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BOOK REVIEWS

The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric, and Public Management—(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 261 pp.
by Christopher Hood

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Christopher Hood, Professor of Public Administration and Public Policy at LSE, looks at "public management," and particularly its expression in "the New Public Management" (NPM), through the backward end of a telescope, locating it in a field of history measured in millennia and crossing a global range of cultures. The telescope lens is constructed of anthropologist Mary Douglas's "grid/group" theory of cultures. Douglas classifies all cultures into four types depending on whether they are group- or individual-centered and on whether they are governed by strong ("high-grid") or weak ("low-grid") bundles of norms, rules, and conventions. Hood judges NPM advocates to be deluded by their own version of the Whig theory of history. NPM is not, in Hood's view, inevitably going to sweep away all older doctrines of public administration with its superior rationality or its more realistic (and economistic) theory of how the world works. We have seen it all before, in many places, argues Hood; moreover, what passes for a theory based on universal truths about human nature and institutional design is just so much culture-bound parochialism.

To a first approximation, says Hood, there are four and only four generic types (or "styles") of "public-management organizations" (p. 9). Each of these is "more-or-less viable," in the sense of "cohering [and] attracting loyalty," claims Hood (p. 10). The "Hierarchist Way" (high-grid, high-group) is socially cohesive and implies a rule-bound approach to organization. The "Egalitarian Way" (low grid, high group) has "high-participation structures in which every decision is up

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for grabs." The "Individualist Way" (low-grid, low-group) entails "atomized approaches to organization stressing negotiation and bargaining." The "Fatalist Way" (high grid, low group) features "low-cooperation, rule-bound approaches to organization." Examples of these four types are, respectively, an army; the German "dark green" doctrines of alternatives to conventional bureaucracy; Chicago-school "doctrines of government by the market"; and "atomized societies sunk in rigid routines" such as those described by Banfield in *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society.* In the last chapter Hood suggests that hybrids can exist also and describes six possibilities, but the bulk of the book is devoted to the basic four.

Typologies are only as good as their ability to illuminate causal connections between the substantive types and phenomena outside the typology. Hood attempts this with respect to beliefs about the causes of organizational failure; organizational vulnerabilities; strategies of control, regulation, and the enforcement of accountability; and various "what-to-do doctrines" about particular issues in public management. With respect to control, for instance, the Hierarchist world-view, says Hood, entails "bossism" and control through "oversight"; Egalitarianism, "groupism" and control through "mutuality"; Individualism, "choicism" and control through "competition"; and Fatalism, "chancism" and control through "contrived randomness" (pp. 50–51). With respect to interpretive frames for "public-management disasters," Hierarchists blame poor compliance with established procedures and demand tighter control; Egalitarians blame the abuse of power by elites and recommend participation, communitarianism, and whistle-blowing; Individualists blame faulty incentive structures and propose "market-like mechanisms, competitions and leagues, information to support choice (e.g., rating systems)"; and Fatalists blame "the fickle finger of fate" or "chaos theory" and look for relief to "minimal anticipation, at most *ad hoc* response after the event (p. 26). Furthermore, each of the major organizational types has its own "Achilles heel." Hierarchists trust authority and expertise too much; Egalitarians reject higher authority as a means of breaking deadlocks; Individualists tend to put individual interest before collective benefit; and Fatalists are "unwilling. . .to plan ahead or take drastic measures in extreme circumstances" (p. 28).

If the triumphalist claims of NPM to universalism and to beneficence are overblown, why have they made such headway among so many of those who write about and practice public management? There is the rhetoric, for one thing, particularly the rhetoric that holds NPM to be modernizing, fashionable, au courant, symbolic of the business sector. Hood devotes an entire chapter to the analysis of the rhetoric supposedly supporting the spread of NPM—and does so in an interesting way, in classical terms invoking tropes, metaphors, enthymemes, synecdoches, and the like. Secondly, the self-interested promotional activities of consultants play a role, along with the self-interested motives of top managers

looking for NPM-derived justifications for their Hierarchist way of carrying on. Thirdly, NPM benefits from the tendency for societies to react, almost in pendulum fashion, against whatever they have been doing for a while. In any event, says Hood, the triumphalism of NPM cannot be justified by appeals to facts and logic alone, since "arguments about how to organize and manage are rarely if ever closed" by these alone; and indeed, "often they cannot be, because the issues at stake are at best 'trans-scientific' in nature," that is, although stateable in scientific terms nevertheless beyond testing because "crucial experimentation is in practice not feasible" (p. 173).

Hood's final chapter considers his and Mary Douglas's version of "cultural theory" as a relatively new acquisition for the social scientific toolkit. He reviews several objections to it but concludes that, despite certain problems, "the analytic assets dwarf the liabilities" (p. 226).

For intellectual scope and ambition, *The Art of the State* is almost without peer in the recent public management literature. For that, and for its many exotic examples of management experiments and management failures, it is worth reading. For a convincing critique of NPM, however, or a convincing demonstration of the worth of cultural theory, it is less satisfactory.

Hood is right to say that cultural theory, including both the group/grid version and others as well, can potentially make a great contribution to our understanding of public management. Hood's rendering fails to do so, however, and on many counts. For instance, his characterization of the essential elements of at least two of the four basic "ways" of public management simply miss the point. The essence of contemporary Hierarchy is less rules and oversight than it is the supposedly planful and rational multi-level division of labor and the assignment of tasks that the rules and oversight enforce. The essence of Individualism is specifying objectives from the center, decentralizing the choice of means to actors with local knowledge, and using performance-based contingent rewards and punishments to motivate achieving the objectives. Competition, bargaining, and negotiation are only occasional or auxiliary features of such systems. It is no wonder, then, that he also mistakenly sees the Achilles heel of Hierarchy as an excess of trust when its much more significant and distinctive vulnerability is the excess of red tape and rigidity.

Hood does not, moreover, trouble to distinguish between administrative systems that are mainly concerned with motivating and controlling their own operatives (e.g., contemporary democratic systems) and those that aim also to manage the larger society (e.g., egalitarian communes, and the hierarchically-minded cameralism of 17th-century German states with ambitious programs of economic development). This means that the "viability" of certain fatalist and egalitarian **societies** then gets transferred to these sorts of administrative systems, which from a technical point of view may not be very "viable" at all. Who would doubt that many "viable" ways of **life** exist and are tolerated, perhaps even

legitimated, by various societies? The question is which performs more effectively and efficiently given certain social objectives. Athletes and drug addicts both have ways of life, no doubt considered legitimate and even desirable by at least some of those who carry on within them, but who would you expect to win a marathon? In mass democracies at the end of the twentieth century the consensual objectives are, in Mark Moore's phrase, "creating public value" for the mass of the citizenry effectively, efficiently, and with due regard for accountability. "Viable" or not, neither Fatalism nor Egalitarianism is capable of doing this. (Fatalism, indeed, hardly even appears "viable.") Both "traditional" (more or less hierarchical and rule-driven) and "new" (more-or-less results-oriented and incentives-driven) versions of "public management" would appear to most observers to have much better claims.

As to whether the more traditional or the newer version of contemporary public management might have the best claims, Hood's agnosticism is surprising. A great many studies documenting improved performance of the new relative to the traditional mode of doing business—from New Zealand to Minnesota—have appeared. Most are merely, albeit very usefully, suggestive, though some, e.g., in the area of contracting out for local services, are on firmer evidentiary ground. Even more surprising is Hood's claim that logic and fact are incapable of resolving uncertainty about such issues. To be sure, as with all complex social phenomena, conceiving and executing good studies is difficult, but certainly not impossible.

Hood is of course correct to say that the rhetorical claims on behalf of NPM are excessive, and that self-interested "gurus" and consultants have a stake in purveying them. But this fact is irrelevant to whether more circumscribed and more realistic claims are true and, if true, ought to be better broadcast. Ironically, I find no mention in *The Art of the State* of the most realistic grounds for criticizing NPM, which are that it (slightly) undermines traditional notions of "the rule of law" and that it is often too hard to operationalize the desirable outputs against which agency or individual performance is to be assessed.