Byzantine Complexity
Making Sense of Accountability

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The concept of accountability is one that has a long tradition as a concept in both political science and financial accounting. In political science for example, John Locke’s theory of the superiority of representational democracy built on the notion that accountability is only possible when the governed are separated from the governors (Locke 1690/1980; cf. Grant and Keohane 2005). It was also a major concern to the fathers of the American constitution and few areas have been so fundamental to thinking about the political system in America as accountability (e.g. Finer 1941; Friedrich 1940; Dubnick and Romzek 1993). The central idea from that time is still with us: When decision-making power is transferred from a principal (e.g. the citizens) to an agent (e.g. government), there must be a mechanism in place for holding the agent to account for their decisions and if necessary impose sanctions, ultimately by removing the agent from power. In accounting the concept’s long tradition is associated with a more limited in scope referring to financial prudence and accounting in accordance with regulations and instructions (e.g. Normanton 1966; Barton 2006), but the principle of delegating some authority, evaluating performance and imposing sanctions is essentially the same.

In the last 10 to 15 years, however, the concept of accountability has become fashionable not just in expanding circles of political scientists and economists but among the broader community of scholars and practitioners concerned with such diverse areas as administration, development, business ethics, governance, international organizations, policy networks, democratization, civil society, and welfare state reform. To illustrate this growth: when Schmitter and Karl (1991) contended that accountability was central key to most definitions of democracy, their claim was met with overwhelming indifference and occasional expressions of hostility (cf. Schmitter 2004). A decade and a half later, a quick search in any of the academic
search engines using “accountability” in combination with “democracy” or “democratization” generates literally hundreds of results. Expanding the search to cover related fields in the social sciences and one is confronted with a dizzying number of entries illustrating the magnitude of the explosion of articles on accountability in its various forms.

Predictably, this proliferation has resulted in a myriad of meanings and dimensions associated with the concept of “accountability”. To make matters worse, the international donor community and their veritable crowds of consultants have picked up on this trend in their focus on ‘good governance’ and added their (not always politically independent) peculiarities to the conceptual landscape. I write ‘make matters worse’ because of the inherent dangers of a byzantine conceptual nightmare leading not only to stretching (Sartori 1970; 1984) but to severe confusion about what the core meaning of accountability is. One may reply ‘so what?’ since examples abound of ‘essentially contested concepts’ (Gallie 1958; Collier et al. 2006) that have produced both interesting and fruitful theoretical debates and spurred further empirical research. This paper is not an argument against such informed engagement in advancement of key concepts in the social sciences. Rather, it is an effort to escape the dangers of ‘hi-jacking’ established concepts and endowing them with new meanings and dimensions that dilute their currency, creates ambiguity, vagueness, and collective semantic confusion. There is an important difference between a debate of advantages and disadvantages of a few clearly delineated alternative definitions, and uncontrolled, myopic, and unrelated conceptual diversification. There are real dangers and costs to the conceptual confusion following such developments. Indeed, if and when a concept takes on too many and at least partly contradictory meanings it loses its value as analytical instrument. Studies using different notions of a concept such as accountability and therefore come to different results, can not be directly
compared and risk engaging in what can be likened to a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ rather than constructive theoretical and conceptual advancement.

Are we at that point with regards to accountability? Perhaps not, but the current state of affairs bear uncanny resemblance to the situation regarding ‘diminished subtypes’ in the study of democratization not long ago. For a while scholars were constantly issuing new more or less helpful labels of democratically sub-optimal systems of rule and Collier and Levitsky (1995) reportedly stopped counting at 550 different ‘democracy with adjectives’ when reviewing the literature in the 1990s. We have not gotten that far yet in descriptive labels of accountability but after reviewing a substantial portion of the literature I have nevertheless counted well beyond 100 different ‘subtypes’ and usages. It may well be that the battle is already lost and we will soon see the abandonment of accountability as an analytical construct in favor of more precise alternative concepts to guide empirical analysis.

Yet, accountability may still be useful if we are able to organize its usage appropriately. The key argument of this paper is that while accountability is one of several methods of constraining power and thus a subordinate to it in a classical sense, the internal structure of the concept of accountability in terms of its subtypes (such as political, bureaucratic, legal, professional, financial, and societal accountability) make it a radial concept. These distinctions are not merely points of intellectually interesting discussion (to some of us…) but has important methodological and theoretical implications. Classical and radial categories necessitates alternative empirical approaches of analysis, and causal arguments based on studies on

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1 Examples range from “limited democracy” (Archer 1995, 166), to “restricted democracy” (Waisman 1989, 69), “protected democracy” (Loveman 1994), and “tutelary democracy” (Przeworski 1988, 60-61). Some scholars have argued that some labels are misleading since they are negations of democracy, for example Joseph’s (1997, 367-8) “virtual democracy”.

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accountability on one level of analysis using a particular type of concept does not necessarily apply to other types and levels.

In an effort to facilitate an informed and somewhat more orderly and consistent usage of accountability, this paper ventures through a few familiar stages of concept formation. Although it may feel a little cumbersome, it is nevertheless necessary since concepts can never be verified. While deductions are validated by their logical consistency and inductions are validated by their empirical applicability over a large number of cases, the validity of the specification of a concept and its internal characteristics lies in its ability to address the research question. The real test of the usefulness of a conceptual construction is its ability to be operational in empirical analysis. This paper thus first clarifies a few fundamentals about concept formation and comparison and then discusses classical, family resemblance, and radial categorizations. From there, the structure of the concept of accountability is analyzed and the implications in terms of appropriate empirical strategies and distinctions are drawn. The paper then takes a closer look at the subtypes of political accountability illustrating the conceptual complexity and the inappropriateness of using the findings in this area for lessons about other radial categories of accountability.

**A Clarification on Terms, Concepts, and Phenomena**

It may be advisable to first state a few fundamentals in order to avoid misinterpretations of the following argument. In reference to what is sometimes called the semantic triangle, there is no necessary linkage between (i) a particular term like “accountability”, (ii) the conceptual construct of the beholder, and (iii) the empirical phenomenon it refers to. Present day post-
positivists of various inclinations\textsuperscript{2} build much of their critique against mainstream approaches on this realization. But Pierce (1931-58), Ogden and Richards (1923) and de Saussure (1915/1974)\textsuperscript{3} recognized it long ago and few modern positivists persist in assuming any kind of objective relationship between a term, the concept we have in mind and the phenomena we try to measure\textsuperscript{4}. Rather, as argued effectively by Sanders (2002, 54-63), modern mainstream social science scholars have found ways to adapt while retaining the strengths of the positivist tradition. For example, while our conceptualizations always condition our observations – such as if we define “swans” as white birds we will miss the black Asian variant of swans – the conclusion is that we need more precise and explicit specifications of concepts, not less. Hence, the indeterminate relationship between terminology, concepts and reality, and the “softness” of certain phenomena that we wish to study do neither translate into making a social scientific endeavor impossible, nor forces all of us to become concerned only with emic meanings. As a source of knowledge,\textsuperscript{5} sometimes it makes sense to integrate new ‘local’ meanings into concepts, sometimes it does not.

Second, if theory is always colored by observation – and I believe it is – there is a critical relationship between theory and observation. Not every observation can support a theory and


\textsuperscript{3} The terminologies they use are slightly different. Pierce referred to these concepts as sign, object, and interpretant; Ogden and Richards talked about symbol, referent, and reference; while de Saussure worked with signifier, signified and referent.

\textsuperscript{4} This recognition has led to many efforts at simplifying conceptual constructs in order to facilitate more valid measurement and analysis. This is particular true with complex, often multidimensional phenomena just like democracy (e.g. Bollen 1990, Coppedge 2003, Munck and Verkuilen 2003).

\textsuperscript{5} No claim is made here that science is the only source of knowledge about the world. The only point made here is that scientific knowledge production in the social sciences should be characterized by striving to attain certain requirements.
accordingly, not all theories are equally good. But any causal or descriptive theory must have empirical referents so that we can make observations. Theory should always be evaluated on its own terms but without empirical implications it is simply not a theory; it is an untestable assumption at best, and a metaphysical belief at worst - except if it concerns theories in political philosophy (c.f. King, Keohane and Verba 1994). This is a stance informed by Popper’s proposition that empirically falsifiable theories are the evidence of scholarship (Popper 1999/1953, 57ff). Thus, any analytical concept (as different from empirically existing concepts, or emic knowledge) we use and its theoretical specification must lend itself towards empirical evaluation. This is not to say that we can always observe the referents of a concept directly, of course, or that we should only be concerned with ‘measurable but trivial’ aspects of social reality. To take an example from the natural sciences, the concept of gravity (a concept that is a whole causal theory in itself, by the way), has empirical implications we can observe but gravity itself can not be observed. Similarly, in most instances we must do with less than perfect empirical referents and data (whether quantitative or qualitative) for evaluation of our theories in the social sciences in order to address non-trivial issues. This can not be used as an excuse for advancing theories that are not testable in principle, however. With these preliminaries, we can move on to the first stage of clarification of the concept of accountability.

**Classic, Radial and Family Resemblance Concepts: Not Always Alternatives but Layers of Conceptual Formation**

What *kind* of analytical concept is the construct of accountability? Most readers are probably familiar with the distinctions between classical categorizations, family resemblance, and radial
concepts but let me iterate the key differences for the sake of clarity. Classic concept formation is hierarchical and aims for mutually exclusive definitions, hence defining attributes are co-jointly necessary and sufficient (in the descriptive sense, not to be confused with causal factors). In the logic of classical understanding of concepts therefore, all defining characteristics must be present in an object in order for it to be classified as an instance (Collier and Mahon 1993; Coppedge 2005; Munck 2001; Sartori 1984; Schedler 2001). The defining characteristics are necessary minimum criteria that must be present in full; if one or more characteristics are missing, the object in question is simply classified as ‘not belonging’. When all criteria are present, that is fully sufficient to make it an instance of the category.

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

The organization of classical categories builds on what Sartori (e.g. 1984, 23) refers to as intention and extension: intension refers to defining characteristics while extension refers to objects to which it applies. It follows that the more and precise characteristics one attaches to a concept, the fewer the objects it will apply to. This is what some philosophers have held to be a ‘law of inverse variation’ (e.g Angeles 1981, 141). Hence, there is a hierarchy of concepts such as red, green and yellow apples are categories of apples, who in turn belong to the class of fruits along with bananas, oranges and so on. Fruits are part of a superior category of foodstuff and we can go on. Sartori (1970, 1040) refers to this as the ‘ladder of abstraction’ but in line with Collier and Mahon (1993, 846) I think it is better labeled ‘ladder of generality’: the further up the ladder the fewer defining characteristics (intension) and the larger number of objects it refers

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6 For a more detailed discussion, see e.g. Collier and Mahon (1993).
7 This is not true in an absolute sense, however. The number of objects a concept refers to is a matter of empirical investigation, not analytical deduction (cf. Munck XXX) but in practical terms the reasoning holds close to always and is therefore useful.
to (extension). Democracy and authoritarianism are subtypes of the superior category of regimes. They both share all the defining characteristics of regimes, but have in addition several defining characteristics that are unique for each of them. Bureaucratic and competitive authoritarianism are in turn subtypes of authoritarianism.

When a concept such as accountability (that once upon a time had a commonly defined core set of characteristics) is applied in new contexts, if it is a classical concept, and if scholars are concerned with conceptual integrity and therefore were following Sartori’s advise, one would be advised to move up the ladder of generality. The answer could be something like: Accountability belongs to a class of concepts under the more general category of ‘methods of limiting power’ (others being, for example, devolution of power, violence, economic pressure, public shame, and anarchy). When a phenomena in a new context does not squarely fit the definition of accountability, one moves up the ladder of generality to a superior category, thus avoiding conceptual stretching. To go back to the metaphor: red apples and oranges are not comparable as instances of apples, but they are comparable as instances of fruit.

Classical concept formation thus follows a neat and simple set of rules not only for categorization but also for comparison. In deciding on what basis a set of cases should be compared, the defining characteristics are used for classification – not for explanation. The methodological implication should perhaps be obvious: Apples cannot, or should not, be compared with regards to their ‘appleness’ as an explanation for why humans tend to favor one type over another. Classical concepts dichotomize into objects that clearly are, and those that are not: a binary 0 / 1 that lends itself to standard small-N comparative methods, Boolean analysis and maximum likelihood estimation techniques. Subtypes of classical concepts, however, can be more numerous and are all complete instances of the general category. Classical subtypes are
therefore nominal categories (not more or less, just different) versions of the type in question. Religions, for example Islam and Christianity, are not more or less religions but nominally different instances, or subtypes. If we think of various kinds of accountability as subtypes in the classical sense, this applies to instances of various types of accountability (political, financial, legal, bureaucratic). None of them represent more or less accountability but different types of accountability.

Classical concepts allows for more flexibility than it may seem at first, if only used with care and conscious crafting. What is sometimes forgotten is that while from the perspective of the superior concept these subtypes are only nominally different (i.e. they are not instances of more/less of for example accountability) they can nevertheless have other interesting qualities and/or effects that are matters of degree. Among full democracies, subtypes distinguished by electoral systems are know to have various effects such as higher levels of participation and women’s legislative representation in countries using proportional representation (e.g. Lijphart 1977, 1994, Lindberg 2004, Norris 2004). All are variants of full democracies.

Second, if one rather wishes to measure the impact of various ‘levels of accountability’ between systems, it is appropriate and fully legitimate to shift unit of analysis. This point about classical categorizations is sometimes missed in the literature (e.g. Marsteintredet 2007, 3-5). Instead of using criteria for what accountability is to select the universe of cases, one picks a set defined by something else, e.g. local community political systems, relationships between courts and district assemblies, citizen-bureaucrat relationships in the land sector, or another topic. Level (and/or kind) of accountability can then be conceptualized as qualities that these units of analysis have to a greater or lesser degree (making them variables at ordinal or interval level). The point is that instead of restricting the universe of cases to objects that are instances of
accountability relationships (when that is conceptualized as the unit of analysis), the universe of cases are defined by a different set of criteria that presents a range of cases that have the potential of displaying certain qualities – in this case accountability relationships. Another possibility is to create a new concept and the social sciences are full of more or less useful and more or less unknown conceptual innovations. The danger is of course isolation and inconsumerability with findings from earlier studies but when timely and useful it can launch important new research directions such as Hyden’s (1980) suggestion to move from focusing on how the government rules (or fails to rule) to study how ‘governance’ actually takes place laying the foundation for the whole new paradigm of ‘good governance’.

The third, very common (and much disliked by Sartori and his followers) solution is to redefine the existing concept by dropping some characteristics and sometimes adding other ones instead. Reading the now vast literature of accountability with various typologies covering virtually everything from policy networks in the international community (Grant and Keohane 2005) to community governance of crime in some particular localities in Britain (Benyon and Edwards 1999), this seems to be the dominant trend\(^8\): It is a byzantine complexity of conceptual innovation and variation that if anything makes a serious comparativist want to either abandon the concept of accountability or simply dismiss the bulk of it.

\(^8\) Another technique frequently used when one or two characteristics are missing for a class of objects, is to create ‘diminished sub-types’. In the democratization literature this has been fairly standard as mentioned above and involves a danger of creating an ever larger set of diminished subtypes with unclear relationships. Strictly speaking, ‘diminished’ subtypes are not instances of the superior category. For example, accountability minus the right of the principal (e.g. the people) to sanction the agent (e.g. a politician, a chief, a family head) is a ‘diminished subtype’ but again is not really an instance of accountability since there is no enforceable obligation by the agent to be responsive to the principal (but more on this later). This, however, in effect means one is departing from classical concepts and move into the land of family resemblance categorization. See more below.
Family Resemblance

But there are at least two alternatives outside of the realm of classical categorization. Some scholars (e.g. Putnam 1981, 19) have drawn upon Wittgenstein’s (1968) investigation of the nature of language and his idea of family resemblance. This entails a principle of ‘belongingness’ to a category that is different from classical categorization in that there may be not even a single attribute that all objects in a category share. Thus, like members of a human family sharing attributes to varying degrees but there is not one attribute that is shared by all. In Collier and Mahon’s (1993, 847) words:

“A category defined in a particular way, may fit a number of cases reasonably well, but on close examination it can become clear that for most cases the fit is not perfect.”

They exemplify with the literature on corporatism (e.g. Malloy 1977; Schmitter 1974) presenting a set of commonalities and defining attributes of corporatist systems without the expectation that any system should display the full set of attributes. In a certain sense, this is close to Weber’s (XXXX) ideal-types that also clearly spells out defining characteristics but use them as variables rather than exacting criteria as in the case of classical categories. The expectation rather is that reality is ‘messy’ but that it can generally be discerned which ideal type a particular case is closer to. While Weber and his followers (at least most of them, and Evans and Rausch 1999 being an exception) worked with qualitative evaluations of the characteristics, this is akin to the creation of multi-dimensional index in an effort to measure a concept, such as many have done for example with democracy⁹ (e.g. Bollen 1979, Coppedge

⁹ In the discussion of empirical democracy, scholars like Alvarez et al. (1996), Huntington (1991, 11-2), Geddes (1999), Linz (1975, 184-5), and Cheibub et al. (1986) rather vigorously argue in favor of a dichotomous approach. Speaking about democracy as a matter of degree is, in Sartori’s words, a “stultifying” exercise in “degreeism” (1987, 184).
and Reinecke 1990, Freedom House, Marshall and Jaggers 2002, Hadenius 1992, and Vanhanen 1997). Each democratic attribute is measured along a scale from zero to full, then the various characteristics are combined according to some formula, usually additive and more rarely multiplicative. The World Bank is working according to the same formula with their governance indicators (e.g. see Kaufman 2006). Qualitative scholars working with ideal type characteristics and measuring in non-quantitative ways how close the combined aspects of a particular case resembles the ideal type, is doing essentially the same thing as the quantitatively oriented index-creators.

The danger with taking a family resemblance approach to categorization is not really discussed in the literature but it should be said that the main disadvantage is a possibility of descending into the abyss meaningfulness. If a concept (for example ‘accountability’) has say five attributes (e.g. 1-a principal; 2-an agent; 3-an area of discretionary responsibility for the agent; 4-an obligation of the agent to inform about and justify decisions to the principal; and 5-a right of the principal to sanction the agent) that can be used to identify objects to which it applies, it may seem reasonable to allow objects that have only four of the five conditions in varying combinations to be ‘enough’ in order to classify them as instances of ‘accountability’, albeit in some less than full sense. Yet, two problems arise that both threatens to lead towards dilapidation:

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10 The difference between these two is methodologically and conceptually important, however. A multiplicative scale implies that all characteristics are necessary conditions: if one scores zero the total will also be nil. An additive scale involves no such logic with the implication that none of the characteristics are necessary. For example, such an index if it includes full suffrage could end up classifying countries with no suffrage as a democracy if it scores high enough on other indicators. It goes without saying that this is a highly questionable strategy. (c.f. Munck and Verkuilen 2002)
A) This implies that none of the attributes are necessary criteria and that having four criteria in any combination can ‘compensate’ enough for the missing one. One would have to interrogate the conceptual validity of these assumptions and take a careful look at the empirical implications in order to justify such permissiveness.

B) If we allow for one missing attribute, why not also one and a half, or two, and then three? How is the permission to allow for one missing attribute but not more justified on a conceptual and theoretical level? Alternatively, how much or close must an object be on each attribute to be classified as an instance of the concept?

In effect one risks what Pitkin (1967, 1973) sees as a reality of many concepts in political science and Sartori with his strict rules tried to avoid: That there is in fact not a single concept but several referring to various phenomena collated under a single term (cf. Adcock 2005, 26-27). Thus too much rigidity may prevent interesting and more complex comparisons from being made but excessive flexibility may make for seemingly interesting but essentially meaningless analyses. Let me illustrate with the concept we are concerned with in this paper. Let say we are studying accountability as a key factor in for example explaining variations in the extent of public goods provided by a political (sub-) system. If all sorts of phenomena that constrain the exercise of power are labeled accountability relationships one may end up with the conclusion that accountability plays little or no role at all simply because several mechanisms that constrain the exercise of power (e.g. violence or anarchy) may not produce much of public goods at all. Yet, some concepts may by their nature be of the family resemblance kind, whether it suits our academic purposes or not (cf. Goetz 2006). For comparative analytical purposes it is crucial to remember when using family resemblance categories that they are always of the nominal kind.
(cf. Marsteintredet 2007, 5). It thus imposes stringent restrictions on the types of comparative analyses one can carry out.

**Radial Categories**

The third type of concept classification is radial categories (Lakoff 1987, 47, 74-76, 83-84). Collier and Mahon (1993, 848-9) borrowing from Lakoff provides what I find an excellent example of this: the superior category of Mother understood as a ‘prototype’ or ‘best case’ of which there are very few objects but subtypes such as ‘birthmother’ or ‘nurturing mother’ that may in fact have more empirical referents than the superior concept – just the opposite to classical categories. Let’s illustrate, borrowing some from the above mentioned authors:

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

For the sake of illustration, let us assume an agreement on a stereotypical ‘prototype mother’, and let A = female, B = provides 50% genetic make-up, C = gives birth to child, D = provides nurturance, and E = married to father. A crucial difference becomes obvious: In classical categories, sub-types *add* attributes to the defining characteristics of the superior (or ‘root concept’). In that case, there can not be more cases in the subtype category than in the superior and in almost all cases there will be fewer. Indeed, this is the very rationale for setting up the subordinate category as such in the classical categorization scheme. In the case of radial categories all attributes are contained in the superior concept and the subtypes have *fewer* characteristics. Therefore the ‘law of inverse variation’ is reversed and there are more ‘genetic mothers’ in the world than ‘mothers’ in the full sense. At least this is the standard interpretation (e.g. Collier and Mahon 1993, 851; Ostiguy 1993).
However, that interpretation seems to be mistaken. The point of radial categories is precisely that no relationship between extension and intension exists per se. There may be more cases in some sub-types than in the superior category but again there may be not. It is easy to imagine a world, or a region (as is the case now in parts of Africa severely affected by HIV/AIDS) with more nurturing mothers than prototype mothers. But one can also imagine a situation with more prototype mothers than say stepmothers. This is because radial categories belongs to the same level of abstraction, or generality as it were, as the subtype. What the previous literature has failed to recognize is that secondary (or ‘sub-’) categories are not secondary in the sense of having less attributes than ‘mother’, but that they include all defining attributes but with either a negative or positive load. Take ‘stepmother’ defined as a female married to the father. If these were the only defining attributes, then a lot more cases would fall into this category than we actually mean by stepmother. Besides the affirming characteristics, there are negative characteristics. The generic understanding of stepmother indicates that this female married to the father is not a ‘birthmother’ and not a ‘genetic mother’. Whether the stepmother is a ‘nurturing mother’ or not is harder to say although folklore wisdom holds that she is not...

Hence, radial categories do not only have affirmative characteristics but also negations of other radial categories as their defining characteristics. The consequence of this reasoning is that subtypes in radial concepts have as many attributes as the superior concept, hence, there is no reason to talk about moving up or down the ladder of generality. This parallels the discussion of ‘diminished subtypes’. In fact, diminished subtypes are exactly what radial concepts are about only they have not so far been recognized for what they are. To come back to the diminished subtypes of democracy-debate (e.g. Collier and Levitsky 1997) from the late
1990s: ‘illiberal democracy’ is characterized by the lack of effective civil liberties protection (Emmerson 1994). Just like the radial concepts discussed above, it is defined by the absence of one particular attribute of the superior concept and not only by that other characteristics are present. There can therefore in principle be as many, more or less cases in either category; and the difference between ‘superior’ and ‘subtype’ category does therefore also not involve any movement on the level of generality. They are radial categories occupying the same spatial extension but with different values on some attributes but all attributes are necessary parts of the definition which makes it distinct from classical concepts. In short, radial concepts consists of superior/prototype and subordinate categories at the same level of generality, hence must be treated as such in comparative work.

This is where scholars like Marsteintredet (2007) goes wrong. I agree with her that it is quite possible to use the characteristics of a concept like democracy (her example), score an object on each of the characteristics, and to combine the score into an index. But to argue that this is only possible with radial concepts seems misplaced. In fact, radial ‘subtypes’ can be partially overlapping with the generic category but between themselves only qualitatively different, not quantitatively so. Each ‘subtype’ of a radial concept is at some spatial distance from the prototype and if some share less characteristics with the prototype than others, it may be possible to measure quantitatively the difference in distance from the prototype. Radial categories may be at the same distance from the prototype but still different – i.e. at the same distance but in different ‘directions’ from the prototype as Marsteinstredet correctly notes. Figure 1 illustrates this.

(FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE)
Accountability as conceptualized above (for illustrative purposes only and without much discussion for now, more on that below), fits readily into the scheme of radial concepts. The core concept is a ‘prototype’ close to an ideal and the ‘subtypes’ have adjectives indicating a more restricted conceptual space (i.e. that they have fewer attributes than the prototype), hence, they may have a larger number of empirical referents than the core concept – in fact are quite likely so have so. But the figure also suggests something else: That different subtypes may be at varying distances from the prototype (more/less overlap), hence, that there is not only a difference in kind, but also in degree.

This leads to the well-known problem with creating single measures (NB whether qualitative or quantitative) of multidimensional concepts. Because dimensions by definition varies independently, more than one combination can result in the same average qualitative evaluation or quantitative score. In studies of democracy this has been a notoriously perpetual problem at least since Dahl’s (1971) formulation of polyarchy as the empirical definition of democracy with two principal dimensions\textsuperscript{11}. We will address this issue with regards to accountability below but before that we need to complete this discussion of concept formation and following that, discuss the substantive understand of accountability and its forms. For the sake of illustration here and now, therefore, let us look at a principal example as illustrated in Table 3. It poses an extremely simple concept with only two dimensions. Arguably, many of the concepts we operate with, and particularly those that are radial, have many more dimensions than that.

\textsuperscript{11} For good discussions of dimensionality and measures in the area, see e.g. Munck and Verkuilen 2002, Coppedge 2005, Munck 2006, XXX
Let us just assume the values on the two dimensions make sense. Even with extremely simplified, crude measures on only two dimensions, we end up with some combinations that according to the conceptual logic ‘should’ be equal (as indicated by the distance from the prototype ABCD) but in reality are qualitatively different. Going back to the example with mother above, it is easy to imagine a mother-type that consists of (female + gave birth to child + nurture child) who is not only qualitatively different from the prototype mother but is also closer in spatial terms to the prototype than stepmother (female + married to father). In a comparative analysis, the two dimensions must accordingly be analyzed separately since no single measure (again whether qualitative or quantitative) can adequately represent both. Thus, if we ultimately agree that accountability is ontologically structured as a radial concept this has important implications for how it needs to be analyzed and how units of analysis must be compared.

Layers of Conceptual Complexity

The above discussion applies to aspects of concept formation that has to do with categorization only. For many concepts, this is relatively uncontroversial and unproblematic. For example if we decide to study countries, legal courts, local governments, courts, legislatures, political parties, or some other of the many other units of analysis in political science, the categorization of ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ is often not controversial. The same goes for many of the more specific qualities, or factors, that we may want to include: The number and categories of bills enacted by the legislature, participation measured as voter turnout, electoral system, women’s legislative representation, levels of education and wealth, and the list goes on. But a fair number of

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12 Except if the dimensions are scalable, which tends to be rare.
concepts are complex, multifaceted and often contested. These tends also to be the ‘big’ concepts used for categorization such a democracy, civil society, legitimacy, and the concept of concern here: accountability.

Before we go into discussing the details of accountability, one final consideration should be useful. Are the three types of conceptual categorization necessarily alternatives even if supplementary (an understanding that seems to pervade much of the literature on concept formation), or can they exists in combinations at different levels of some concepts? The possibility of multilayered concepts that have varying ontological structures at different levels, is not much discussed in the debate on concepts. It should be recognized that Sartori’s level of abstraction, or generality as it were, is relevant for concepts of the family resemblance type and radial categories as well as for classic concepts. Even if the boundaries of family resemblance and radial concepts are different from classical, radial and family resemblance concepts typically still belongs to, and is a part of a broader and more general set of concepts that in turn have a superior category – even if that superior category itself is radial or of the family resemblance type! Mother as a radial concept is still subordinate in a classical way to females, which is subordinate to human beings.

(FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE)

As Figure 2 illustrates, legitimacy may be a radial concept but is at the same time subordinate to methods of domination, and in the same way democracy is subordinate to regimes. The latter example is particularly interesting. Collier and his collaborators (e.g. Collier and Adcock 1999, Collier and Mahon 1993, Collier and Levitsky 1997) has convincingly argued that democracy is a radial category. At the same time, they show how authoritarianism belongs to classical concepts, and together they constitute the main components of the superior concept
of political regimes. Thus the conceptual structure is even more complex that the illustration with ‘mother’ above since in that figure ‘father’ and ‘child’ arguably are equally radial in nature to ‘mother’ whereas democracy and authoritarianism is a pair consisting of one radial and one classical concept. This illustrates how the various categories can be combined at both the same and different levels of generality. This complicates comparative analysis since different types of concepts sometimes requires alternative empirical strategies for comparison and thus one needs to be aware of the structure of related concepts as well as the internal structure of the main concept of the analysis.

I will argue that the superior concept of accountability is ordered in a classical sense to a more general concept of constraints on power. But the internal structure of the concept of accountability is radial like the example with ‘mother’ and has several subtypes that share various combinations of positive and negative characteristics defining for the superior concept. Depending on which of the conceptual levels we wish to engage (superior concept, radial subtypes, or subtypes of the radial subtypes), we must remember which methodological approaches are appropriate for the various levels and types of concepts.

In a more practical sense, it stands to reason to believe that problems and prospects of accountability differs. What is required for a society to imbibe a general culture of expectations of accountability from the state and its political institutions is one thing, the specific issues relating to vertical political accountability between citizens and representatives is another, how horizontal political accountability in terms of the legislators providing effective oversight of the executive a third, what factors and incentives makes for effective vertical bureaucratic accountability is a fourth question, and so on. It can not be assumed that what works in one area will also work in another. There might even be causal relationships between them such as the
prevalent logic of vertical political accountability (exercised through voting and other means), can impact on how much horizontal political accountability is provided in a particular political system. If, for example, vertical political accountability is centered on local and perhaps even personal issues, there are few incentives for legislators to invest time and resources in the provision of executive oversight. Conversely, an electorate putting a high premium on a clean and well-monitored executive will impact positively on horizontal accountability. A situation in which both vertical and horizontal political accountability are such, is in turn likely to impact on the nature and level of bureaucratic accountability. In short, it is vital to be aware of the full range of possibilities so as to be clear when it comes to research design and analysis.

The Fundamental Notion of Accountability

If potentially overlapping, multilayered, and multidimensional – what is this polysemantic concept of ‘accountability’? The fact that there is now a increasingly growing number of varying definitions used in a literature ranging from ethnographic interpretations of idiosyncratic local meanings to highly technical financial auditing techniques, should perhaps caution us not to even try to find common denominators. It would also be impossible to

discuss all the attempts in the literature to define and operationalize accountability. Yet, a discussion of some of the varying meanings can help us narrow down and identify core attributes of the root concept – whether we think it is radial or classical in nature.

Bentham’s principle that “The more strictly we are watched, the better we behave” (quoted in Hood et al. 1999, p.XX) perhaps best captures the idea behind the necessity of accountability. Nietzsche thus indicted that we give an account only when it is requested, and only when that request is backed up by power (from Butler 2005, 11). This is the reason that accountability has for long been a key issue in constitutional scholarship (Smith and Hague 1971, 38). At a very fundamental level then, accountability is thus closely associated with authority though not necessarily political authority. Puppets acting as extensions of someone else’s will are not legitimately objects of accountability (even if puppets sometimes become scapegoats in practice). That is why accountability is different from ‘responsiveness’ (cf. REFS). While a certain degree of responsiveness is often hailed of as a desirable characteristic of leadership, in its extreme it removes both leadership as such and any need for accountability mechanisms. Only actors with some discretion to make authoritative decisions can be the object of accountability relationships (e.g. Christiano 1996, 219; Hyden 1992, 14; Thomas 1998). In Burke’s succinct statement on representative accountability: “Your representatives owes you not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.” (Burke 1774, cited in Brevold and Ross 1960, 148). Accountability hence, is associated with the act of discretionary governing, typically understood as the authoritative allocation of resources and exercising control and coordination (e.g. Dahl 1971, Koiman 1993, (1998), Thynne and Goldring (xxxx), Tsai (2007), Walker (2002), Weber (1999), Wods and Narlikar (2001), Woods, (2001), Wrede (2006).
Marsh and Rhodes 1992, Rosenau and Czempiel eds. 1992). This in turn points toward the need for a identifiable locus of authority, as argued famously by Mills:

“Responsibility is null and void when nobody knows who is responsible. … there must be one person who receives the whole praise of what is well done, the whole blame of what is ill.”

(Mills 1861/1964, 332)

This of course, does not negate the possibility that having overlapping layers of accountability relationships creates a stronger bulk walk against undesirable use of authority as argued by e.g. Day and Klein (1987), Finn (1993), Fisse and Braithwaite (1993), Romzek and Dubnick (1987), and Stone (1995). But it explains why accountability always has been central to democratic theory to the extent that it is sometimes posited that accountability necessitates democracy (REF). What Locke referred to as all men are, or ought to, be considered equal as political beings

(Select 1689-90/1970, 322) and what Dahl calls the “idea of intrinsic equality”

(1989, 85) is the fundamental condition of rule by the people. It is the equal access to be part of the decision-making process rather than the liking of the substantial decision to everyone, which satisfy the right to self-government (Ake 2000). Yet, the etymological understanding of democracy leaves out the other side of the coin (Sartori 1987: 30). Rule of the people is exercised over the very same people and to be workable any modern form of national

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14 At the time, of course, men meant just free men excluding the vast majority of the population. Without any intention of downplaying its significance, the difference is a matter of citizenship and not democratic principle, hence, is not central to the discussion here.

15 Not within the scope here to go into depth with each of these related concepts. For a good discussion of the notion of how the “people” can be conceived, see Dahl 1989, Ch. 9.

16 Political participation in the decision-making process may indeed take many forms in a democracy, ranging from localized and indulgent deliberations among friends to national and cross-national advocacy, and the selection of representatives for the execution of power. But in terms of democracy as a political system of national self-rule, it is the latter that is a necessary component and hence the focus here.
democracy must be representative\textsuperscript{17}, thus representation became grafted upon democracy (Hindess 2000). This understanding of democracy induces a particular kind of vertical political accountability (Schedler 1999), and with modern notions of democracy in larger more complex political systems, accountability has taken on a paramount significance (e.g. Moncrieffe 1998; Schmitter and Karl 1991).

Yet, there are non-democratic, as well as democratic types and mechanisms of accountability (cf. Grant and Keohane 2005) and accountability as an idea pre-dates modern democracy and is still wider in scope than just ‘democratic’ accountability. For now we thus have to stay on the more general level. At that general level, there seems to be a general agreement on four characteristics of all types of accountability. Unless I am mistaken, more or less all of the literature referred to in this paper agrees that the following should be included in the defining characteristics of any form of accountability:

1. An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent);
2. An area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);
3. An agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal);
4. The right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D, and
5. The right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.

\textsuperscript{17} Even “participatory” democracy as a formula for decision-making translates into a representative form as only the few can in practice lead, speak and contribute to mass meetings – or the meetings would be endless – whilst the many are confined to listen, evaluate and vote just as in a representative democracy proper (e.g. Dahl 1989, 277). There are indeed other venues for participatory approaches of inclusion that can feed into a policy process before the decision-point but that renders participatory approaches a supplement, as opposed to alternative, to representative democracy.
These defining characteristics may be expressed in various ways but seems to capture a core of the concept. It should be noted at the outset that none of these conditions specify that these relationships have to be formally codified or that the agents and institutions involved are formal institutions or hold an official office. Even if the individuals involved are indeed office holders such as bureaucrats in a state body, their accountability relationship may be in part of wholly informal. A director of operations may also be an informal patron of a number of employees who in turn as clients (although chief transport officer and so on) are given areas of responsibility, for example make sure that the transport needs of the director’s main rival who is also a Director competing with him or her for the slot as deputy chief director, are never met. If and when the rival’s transport works well so that he or she can claim successes in his operations and thus threaten to overtake the Director in his or her quest for the higher office, the informal client will be called to justify and explain and possibly sanctioned. In any case the client will be monitored and evaluated and if successful, rewarded.

Condition 1 and 2 together means that an identifiable person or office must have some discretionary power over a certain domain, and that domain is subject to accountability. This neither implies that the agent or institution is elected or otherwise democratic, nor does it mean that the agent or institution is necessarily accountable for all of the domains it has discretionary decision-making power over. Condition 3 and 4 together means that there is another agent or institution with a de facto right to require the agent or institution A to explain and justify decisions and actions with regard to the specified domain. Again, it is not assumed that P is elected or acting necessarily in the public interest (cf. Philip 2008, 3). Another important thing to note at this stage is the wider applicability of this conceptualization to many others, in

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18 For a very similar reasoning, see Philip (2008).
particular those that build on democratic principal-agent theory (e.g. REFS). Accountability is then usually thought of as P (the people) holding A (elected official) accountable for actions with respect to P itself. However, in many accountability relationships P is holding A accountable with respects to x, y or z denoted above as D. For example, ministers can hold top-level bureaucrats accountable for their decisions and actions with respects to lower-level bureaucrats, or other state agencies. In other words, it should not be assumed that those affected by decisions are necessarily the ones who have the right to hold the decision-maker(s) accountable.

Finally, condition 5 stipulates the crucial condition of the right for P to sanction A if the request to inform and/or explain and justify actions is not honored to P’s satisfaction. More restrictive definitions that exclude condition 5 are rare but Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) in their conceptualization of ‘societal accountability’ for example, excludes any right to sanction agents and institutions. The effectively removes any obligation of decision-makers and actors to inform, justify and explain their actions beyond what they themselves are comfortable or feel obliged to disclose. This to reduces the notion of accountability to mean little if anything in terms of holding to account since the decision-maker then are holding themselves to account only as much as they like.

A few things regarding condition 5 should be noted. The right to sanction is limited to the right to punish a failure with regards to A providing information and justification in the most general conceptualization. Many definitions of accountability (e.g. Schedler 1999, REFS) take this further to require that the right to sanction A’s decisions and actions is part of the definition. But an important distinction should be made between the right to sanction A for failure to provide requested information and justifications for decisions and actions taken, and the right to
sanction agents or institutions (A) for the content or effects of such decisions and actions. In its core, accountability only necessitates only the right to sanction A for failure to provide information and justify decisions. The right of P to also sanction the content of decisions and actions by A, is a possibility that if present adds additional leverage for the P but is not strictly necessary for the concept of ‘accountability’. There are many examples of institutions of accountability that can illustrate this. Take the ombudsman office present in many contemporary democracies. It acts as a principal monitoring elected officials as well as bureaucracies and has the right to request that those agents inform about their decisions and actions as well as calling them to justify their actions. Ombudsman-offices does typically not have the right to sanction the agents for their actions as such but can use the courts to sanction offices if the requested information and/or justifications are not provided. Similarly, in many situations elected officials can demand bureaucrats to provide full information about their decisions and actions and to justify them, but as long as a holder of a bureaucratic office have not acted in direct contravention of the formal rules and instructions, the elected official (the P in this case) is not allowed sanction the bureaucrat with degradation, loss of office and so on.

The right to sanction failures by A also has another implication. There must exist a set of criteria for measuring accountable behavior (cf. e.g. Knouse 1979, Schedler 1999). If there are no standards or measurable expectations of A with respect to A’s duties in the domain (in terms of information, justification, and perhaps decisions and performance), there can be no accountability. If one has no clear picture of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behavior, it can not be evaluated and sanctioned. This means further that there must be some form of evidence of accountable behavior. Together these implications are crucial in drawing a line between instances of empirical phenomenon that belong to accountability and those that do
not. In private client-patron networks, for example, there are often only blurred or poorly defined expectations of behavior on the part of the patron whereas the client can be confronted with rather direct demands. The clients’ right to demand information and justification from the patron is sometimes very weak, or non-existent in these highly asymmetrical power relationships and then it ceases to be an accountability relationship. If the client can request such information, there are often no or few means available to verify it and then the level of accountability is low. No one really knows what the patron does for the various individual clients except the patron him/herself. Thus, even if the client or a set of clients regularly can exhort some form of compensation, protection, or personal favors from the patron, that does not make such relationships being instances of accountability. If and when the patron-client network is at least partly transposed into a more public form where the asymmetry of power is more level, for example when the patron becomes and elected official, the clients get principal-status as voters and can demand information as well as justification on explicitly stated standards such as promises made during election campaigns. There will also be more verifiable measures of behavior such as to facilitate accountability.

This example is not intended to mean that only elected officials can be held accountable, nor that informal relationships such as patron-clientism, can never involve accountability relationships. In any setting with any set of actors, however, the five conditions and the implications discussed above with regards to measurable standards and verifiable information must be met to a sufficient degree. I am acutely aware that this still leaves substantial room for interpretation in terms of what ‘sufficient degree’ means. I am not sure this can be resolved at this level of generality, however. What is sufficiently explicit and measurable in terms of duties of information and justification, and in terms of verifiable measurables, must probably be
established in context-specific analyzes of specific subtypes of accountability. The principle argument however, is therefore important to keep in mind.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The five conditions also translates into a stylized time-line of accountability as depicted in Figure 3. Decision-making power over a particular D must first be transferred to A by P. A then acts in this capacity and P can thereafter require A to provide information and justification for these actions; and if A fails to do so, P

The previous elaborations, perhaps somewhat prolonged, have nevertheless been necessary to avoid misunderstandings along the way preventing a full understanding of the final argument. Accountability is a complex concept. As we shall see in the following, the radial categories of accountability add several other aspects. The scholars who have worked out various sets of types of accountability provide us with an analytical foundation for the radial nature of the subtypes of accountability.

Types of Accountability as Radial Categories

Formulations based on types of accountability use a variety of criteria to make analytical distinctions but it seems that these can be organized along three dimensions. Following the reasoning above about radial concepts, on each dimension, a type of accountability is characterized by either presence/high or absence/low, or in the case of spatial direction of the relationships, vertical or horizontal.

A basic notion is the distinction between if the source of the accountability relationship (the accountability holder, or principal) is internal or external to the one being held to account (e.g. Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Radin and Romzek 1996, Gormley Jr. and Balla ). For
example, in a bureaucracy where superiors are holding subordinates accountable for their tasks the source is internal. In the relationship between voters and representative, the source is external to the legislature or executive being held to account.

But it is not only the source of accountability that is important, the degree of control the principal exercises over the power holder is also important. It is probably preferable to keep our conceptual tools open to some extent to the possibility that the degree of control varies. That variation can be a source of explanation and interest in itself. Studies of voting have, for example, spent considerable energy on trying to find out exactly how much control voters in fact exercise over representative (e.g. Cox 1997, Powell 2000). Nevertheless, there are some fundamental differences between say financial auditing exercising extremely detailed control based on specific rules and regulations, and patron-client accountability where control is typically diffuse and highly contextual.

The third critical dimension in distinguishing types of accountability regards the spatial direction of the accountability relationship (c.f Schedler et al 1999 among others). Shareholder exercise an upward form of vertical accountability when they hold business executives accountable for the company’s performance. When politicians hold bureaucracies and their leaders accountable for the implementation of decision they have taken, the accountability relationship runs downward in a vertical fashion. Finally, when the legislature engages in executive oversight or the constitutional court reviews acts adopted by the legislature, this is a form of accountability that runs horizontally ‘among equals’ (O’Donnell 1998).

Using these three dimensions as analytical distinctions, we end up with 12 different types of accountability relations as depicted in Table 4. Business accountability is characterized by a P that is part of the organization typically as shareholders, holding A (executives) to
account for producing profit. The degree of control is high with details of operations provided and it runs vertically upward. The control is not necessarily detailed but in principle the P can require any form of information regarding the business. Sometimes the business accountability serves as inspiration for enhancing accountability in other spheres. It is often this type of accountability that serves as the model for various experiments with user-influence in efforts at expanding local democracy and improve quality of service delivery. But a user is not empowered in the same way as a share holder and users also typically have a range of interests whereas shareholders are joined by the vested interest in successful operation of companies and expanding profit. Hence, the business model of accountability or studies thereof, can not be transferred directly to other settings. Bureaucratic accountability is also characterized by an internal P and high control but runs downwards from top managers to lower levels. As long as it is a question of bureaucratic accountability (and not informal patron-clientism) the object of accountability is following rules and regulations in carrying out the instructions of implementation decided upon at higher levels. Managers have the right to request any information regarding the operations of the bureaucracy from lower levels, but not from higher-ups. The fact that seniors can influence and often directly decide about juniors careers, promotion and conditions of work and the formal hierarchy of a bureaucratic organization gives this form of accountability its special character. Audit accountability is a particular breed of business or bureaucratic accountability in that it is horizontal rather than vertical. An internal P is holding other offices and office holders within the same state organization accountable typically for financial accuracy and prudence. Again the level of control and ability to require very specific information is a defining feature but auditors cannot request just any kind of information but only such that lies within the formal purview of the audit.
In all organizations we can find informal forms of accountability relationships that runs both upwards as in client-patron accountability and downwards as in patron-client accountability. Both are characterized by a low degree of control with adjacent information scarcity and limited means of monitoring and evaluation. A client can request information and hold the patron accountable for delivery of the kind of benefits promised as part of the bargain but is usually limited to that. If the client is a more powerful broker as representative of an important group of clients for example, or have a special favored relationship with the patron, that client can often hold the patron accountable for certain issues outside of the direct exchange relationship. The exact dynamics typically revolves around the importance of the loyalty of the client to the patron since the main leverage for the client tends to come from threatening (implicitly or explicitly) to exit. The reverse is also true. In the patron-client form of accountability, the patron can usually hold the client accountable for a wide range of things given that what the patron can offer the client is important enough be it material rewards, personal safety, career opportunities, or improved status and fame. In poorer societies, material rewards and low-skill jobs are naturally more powerful tools for a client than in more economically developed countries. To buy client loyalty of poor people take a lot less resources than paying off more affluent individuals. Add to that the informal norm that someone who helps to sustain your living is a “father” who you always have to be loyal too which is not uncommon in poor nations, and the power of the patron to hold the client accountable is usually stronger than the client’s. Nevertheless, the patron’s right and ability to require very specific information regarding all facets of the clients activities is fairly low compared to the subtypes of accountability discussed above. The individualized nature of patron-client forms of accountability and the absence of formal rules along with the exit option for clients seems to
distinguish this form of accountability from other subtypes to the extent that generalizations from studying clientelism are unlikely to be generalizable to other forms. A sometimes formal (as in academic and professional organizations) or informal (as among peers and cohorts of professionals) form of horizontal accountability is professional/peer accountability. The degree of control is low since peers can only require information about very narrow segments of the activities of their colleagues and usually not that specific information but the P (the peers) are internal and accountability relationships are horizontal focusing like audits on safe-guarding the organizational or occupational reputation. Among the factors that distinguish this subtype of accountability is the respect for colleagues and voluntary self-submission to being held accountable that comes with professional peer reviewing. Academics evaluating each other’s work and results, and laywers’ associations certifying and monitoring peers, are examples. Thus, the dynamics of this subtype of accountability is also not easily transferred to other spheres and findings from studies of peer professional accountability are unlikely to be useful for generalizations across to other subtypes.

Accountability relationships with external P’s are fundamentally different. Representational accountability in democratic political systems has the citizens as P and their elected representatives are A in a vertical relationship running upwards, and the degree of control is relatively high. Several forms of participation are available to citizens for the purposes of requiring information and holding elected leaders accountable. Voting is one such activity that can have dramatic consequences for representatives but it is non-continuous and in between electoral periods other means are more effective. Calls, meetings, demonstrations, letters, emails, writing in newspapers, and mobilization of community and action-groups are just some of them. The nature of elected office gives citizens a powerful position and they can require
specific and detailed information about a broad range of issues covered in political activity, often also about private issues of the representatives. Yet, in modern states with large citizenries, a rather large-scale collective action is often required to exercise effective accountability not the least when using the tool of voting. Thus special collective action problems frequently affect the P’s ability to use the formal rights of requesting information and holding elected representatives accountable that distinguishes this form of accountability from many of the other subtypes. In addition, the formal rules and set-up of political institutions differ that in certain ways impact on the accountability relationships. First-past-the-post electoral rules in single-member districts for example, facilitates a closer and more direct accountability relationship between citizens and their representative to the national legislature but effectively also undermines the viability of using elections to demand new policy by voting for new or smaller parties. These are just illustrations to exemplify that generalizations regarding both the causes to, and effects of representational accountability are unlikely to travel well to other subtypes, hence, comparisons between findings from studies of representational accountability and other subtypes are probably not going to form a sound basis for higher-order theory. Fiscal and Legal accountability respectively can be both vertical downward and horizontal. In both cases the degree of control is typically high and very detailed. When fiscal accountability runs vertical-downward an external P such as legislatures hold various ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) fiscally accountable. Another case is when a state bureaucracy hold an implementing agency that can be a non-profit business fiscally accountable. But when the legislature holds the executive accountable for fiscal prudence and budgetary constraints, the relationship is horizontal rather than vertical. The ministry of finance can also hold other ministries fiscally accountable and again the relationship is horizontal. We find a similar
situation with regards to legal accountability. Most instances of legal accountability run vertical-downward. Various judicial institutions being the external P hold citizens, businesses, politicians and others accountable for lawful behavior. But when judicial institutions hold other state institutions accountable such as in the case of a constitutional court, or in some countries the supreme court hearing cases of the lawfulness of executive decisions and acts by the legislature, the accountability relationship is horizontal.

An external P does not always go hand in hand with a high degree of control, however. *Societal accountability* is characterized by actions taken by civil society and media aiming at forcing political, bureaucratic, business and legal decision-makers to give information on, and justifications for their actions. The strength of control is typically relatively weak in these cases but also varies with contextual factors such as legislation (e.g. freedom of information act or not). It is distinguished from representational accountability in that the P’s are more or less “self-appointed” in their role and first have to convince the A’s and the surrounding society of this arrangement. Yet, it is therefore tenuous and circumscribed by the fact that the “right” of the P to hold the A accountable is in the end based on voluntary action and the degree of control therefore becomes low and rather diffuse. *Political accountability* is the vertical-downward variant of external accountability with relatively weak control. Politicians’ degree of control over MDAs is by its very nature relatively weak. Bureaucracies are large and handle thousands of issues every day and politicians are few, have several competing priorities as well as severe time and cognitive constraints. In consequence, there are only a very limited number of bureaucratic decisions and processes politicians can attend to in any detail giving the bureaucracy significant discretionary powers. *Reputational accountability*’s most significant expression runs horizontally among peers or peer institutions that are external to the agent. It is
another form of diffuse and even indirect accountability whereby the agent’s reputation among other equals can be damaged if deemed to act in contradiction with established norms and procedures. It is highly dependent in informal norms amongst participants, both agents and principals, and thus even within this category the causes and effects of successful accountability are likely to vary significantly.

Before moving on to accountability mechanisms, a final note is important. Responsiveness is often proclaimed to be one of the key aspects of accountability (e.g. Schedler 1999, Walker 2002, Kelly 2003, Barton 2006). There is a crucial difference here between the two types of vertical accountability. In vertical-upward forms of accountability this is exactly the point. Share-holders, clients, citizens, and societal organizations are the P’s who after delegating decision-making power and discretion to agents such as executive, patrons, and politicians, monitor their behavior and hold them to account for their failure or success to provide information and justifications for their decisions (and sometimes the outcomes of those decisions as well). If dissatisfied, the P’s can sanction the A’s by way of ‘throwing the rascals out’ or simply expose the A’s actions and failures. The sought after effect is to make agents be responsive to the wishes and interests of the principals.

Vertical-downward is in principal very different. In these cases, the P (who transfers power to the agent) is not directly involved in the accountability relationship. Instead it is the A who in turn holds and implementing agent (I) accountable for its’ actions toward P, or even a principal behind P. For example, a president (P) appoints and transfers decision-making power to a head of an agency (A) who holds the bureaucracy of that agency (I) accountable for carrying out directives towards citizens (principals behind P) who elected the president (P). In this case, you may argue that the ultimate principal is the citizens, but even if we limit ourselves
to consider the president as the P, the triangular relationship has consequences. The I is held accountable by A but not supposed to be fully responsive to A, but rather consider P (or even the principal behind P, the citizens) and still act within the law and bureaucratic regulations. This means that lower-level bureaucrats are in fact not supposed to be responsive to A or P if and when A’s or P’s directives goes against either bureaucratic rules or the law. This is particularly evident in the case of legal accountability. Highest ranking judges are typically appointed by the executive and/or legislature with the mission to uphold the law. In a democratic system it is reasonable to argue that citizens are the ultimate P who elects the politicians that in turn appoint judges. In exercising their mandate, however, judges are not supposed to be responsive to either politicians nor citizens. Indeed, they are expected to do the exact opposite: to exercise their decision-making power independently of the interests and wishes of various P’s in the interest of the rule of law. Judicial institutions generally, are held accountable for being non-responsive. Similarly, vertical accountability in the form of periodic voting may for example be a blunt instrument of policy-specific accountability since voters typically can only chose between a few alternatives that represent complex mixes of a number of policies from defense to child care. But vertical accountability exercised in the form of frequent interactions between the legislator elected in single-member constituencies and constituents, can be very effective in achieving policy-specific responsiveness. In short, responsiveness may be the desired outcome of some types of accountability but far from all, and should not be understood as integral to accountability itself.

Making Sense of Accountability for Empirical Analysis

Where does all this leave us? A key argument of this paper is that accountability as an analytical concept can be saved despite the current state of conceptual stretching and Byzantine confusion.
They way to save the concept and its usefulness for empirical analysis is to clarify first, what kind of concept it is. Understood as a radial concept rather than a classical one, one can start to discern a way out. Five key characteristics denote the conceptual core of accountability: 1) An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent); 2) An area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain); 3) An agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal); 4) The right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D, and 5) The right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.

Beyond these five characteristics, this paper argues that there are three additional characteristics that can take on two values each and that the absence or presence of these characterize the twelve radial categories of accountability. Each one is characterized not by simple the presence of at least one additional feature beyond the defining characteristics of the superior concept (such as in the example with apples), but the presence of some and designated absence of other of the characteristics that bring all radial categories together. In addition to the differing characteristics of these twelve subtypes and the difficulties of making generalizations above the level of subtypes with regards to causes and effects, it should be observed that most accountability theory assumes linear cause-effect relationships, as well as rational and informed decision making with the aim of producing collective goods. This is not a viable empirical assumption and, as also the conceptual theory above discloses, is not theoretically consistent where the object of accountability can have as the primary focus to maximize the non-objective function such as to maintain relationships and loyalties (cf. Philips and Berman 2007). There is a second reason why effective accountability can not be assumed to have only positive or desired outcomes. The incentives for agents to be responsive to principals as an consequence of
effective accountability relationships can also lead to agents taking actions and decisions that are easily “sold” or popular rather than doing what is right or necessary (Maskin and Tirole 2004, 1035). In the extreme, agents may undermine the functioning of a society’s economy and the rights of minorities and other groups.

Taken together, the above reflections have important implications for empirical research on accountability. First, we can not scale or even rank order the various types of accountability. The differences between them are nominal and it makes no sense to use qualitative or quantitative techniques designed for scale or ordinal variables in analyzing outcomes.

Second, each type of accountability has its designated functions and is compatible with certain situations only; no one is a panacea for all kind of problems of restraining power. Besides the mostly logical reasoning in this paper, contextual factors naturally play a role in this but it remains important to recognize the different nature of the problems various types are suited to address. Legal accountability is designated to insulate agents from influences and responsiveness of principals for example, while bureaucratic accountability is suited for detailed and very direct responsiveness by subordinates. Representative accountability allows for broad mandates allowing sufficient (sometimes excessive yes) discretion to agents to deal with unforeseen and complex matters according with their judgment. An empirical analysis that mistakes different types of accountability for more or less accountability, is unlikely to be very helpful.

Nevertheless, within each of the radial categories of accountability, one can find many variations in levels. It is possible to construct measures of levels (ordinal or scale, qualitative or quantitative) for each of these types. Yet and third, it remains crucial not to assume that a measurement instrument, criterion, or approach used for one type of accountability necessarily
is very useful for gauging levels of accountability in another type. Radial categories (as different from classical ones) do not allow for assumptions of equivalence either in units of distances across categories. We need to develop separate measurement schemes and instruments for each type.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one has to be very cautious in terms of making generalizations from the study of one radial subtype of accountability. This makes a fundamental difference between classical and radial categories. When using a classical concept as in the example with “apple” in the beginning of this paper, one can make generalizations about all subtypes of apples (green, red, yellow) as long as the causal inference is based on the core defining characteristics of apples. All apples share those characteristics and thus causal inferences based on those features should go for all apples everything else being equal. As long as one’s ontology with regards to causation stays within the typical statistical worldview (i.e. assuming unit homogeneity, symmetric and linear causation, and independent effect of individual factors) that is the end of the story. At least, studies of the same subtype of accountability can be compared across contexts and generalizations be drawn from an accumulate set of results in so far as they are compatible in their findings. However, many contemporary theories about politics theorize rather more complex and varying models of causation where equifinality, multifinality, multiple conjectural causal models, path dependencies, increasing returns, and diffusion figure prominently (cf. Gerring 2001, George and Bennett 2005, Hall 2003, Mahoney and Goertz 2006, Ragin 1987). When trying to serve the aim of accumulation of knowledge, efforts at combining results from such studies to create more general statements about either the causes of, or the effects of one particular subtype of accountability seems to be inherently implausible, or at least very much more difficult. A path
dependency argument for example, negates the independent effect of individual factors as well as the causal ontology of multiple conjectural causation as far as the factors conjuring to create a particular outcome are modeled as current and historically independent. In short, one complication for any research program investigating various spheres of society where different subtypes of accountability are studied, will be difficult to compare with the aim of making generalizations. In addition, even if studies are carried out on the same subtype of accountability but are based on different causal ontologies, the results will again not be a sound basis for comparative generalizations.

If we agree that the conceptual structure of accountability is radial, rather than classical, we have to be even more careful with making generalizations since the prototype, or superior, concept that encompasses all forms of accountability, for example, is akin to an ideal type and since all the subtypes are various combinations of present/absent defining characteristics, one has to be very cautious in making claims about external validity. As long as the causal inference involves such defining characteristics with varying values, the inference can only be generalized to other subtypes with the same defining “profile”. In most cases, subtypes are unique in their profile on the characteristics relevant to the causal inference, hence, results can not be generalized to other subtypes without appropriate testing.

Empirical reality has a way to make things complicated, however. In most societies and political systems various accountability relationships have been established at various points in time with the effect that even single institutions have multiple layers of various types of accountability. This makes it hard to discern and then disentangle when and where a particular type of accountability relationship is engaged, and then trying to establish the level of accountability produced. That it is not easy does not justify not doing it however since the
alternative is fraught with risks of systematic measurement errors (conflating the presence of one type of accountability with zero accountability for example) undermining the validity of the analysis.
Bibliography


Donald Emmerson, "Region and Recalcitrance: Questioning Democracy in Southeast Asia" (Paper presented at the World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Berlin, 1994), 14


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Rhodes 1986, 1988;


Table 1.
Classical Category: Apples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior:</td>
<td>Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Types:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Apples</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Apples</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Apples</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Radial Category: Example Mother

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior:</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Types</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genetic Mother</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Mother</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing Mother</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepmother</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Problems of heterogeneous categories at equal distance to a prototype with attributes A, B, C, D along two dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension A: Distance (#missing attributes)</th>
<th>Dimension B: Type (Which attributes are present?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ABD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A=given core value; B, C, D=attributes of prototype
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Control</th>
<th>Strength of Control</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upward</td>
<td>Downward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Client-Patron</td>
<td>Patron-Client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Fiscal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is an elaboration and synthesis of typologies found in Gormley Jr. and Balla (2004), Radin and Romzek (1996), Scott (2000), Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000), Grant and Keohane (2005), Mulgan (2004), and Schedler (1999).
Figure 1.
Radial Conceptualization: Overlapping Notions of Accountability

Financial Accountability

Business Accountability

Legal Accountability

Bureaucratic Accountability

Political Accountability

Societal Accountability
Figure 2.
Generality and Radial Concepts

Ladder of Generality

Mammals

Human Beings

Radial Concept

Stepmother
Mother
Birthmother
Nurturing mother
(Father)    (Child)
Figure 3.
Time-Line of Accountability

Transfer of decision-making  Agent act using discretionary power  P request information and justification from A  A adheres or not  P sanctions or not