3.   Accountability and its metaphors: from forum to agora and bazaar

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Even if we could agree the core principles of good governance, we would have no sense of how those principles ought to be expressed. People might accept that an organisation should be transparent but differ over how much transparency is required, what it is to be transparent (actively publish reports? respond to requests for information?), or - most importantly perhaps - on who decides transparency's parameters at any point in time. What, alternatively, is it to accept democratic voice? What constitutes acceptable democratic restraint? To what degree can a democratic say over micro-level decisions (specific placements of wind farms for instance) be balanced against an organisation's effective pursuit of already-mandated macro-level goals (operationalizing a carbon-mitigation energy plan).

Governance not only requires everyday decision-making processes in order to decide questions such as these but has shied away from solving them by allocating unilateral decision-making power to single decision-makers. It has instead developed ever-more-complex mechanisms that test decision-makers, expose them to scrutiny and often to retribution. No decision-maker's power is absolute therefore, although precisely *how* their non-absolutism can be characterised may differ in different circumstances.

The degree that law simply prohibits specific kinds of executive behaviour varies for instance. Law might delegate power over executives to boards themselves or designate organisational stakeholders either as decision-makers or as decision-reviewers. Or it might aim at some mixture of the three. Questions of what it means - in everyday operational terms - for powers to be delegated arise, as do questions of how powers of restraint may be expressed. What executive discretion even means is subject to negotiation, struggle and debate both within law-making, within organisations and between the two.

Our expressing values in governance is not simple therefore. How democratic voice is imagined in administrative contexts; which degrees or kinds of transparency are deemed appropriate etc, often comes down to authority and decision-making power being shared and checked in a multiplicity of ways. Once we expect those exercising authority to answer for their decisions, then we are in the realm of accountability. Once we decide that no decision-making power can be unilateral, then accountability and the quality of governance become the same thing.

In this paper we not only address how resolutions for such questions are imagined but suggest supplementary pathways to imagining those resolutions. How do descriptions of social situations shape and constrain the solutions used to answer the questions posed above? The words we use to describe social phenomena are not neutral. They are constructive of the conceptual maps we use to navigate and negotiate the social world. Checks and balances, decision-making powers and the like are reproduced using analogies and metaphors that themselves play a role in how solutions to social problems are conceived.

We focus on Mark Bovens's use of the forum metaphor in his accountability model. The forum metaphor has emerged as a fundamental component in accountability's status as a 'cultural keyword', reflecting its extension into the political rhetoric and everyday language of our time (Dubnick 2014a). People do not imagine value in governance directly, through observation. They construct it through metaphorical language and, when it comes to how the underlying decision-making processes are described, Bovens's work is at the fore.

Contra Bovens, we argue that his relational perspective could be taken much further. We advocate a far broader and more fundamental engagement with the idea of relational accountability. Expanding the metaphors, we point to two other accountability spaces: 'agora,' a primordial accountability space and 'bazaar', an emergent accountability space rooted in ground-level exchange between different actors. Assertions about 'unaccountability,' we argue, very often reflect a failure to appreciate the fundamentally relational nature of accountability: those who use such assertions as bases for action aimed at making situations, processes or people 'more accountable' in fact seek to assert or impose

a certain form of relationship – one that is hierarchical and monopolistic – and reflect therefore a drive to power and domination.

Its mere appearance in the title of legislation for example triggers an affective response whether or not the term's use is appropriate or justified by the content of the law. The symbolic gesture of stating 'we shall hold them accountable' is now part of the standard repertoire of public officials responding to some scandalous faux pas or criminal act. Moreover, we now associate the notion of accountability to any 'good governance' reform agenda that promises to reduce corruption, enhance performance, assure justice and improve democratic involvement. The concept of accountability has, in short, become both the medium and the message of modern governance. Today, the study of governance is effectively the study of accountability.[1]

The first half of this paper is devoted to a discussion of the Bovens model, how it uses the forum metaphor and how it negotiates a line between more traditional and mechanistic 'principal-agent' perspectives and an outlook that focuses on particular social relations in the development of accountability. We distinguish Bovens's relational perspective from other ways of approaching the problem of what accountability actually is. And we show that ideas of 'unaccountability' only work where our ideas of integrity, accountability etc are inordinately fixed. Broadening our perspective pushes us to think about how *organisational dysfunction functions*, so to speak.

The paper's second half seeks to expand upon the Bovens model by outlining two relational accountability spaces: 'agora,' which we regard as a 'primordial' accountability space upon which other spaces rely, and 'bazaar,' where accountability relationships based on mutual exchange emerge. This exercise is useful in its own right because it highlights how a more flexible approach to accountability's conceptual underpinnings can refocus our thinking about how organisations might be arranged and understood. It is also useful because it allows us to consider how our concepts of accountability underpin the ways we understand key

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[1] CF Strydom 1999, who saw 'responsibility' as the emerging 'master frame' that would shape social and political thinking in the 21st century.

organisational norms - such as democratic voice and transparent work - and from there how organisational integrity might be constructed.

We aim, at least in the first instance, to isolate the principal-agent components of the relational model and to demonstrate how critical the 'relational' is to accountability in the first place. We do not do this in order to abstract out the components of accountability for it own sake but because we seek to explain so-called unaccountability: deviations from principal demands (drifting though they are, on which see Schillemans & Busuioc 2014)) tend to be conceptualised as simple misfeasance, or corruption, or 'shirking,' the solution to which invariably involve harsher penalties or more tempting inducements (depending, a cynic might suggest, on how high up the 'unaccountable' actor sits in the hierarchy).

It may be that apparent unaccountability should be approached and conceptualised as a function of other forms of accountability, though perhaps ones that are subterranean and are illegible within the forum concept. These forms of accountability represent the human drive to negotiate the multiple, diverse and often conflicting expectations (Dubnick 2014b) that arise in all aspects of their social lives, including their worlds of work.

We differ from the Bovens model in the degree to which we emphasise organisations, whether administrative or corporate, as a social flux, unpredictable, unstable, and often unmanageable. Modernity is in large part the story of the organisational tools employed to solidify, constrain and direct that social flux, but we ought not to pretend either that modernity's project has been a resounding success on this front or that we would wish its success to be complete.

Accountability's role in the policy realm and in theory both invites frustration in its ongoing failure to achieve submission and acts as 'promise,' (Dubnick & Frederickson 2011a) holding out the hope that the right measures or the right attitudes or the right interventions will lead us to better performance, or coordination or the like. Accountability so conceived aims towards a kind of silence, where aims, intends and actions are transparent and clear. Accountability as we conceive it is never so: it is noisy, complicated and multifaceted. The Bovens's model hints that this sense of accountability is what differentiates it from the

principal-agent perspective. Our point is that the model does not go far enough. The forum metaphor, we fear, acts to constrain thinking about accountability and allows people to drive themselves back towards the very principal-agent thinking that the forum metaphor could have surpassed. The focus on process and hierarchy restricts the forum's potential to broaden our thought: a point we discuss in the section below.

The forum and accountable governance

Ironically, while the relevance and salience of (and academic interest in) accountable governance has expanded, accountability has become more elusive both conceptually and theoretically. Often regarded in the past as a species of 'responsibility,'[2] accountability is now frequently treated as the primary concept (i.e., the genus) among those terms bearing a synonymic 'family resemblance' to responsibility.[3] Thus, rather than being regarded as a distinct alternative to other members of that conceptual family, accountability is increasingly perceived as an encompassing concept that covers what has traditionally been associated with responsibility, and then some. In everyday usage as well as in scholarship, few would argue with the idea that to be accountable is to be liable, obliged, responsive, transparent, answerable, blameworthy, trustworthy, etc. Accountability as a cultural phenomenon has enveloped and contained most of its familial relations.

This 'ever expansive' nature of the concept (Mulgan 2000) is clearly a challenge to those who seek conceptual clarity, and especially to those attempting to make theoretical sense of how the cultural form of accountability impacts on governance. In this section we explore and seek to build on the major effort undertaken by Bovens and others to deal with that challenge –

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[2] Two often cited expositions of the historical development of responsibility as a concept are McKeon 1957 and Ricoeur [1995] 2000. Both rely on a historical distinction between 'imputation' and 'accountability'; see Kelty 2008 for an overview of these works. Much of the scholarship on responsibility has followed that approach. For example, Goodin 1987 drew a distinction between 'blame' and 'task' responsibilities and assigned accountability to the latter. In Bovens 1998, accountability is presented as a distinctive ('passive') form of responsibility and contrasted with 'active' (virtue-related) responsibility. In his explication of environmental governance, Pellizzoni (2004) posits accountability as one among four types of responsibility (the others are care, liability, and responsiveness). More recently, Vincent 2010 provides a six-fold elaboration of responsibilities (based on the work of H.L.A. Hart) that avoids any reference to accountability while clearly implying its relevance to several of the 'syndromes' she highlights.

[3] See Bambrough 1960, for an overview of Wittgenstein's view of family resemblances.

the development of a forum-based model of accountability. The work of Bovens and his colleagues represents one pathway among several that have attempted to address the need for fresh approach to the study of accountability now that it has assumed keyword status and become untethered from responsibility.

One model among many

Putting the Bovens model in perspective, it must be seen in the light of the broader metatheoretical challenge to make sense of accountability (see Table 3.1 below).[4] Various theories and frameworks have been mobilized and applied to that task. Some deal with accountability through principal-agent models that stress a mechanistic view of accountability – that is, that accountability involves various arrangements aimed at dealing with the problematics of getting agents to comply to with the preferences of their principals (see Gailmard 2014; Mansbridge 2014). Others treat accountability as a function of governance, and rely on institutionalist theories and models to explain their emergence and development over time (e.g, Harlow 2014; Olsen 2014). Cultural theorists perceive accountability as a reflection of what kinds of behavior and relationships are prescriptively valued in alternative social settings (Wildavsky 1987; Licht 2001)   Still another perspective views accountability as a form of individual behavior that can be explained using theoretical lenses borrowed from social psychology. (see Hood 2014; Patil, Vieider, & Tetlock 2014).

The relational view of accountability, finally, focuses attention on accountability's emergent and 'second-personal' nature. As we will argue, much of the theoretical work underlying this view is associated with moral theory and specifically the work of contemporary writers such as Steven Darwall (2006; 2013) and others[5] who have revived interest in the ethical foundations of accountable relationships.

Because it is rooted in the relational perspective, the Bovens model offers some insight into this understanding of accountability; but as we will see its reliance on the forum metaphor does not provide a theoretical foundation for pursuing the study of accountability. Our task

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[4] Compare with overview in Bovens, Schillemans, & Goodin 2014.

[5] See the work of Judith Butler (2005), R. Jay Wallace (1994).

here is to lay the groundwork for such a theory by using other metaphorical models to demonstrate the relevance and power of the second-personal standpoint for our understanding of relational accountability.

Table 3.1 – Five models of accountability	
Accountability as:	Relevant theory:
Mechanism	Principal-Agent Theories
Function	Institutional Theories
Value	Cultural theory
Behaviour	Social Psychology
Relationships	Moral Theory

The Bovens model

Central to the Bovens model is the concept of the 'accountability forum' that was first used by Mark Bovens in his 1998 *The Quest for Responsibility*:

> Accounting for oneself, taking responsibility, and justifying oneself never. . .happen in a vacuum; there is always something or someone who asks the questions or makes the imputation. Such asking and accusing happens mostly at the instigation and in the presence of some forum or other, varying in the Constitution from the forum internum of the conscience to the informal forum of family members, friends, and colleagues, the much more formal disciplinary committee, tribunal, or parliamentary committee of inquiry, or even the television, the forum of the nation (Bovens 1998, 23-24; italics in original).

The concept is applied loosely and broadly throughout that work, with the forum indicating both some referenced 'other' and/or a type of venue. It is within the context of a forum that responsibility is transformed into accountability.[6] In that regard, the forum is more than a mere 'meeting space' for interactions and exchanges (political, economic, social and otherwise). In that sense, it is neither Habermasian public sphere nor Hayekian marketplace.

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[6] Bovens cites H.L.A. Hart's elaboration of various forms of responsibility in this regard, noting that he is using the term 'accountability' in lieu of 'liability-responsibility' which he prefers 'since it has fewer strictly legal connotations and also entails an element of moral or political responsibility' (Bovens 1998, 24, n.3).

The accountability forum functions, rather, as a juridical location where one is subjected to the judgment of others through imputation and interrogation (Ricoeur [1995] 2000; Van Hooft 2004). The concept next emerges in 2005 in a number of sources, including a paper by Albert Meijers and Bovens focused on accountability and information technologies (Meijer & Bovens 2005), and again in a chapter Bovens contributes to a volume on public management (Bovens 2005). These become the basis for a draft proposal for the funding of a major research project which was to focus on accountable governance in Europe (Bovens, 't Hart, et al. 2005). There the Utrecht group (co-led by Meijers & Bovens) initially equates the forum with the 'accountee' in an accountability relationship and uses the existence of a forum as the pivotal factor which distinguishes accountability from other forms of political conduct or activities that involve, such as transparency, responsiveness and participation.

'For an actor to be accountable, information is given to a forum, which then comes to a judgement that may have consequences for the actor in case it is negative' (Meijer & Bovens 2005, p. 5).[7] In that sense, the forum becomes the defining feature of accountability, and the projects to be undertaken in the research program would highlight the various 'accountability modes' and 'accountability regimes' reflecting that forum-centered perspective. What we regard as the Bovens model becomes clearer as the proposal focuses on their intent to "open the black box of the accountability process" (emphasis in original).

> The relationship between the actor and the forum, the account giving, usually consists of at least three elements or stages. First of all, the actor must feel obliged to inform the forum about his conduct, by providing various sorts of data about the performance of tasks, about outcomes, or about procedures.

> Secondly, the information can prompt the forum to interrogate the actor and to question the adequacy of the information or the legitimacy of the conduct (debating phase). Thirdly, the forum usually passes judgement on the conduct of the actor. In

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[7] Interestingly, the initial reference to the forum concept does not cite Bovens's 1998 work, but rather Christopher Pollitt's use of the concept in his 2003 The Essential Public Manager. Pollitt, however, is using the concept quite different – that is, to describe the deliberative arena in which public managers are operating. See Pollitt 2003, pp. 84-85.

case of a negative judgement the forum may impose some sort of sanctions on the account or. These may be formal, such as fines, disciplinary measures, or dismissal, but they can also be implicit or informal (such as negative publicity). The three projects will ascertain to what extent the various accountability regimes entail each of these stages of an accountability process, and will study the relevant processes to examine how they unfold, and what pattern of relations between accountor and accountee exists (Bovens, 't Hart, et al. 2005, p. 6).

By 2007, Bovens was able to present the model as "a parsimonious analytical framework that can help to establish more systematically whether organisation or officials, exercising public authority, are subject to accountability at all" (Bovens 2007, 448, emphasis in original).[8] Bovens emphasizes that the 'framework' is intentionally narrow and analytic in its explicit focus on 'account giving,' which he defines as a relationship involving "the obligation to explain and justify conduct" to a forum. While acknowledging that the framework does overlap with principal-agent models, he emphasizes that the actor-forum relationship can be quite different (a point recently made explicit by two members of the Utrecht project group (see Schillemans & Busuioc 2014), and he offers a seven-point summary of what constitutes the 'social relations' at the heart of the model as well as a graphic representation of the model's relationships:

Table 3.2 - 'Accountability as a Social Relations'
(box 1 in Bovens 2007, p. 452)
A relationship qualies as a case of accountability when:
1. there is a relationship between an actor and a forum
2. in which the actor is obliged
3. to explain and justify
4. his conduct;
5. the forum can pose questions;

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[8] See also Schillemans & Bovens 2011; Bovens 2010; Bovens, Schillemans, & 't Hart 2008; Bovens 2007.

6. pass judgement;

7. and the actor may face consequences.

Figure 3.1 - 'Accountability' (Figure 1 in Bovens 2007, p. 454)
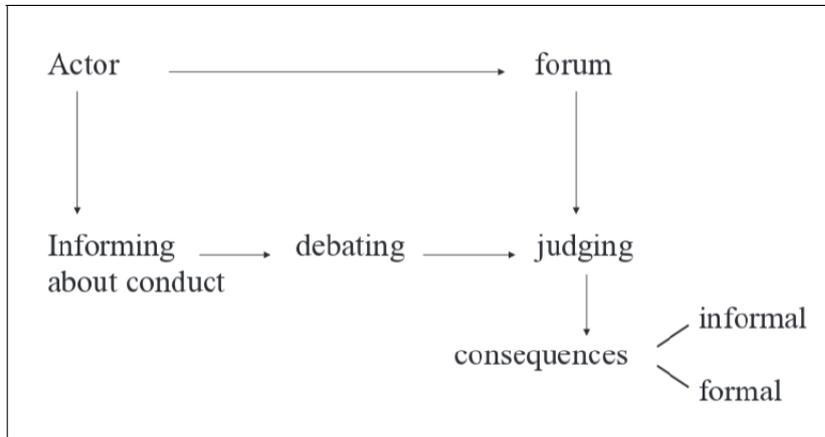
The four-year research project based on the forum model generated a number of empirical studies (e.g Brandsma 2013; Bovens, Curtin, and 't Hart 2010), as well as further development of the model itself. For example, two members of the Utrecht group – Thomas Schillemans and Gijs Brandsma – recently published a more elaborate version (termed the 'accountability cube': see Figure 3.2 below) that attempts to enhance it usefulness as an analytic tool by transforming the three dimensions of the original formulation (information, discussion and consequences) into operational measures.

Figure 3.2 - 'The Accountability Cube' (figure 1 in Brandsma and Schillemans 2013)
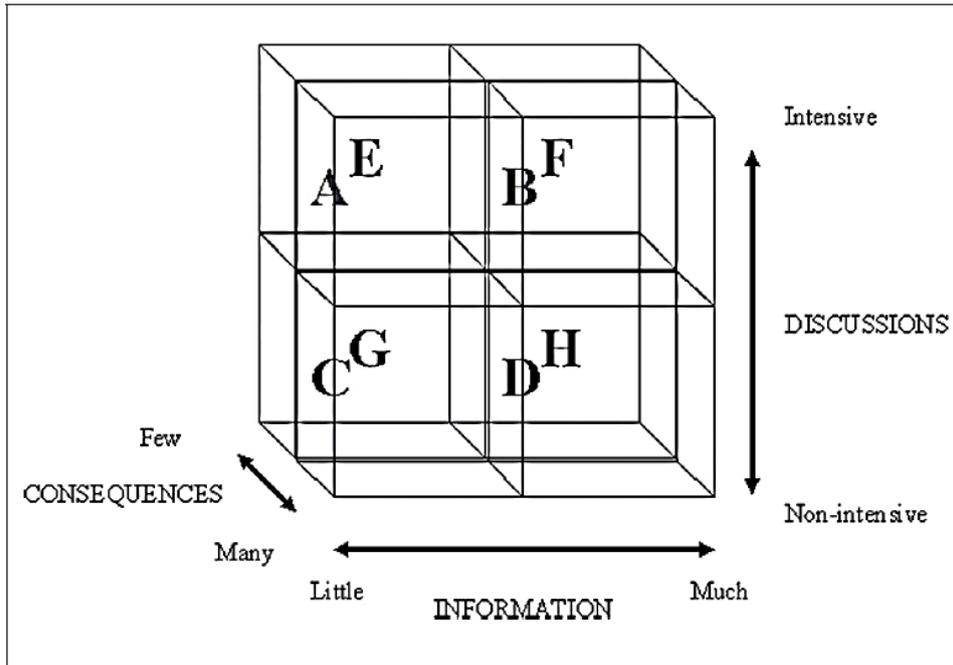
Assessing the forum

As one of the only explicit attempts to develop a framework for analyzing accountability relationships, the Bovens forum model might also be regarded as the basis for a theory of such. However, while we think the model has proven its value as an analytic framework, we are concerned that its analytic success can restrict the development of a credible theory of relational accountability.

The basis for our argument is, in part, found in the developmental path of the model:

1. Accountability is conceptualized as a relationship, thus narrowing the model's focus and making alternative views (accountability as mechanism, function or behavior) of secondary relevance.

2. The focus is further narrowed when the actor-forum interaction is established as the core relationship. In the process, consideration of other forms of accountability relationships are put aside.

3. Within the actor-forum relationship, three process factors are emphasized (e.g., informing, discussing, judgment/sanctioning) to the minimization or exclusion of other, often more substantive, situational factors (e.g., norms, values, rules, etc.).

To be clear, there is nothing inappropriate or wrong with that developmental path – and in fact, the very process of modeling necessarily involves the selection and highlighting of certain factors and the winnowing out of others. It is in the nature of model development to narrow one's perspective, which is why methodologists are quick to warn of the possible drawbacks of overcommitment to any such construct (Kaplan 1964, Ch 7).

Another source of concern for us involves the inherently metaphorical nature of the forum model. Technically, the Bovens group regards the forum per se as just one factor among several in their model (i.e., as synonymous with the 'accountee' in the relationship).

Nevertheless, their use of the forum factor is pivotal and critical to the model, and few would argue against calling the construct the 'forum model.' But this labeling can prove problematic, for the notion of a forum is tied into a range of different meanings and contexts. Even within the Bovens group (as well as in Bovens's initial use of the concept, as quoted above), strict adherence to the idea of 'forum = specific accountee' is rare, and they (like all of us) are easily drawn to the image of forum as a place or venue – a physical or virtual space within which the action is taking place.

A major attraction of the 'metaphorical style' in model and theory construction is its capacity to make difficult and abstract concepts and ideas come to life through more familiar forms. [9] Moreover, metaphors often act as an intellectual stimulant, allowing analysts to extend their understanding of a subject further and deeper than was intended by developers of the initial model.[10] At the same time, the fertility and richness of metaphors can prove counterproductive when they function as (pardon the metaphor) blinders or constraints on theory development and analysis.

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[9] Kaplan 1964, pp. 259-262 elaborates six different 'cognitive styles' through which models are applied (literary, academic, eristic (propositional), symbolic, postulational and formal), and treats metaphors separately as a problematic (p. 265-266). During the 1970s and 1980s, however, a 'metaphorical turn' occurred among methodologists and those who study the history, sociology and philosophy of science (see Marshak 2003), and there is little doubt that Kaplan would have included 'metaphorical style' in an updated list.

[10] For example, see Leary 1990.

As we hinted at in the introduction above, it is our sense that the forum model/metaphor is proving so inviting that it may be undermining the development of a more elaborate and credible theory of relational accountability. Models, as valuable as they are to enhancing our understanding of complex subject like accountability, are not theories. Oftentimes they play key and critical roles in the process of theory development, but they can also act distractions and diversions when they block consideration of alternative constructs that might prove more fruitful.

In the case of the forum model and its success, we seem to be on the verge of over-commitment. The metaphor of the forum is a powerful one, and fits well with the conventional view of accountability. Our sense is that the forum model, for all its insights and analytic power, is lacking when it comes to theoretical credibility. It describes much, but at this juncture explains little.

And yet, we are intrigued by the forum metaphor itself, for in establishing the idea that accountability relationships occur within a certain context, the model has led us to consider and contrast alternative metaphorical contexts within which account-giving takes place.

The relational

Our plan in the remainder of this paper is to broaden the relational perspective on accountability. Without at all suggesting that they represent an exhaustive overview of possible accountability relationships,[11] we do so by pointing towards two accountable relationships that might emerge in public administration, where accountability emerges in particular kinds of venue and towards specific others. These are the 'agora' and the 'bazaar.'[12]

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[11] In fact, we suggest four possible relationships elsewhere (see O'Kelly & Dubnick 2014) though we expand on only two in this paper. The two relationships that are missing from this paper are the 'cathedral', a space bound by hierarchies, rituals and rules, and the 'monastery', a stable space defined by 'thick' relationships founded on shared norms.

[12] We employ these terms, as we say above, in order to assist some complex concepts and ideas to come to life. The first thing to note, given this, is the overlap between the Greek 'agora' and the Latin 'forum': both in reality denoted the same or similar public spaces, where people gathered for trade (drawing in parallels with the Persian (through Italian) 'bazaar'). We draw the following distinctions (in brief): forum as juridical and historiographical, ritualistically aimed at reconstructing reasons and states of mind behind actions and then at producing some form of action in response to the perspectives that emerge; agora as the foundational space within which – fleeting and contingent perhaps – publics emerge through fundamental social interactions; and bazaar as a space through which people use exchange in order both to pursue objectives and to 'thicken' their social ties.

While the forum's overlap with principal-agent models in Bovens and others lies in its focus on appraisal and action, it is possible to distinguish, as we see it, its relational underpinning from its principal-agent derivation. Bovens's emphasis on the investigatory or confessional character of the forum ought not to diminish his perspective of it as relational. What this means, however, cannot simply be formulated with reference to process: the relational is by necessity a negotiated space, both requiring social imagination on the part of both account-holders and accountees.[13]

The forum's juridical character is investigatory, relying in the first instance upon a sympathetic engagement between accountor and accountee.[14] This provides us with a crucial distinction between the forum in the Bovens model and the principal-agent model, which is led far more by power and contract.[15] Whereas the forum must by definition begin with the relationship, the principal-agent model brings the event that is under investigation to the fore, linking it primarily to a principal's (not necessarily unchanging, as Schillemans and Busuioc (2014) point out) interpretation of contract and seeks to allocate consequences on that basis. The forum, in other words, is interpretative, in the first instance at least. The principal-agent relationship is punitive. What Schillemans and Busuioc call 'forum drift' (Schillemans and Busuioc 2014, p. 11) is more likely a drift in principal intent with the necessary discourse inherent in the forum as we describe it being weak or absent.

A distinction between the forum and the principal-agent perspective is important because it helps place the forum as a subset of and as reliant on the multiplicity of other accountability

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[13] The forum, as we see it, through its procedures and rituals, seeks at its best to construct a kind of 'historical knowledge', as Collingwood would call it, that requires a 're-enactment' of some event (see Collingwood 1946, 282_). For an historian, this requires that 'past thought [be] rethought by means of the critical scrutiny of contemporary evidence' (Browning 2004, p. 74) in order to bring past thought into the present (see Collingwood [1939] 1944, 73_; and Collingwood 1946, 302_ in particular). In the forum's case, the production of knowledege requires the soliciting of evidence from events, documents and, most significantly, from the accountee him or herself.

[14] Sympathetic in Adam Smith's ([1759] 2009, 21_) sense, as in a route into an understanding of the other's 'sentiments'.

[15] Although an archaic form of contract that lacks the relational elements identified in socio-legal scholarship (see MacNeil 2001; Fried 1982; Fried 2012).

spaces through which people live their lives and do their work. Bovens's use of the forum metaphor – assisting him in taking an important step away from mechanistic perspectives – still underplays the negotiated and the social in the relational form. The forum relies upon a pre-exiting sympathy between actors, whereas the principal/agency model places a far greater emphasis on force or on the threat of force. That said the forum as described in the Bovens model is narrowed by its focus both on the actor-forum interaction and, within that, by the emphasis on the process factors. The remainder of this paper seeks to broaden our understanding of accountability beyond that point.

One final remark on this matter: it is important to note, as we also say below, that each of these metaphors and types point to distinct traits that can be discerned in actually existing administration. They do not exist in isolation. Each of the spaces we describe is in fact one component of a single phenomenon: the everyday ground-level experience of accountability in administrative work. When we speak of conditions of multiple, diverse and often conflicting expectations under which actions and decisions are made – of accountability as a kind of second-personal 'practical reason' – we are interested in the constant flux of normative reflections, social relationships, practical bargains, expedient compromises, and myriad other manoeuvres that people construct in order to get through their day with their personal integrity and their social milieu more or less intact.[16] So isolating one element is rather like isolating a person's heartbeat from the flow of their blood for scrutiny, or a city's traffic from its streets. It is useful but we must always remember that it is one part of a whole.

In the next section, where we discuss both the agora and the bazaar, we broaden the relational account through a focus on that which underpins all 'relationality' (agora) and through a focus on an alternative accountability space that might emerge (bazaar).

Two accountability spaces

Agora

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[16] When we speak of practical reason we mean the construction of reasons for action: resolving the question of 'what one ought to do'. See Darwall 2006; Wallace 2014.

Let us begin with a discussion of the 'agora.' We are concerned with the agora – in our context – as a fluid, contingent and localised accountability space, founded on an unending cascade of social situations and the relationships that these situations inform. Following Norton (2014), we take the situations and relationships that emerge within such spaces as our 'primordial unit of analysis.' The agora, that is, is the fundamental social milieu from which reasons, purposes and norms emerge, not because that is the agora's aim, but because, such a space is required if these things are to emerge.

Taking ground level administrative work – as with any other collaborative spheres – as fundamentally and inherently social, we see human sociality and, following Smith ([1759] 2009), reciprocal sympathy as the foundation of practical reason. Such social spaces and their relationships, that is to say, found our motives for action: they are inextricably linked to the development of collaborative purposes. Motives for action are founded, we argue, on the matrix of second-person standpoints within which we live our lives (following Darwall 2006). It is through these relationships that people develop and contribute towards collaborative projects, underpinned by collectively derived norms that focus on the fairness of group aims, and the internal fairness of the procedures that the group employs.[17]

Our model, following Tyler and Blader (2003, 116_, for instance), is that the general 'toing-and-froing' of people getting on (their 'thick' relations, so to speak), informs their standpoints towards relatively 'thin' organisational procedures, managerial power and the narratives of purpose that are handed down through organisational structures. The metaphor of the agora, as such, constitutes the crux of our distinctive perspective on accountability because, rather than holding ground-level actors to be relatively passive in the construction of reasons for action, or individual motives, we hold these actors and their relationships as primary in the construction of reasons for action.

To put this differently, our existing in these spaces help us 'bridge the gap' between "what can be immediately experienced about the other person and that person's psychological

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[17] On which, see Tom R. Tyler & Steven L. Blader 2000; Steven L Blader & Tom R Tyler 2003; also Tom R. Tyler 2010; Olkkonen & Lipponen 2006; Lind & Bos 2002; Tom R. Tyler & Steven L. Blader 2003.

states" (Schilbach et al. 2013, p. 394). These spaces, in bridging that gap, give us a place from whence we can absorb the practices that help us get on. It is from there that common purposes can emerge and develop in the context of people combining their broader moral sentiments with the particular ethical requirements and constraints they experience in their everyday lives.[18] We see the development of collective purpose, in other words, as being a function of more fundamental sets of thick social interaction.

Stepping on from this, our idea of the 'agora' denotes the everyday, ordinary, story of collective purpose emerging from people's being together. The special contribution of administrative, corporate, state and other organisational bodies is that they seek to exploit these social dynamics in order to harness the productive energies that emerge from social relations. Accountability, as we see it, describes the spaces produced through these situations and relationships. This is significant, at the very least, for more mechanistic accountability studies because such studies tend to assume collective purpose as a given, as something that is available to enforce (following Schillemans & Busuioc 2014). 'Unaccountable' behaviour and the like is, in such approaches, taken simply as a matter of compliance.

Our argument is, first, that the kinds of hierarchical intent that underpin relationships within the Bovens model, and that are at the heart of broader principal-agent mechanisms, is only one force being brought to bear on collective purpose – and brought to bear very often with unforseen consequences – and that so-called 'unaccountability' is likely to lie in the realm of the broader accountabilities we describe here rather than in simply self-serving conduct or in shirking. Where accountability studies places the forum at its core of a system through which hierarchical will is disseminated and deviance is uncovered – a system of control in other words – we see accountability as a far more pervasive matrix of standpoints within which the individual negotiates their social existence, the group develops purpose and that purpose is

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[18] This echoes Hegel's conception of Sittlichkeit, described by Pinkard as 'the system of practices and institutions that surround the moral life.' Sittlichkeit, in other words 'furnishes agents with a conception of what is good and best for them, and it trains them into a kind of 'ethical virtuosity' in discerning what is required for the type of person they are in the type of situation in which they find themselves' (Pinkard 1999, pp. 226, 226). In some ways, also, our outlook echoes that of Julia Annas' discussion (2011, see also Rorty & Wong 1993 and other essays in the same volume), from a virtue ethics perspective, of virtues as learned – as skills – and as being in many ways subject to intelligent engagement (as opposed to being simply handed down from authority).

normalised. This is not simply a 'black box' that is irrelevant to accountability studies, and nor is it a dynamic that accountability forums should aim to overcome. Accountability in the broader sense, as the font of practical reason, both limits or enables the forum's reach, depending on the situation or on the manner in which the forum's power and message cohere with other powers and messages as people's standpoints form and persist.

A role for moral theory
Theories are not arguments, as David Schmidtz points out: they "are maps." "Like maps," he writes "theories are not reality. They are at best serviceable representations. They cannot be more than that (but they can be less; some maps are useless)" (Schmidtz 2007, p. 433).[19] Theories set out to define a terrain – of justice, of 'good work,' or the like – and in the case of moral theory are inextricably linked to everyday experience and the hard questions we encounter every day.

In accountability's case, such terrains have long been the subject of moral philosophy.
We are particularly interested in the moral sociology of Adam Smith ([1759] 2009; [1776] 1999) and, as we mention on the pages above, in the work of Stephen Darwall (2006; 2013). Smith's contribution comes through his focus on sympathy and on the social foundations of and the interaction between normativity, recognition and esteem. Darwall, following from Smith, focuses on the 'second-personal' character of norms and thus emphasises their elementary, emergent and egalitarian bases.

So, while the metaphors scholars use as are useful in articulating and illuminating complex concepts – in this instance the accountability's relational character – we ought not to overlook their theoretical roots: that through metaphor we are setting out a terrain through which moral theory can be read into and applied to the ground-level experiences of everyday work.

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[19] Schmitz goes to say that No map represents the only reasonable way of seeing the terrain. We would be astounded if two cartography students independently assigned to map the same terrain came up with identical maps. It would not happen. Likewise, theorists working independently inevitably construct different theories. The terrain underdetermines choices they make about how to map it. Not noticing this, they infer from other theorists choosing differently that one of them is mistaken and that differences must be resolved (Schmidtz 2007, p. 433).

The Smithian perspective on practical reason, which acted as a precursor to Kant's more 'internal' perspective (see Kant 2005; Fleischacker 1991), focuses on the social in the development of reasons for action. Smith's perspective is radically intersubjective. If we think about it from the individual's point of view, people develop reasons for action, appropriate to the context they find themselves in, based on irreducably social considerations. They engage with questions of action in terms that sit in the same conceptual arena as Smith's 'impartial spectator' - that is, they consider their own position by developing a sense of how they might appear to others. This is not a simple egoistical calculation, but a combination of contextualised norms, concern for their fellows and concern for how their fellows see them.[20] Such an endeavour would not be possible, however, without the individual's entry into society and without the development and practice of everyday social relationships between the individual and their peers. Moral self-examination is a skill and as such it must be learned (see Annas 2011, for similar points).

As Darwall (2006) has it, this 'team-building' skill is rooted in conditions of mutual recognition between people as they regard each other in various ways, as moral equals, as particular subjects of esteem and as authorities on particular modes of action. Note that, for Darwall's development of Smith, the authority of others is not initially a function of any formal office they hold, but a recognition of them as moral equals acting in a particular shared context, of which formal offices are one part. So, we argue, as Sennett (2007) would have it, a formal office holder who was not deemed deserving of their authority would have little capacity for influencing social action.

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[20] As Smith has it, When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence upon it, either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person who I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion' (Smith [1759] 2009, 135f).

See also Raphael 2007, esp ch. 5, for an account of how the idea of the impartial spectator evolved across the various editions of Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments.

The forum's traction, as we see it, is filtered through such perspectives. It is not separate from them. Its relational power comes not from its formal processes but from a broader and partly emergent legitimation dynamic that all social offices must both undertake and undergo (on legitimacy and legitimation in political offices, see Barker 2001). A relational 'grammar' must emerge whereby the forum's imperatives agree with broader social expectations: otherwise actors might well baulk at the prospect of obeying the forum's demands. Any descriptor of action as 'accountable' or 'unaccountable' is in effect a call for particular 'proper' purposes over others and is, we think, invariably taken as a given within accountability studies. In fact, as our perspective suggests, purposes emerge, evolve and are negotiated within social spaces at ground level,[21] in (invariably incomplete and contingent) answer to multiple, diverse and often conflicting social expectations (see Dubnick 2014b, for a discussion) with externally disseminated imperatives constituting but one force on people's active engagement with their conduct.

Of course, we do not discount the possibility of shirking or dishonesty in administrative work. Nor do we dismiss the capacity of disciplinary mechanisms for limiting opportunities for such conduct to take hold. Our point is more that those mechanisms necessarily interact with people's more 'primordial' accountability spaces, often in unpredictable ways.

Consider, for instance, the problem of gaming in target systems, as described by Hood (2006) and others (Bevan and Hood 2006, for instance), where attempts to deliver accountability with regard to performance led instead to almost the opposite of what was intended.

From our perspective, the disruption is very often linked not only to tension between hierarchical aims and ground-level dynamics but also to the effects that reinforced imperatives, 'externally' imposed (relative to social dynamics), have on the internal politics of organisations.

Given this, for instance, we hold the forum's effectiveness – the forum as described by Bovens etc – to be in large part a function of the agora rather than being an independent force in its

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[21] See for instance Suchman and Edelman 1996, on such dynamics within law-making.

own right. Both the forum's capacity to bring itself to bear on people's conduct and its' the capacity to comprehend the roots of 'unaccountable' conduct are rooted not so much in hierarchical force and in the tools that the principal-agent model propose, but in the ground-level social dynamics that we describe above. Whether these dynamics are described as 'culture', or as 'networks' or the like, they come down to a relatively free-flowing, morally-egalitarian set of interactions, from which common purposes emerge.

The force that mechanisms bring to bear do not do so in a vacuum: they do so in a context and the context determines the effect they will have. Bovens notes that individual identities emerge "on the basis of existing ideas and in dialogue with others" (Bovens 1998, p. 99) but he is less successful at extending this observation to the hierarchical power of the forum itself. This matters because accountability (in its forum guise) tends to regard itself both directly as monitor and indirectly as reason for action. It constitutes the transparency that allows knowledge to be passed up the hierarchy and as such is, post-factum, the vehicle for retribution and pre-factum, the edifice that induces compliance (on pre- and post-factum, see Dubnick and Frederickson 2011b). It is, in other words, necessarily hierarchical and coercive.

The forum is weak if there is no ground-level 'fit'. In practice, the forum's response to this weakness is invariably a reinforced turn towards its principal-agent tools. When the principal-agent mechanism comes to the fore, the focus turns to reinforced surveillance and scrutiny, reinforced reward/penalty structures and reinforced narratives of admonition and approbation. Again, however, the success or not of these tools depends on the broader patterns of accountability that have emerged within organisations.

Bazaar

Whereas the Bovens forum, as with all other accountability spaces, relies upon the agora for its traction, other accountability spaces that pervade public administration tend to be illegible to more formal or ritualised spaces, or are treated with great hostility. We turn to the 'bazaar' here as one such space. Bazaar describes the exchange element in the accountability space: the standpoints that emerge in situations where people develop relationships – fleeting at times – rooted in their trading with others in mutual pursuit of each other's interests.

This section is crucial for us because it sets out an alternative and emergent relational space, independent of – and illegible to – the forum, through which both accountable relationships and seeming unaccountability emerge. We suggest that the dynamics inherent in bazaar are fundamentally human, elemental and inevitable (following Smith [1776] 1999) but also that they are fundamental to administrative work. That the Bovens model cannot account for bazaar is striking, we think, because it suggests the model's narrow nature: it seeks accountability out in a space largely defined by the principal agent model but not by the social underpinnings upon which its relational precepts rely.

The section is broken down into two parts. First, we discuss what precisely we think is included in this kind of 'thin/thick' space. Second, we discuss some characteristics of bazaar – its ubiquity and its contribution to productivity and from there discuss the attitude of actually-existing forums towards the bazaar and what that tells us about the idea of accountability itself. Our aim is as such twofold: to draw out the special characteristics of this accountability space and to emphasise its centrality to actually existing administration.

Note that we do not approach the forum as a moral problem primarily: as we have it in the discussion below, exchange may well be used for good reasons and bad. One can easily imagine the emergence of a kleptocratic system as people trade on their insider power. What is hard to imagine, though, is a social system where people do not trade on their positions to some extent. It is not automatically the case that this must be deemed a bad thing.

Our focus is on the emergent cascade of negotiations, exchanges and favours that come to the fore both in corporate and administrative environments. These sometimes fleeting instances of exchange, emerging within the agora, assist people in developing reciprocal standpoints, commiting to arrangements and giving accounts of themselves to their peers. They also help them to develop practical reasons and to act on the social foundations that they (collaboratively) construct. Such arrangements are 'thin' in their fleeting nature, but

'thick' in the moments that they hold (drawing on the thick-thin distinction that is brought to the fore in O'Kelly and Dubnick 2006).[22]

What we are interested in in this section, in other words, is the fundamental trait Smith outlines in The Wealth of Nations:

> In civilised society [a person] stands at all times in need of the co-operation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons . . . But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of (Smith [1776] 1999, pp. 118-9).[23]

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[22] Let us begin by noting that we do not associate the core characteristics of the 'bazaar' accountability space with the dynamics that are associated with New Public Management (NPM) and subsequent movements. New Public Management's call to utilise the price mechanism, market forces and innovation to allow the state to steer public services rather than provide them itself (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). It is no coincidence that this major driver in discussions of public administration has been positively correlated with the rise of accountability as government's core focus. NPM and its heirs are, after all, articulated precisely as being a solution to accountability failures in bureaucracy and as the route to weeding out non-performance through accountability.

What does this form of accountability actually mean however? Accountability here is a form of exposure. NPM's point, in a sense, was to create new, seemingly more constructive problems and vulnerabilities for bureaucrats to focus on – competition, tendering and the like – in such a way that something called accountability would emerge (see for instance Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector 1990, on 'change management' and the requirement to concoct new pressures to force organisational reform).

This accountability would come either from the disciplinary effects of failure's transparency, or from the more explicit standards set by 'contractual' governance – it relies, in short, on the production of narrow principal-agent mechanisms. NPM is a project aimed at developing evidence through which non-performance might be exposed and, derived from that, it is generally supposed, (Although the link between this style of 'accountability' and administrative performance is tenuous at best. On which see Dubnick 2005) through which performance might be improved. The actually-existing switch to a more business-like public administration, however, emerged not as marketized bureaucracy, but as a market for bureaucracies. The major thrust of the era has been the rise of 'giant firms' (as Colin Crouch 2011, has called them) that compete for relatively long-term contracts in the provision of public services, be they in education, healthcare, administration of security or employment benefits etc. As with the state, each of these firms is in many ways

characterised by complex lines of vertical and horizontal integration, and is subject to processes of a Weberian 'militarised' discipline (Weber 1978, 1155_) that seek to define and control the landscapes of work.

[23] This paragraph continues, famously, with Smith telling us that 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.'

The will to exchange 'by treaty, by barter and by purchase' is a central social trait, whatever the currency of exchange. Trade in reputation, esteem, influence, access, gifts or power is as compelling as more traditional commerce and it provides an important basis for cooperation in organisational settings.

It is also worth pointing out, following Smith, that we do not necessarily see this kind of trade, to put it somewhat pointedly, as the 'feral' pursuit of some kind of solipsistic advantage. Exchange as Smith sees it can be more related to prudence, a rational balancing of interests with the facts and constraints of the exchange itself and a socialising influence on human ambition (see Hirschman 1997; also Macfie 1967, esp ch. 4).

If this is the case, then exchange ought to be regarded as a far more nuanced phenomenon than is generally the case. The relationships that emerge in the 'bazaar' tend to be viewed as purely egoistical – borne purely from unreasonable, or non-reasoned self-interest. The perception of informality around exchange, its association with individual gain and the whiff of corruption all lead exchanges invisibility in administrative ethics literature except as a phenomenon that needs to be rooted out.

Contrary to this perspective, we look upon exchange as a crucial subject of study in our field – for two reasons: its ubiquity and its underpinning of organisational productivity. We discuss ubiquity and productivity briefly below before moving on to discuss the relationships between accountability within exchange and the accountability forum.

Ubiquity
In part, as Smith realised, exchange rooted in self-interest is a fundamental aspect of human society and requires a strong level of mutual respect for each other's dignity on the part of the persons involved (Darwall 2013, p. 39). Although exchange does not rely on thick personal connections, people pursue their goals by shifting to the development of relatively narrow connections, based on reciprocal commitments to pursue agreed ends with their interlocutors, and on normative commitments, "for example that the exchange is made by free mutual consent, that neither will simply take what the other has and so on" (Darwall 2006, pp. 46-47). Exchange, Darwall goes on to say,

> . . . involves a reciprocal acknowledgement of norms that govern both parties and presupposes that both parties are mutually accountable, having an equal authority to complain, to resist coercion, and so on. (Darwall 2006, p. 48)

This kind of exchange, in other words, is a necessary element in the human condition and it is surely beyond the capacities of any organisational infrastructure to eradicate it. Where people work together towards various ends, they will exchange favours, information, or esteem in pursuit of those ends.

Exchange involves the development and maintenance of skills that derive from familiarity with the rules and norms of a range of social practices (involving an (implicit) absorption both of 'games' and of 'meta-games', following Tanney 2000). It is inherently social and, for those who develop the skills, especially in 'repeat games', where the same players repeat their interactions numerous times, benefits follow.

Productivity

In fact, given that any work process must be necessary be incomplete, it may well be that these kinds of relationship are necessary given the difficulty both in fully anticipating the requirements of any task and in rendering work fully legible to managerial control. The travails of organisations where employees 'work to rule' are proof of the reliance of organisations on self-directed action by their workforce. While it is not the only aspect of this, we place bazaar into this category - self-directed collaborative action without which administrative organisations would simply not function.

In part this is because the kinds of exchange we are interested in, often as part of repeat games are crucial in the development (or not) of trustworthiness and in networks of trust. So, while bazaar in and of itself sits between 'thick' and 'thin' in terms of social relationships ('thick relations' within 'thin parameters'), repeated iterations of exchange may well lead to some thickening of relationships as people establish their reliability and bona fides and as more stable accountability spaces emerge.

Bureaucratic Back-Scratching. One instance of this was outlined by Robert Goodin (1975) at level of bureaucratic agencies: 'bureaucratic back-scratching' as he called it. Writing from a public choice perspective, Goodin challenged the idea that bureaucratic interaction could be explained simply in terms of clashing self-interest. 'The traditional emphasis on conflict in the bureaucratic politics model is appropriate only in certain circumstances,' Goodin wrote. 'Where high stakes are involved it is likely to work well, but on the other side of some fuzzy threshold stakes are low and rational bureaucrats would cooperate rather than fight' (Goodin 1975, p. 65).

For Goodin, the key dynamic in exchange of this type was towards coordination and collaboration aimed at ensuring, not that all would compete, but that all would get something that they wanted. It was inherently cooperative – a point that can be made in more general terms about markets (Lindblom 2002). And indeed, administrative systems can be highly efficient in their development of dual trust-exchange dynamics between parties (Williamson 1975).

Tolkach. The Soviet system represents one – perhaps surprising – administrative arena where exchange emerged in interesting ways. The intensely top-down system through which the mid-20th Century Soviet Union was organised relied upon Gosplan's instructions and disciplinary capacities to drive production. The basic idea was that Gosplan would concoct a matrix of inputs and outputs required to arrive at an endpoint for production, that this would be disseminated to plants, distribution points etc, and that managers would implement the plan in accordance with their instructions.

In fact, the system was sustained, to the degree that it was, through a system of exchange that existed well below the official line of sight. This system relied on 'blat' – the exchange of favours, goods, and the like – and especially on the tolkach (see Berliner 1957).[24]

> Present in most Soviet enterprises, a tolkach acted "as an expeditor," as Litwack puts it (for Berliner (1957, p. 209), a 'pusher' or 'jostler'), whose primary responsibility is to establish long-run personal relationships with other organizations for the purpose

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[24] See also Berliner 1952; Berliner 1957; Padgett and Powell 2012; Holden 2011; Khestanov 2014.

of procuring needed supplies, particularly in emergency circumstances. The presence of these informal relationships is critical to the coordination mechanism of the economy itself" (Litwack 1991, p. 80).

The Soviet system, especially the vertical economic planning system centered around Gosplan, the Soviet State's economic planning commission, can be imagined as the ultimate realisation of vertical integration, in its case integration across the state as a whole. Importantly, though, it could only have persisted as long as it did because of the informal institutionalisation of exchange at the ground level through the tolkach (on Gosplan etc see Spufford 2011; Shalizi 2012).

Blat, of course, also extended into society as a whole. The delegitimation of explicitly price-driven market institutions in Soviet economic life simply served to displace exchange into informal – and invisible – arenas, with exchange reconstituted as part of the broader workings of social life. The truck and barter of everyday life, so to speak, serves to fill the vacuums created within managerial orders. As the hero of Monika Maron's Flugasche, an East German novel of the 1980s, was chastised: "'You have so many friends,' Aunt Ida always said, 'and in spite of that everything in your place always needs to be fixed'" (Maron [1981] 1986, p. 17). This is where we find bazaar to be most interesting: it emerges as one part of a broader social milieu: one set of expectations that sit in an unstable equilibrium with other expectations in the accountability space. And it is inextricably linked to the creation, management and maintenance of relationships between people.

So the lesson we can learn from the Soviet experience is this: no matter how much exchange is discouraged, it can at best be displaced. It is not only an essential part of human interaction but is, as Goodin points out, irreducibly normative. It can of course be highly exploitative, where people trade on their insider power – as gatekeepers, as service providers etc – for their own benefit, but it is not necessarily so. It can equally involve people trading on their insider power, with other insiders, in order to get things done, to construct relationships of trust and to deepen productive ties within or across organisations.

Hostility

The hostility with which bazaar is greeted in actually-existing accountability forums arises, we think, from two concerns. First and foremost, is the concern about 'trade as kleptocracy': that is, that people might trade their insider power in exchange for favours, goods, money and the like. This is, in other words, a concern about corruption, as commonly defined. The second concern is a broader concern for the 'illegibility' of the kinds of exchange we discuss above: that such exchange is not open to description, or formal scrutiny or the like. That makes it seem either trivial – because it is simply part of a 'black box' of everyday work – or sinister – because it cannot be brought within the remit of the hierarchies that the forum seeks to enforce.

The problem of corruption is of course undeniable, but we see it very often as a distraction. Our point is that an understanding of accountability must entail an understanding of the ground-level environment through which people construct their fields of action. Those environments involve the construction, management and maintenance of both thick and thin relationships between people and most importantly they are the substrate through which the productive character of work emerges. Accountability, understood as a forum, is rightly concerned with corruption, but the study of accountability must also be a study of performance. Regarding which the forum is simply not the only place to look.

For the same reason, the suggestion of triviality – that bazaar is not a relevant subject for accountability studies – is misplaced. In constructing the accountability space, that is in developing practical reason in the face of multiple, diverse and often conflicting expectations, the forum is but one motivating factor among many. That is because people function in a network of expectations and pressures to act and seek to form a path through their working day in accordance with the imperatives the derive from that network (including through broader concerns about purpose as derived through the 'agora'). 'Third-personal' hierarchies and their forums are certainly important, but they are only one element in the pattern of expectations. And apparently 'unaccountable' conduct from one – say third-personal– perspective might well be accountable conduct from, say a second-personal perspective. What's more, what we privilege in the third personal perspective might well function best as a series of second-personal perspectives as managerial force is translated into persuasion, collaboration and, as we see below, the collaborative development of the corporate purpose.

Concluding remarks

Drawing on Dubnick's Situating Accountability (2007), Bovens discusses the phenomenon of "political officials and public organisations sometimes [free-riding] on [the] evocative powers of accountability" (2010, p. 949). His point is that political actors recruit the term "as a rhetorical tool to convey an image of good governance and to rally supporters" (Bovens 2010, p. 950). We too find this to be striking and important, although we suggest that the line from this view of accountability as 'desirable' to the idea of it as 'normative' is complicated by the problems of power, 'subservience' and discretion that Bovens goes on to discuss.

It is important to emphasise the political content of public institutions when we discuss the idea of governmental questions as being normative. The 'normative,' in such environments, cannot simply be regarded either as exogenous to the institutions, or as a separated from the kinds of political struggle that we associate with the political realm. The normative, in other words, cannot simply be taken as a given, introduced from outside our sphere of interest. It is, rather, a territorial claim, designating the speaker, or their favourites, as authorities who possess the right to define and enforce specific organisational purposes.

In this context, the virtue statements contained in many accountability discourses are better described as polemical rather than solely as normative. This means that we ought to push one step beyond the 'ought statements' that make up much accountability talk and take note of accountability's utility in attempts to solidify and fix organisational purposes towards specific ends. Official accountability discourses – the accountability forum, in other words – are at base rooted in questions of power (on which, see O'Kelly & Dubnick 2013).

Our core point is this: assertions about 'unaccountability' very often reflect a failure to appreciate the fundamentally relational nature of accountability: those who use such assertions as bases for action aimed at making situations, processes or people 'more accountable' in fact seek to assert or impose a certain form of relationship – one that is hierarchical and monopolistic – and reflect therefore a drive to power and domination.

That this is rationalised as the quest to improve performance, democracy, ethics ought not obscure its basic intent. The accountability forum, driven by polemical claims, seeks to impose order and authority on the social milieu within public organisations (and elsewhere) but it constitutes only one form of accountability. It constitutes only one cascade of expectations amongst an often conflicting and diverse multiplicity.

The Bovens Model, with its emphasis on process, seems to regard it as describing and enforcing a preeminent expectation that ought to override the others. Which is a way of saying that they tend to either assume (or accept) the legitimacy of the forum's claims. This is unfortunate because it allows the forum to tack towards an emphasis on its principal/agent components. A greater emphasis on the relational would take the forum's claims and authority as negotiated and as a contingent by-product of many other commitments that people have made and (emergent) expectations under which they work.

It is insufficient for any study of accountability, however, to simply describe unaccountability as an absence of accountability and leave it at that. Such an apparent absence, from the forum's point of view, most often describes a situation shaped by two factors, whether for good or ill:

> 1. The forum's making a claim that runs, on balance, against the other expectations through which people have shaped their working lives.

> and thus

> 2. The forum's disciplinary mechanisms either failing to overwhelm those expectations or reconfiguring the paths people negotiate through their expectations in unintended ways.[25]

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[25] It is also possible that some apparent accountability failures might best be explained as a forum style mechanism (the bonus system in large financial institutions perhaps) creating, reinforcing and even intensifying a social milieu that runs against outsiders' interests.

So unaccountability is not a failure of people to 'be accountable,' or at least that is not a useful description of their conduct. Unaccountability is, rather a failure of power, and often a failure of force.

We say this without committing ourselves to the rightness or otherwise of any path of conduct within organisations, although we are disposed to approaching accountability failures sympathetically in the first instance. Rather than assuming the decision-making autonomy of a homo oeconomicus, we treat people as irreducibly social in their motivations and in their developing reasons for action. They as active agents in the construction of integrity, transparency and the like. Organisational ends are in fact negotiated at the ground-level and are not simply 'received'. Those who hold the formal power to shape ends, their purported agents and myriad gatekeepers and middlemen all negotiate collection action on endless bases having 'come together as a [in this case relatively local] public' (Habermas 1989, p. 27) in – as we call it – an 'agora'. They do not do this as a matter of policy or by organisational imperative. They do this because the agora is a fundamental aspect of both governance and the human condition. Administration, from this perspective, is just that: human before anything else.

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