, is that mutuality as an organising principle has largely been abandoned. It did not fit with bureaucratic service delivery in the Welfare State and was replaced. Cooperatives in UK today are in a sad condition. As enterprises they largely escaped the control of

⁶ Hamlet, Act 3 Scene 1[again: this appears to be a favourite quote]



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their member shareholders. They stumbled along under bureaucratic management for most of the 20th Century but tired of that eventually. Today the remaining few refuse to submit to the rampant individualism of the market; but their fate remains unknown. The building societies had likewise lost their mutual interest character when the Thatcher government facilitated their transformation into private limited companies [Chapter 15]. Several were then swallowed up into banks, to contribute their bit to the subsequent banking crisis.

In the post-modern world that has emerged, or is emerging in the 21st Century, cooperation as a principle of organisation might return. With both state and market showing signs of 'failure' something must fill the gap. Joint effort certainly underwrites the environmental and anti-capitalist protest organisations, some gradually moving from simply being 'against' to accepting some responsibility 'for'. It is also evident as an idea in the 'Third Way' and 'Big Society' musings of recent UK governments. The active agent behind mutuality is awareness of common purpose. It was common purpose which drove the Rochdale Pioneers who established their cooperative store in 1844. Their plight – dependence upon company owned stores – had what I have elsewhere called salience about it [Chapter 17]. Maybe, awareness of the pressing 'common bads' of the post-modern world may lead to new forms of governance in the common interest. By focusing upon particular areas of common interest bad situations could become governed through joint effort. Particular-purpose government [as against the prevailing all-purpose government] could emerge in surprising places:

- ◆ jointness of effort between the big corporate players in their mutual interest may play some role in international governance, supporting global industrial standards, cooperatively governing aspects of the supply chains of multinational corporations in the textile industry for instance [chapter 21];
- ◆ river governance could return to the multiple interest holders who use or benefit from a particular river and its catchment area;
- ◆ bits of the world-wide web could be governed by exclusive clubs of users who sign up to a mutual contract and monitor each other [chapter 15];
- ◆ banks could mutually again take on – or be obliged to take on – the onerous and costly risks of governing the banking sector;
- ◆ a neighbourhood park could be subject to user-owner governance.



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Social reconstruction necessarily takes place out of known patterns of coordinative behaviour and 'get together' is better than conflict. Institutions through which people take responsibility in the real world evolve, often out of failure. Necessity strikes. But birth pangs will be felt in the decay of previous sets of social rules. There will be struggles to create new boundaries, exclusions as well as inclusions and new sets of rules will emerge that people are prepared to enforce upon each other. Nothing will be perfect. Everything must be workable.

These essays aim to reveal the dynamics of governance institutions. Responsible social action requires some mastery of the means of social coordination that are available to people in office or to citizens who seek what they see as the common good in society. There are, however, two obstacles in the way of understanding. The first is obscurantism, much favoured by the holders of power – who, when obliged to extend their cover beyond the mask of the 'modern', may, for instance, talk 'participation' with the aim of exclusion or decentralisation when their intent is to centralise.

Obscurantism is facilitated by the ways in which the social norms behind state hierarchy, community and market have become free-floating ideas within political and advocacy discourse, more or less detached from any understanding of their purpose or means of achievement. We now have:

- ◆ demand for uniform standards – as in universal human rights - appealing to universalist principles, without specified means of delivery or enforcement;
- ◆ 'community' values, with appeal to mutual interest and solidarity now underlying the crudest forms of nationalism, justifying isolationism, standing in stark contrast to actual divisions of identity or wellbeing [see the speech of Tony Blair – Chapter 16];
- ◆ Appeals to 'self-reliance' and 'enterprise culture' that are more about justifying the deconstruction of the welfare state than about enabling.

The second obstacle is in practice more substantial. It is the fact that most people take the institutions that they encounter and live through for granted. Institutions are what society is. They are imbibed like language, and their rules, like the rules of language are simply assumed to be 'how it works'. Only when they don't work do we question a set of institutional rules and then we are often at a loss as to how to invent or evolve something better.

What these essays also say is that the struggle to find effective patterns of coordinated social action is nothing new historically and not in any way unique

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to post-industrial societies. Patterns of relationships for dealing with conflict, allowing for trade, reproducing the species, or whatever, are found in all societies at all times. Philosophers have pondered them. Poets and playwrights have spelt out their dilemmas. Anthropologists have made a profession of interpreting them. A glance at the ways of 'others', present or past, can be useful comparatively in helping us to understand what we must deal with here and now. Thus I justify my innumerable digressions, quotes and references in the essays that follow.

I wish I had more to say about how to pursue good intentions and about what can be done to enhance the possibilities of their achievement. It is in there but I have perhaps been more inclined to see the glass 'half empty' than the glass 'half full'. What I do see is the virtue in struggle itself. In abstract this is human agency. In practice it requires people in organisations whose commitment is primarily to purpose rather than to power or the reward; change agents who will get together to make change; citizens willing to take on the responsibilities of citizenship – while enjoying the benefits.

Looked at from this perspective imperfect institutions are opportunities rather than constraints. **Chapter 6**, on constitutionalism, concludes that it is better to have to struggle to achieve good outcomes within a nation than to slip into complacency or to be locked in to archaic forms. **Chapter 12** makes a plea for tolerance; allowing a bit of latitude to individuals to do their best; rather than condemn them for failure when measured against some criteria of supposed excellence. **Chapter 5** argues that committed people should be exposed to responsibility and then left to their own devices in looking for best public value. **Chapter 8**, about how to let local communities be different, highlights both the role of civil society agents in stimulating new approaches or insights and the significance of individuals within formal government being able to link with agents outside government, demonstrating 'the strength in weak links'.

What then of truth and power? The test of truth is that it is 'true to human need' rather than simply the apparent outcome of power-play within a particular institution. Institutions evolve in response to human needs. Without institutions there are no outcomes. But good outcomes; responsive to emergent human needs, call for personal commitment and agency that must often go beyond the requirements of status, or position, or social code.

And power? Power is, I think, as Max Weber conceived it to be. But while he, at the turn of the 19th Century, was most concerned to see power legitimated as government authority within the nation state, a troubled century on that formula has its limitations. Over-reliance upon central authorities to be authoritative in

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their dealings is now, for many citizens, the problem. To produce other forms of tempered power is a civic duty. Good governance can only be expected as an outcome of plural forces in society; requiring pressure groups, non-governmental organisations, 'think tanks' and networks or thinking people who are prepared to challenge as well as to provide alternative sources of legitimacy.

Constantly changing needs and demands – from environment, polity or economy – do not allow any governance system to become static. The key to adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness is to keep all the actors within governance systems focused upon public purpose. To enable such responsiveness real power and influence has to be devolved throughout the system and in civil society, with arrangements that allow new forms of social compromise to be worked out by committed parties. Good intentions then call for civic vigilance; mastery of new media, recognition by individuals that they may be a fragment but that fragments – no, not fragments, something organic, good viruses perhaps – can form a social movement or create new institutional forms addressed to newly recognised issues in the public weal. Not so easy, as I confess myself in **Chapter 23**, but without such creativity there is no good governance.