Laudatio for Honorary Doctor Professor Christopher Hood

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(gesproken woord geldt)

Dear Rector, esteemed colleagues, dear distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure and privilege to introduce the honorary doctor.

Professor Christopher Hood is emeritus Fellow at All Souls College of Oxford University. He was Gladstone Professor of Government at Oxford from 2001 until 2014. Before that, he was Professor of Public Administration and Public Policy at the London School of Economics. And yet earlier in his career he had affiliations with the National University of Singapore and the University of Sydney. From 2004 until 2010 he was director of the research programme Public services: Quality, performance and Delivery at the UK Economic and Social Research Council.

He has received many recognitions for his work. Among others: In 1996 he was elected as Fellow of the British Academy in 1996; in 2010 he was awarded the Routledge Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Public Management Research by the International Research Society for Public Management; in 2011 he was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to social science.

Over the course of his career, Professor Hood has produced a continuous stream of iconic publications. Probably his best-known paper is ‘A public management for all seasons?’, published in 1991. It is one of the most influential contributions to the discipline of Publication Administration, and considers the shift from so-called “traditional government” towards “new public management”: the adoption in the public sector of market tools such as contracts and performance indicators. In this ground-breaking paper, Hood provided public administration scholars with the concepts to make sense of the neo-liberal new public management
practices that were emerging all over the world. In this article Hood also called attention to the risk that economically inspired values such as efficiency and effectiveness would drive out public values such as quality, fairness and resilience. To this day, governments and public organizations—also in the Netherlands—are wrestling with the tension between market and public principles.

Christopher Hood’s influence on the fields of public administration and management is not restricted to issues of new public management. His work on the “tools” of government pushed research on policy instruments--exemplified in the Netherlands by the programme at the University of Twente, and especially that of Arthur Ringeling, who is one of the founding scholars of the of Public Administration department at Erasmus University. Professor Hood’s 1976 book on the Limits of Administration was a source of inspiration for the development (in the late eighties and early nineties) of ideas on policy networks in the research program of the newly established department of Public Administration at the Erasmus. Ideas on policy networks, recognizing the interdependence between government and other societal actors, became part of the DNA of the research of this department.

From the 90s onwards Hood has been studying regulation and public reforms, examining the influence of developments such as the penetration of information technology and the rise of information management, focusing specifically on the role of rhetoric and ‘spin’. Relevant publications are the 1998 book The art of the state, the 2007 book co-authored with Helen Margetts Tools of government in the digital age, and the 2011 book The blame game. Professor Hood also addresses the governance of risks accompanying the introduction of new technologies. He has creatively applied and expanded cultural theory to identify approaches in regulatory regimes facing these risks.

Hood’s critical attitude towards rhetoric served as the impetus to study the impact of three decades of new public management reforms in the UK together with Ruth Dixon. Findings were reported in 2015 in a book with the provocative title A government that worked better and cost less? The promises of administrative innovation have not materialized, setting the
stage for critical reflection on future directions of the organization and management of the public sector. This book won the 2015 Louis Brownlow award from the United States National Academy of Public Administration, and the 2016 W.J.M. Mackenzie award from the Political Studies Association in the UK.

Professor Hood’s academic work has addressed some of the most relevant topics and developments within the practice of government, and has enriched and shaped the repertoire of conceptual tools and intellectual frames of reference for researchers in the fields of public administration, policy and management. His work has had a constituent influence on the discipline of public administration in the Netherlands, inspiring the young discipline as it matured and sought to connect with the international academic community.

Apart from the content of his research, the manner in which Hood practices scholarship has been and continues to be a source of inspiration. His manner is erudite, intelligent, critical and inquisitive. He serves as a role model in times of populism and fact free politics: avoiding easy normative positions, being critical and reflective towards rhetoric, stressing the need to empirically study and quantify the claims that public services make. Hood’s approach serves as a call to arms for a discipline aiming to understand the forms, effects, limitations AND opportunities of public administration and public management in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

On the occasion of the 104h Dies Natalis of Erasmus University, we honour Professor Christopher Hood for his outstanding contributions to the development of the field of public administration in general, the discipline of public administration in the Netherlands, and that of the department of public administration at our university in particular. The Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Studies warmly congratulates prof Christopher Hood with the honorary doctorate we today confer upon him.