



Foreword

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In all five articles in this issue, some aspect of governance plays a significant role. The term ‘governance’ appears in the titles of two articles, and words such as ‘govern’, ‘government’ and ‘governance’ occur in all the articles – altogether more than two hundred times. This did not happen in response to any call for papers or as a result of any planning for a special issue. This is therefore not a special issue on governance, but it happens to be a regular issue full of articles about governance matters.

As I was reading and editing these articles, my thoughts turned to the metaphor embedded in the verb ‘govern’ and its derivatives. I did remember how communication and hermeneutic studies caution us against an obsession with diachronic and/or root meanings. I do agree with the semantic experts therefore, when they advise us not to be carried away by meanings of long ago and/or meanings of the original component(s) of a term. It is true that a term is currently used in its synchronic field(s) of meaning and usually without any thought about root meanings.

I also feel, however, that there are occasions when a justifiable reference can be made to some facet of an ‘original’ meaning. So, with regard to governing, I wish to share my few thoughts about the simple but significant metaphor present in the set of words containing ‘govern’. Ancient Greek had a verb κυβερνάω (kybernaō) for the meanings ‘to steer [a boat or a ship], to hold the helm of the state, guide, govern’, and a noun κυβερνήτης (kybernētēs) for the meanings ‘steersman, helmsman, guide,

governor’ (Liddell and Scott 1944:397a). The Greek philosopher Plato used *kybernētikos* (good at steering) in the context of ‘the study of self-governance’ (New World Encyclopedia 2017). Classical Latin adopted the set of words, but changed the ‘k’ into the ‘g’ which we still have in English and several other contemporary languages.

The metaphor that I find ‘simple but significant’ is the one of steering a vessel or a vehicle – either as the only one on board or with one or more trusting passengers. In various ways, all of us have certainly experienced feelings of responsibility for passengers when driving, and feelings of trust when oneself is a passenger placing faith in a driver or pilot. Therefore, what this metaphor can do is to confront all of us – whether in government or among the governed – with the realism of steering. It may help those in leadership positions, at all levels, to feel responsible, or more responsible for their trusting followers/passengers. Leaders may then realise that the safety and desired destination of the passengers is not a vague, abstract idea, but a distinct, concrete reality – to be taken seriously. And followers may realise that entrusting themselves to the steering abilities of a particular leader is not a matter of casually going along with a multitude, but one of making a well-informed decision with real-life implications for themselves and others.

On behalf of our editorial team and our Advisory panel, I do hope that our readers will find guiding ideas and insights in these articles, and especially that governing leaders will use such guidance to the benefit, not of themselves, but of their followers. May more and more of those who govern, at whatever level, become follower-oriented experts in Cybernetics, ‘the science of communication and control in machines and animals (including man)’ (Hornby 1982:215), and steer the system concerned in the most responsible direction and way.

Finally, however, I feel obliged to add a thought about updating our metaphor to include a contemporary factor. The Greeks had the image of a helmsman steering a ship in (apparently) two-dimensional space. In the last hundred years, the image of a pilot steering a plane in three-dimensional

space was added. Fifty years ago, however, an astonishing new ‘picture’ came onto the scene: ‘the internet considered as an imaginary area without limits where you can meet people and discover information about any subject’ (New World Encyclopedia 2017). And it was given a name which includes the root concept of steering: Cyberspace! Although not specifically mentioned in this quoted definition (one of many), the steering potential of information is surely implied. We, the leaders and the led of the 21st century, therefore have an unlimited ‘space’ of information at our disposal, which can be applied in self-interested strategies of brinkmanship or in altruistic commitments of genuine leadership.

Let us drive then, literally *and* figuratively, as responsibly as possible – for the survival and well-being of ourselves and our literal *as well as* figurative passengers.

Sources

Hornby, A.S. 1982. *Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary of current English*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Liddell, Howard G. and Robert Scott 1944. *A Lexicon abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

New World Encyclopedia 2017. *Cybernetics*. Available from: <<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cybernetics>> [Accessed 29 May 2019].