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The art of good governance: how images from the past provide inspiration for modern practice

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, discourse on ‘good governance’ has become more prevalent. What ‘good governance’ means and entails, however, and when we can speak of ‘good’ governance in this discourse, is not always clear. Many scholars in public administration and other social sciences writing about good governance have used visual interpretations of good governance from centuries ago to illustrate their case in point. Here, we also use pictures from the past – Lorenzetti’s Sieneese frescoes to be more precise – yet, not as an illustration, but as the core of the argument. Our main research question is: *how can Lorenzetti’s frescoes of Good Governance inspire our modern-day conception of good governance?* We conclude that good governance is governance by good governors, and good governors are governors guided by benevolence. We end with a discussion of what that entails for modern-day governance practice.

Points for practitioners

Governance without integrity violations is not necessarily good governance. Benevolence is needed for that.

Keywords

benevolence, caritas, good governance, integrity, Lorenzetti

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Introduction

At the beginning of his *Politics*, Aristotle states: '[e]very state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to attain that which they think is good'. That still leaves the question: when can we speak of *good governance*?

Since the early 1990s, discourse on 'good governance' has become more prevalent (Bevir, 2009). What 'good governance' means and entails, however, and when we can speak of 'good' governance in this discourse, is not always clear (Perry et al., 2014). The concept is used in many different ways and often remains undefined. Most scholars agree that it was the World Bank in 1989 that introduced the concept into modern-day discourse, making good governance a special requirement for developing countries who wanted to borrow money (Bevir, 2009), which interprets governance as 'the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised'. The purpose of good governance here is the promotion of economic development; development and good governance are closely intertwined. Some would say too closely:

As argued in *The Economist* (June 4, 2005) defining 'good governance' as 'good-for-economic-development' may generate the following infinite regress: 'What is required for growth? Good governance. And what counts as good governance? That which promotes growth. And what is required for growth... (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008: 168)

Choudry (2002) argues that 'Good governance is a serious contender for a prize for the best example of Orwellian doublespeak'.

Good governance is a clearly normative concept:

By and large, the term 'Governance' has by now become a more or less neutral concept that focuses on steering mechanisms in a certain political unit, emphasizing the interaction of state (First), business (Second), and society (Third Sector) players. 'Good Governance', on the other hand, is not at all neutral; rather, it is a normative concept that again embodies a strong value judgment in favor of the retrenchment of the state, which is supposed to yield to Business standards, principles, and – not least – interests. In that sense, 'Good Governance' privileges the Second over the First Sector, even in First Sector areas. (Drechsler, 2005: 17)

The concept as used by the World Bank is clearly an ideological use of a concept (De Graaf et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2007). As Rhodes (1996: 656) put it: 'In short, "good governance" marries the new public management to the advocacy of liberal democracy.' Usually, organizations using the good governance concept define it by creating a wish-list of rules, processes and the behaviour of governments (Bevir, 2009; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2005).

It is easier to agree on what constitutes bad governance than on what good governance is (Perry et al., 2014). Within the literature, there is an extensive debate about what good governance is about:

Should it be about procedures only (like most definitions of representative democracy) or should it also contain substantial policies and outcomes? Should the concept be universally applicable worldwide (like the UN Declaration of Human Rights) or should it be relativized to different cultures? Should the concept be equated with administrative and economic efficiency or should it be understood as something that explains such efficiency? Should good governance include how well those who govern represent those who are governed, or should it be about the capacity to steer society? (Rothstein and Teorell, 2012: 17)

The most cited definition is the one by the World Bank. Here, good governance includes: (1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and (3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (Kaufmann et al., 1999: 1). Rothstein and Teorell (2012) discuss many other usages of the concept. Some scholars judge the goodness of governance by one overriding value or norm, like impartiality (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). Rothstein and Teorell (2008) mention competing conceptions such as democracy, the rule of law or effectiveness/efficiency. Here, we propose a new overriding value: benevolence.

Research question and method

Confusion surrounds the good governance concept. Here, we are not so much interested in giving yet another definition as in looking to see whether insight into 'good' governance can be provided by images from the past. When writing about good governance, many scholars in public administration and other social sciences have used visual interpretations of good governance from centuries ago to illustrate their case in point. For example, many social scholars discussing good governance refer to Ambrogio Lorenzetti's famous frescoes of Good and Bad Governance in Siena (e.g. Drechsler, 2001; Hendriks and Drosterij, 2012; Liebling, 2010). The frescoes have also received much attention from prominent (art) historians (e.g. Rubinstein, 1958; Skinner, 1999). Although they operate largely in separate realms, the disciplines of political philosophy, art history and public administration do come together in certain inspiring images such as Lorenzetti's frescoes (see Figure 1).

Here, we intend to use pictures from the past – Lorenzetti's frescoes to be precise – not as an illustration, but as *the core of the argument* (Drechsler, 2001). Our main research question is: *how can Lorenzetti's frescoes of Good Governance inspire our modern-day conception of good governance?* In the search for insight into the



Figure 1. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Justice and Good Government*, fresco, 1337–39, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, Sala dei Nove. Photo: Centre for Art Historical Documentation (CKD), Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands).

concept of good governance, our goal is to see whether the frescoes can help us develop a fresh perspective on what makes governance *good* governance. We use the hermeneutics of art:

But can we really use a work that is so old, so distant, from such a hidden past, depicting a life that is so clearly not ours? Can we even know what Lorenzetti wants to tell us? This is a question behind all history of thought and/or political philosophy, that is supposedly relevant for the present. The popular scholarly answer, more often than not, is: No, we cannot use such works today. (Drechsler, 2001: 7)

Like Drechsler, we argue that we can because:

What we have here is a work of art. . . . This is superbly explained by none other than Hans-Georg Gadamer . . . ‘art is the overcoming of the past. All is presence in art. It becomes presence’ (Gadamer, 1997: 25). This is so because art is only ‘there’ during ‘the act’ – interpretation, in the sense of engagement, is what makes the work of art. This is a-temporal; if we look seriously at, and engage with Lorenzetti’s fresco . . . it becomes alive at that moment, and on a level that is neither merely aesthetic nor purely intellectual or historical. (Drechsler, 2001: 7–8)

Following this line of thought, under the right circumstances, the analysis of a work of art can lead to inspired insights. In art history, images – paintings, statues,

prints or miniatures – do not serve as illustrations of ‘how it used to be’. On the contrary, the image, its context and its intended audience(s) are the points of departure that, combined with other archival, literary and visual sources, *expose* the concepts and practices of its day, both intentionally and unintentionally. Works of art show ways of looking at the world that might seem strange to modern eyes. They offer an unfamiliar view, and that is exactly why they can be inspiring. In the case of Lorenzetti’s fresco on Good Governance, the discussion should involve both art historians and public administration scholars. Only when an argument integrates a thought-through interpretation of iconographic detail and a vision that goes beyond the purely historical does it become a serious discussion about the inspirational power of imagery.

This is not a study on 14th-century Sienese values, or on the governance of 14th-century city-states. Of course, it is doubtful how much that would inform us on modern-day (good) governance and public values. Here, we want to get inspired – using a research method from art history – by this piece of art on our modern-day conception of good governance. We could have chosen another piece of art for that purpose. However, when it comes to good governance, Lorenzetti’s frescoes are arguably the most prominent work of art on that theme. As stated, many scholars in the good governance debate refer to the frescoes, and they are often used as an illustration in these debates.

Current ideas on governance have influenced (and will always colour) the ways in which we look at Lorenzetti’s frescoes. We decided that it was time to reverse the roles and have the work of art inspire and colour our current ideas on governance. The inability – to a certain extent – to look at images from a distant past subjectively justifies our implementation of the frescoes in a debate on modern practice.

Analysis of *Il Buon Governo*

As a departure from other public administration studies on images of good governance (with the notable exception of Drechsler, 2001), we begin here with an analysis from the art historian’s perspective. A careful examination of that part of the fresco that depicts the Allegory of Good Governance reveals that there are some elements in the fresco that have so far received little attention in secondary literature, despite the extensive scholarly awareness of the fresco. These under-exposed aspects are the biblical virtues of faith, hope and charity. Today, these virtues are often ignored in governance studies that mention the frescoes (e.g. Drechsler, 2001; Hendriks and Drosterij, 2012; Liebling, 2010). In the literature of art history, they have been noted, but have been branded as ‘less central’ than the other virtues, ‘somewhat removed from the main scene’ (Rubinstein, 1958: 180).

In our view, the biblical virtues are more vital to the fresco than generally recognized in art history (or public administration or political science) studies. Every last element in the fresco has been carefully chosen and there is no reason to assume that the biblical virtues were incorporated without thinking them

through thoroughly: their position and the way Lorenzetti depicted them, is purposeful. Contemporary sources, such as the literature and treatises of about the same time, shed light on the meaning of the virtues in the fresco, on why Lorenzetti incorporated these virtues and what they have to do with *Buon Governo*. In fact, contemporary writers discuss faith, hope and charity, especially the latter, in much more detail than has been previously suggested. The biblical virtues deserve careful consideration here, too, because they offer a different and supplementary view, not just of the fresco itself, but also of what was regarded as good governance.

We need an introduction to the context in which the fresco came into existence. In the 14th century new types of administration were developing in Europe. Monarchs and emperors had been supreme in their territories, but now, for the first time since the Roman Republic, groups of people chosen from aristocratic families were beginning to rule Italian city-states such as Florence and Siena. These innovative forms of administration posed new questions for art and generated different types of image, especially in public buildings such as city halls. In these new images, both the city and the civic responsibilities of the individual play an important part (Rubinstein, 1958; Frugoni, 1991; Wieruszowski, 1944: 29). However, the most famous examples are, without doubt, the allegorical frescoes of Good and Bad Governance in Siena. The nine members of the council (*signoria*) who were elected to govern the community of Siena commissioned the paintings for their room (*Sala dei Nove* or room of the nine) in the communal palace, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti executed the frescoes between 1337 and 1339 (Skinner, 1999: 1). The challenge for artists such as Lorenzetti was the visualization of abstract concepts that had become important in the Italian city-states, concepts such as civic community and civic responsibility. Essentially, the common good was considered more important than the individual good, and governors – as well as any inhabitant of Siena – should place the common good before their individual well-being.

Representations of good governance were not new; good rulers had been depicted before. These representations often show identifiable rulers surrounded by personifications of virtues. The virtues vary from image to image, but they often incorporate those that had been attributed to good governors since Cicero – temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice. Justice, fortitude, prudence and temperance remained the usual companions of emperors, kings and princes throughout the Middle Ages. These compositions of the ruler amid his virtues are sometimes called ‘mirrors of princes’ as visual counterparts to the texts with the same name. The texts were written to admonish and inspire kings and reflected the theocratic idea of kingship in which an explicit analogy is made between secular and divine government (Yun, 2007: 21–22).

In order to depict good (and bad) governance, Ambrogio Lorenzetti adapted the traditional ruler portrait to represent a group of people instead of only one person (Rubinstein, 1958: 181). As in traditional ruler portraits, an enthroned male figure is surrounded by female personifications of the virtues that were associated with good governance. However, unlike former and contemporary ruler portraits,

the male figure is not a historical person, nor a living ruler; he has divine features reminiscent of images of Christ ruling the world as Saviour (Skinner, 1999: 11–14). In short, Lorenzetti was depicting a personification of the Good Ruler, an earthly counterpart of the heavenly king. He visualizes an abstract notion of ideal rule as a male figure of authority that would have corresponded with the intended male audience of Sienese governors. The figure would have had special appeal to Siena's rulers because he wears the colours of Siena's 'balzana' (black and white), the Sienese she-wolf is at his feet, the initials C.S.C.V. (Commune Senarum Civitas Virginis or 'Commune of Siena, City of the Virgin') surround his head and he holds a shield bearing an image of the Madonna (Siena's patron saint and protectress). The Good Ruler is itself a personified image of Siena (Skinner, 1986: 45). He is both a figure of authority and a visualization of that community to which the governors should subordinate their own interests.

To the political virtues of justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence surrounding the ruler, Lorenzetti adds the personification of magnanimity, which Seneca regarded as 'primus inter pares' and on the same level as Cicero's four (Skinner, 1986: 20; 1989: 94–95). Brunetto Latini, too, whose *Li Livres dou Trésor* was an important source for the painter Lorenzetti, afforded magnanimity a senior position. Latini was an eminent Tuscan statesman and philosopher but was banished from Florence because of his political preferences. He wrote *Li Livres dou Trésor* or 'the books of treasure' – *Trésor* for short – in France during his exile. This encyclopaedic work presents a significant body of knowledge of governance inspired by classical writers such as Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca, but also early Christian philosophers such as Augustine. As an accessible work on governance in the vernacular, it undoubtedly inspired the governors of Italian city-states such as Siena and indirectly Lorenzetti, though it is conceivable that Lorenzetti, who was scholarly, consulted Latini's books himself.

The greatest of these is charity

The fresco is divided into three horizontal layers. The lower register is populated by the people of Siena. The bench with the ruler is situated in the middle. Above the head of the personification of Siena, in the third and upper register, Lorenzetti depicts the three theological virtues. Lorenzetti gives them pride of place, with charity at the top according to St Paul's ranking: 'And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity' (I Cor. 13.13). Due to their elevated status, Lorenzetti gives the theological virtues wings whereas the others are without, which further accentuates their importance. Charity surmounts them all. This positioning is in line with contemporary views of charity. Brunetto Latini writes: 'Even if someone seems good in faith and in works, I say that he does not have any virtue if he is deprived of charity and of love towards his fellow men' (Latini et al., 2007: 624). Latini then points to Paul, who says that one can offer his body and then boast about it, but it would not mean anything without charity.

What, then, does charity entail to earn it such an important place in Lorenzetti's fresco and to suggest that it is a significant element in good governance? Today, charity is mostly regarded as the love of one's fellow man. Charitable acts are directed towards fellow human beings. In Augustinian times, however, the virtue of charity was regarded as the love of one's neighbour, but first and foremost as the love of God (e.g. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, XXXI.II.5: 'Amor Dei, amor proximi, charitas dicitur' in Migne 1861: col.260). Without the love of God, it is impossible to love God in return or one's neighbour. These are two inseparable sides of one coin. Augustine regarded charity as the virtue to uplift mankind and reflect man's closeness to God because the love of man was a reflection of God's love of mankind (Dassmann, 1991: 239–250; Fehr, 1951: 35–46; Puzicha, 1980). Christ had offered himself for the sake of human beings. Only the grace of God's love makes it possible for human beings to love. By loving one's neighbour, a person could imitate Christ and get as close to God as humanly possible. The virtuous life thus transcends earthly boundaries; it conducts the soul to God, where it longs to be. The earthly world and the heavenly world are not separate but mingled (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, esp. XVIII and XIX, in Migne 1864, 41).

In Lorenzetti's fresco, charity is not only depicted as the most important Christian virtue, as Paul had emphasized, but the most important virtue of a Christian ruler. Charity is depicted in the upper, arguably the most important, register, which links men with God. The difference between biblical and political virtues is accentuated in the fresco. The wings of the theological virtues and their position above the head of Siena make the theological triad a heavenly counterpart to the 'benched' political virtues below.

With the terms 'contemplative' and 'active', Latini couples the virtues with the active and the contemplative life, which he regards as two successive steps towards the eternal life. The contemplative virtues are focused on *contemplatio*, meaning the desire to witness God's glory. Of course, the contemplation of God 'face to face' is only possible in the hereafter, but a person can try to catch a glimpse of heaven while on earth. Latini writes that 'the contemplative life surmounts the active life' (Latini et al., 2007: 620), pointing forward to the separation of virtues in Lorenzetti's fresco. He specifies that the active virtues – or moral virtues as he alternatively calls them – prepare for the contemplative ones, and the contemplative ones prepare for the highest goal, for example, 'the good of the good' (Latini et al., 2007: 455). Here, Latini echoes early Christian writers such as Augustine, Ambrose and Zeno of Verona (Skinner, 1986: 25; Von Thadden, 1951: 15).

Although the theological virtues are further up the hierarchy, Latini explicitly states that the contemplative virtues do not make the active virtues redundant. A person must go back to the active life time and time again 'govern oneself in the midst of worldly matters' (Latini et al., 2007: 454). To clarify, Latini uses the illuminating metaphor of an eagle who keeps his eyes focused on the sun, but has to divert his eyes every now and then to eat (Latini et al., 2007: 620). Latini adapted traditional Christian views and applied them to the day-to-day practice of governing, which acquired a firm foothold in the active life while maintaining the

importance of the contemplative life. The theological virtues were to inspire the nine who represented Siena to govern well, always contemplating the heavenly city, but diverting their eyes to the city in order to govern well. Guided by charity, both the love of God and the love of mankind, inextricably connected as warp and weft of one fabric, the governors could elevate the commune and all its members and bring them closer to God. This ideal, heavenly state is anticipated in charity's upturned gaze. Depicted at the top of the pyramid of virtues, she is the link between God and men.

What is the purpose of it all? What would be the outcome if those involved in government let themselves be inspired by the picture of the ideal that Lorenzetti painted for them? In the middle of the fresco, between divine justice and the Good Ruler, Lorenzetti added the personification of peace, which is the effect or outcome of good governance. The preservation of harmony and peace was certainly considered the most important task for the nine who presided over the commune of Siena. At the beginning of the oath of office taken by the nine, they swore to 'provide that the commune and people of the magnificent city of Siena are, and are preserved, in good peace and concord' (Bowsky, 1981: 55; Waley, 1991: 47). In his allegory, Lorenzetti shows the council members how to contribute to this peaceful state. The presence of peace underlines that his is not just a guidebook containing rules that the governors of the city-state should follow in order to be 'good', but that he is providing an image of 'good governance' that incorporates both its prerequisites and its effects. To sum up, good governance results from virtuous governors who place charity before everything else. From charity, all other virtues follow, and without charity, the other virtues are meaningless. Both the love of God and the love of men, which make governors a reflection of the supreme judge, are essential to the achievement of peace on earth, of an earthly paradise.

Back to the future: from Lorenzetti back to the present-day discourse on good governance

Although depictions of the 'good ruler' were not new when Lorenzetti painted his fresco, he did adapt the ruler portrait to fit new forms of governance and new responsibilities. Lorenzetti did not depict a historical person, but instead transformed the 'good ruler' into an abstract figure, the Good Ruler, someone every governor in Siena could, or should, identify with. As mentioned at the outset, the frescoes adorned the room where the nine would gather daily. The fresco is a mirror like the traditional 'mirror of princes' in which governors should both reflect themselves and use to reflect *on* themselves while at the same time legitimizing their position of power. Lorenzetti made the ruler portrait suitable for the nine who governed Siena by replacing the ruler with a personification of the city. The message is multilayered: *governors should rule, with almost godlike authority, but at the same time make themselves subordinate to the community*. They should look to God as the example of a perfect ruler, and at the same time keep their eyes on the city. They should focus on a divine ideal and have an eye for the practical needs

of society. The most important virtue to achieve these – sometimes paradoxical – objectives is charity. *Lorenzetti, in the footsteps of contemporary writers as Latini, states that ideal governance consists of governors guided by charity.* It is striking to see that both in an age-old work of art as much as in the World Bank discourse, the concept is used in an *ideological* way (Hoppenbrouwers, 2008). In the Siense frescoes, good governance is coupled with a dominantly Christian world outlook; the World Bank coupled it to a neoliberal agenda.

The question we set out was how a work of art can inspire us on the concept of good governance. In general, we all want good governance (Who can be against it?) but we are not sure or agree on what it entails. First – of course – we need to make clear what we mean by *governance*. This concept has been attributed different meanings (see, e.g., Kjaer, 2004; Rhodes, 2007; Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden, 2004); the core of the concept has been described as ‘activities’ (Kooiman, 1993), ‘pattern of rule’ (Bevir, 2009: 3) and a ‘process’ (March and Olsen, 1995), and the World Bank talks in its earlier-discussed good governance definition about ‘traditions and institutions’. As we saw, Lorenzetti’s story is mainly about the *governors* and their virtues; in that sense, it inspires us most to see what good governors are. Centeno (2007: 50) states that ‘Lorenzetti’s frescoes are in the city hall of Siena – not the main market but the seat of government. They explicitly state that to have a good society, you must have moral leaders.’ Good governance is governance by good governors, and good governors are governors guided by charity.

What would governors guided by charity entail? First, Lorenzetti’s charity – clearly – is not the same as philanthropy (Eikenberry and Nickel, 2006). Philanthropy by government is close to an idea of governments defining the Good (Nickel and Eikenberry, 2009). Lorenzetti’s challenge was to visualize abstract concepts that had become important in the Italian city-states – such as civic community and civic responsibility – in a fresco that was supposed to inspire, or guide. Today, if we search for the phrase ‘good governance’ in Google Images, we see nothing but charts with ‘good governance’ in the centre, with many (differing) values surrounding it (Beck Jørgensen and Sørensen, 2013). None of these values is charity; the contemplative virtues are also mostly missing in the academic governance studies that mention the Siense frescoes: ‘There is no agreed definition of good governance. Definitions usually consist of a wish list. . . . Yet each organization that is concerned with good governance appears to construct its own wish-list’ (Bevir, 2009: 92). On none of these modern wish-lists does charity appear. Rather, the focus is on (derivatives of) political virtues that hark back to late antiquity because they fit our secularized views of good governance better.

Should charity be dismissed so easily because of secularization? In 14th-century Siena, governors coupled good governance with their own virtues to put the good of the community before their own interests. In the Siense frescoes, good governance, which is essential to the achievement of peace, results from virtuous governors having charity as their driving force. Whatever we want to achieve with good governance – peace or economic development, or both – Lorenzetti’s frescoes

inspire us to consider *caritas* as an important virtue for those who govern and as a prerequisite for achieving good governance. In the frescoes, charity is clearly connected to a religious ideology, which is far from our modern-day Western approach to governance. Yet, if charity can be understood as helping the needy for good reasons and not for personal gain, putting the common good before one's own, then charity in this sense can be interpreted as unselfishness, altruism, benevolence or love for others. This form of charity might be inspired by the love of God or by something else entirely, depending on your philosophy of life. Charity can be as much a secular motive as a religious one.

Interestingly, benevolence and altruism do pop up in recent discussions on the economic and credit crises. Some claim that the economic crisis was caused by a *moral* crisis (e.g. Adams and Balfour, 2012): bankers were only motivated by personal financial rewards, lacking any altruism or sense of community service. Maybe greed is *not* good, contrary to the claim by Gordon Gekko, the fictional character in the film *Wall Street* in the 1980s, or at least it will not lead to good governance and thus not to whatever we want to achieve with good governance. The World Bank's discourse on good governance serves a neoliberal ideology, reminding us of Adam Smith's (1776/1957: 1) famous words: 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.' Having benevolence as the central virtue is opposite to that. The National Commission on the Causes of the Financial Crisis and Economic Crisis in the United States concluded (Commission, 2011: xxii):

We witnessed an erosion of standards of responsibility and ethics that exacerbated the financial crisis. . . . You will read about mortgage brokers who were paid 'yield spread premiums' by lenders to put borrowers into higher-cost loans so they would get bigger fees, often never disclosed to borrowers. . . . we do place special responsibility with the public leaders charged with protecting our financial system. . . . These individuals sought and accepted positions of significant responsibility and obligation. Tone at the top does matter, in this instance, we were let down. No one said 'no.' (Commission, 2011: xxiii)

Similarly, Stiglitz (2010: 275–276) argues:

We have gone too far down an alternative path – creating a society in which materialism dominates moral commitment, in which the rapid growth that we have achieved is not sustainable environmentally or socially, in which we do not act together as a community to address our common needs, partly because rugged individualism and market fundamentalism have eroded any sense of community and have led to rampant exploitation of unwary and unprotected individuals and to an increasing social divide. There has been an erosion of trust – and not just in our financial institutions.

Entering unselfishness, altruism, benevolence or love for others in the vocabulary of the good governance discourse is new and sounds strange in modern-day

governance discourse – at least to Western ears. Yet, it is not new in modern-day Western institutions. For example, in professions – where asymmetrical power relations are paramount – benevolence plays an important role. In the doctor–patient relationship for example – next to medical competency – benevolence on the part of the doctor is considered important, if not essential: ‘Obviously, benevolence is the character trait that patients most want and expect in a doctor – a personal caring and an open relationship’ (Drane, 1988: 37). Also:

In general, it is plausible that clinicians who are internally motivated to facilitate patient involvement, for example by benevolence, honesty and respect, are likely to engender a very different sense of involvement for patients than those who are motivated to discuss treatment options with patients by externally imposed mandates and the considerations of self-protection that arise from these. (Entwistle and Watt, 2006: 274)

Just as the doctor has power over the patient, the state and its politicians and administrators have power over citizens. Both are relationships of dependence. Inspired by Lorenzetti’s art, we argue that citizens should expect benevolence from politicians and administrators, just as patients expect it from their doctors. This idea is far from new; there have been calls before for benevolence in governance in the public governance literature, for example, from Frederickson (1991: 411):

It should be the purpose of public administration to have a concept of the public that is based on benevolence. Embodied in the notion of benevolence is the sense of service, which has long been associated with public administration. Similar, too, is the commitment to the greater good and the dedication of one’s professional life to that end (Frederickson and Hart, 1984). It is no wonder that there has been a loss of regard toward the public service. That regard can only be reclaimed by a public administration which esteems the public through benevolence.

Frederickson and Hart (1985: 548) argued that the central motive for public administrators should be ‘patriotism of benevolence’, defined as ‘an extensive love of all people within our political boundaries and the imperative that they must be protected in all of the basic rights granted to them by the enabling documents’. On this, James Perry (1996: 5) argues:

Although they argue that the patriotism of benevolence represents a particular moral position, it also may be understood to describe an emotional state. In fact, the type of moral ‘heroism’ Frederickson and Hart envision may be attainable only through an emotional response to humankind.

Criticism of the call for more benevolence in public governance might include a fear of the paternalism that charitable work can be accused of. Van de Veer (1986: 12), in his provocative book *Paternalistic Intervention: The Moral Bounds of*

Benevolence, defines paternalism as a relationship ‘in which one person, A, interferes with another person, S, in order to promote S’s own good’. Underlying this definition is an implicit assumption that the superior ‘knows what is best for the subordinate’ (Aycan, 2006: 451). Yet, we argue that the virtue of benevolence excludes paternalism. In other words, once the relationship becomes paternal, we cannot speak of the virtue of benevolence any more. We would also, of course, not go so far as to promote the idea that administrators should form their own idea of the Good, the Good Life or Good Society, and then pursue that idea. Isaiah Berlin – among many others – rightfully warned against all-embracing ideas about the Good Life, which always end up in dictatorships. History is rife with destruction caused by self-proclaimed benevolent movements. Benevolence should, however, be in the governmental actor–citizen *relationship*; benevolence is more horizontal than vertical. There are many studies on the values of policies, but less on what intentions administrators have while doing their job (cf. De Graaf, 2005). Are they just doing a job, or are they trying to do some good? Is there benevolence involved? Compare with the following: ‘The benevolent doctor acts differently from a colleague who thinks of himself and of medicine in purely impersonal terms. Benevolence creates openness to the patient’s lived experiences and interest in what the patient has to say about his illness’ (Drane, 1988: 35). Similarly – inspired by Lorenzetti’s art – we argue for benevolence in the administrator–citizen relation; some altruism. It is not about an idea of the Good, about where to go or specific policies, but about the genuine intention and exercise to do good, which is an important and often neglected ingredient of governance. This harks back to the literature on Public Service Motivation (PSM): ‘Public service motivation is often equated with a desire to serve the public interest, or more generally, with altruism’ (Dur and Zoutenbier, 2014: 145).

New Public Management (NPM) theory – calling for more market as the best coordinating mechanism – is less influential these days (Bevir, 2010). In markets, benevolence has no place, but rather contract and competition. Yet, government–citizen relationships can also be impersonal. Benevolence is far from a given in these relationships (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Lorenzetti inspires us to pay more attention to the virtue of benevolence in governance. We call for more studies on how benevolence in governance might be increased, though there have been some studies done, especially on PSM: ‘A common finding in this rapidly growing literature is that public sector organizations optimally set relatively low wages so as to promote self-selection of altruistic workers’ (Dur and Zoutenbier, 2014: 146). Most literature on the ethics of administration is about what goes wrong in public governance: what causes integrity violations, its effects and how to prevent it (De Graaf and Van Exel, 2009; Huberts, 2014). There is, however, much less attention paid to what we consider to be above the line of integrity violations, the virtues of governance and governors. This may be the case because it is easier to agree on – and point out – integrity violations than it is to agree on – or investigate – the proper virtues of governance. Yet, governance without integrity violations is not necessarily good governance. Benevolence is needed for that.

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