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In Search of a Welfare Democracy

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This article contributes to the growing literature concerning the necessity and desirability of democratising the UK welfare state. It takes a theoretical approach by exploring some of the key influences on contemporary debates: risk society, governmentality, the new social democracy and associational welfare. The article suggests that none of these supplies the theoretical foundations of a welfare democracy and that another approach must be found. It concludes that only by engaging with the debate concerning deliberative democracy can social policy find a way forward. The key is to emancipate social time through an alternative ethic to that of paid employment.

The premise of this article is that a democratisation of the UK welfare system is needed if an alternative is to be found to both state collectivist (1945-79) and market individualist (post-1979) ways of organising welfare institutions. For whereas collectivism and individualism are based upon a political gulf between state and citizen, democratisation refers to a process of building bridges between the two. Such themes are by no means new but may have been neglected by the discipline of social policy (cf. Ellison, 1999) in its attempt to defend state welfare against the assaults of Thatcher, Major and, arguably, Blair.

The article proceeds at a theoretical level to explore the debates concerning risk society, governmentality, the new social democracy and associational welfare. These have been selected not only because they are four of the most important contemporary influences upon the subject but also because each subverts the traditional standoff between collectivists and individualists. Yet, despite this, the article suggests that none of the above supplies the theoretical foundations of a welfare democracy and that another approach must be found. It concludes that only be engaging with the debate concerning deliberative democracy can social policy find a way forward. The article's purpose is therefore to clear the ground for a more extended discussion of welfare democracy elsewhere (Fitzpatrick, 2001).

Risk society

Although the risk society thesis does not depend upon the work of Ulrich Beck it is his influence which has dominated the debate (e.g. Taylor-Gooby, 2000). This is because Beck (1999: 72–90) challenges the bases of traditional social policy. During the 'first modernity' it was believed that risks could be insured against by designing welfare

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institutions against the evils of want, ignorance, disease, idleness and squalor: income maintenance, education, health, employment and housing. The state's legitimacy therefore derived from its capacity to subdue those 'external' evils. However, social changes have undermined that legitimacy: the changing status of women, the rise in divorce rates and the decline of the nuclear family, the end of full-time full employment, individualisation, globalisation, as well as a range of risks and uncertainties that derive from the operation of welfare systems themselves.

Far from requiring the dismantling of state welfare systems, however, Beck (2000a) advocates a radical reformism: systematic working-time reductions, Basic Income systems and a concentration upon civil labour within the third sector. The point here is not to develop a once-and-forever series of welfare institutions that will protect us from external hazards, but to create a social culture of experimental diversity that allows the quick, flexible and transnational management of risks whenever they arise. So, whereas the welfare state constituted a safety valve that protected its clients from the risks they collectively faced, Beck advocates the *democratisation* of this increasingly redundant shield in order to more fully empower those who experience risks.

For those interested in the democratisation of welfare, Beck therefore provides an interesting and useful perspective. However, it is unlikely that a welfare democracy could be founded upon the kind of theoretical ground that Beck establishes. Essentially, this is because he adopts an indeterminist reading of social change in the risk society:

> Society has become a laboratory where there is absolutely nobody in charge. (Beck, 1998: 9)
>
> The unintended consequence of the neoliberal free-market utopia is the Brazilianisation of the west. (Beck, 2000a: 1)

Few would deny that unintended consequences are an inherent part of human society, yet I seem to recall that the Brazilianisation of the west was precisely what the Right was hoping for back in the 1970s! Commentators might disagree about the sources and engines of social change, but to refuse to identify *any* individuals, groups or nations as the main power-holders is tantamount to claiming that responsibility for social change is distributed equally between *all* individuals, groups and nations. It is here that we encounter the limitations of Beck's ideas (Scott, 2000). Since a welfare democracy would require a more egalitarian distribution of power and resources than exists at present we need an account of those from whom power and resources would need to be redistributed. Beck's emphasis upon unintended consequences prevents such an account and his version of a welfare democracy would involve cultural but not necessarily material empowerment.

Of course, Beck tries to avoid the logic of his critics by insisting that they have trapped themselves within the false dichotomies of Enlightenment thinking. The proposition that nobody is in charge is a consequence not of my ideas, he might say, but of the ongoing and misguided attempt to explain the second modernity through the conceptual prism of the first: our 'relations of definition' have not kept pace with reflexive modernisation leading to an 'organised irresponsibility' where the more we regulate the more we are re-visited by anxieties generated by the risks we are trying to control (Beck, 1999: 148–51; 2000b: 224–5).

So the issue would seem to hinge upon Beck's attempt to evade the dualisms of Enlightenment thought. For instance, he announces that it is desirable to embrace elements of both realism and constructivism, not in terms of a theoretical synthesis or

sustained critique, but in terms of a pragmatism where the aim is to 'open up the social sciences to the new and contradictory experiences of the global age of global risks' (Beck, 2000b: 211–12; 1999: 23–37). But what this leaves us with is not a transcendence of Enlightenment categories but a lazy dependence upon them that is dressed up as sociologically innovative. By collapsing the bipolarities of reality and construct Beck (1999: 36), once again, proposes a generalised equality of power and responsibility:

> It is hardly possible any more to blame definite individuals for such [environmental] damage: the principle of a guilty party has been losing its cutting edge.

Fortunately, Beck's insights into social policy are not dependent upon his sociological critique. Gorz (1999) has also recommended a civic experimentalism that democratises social institutions and breaks free of the logic of productivism, though without recourse to a sociology of unintended consequences. Therefore, elements of Beck's risk society thesis, especially his call for the freeing up of social time (see last section), can be incorporated into a theory of welfare democracy without us having to accept the whole package.

Governmentality

The governmentality literature (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999a, 1999b) draws upon post-structuralism. Its principal advantage is that it reminds us that 'governance' is not equivalent to state or government action. If less state can actually engender *more* governance, then the simplicities of the free market Right are further exposed. The Right may or may not have succeeded in rolling back the state but they have certainly succeeded in rolling *forward* the apparatus of governance by privatising the means by which risk and insecurity were formally pooled across both space and time. With social insurance systems having been undermined, both poor and affluent are expected to make themselves over as risk-taking entrepreneurs who are prodded by supply-side reforms into investing in a multiplicity of individually tailored welfare packages. Here, we see how governmentality overlaps with the risk society thesis. Ericson and Haggerty (1997) observe that as the need for risk management increases so new methods of classifying and profiling at the micro-social level emerge, reflecting back on the general consciousness of risk and uncertainty, and propelling forward the vicious circle thereby set in motion. Policing therefore becomes inscribed within the *ex ante* spaces of freedom that had previously lain immune from the actuarial gaze of surveillance.

Although governmentality does not lend itself to prescription (see below) it is possible to detect elements of the debate that offer support to the democratisation of welfare systems. If a welfare democracy is incompatible with the free market revolution then we have to understand (a) how and why the technologies of market individualism have colonised the micro-social, and (b) how the micro-social might become a source of counter-critique. If, as Foucauldians suggest, acts of resistance pervade the everyday then it is possible to conceive of the social edifice as being constantly undermined by a guerrilla army of movements and alliances. The democratisation of social welfare systems might begin at that point.

However, although the governmentality literature is strong on (a) it is weak on (b). Just as Foucault treats power as ubiquitous and subjectless, so governmentality theorists may end up disarticulating the truth-claims of the dispossessed, the poor and the

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oppressed – because such claims are themselves held to be just another face of power. O'Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997) outline a 'weaker' version of post-structuralism, one where the governmentality literature might engage more creatively with social critique, yet they do not explain how this association may be performed as this is precisely what any kind of post-structuralist approach seems to preclude. It is only by slipping back into the confines of humanist and naturalist social science that Rose and others can fail to notice that their normative criticisms of free market liberalism are disallowed by their conceptual premises.

As with Beck, then, there is a reluctance to theorise the persistence of 'guilty parties'. The moral outrage of the Foucauldians is directed at the micro-effects of a capitalist system that they refuse to visualise at the macro-level in the mistaken belief that visualisation closes down the possibility of new narratives and new descriptions. Rose (1999b: 95) insists that:

> One must discard the presupposition that one can criticize regimes of power to the extent that they falsify and distort human subjectivity and utilise the extent of this falsification as a yardstick by which power can be evaluated . . .

Again, the evaluation of power is ruled out of court and we are left without a centre of power and responsibility that would permit a theoretical critique, the aim of which is the redistribution of power and responsibility. So, although they direct our attention to the governance of subjectivity and of the micro-social, the theorists of governmentality resemble foreign correspondents who may support the events upon which they are reporting but are unwilling to intervene in those events. The non-intervention of journalists is due to a commendable adherence to the ideals of objectivity and undistorted communication; for post-structuralists it is due to the less commendable belief that objectivity and undistorted communication are philosophical chimeras. The governmentality debate offers useful insights into the disempowerment that free markets engender, and which a welfare democracy would set out to reverse, yet it is the very people who are dispossessed by global markets who are likely to regard post-structuralist non-intervention as affluent self-indulgence.

The new social democracy

Whilst there are now many authors who identify themselves with the new social democracy, or the Third Way (e.g. Hombach, 2000), it is to Tony Giddens that most debates justifiably turn.

Giddens (1994) acknowledges that the *causes* of social exclusion are structural rather than cultural, but asserts that cultural factors are of crucial importance in the *persistence* of exclusion, as the underclass are less able to negotiate the risks and manufactured uncertainties of late modernity. 'Positive welfare' therefore represents a pre-active attempt to equip people with the tools needed to cope with internal risks, in contrast to the reactive instruments of the classic welfare state. This necessitates a 'life politics' that does not blame the excluded for their exclusion, but which does stress the responsibilities of the poorest.

These ideas later crystallised as a Third Way attempt to renew social democracy (Giddens, 1998) where the welfare state must be reconfigured as a social investment state. This means re-defining equality as inclusion. Income levels are now less important

than the willingness to contribute to one's way of life. The subjects of this investment state are no longer the passive clients of state welfare, nor the atomised consumers of market welfare, but are responsible risk-takers who have the moral capacity to 'entrepreneur' the uncertainties of globalisation (Giddens, 1999). These risk calculators are to be counselled through the vicissitudes of life rather than accorded unconditional social rights to material resources (Giddens, 1998: 117). For although Giddens (2000: 86) does not want to ignore redistributive justice altogether, because equality has been re-defined as inclusion what he seems to be supporting is the social participation of unequals.

Although Giddens does not engage with the governmentality literature we can infer from his ideas how easily a concern with risk can engender social reforms that tighten the web of micro-governance: counselled selves who must perpetually re-calculate the manufactured hazards of a post-scarcity society. In the social investment state, insurance is no longer just a formal system into which contributors pay but an internalised, psychological state of persistent vigilance; and security is no longer about a protective distancing *from* risk but an actuarial immersion into the normalities of risk-taking. In the investment state, calculative entrepreneurs must internalise the imperatives of global-oriented competition by constantly weaving their past and future selves together via cybernetic systems of information and prediction. Put simply, insurance is now less about entitlements built up through past contributions and more about the obligation to endlessly manufacture a future where one is not a drain upon the entrepreneurial activities of others.

On the positive side, Giddens's work on reflexivity and risk leads him to support greater democratisation, or the 'democratisation of democracy'. However, these sociological commitments are combined with a post-Thatcherite politics of the 'extremist Centre', i.e. where alternatives to the Centre are treated as ideological no-go areas. It is this combination which leads to a striking omission in his recent work: the relevance of democracy to welfare reform. For instance, his justified criticism of productivism is contradicted by his constant references to human capital:

> In the new information economy, human (and social) capital becomes central to economic success. The cultivation of these forms of capital demands extensive social investment. (Giddens, 2000: 52)

So his support for 'second-wave democratisation' extends to global politics, the EU, science and technology, the environment and family life, but only tangentially to welfare reform (Giddens, 1994: 112–32). It is as if the freedom permitted to our psychic selves is only intended to counter-balance the degree to which our material selves remain tethered as human capital to the employment-based economy. We are autonomous and reflexive citizens only in so far as we perform and enjoy our duties within capitalism's global marketplace. We are enjoined to embrace global capitalism by finding within it all of the emancipatory potential that was once taken to lead in the opposite direction. Giddens is calling for the emotional and civic solidarity of material unequals.

So although he looks favourably upon dialogic forms of democracy this is interpreted in psychological and emotive terms rather than in terms of widespread socio-economic reconstruction; the emphasis is upon making the best of informatic and globalised changes that are already underway. Therefore, while Giddens is correct to recognise the importance of risk, of governance and of democratisation, his ideas represent a petrifica-

tion of socio-economic developments that largely ignore the radical implications of democracy for social policy.

Associative welfare

At present, it is Paul Hirst (1994, 1997) who has arguably come closest to working out the theoretical framework of a democratic welfare system. He argues that large parts of government can and should be devolved to self-governing, voluntary, publicly funded and publicly accountable associations whose members would have varying degrees of control over public systems of provision. An associational welfare system would maintain an emphasis upon distributive justice but would be less collectivist than the classic welfare state. Self-governing associations would deliver and/or purchase many of the services that are currently provided either by the state or the market, yet play a more systematic role in the welfare of society than the traditional independent sector. Hirst envisages that we would all become members of these associations, with rights to vote and to exit if we choose, and that the associations will have to meet certain criteria if they are to receive public funds via some form of formula-funded voucher system.

The attraction of associational welfare is that it would empower the users of public services more effectively than either state collectivism or a Third Way approach. Those who defend the former (Stears, 1999) tend to overestimate the paternalistic virtues of the welfare state and to underestimate the extent to which any inability that citizens now possess to take greater control of their lives is a regrettable *effect* of paternalism rather than a justification of yet more paternalism (cf. Hirst, 1999a). Those who defend the latter overemphasise both the importance of globalisation and the declining validity of older versions of social democracy (Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Hirst, 1999b).

However, there are three main problems with associative welfare, at least under Hirst's formulation. First, he places too much stress upon exit and not enough upon voice. His associations would be representative democracies in which the main constraint upon associations' leaders would be the withdrawal of their members and the consequent loss of public funds. This fails to break away from today's consumerist ethos where voice is only ever an individualistic prelude to exit rather than a cooperativist strategy. This is not to argue that a welfare democracy would have to limit the right of exit; instead it is to recognise that *it is the market system which limits the right of exit* whenever public goods are concerned. Therefore, the point is to regard voice and exit as compatible if they are both conceived in cooperativist and mutualist terms.

The second problem, then, is that Hirst presents associational welfare as politically neutral. This is similar to Offe's (2000) mistake in imagining that working out the proper civic mix between state, market and community can be done without reference to ideological schemes. What this ignores is the fact that any welfare democracy worthy of the name would have to subject the meanings of 'state', 'market' and 'community' to challenge, challenges that could not occur without ideological orientations. This need not mean that a welfare democracy would be politically myopic, but it would have to directly confront and present alternatives to the radical Right hegemony. The classic welfare state shifted the political battleground to the Left and deliberative welfare should possess a similar goal.

The final problem is that Hirst does not pay enough attention to the centralised state, insisting that the methods of governance would flow *from* the state *to* associations. Yet

here, again, we are presented with an either/or logic which treats the state and associations in exclusivist terms. Any shifts in the loci of governance must aim to *enhance* the democratisation of the state rather than merely sublimating democratic governance to the civic sphere. For instance, Hirst regards Basic Income as a big bang reform without which associationalism is virtually unimaginable; but if, as Fitzpatrick (1999) shows, there are many different, ideological versions of Basic Income then such reform will always be a subject of contestation. Therefore associationalism and Basic Income *underpin one another*, so that associations would always have to direct their energies in and through a public sphere that continues to have the state as its centre of gravity.

In short, we can conceive of a welfare democracy as resembling an associative system so long as the above criticisms are borne in mind. Consequently, a welfare democracy would need to involve: (1) cooperativist schemes where the producers of welfare are also the consumers, i.e. something akin to Local Exchange and Trading Systems (Fitzpatrick with Caldwell, 2001); (2) Hirst's welfare associations but with a greater emphasis upon voice; (3) a reconstituted welfare state that aims to maximise social justice through strategies of empowerment. (Here, we might take the recommendations of the Commission on the NHS (2000) as a model where they advocate an NHS constitution, making the NHS independent from government and with elections to health authorities and trusts.)

Welfare as deliberation

A complete account of a welfare democracy would need to debate: (1) its theoretical foundations, e.g. the conception of well-being that underpins it, and (2) its institutional and organisational forms. Having indicated that associative welfare provides the first hints of (2) I wish to conclude by suggesting that a welfare democracy would embody a particular notion of well-being. Having done so, this article will then have supplied the basis for further thought and reflection (Fitzpatrick, 2001) by drawing attention to the importance of 'social time'.

'Aggregative' democracy treats citizens largely as voters whose preferences are already given and merely need to be aggregated through the mechanisms of electoral representation. For post-war social democrats the welfare state derived its legitimacy from its supposed ability to fulfil basic needs and maintain social cohesion. The influence wielded by the populace on welfare services was to be indirect and via the ballot box. In short, what was important was welfare *output* not democratic *input*. Far from challenging this, the radical Right reinvented the citizen as the consumer whose sovereignty was to be exercised partly through the aggregative vote but mainly through the freedom to exit that market reforms would bring.

For these and other reasons many now call for deliberative reforms that stress voice as well as exit and voter loyalty (Dryzek, 1994, 2000; Benhabib, 1996; Elster, 1998). Whereas aggregative democracy merely counts preferences, deliberative democracy enables preferences and beliefs to be transformed through discursive interaction; whereas the former is instrumentalist and representative, the latter takes account of social ends as well as electoral means, introducing participatory elements that seem more practical and realistic than proposals for direct democracy. (The problem with such proposals is that they leap too quickly over the process of collective self-education that is

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the precondition of political and economic decentralisation.) Of course, deliberative democracy would require aggregative systems of accountability and a traditionally liberal constitution, but some are beginning to identify the emergence of a deliberative democracy in the form of citizens' juries, policy panels, referenda and electronic public spaces.

There are, though, two versions of deliberative democracy on offer. The proceduralist version aims to create a well-ordered society, an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines, within which all voices can be heard and where it is the force of the better argument that prevails (Rawls, 1999: 138–40; Habermas, 1996, chapters 7–8). The pluralist version (Mouffe, 1993, 1999, 2000) stresses the ineluctability of power and conflict, where there is no extra-discursive space from which we can ever judge what the better argument is. For proceduralists, pluralism appears too inchoate and institutionally vague; for pluralists, proceduralism treats the identity of the democratic agent as unproblematic.

So, if there are two versions of deliberative democracy must there be two versions of a deliberative welfare democracy also? I am going to suggest not, and that a welfare democracy must adopt a stance of creative agnosticism vis-à-vis proceduralism and pluralism. Basically, deliberative welfare is committed not to any one side of the debate but *to the perpetuation of the debate on as wide a public stage as possible*. In a sense, what I have in mind here is a version of Macintyre's (1982: 219) statement that:

> the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.

Similarly, deliberative welfare is only initially about the realisation of basic needs (as important as these are) and more about a collective, democratic quest whose value resides in the fact that the expedition is endless. At its highest level, well-being arrives through the *search* for well-being, a search that is rooted in a democratic deliberation that does not seek an end. Thus welfare is given an Aristotelian spin that we can call *self-referential well-being*. Well-being is not a thing, a condition, nor even a set of fulfilled needs, but a performative process of becoming. Therefore, deliberative welfare is a form of creative agnosticism that regards both the procedural and the pluralist schools as vital components of social welfare, and a welfare democracy is that which would give institutional form to this notion of self-referential well-being. The previous section indicated that associative reform points us in this direction, though with a greater emphasis upon voice.

Therefore, deliberative democracy and deliberative welfare both depend upon a substantial reconfiguration of market societies. Deliberative democracy requires a democratic welfare system that emphasises empowerment as a source of a new social solidarity; and democratic welfare therefore requires a deliberatively engaged, active citizenry. It seems clear, then, that deliberative citizens must aim to give themselves as much discursive space as possible (Beck, 2000a). If western societies currently suffer from 'time poverty', i.e. overwork and stress, and if this is related to social inequality, where relatively few of us achieve a desirable balance of free time and decent income, due to the disciplinary constraints of an 'exclusive society', then both the motivation and the goal of deliberative competence are one and the same: the emancipation of social time, i.e. time spent by autonomous citizens in sociable and justice-enhancing activities.

Freed time loses meaning without self-referential well-being and self-referential well-being requires the freeing up of social time so that we are no longer squeezed between the reinforcing grips of employment and consumption. The ethic which binds welfare and democracy together is a care ethic, i.e. an ethic which offers an alternative to the current situation where employment time dominates life, an alternative which those who misread Oscar Wilde ('people have better things to do than sit in endless meetings') can only resist by denying that a care ethic is either desirable or widely desired. So, a deliberative democracy requires institutional reforms that correct the imbalances of time and income that presently lie at the heart of social injustice. The redistribution of income and wealth is unlikely to enhance the quality of life without the simultaneous reorganisation of time; and for time to be emancipated as social time, employment activity must not only be reduced but new civic spaces of discursive interaction and care opened up.

The debate about how to realise a deliberative welfare democracy begins in earnest at that point (Fitzpatrick, 2001).

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