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Governance and Social Policy

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Abstract

Governance is now quite widely used as a frame of analysis, although not in social policy. This article elaborates some of the different roots and usages of governance and interrogates the utility of the concept for the discipline and study of social policy. Having traced the concept's diverse origins and contemporary usages, the article goes on to develop from them a framework for the analysis of developments in public policy in the UK under New Labour. This is then applied to consider in turn the nature of the public sphere, policy-making, policy implementation and societal incorporation. This leads to a discussion of the various strengths and weaknesses of governance. The former include its direct interest in policy-making, its focus on the state and the fact that it can connect different levels of action and analysis. On the negative side, though, one must question to what extent a governance perspective finds social policy interesting in its own right and whether its over-riding focus on state and government leads it to residualise both social policy and society.

Introduction

This article undertakes a conceptual mapping exercise of governance and explores the relationship between governance and social policy. It has one main objective: to interrogate and register the significance of governance for social policy, as a discipline and as a practice or set of practices around public policy. The article proceeds in three parts. The first searches after the origins and main lines of development of the concept of governance. Since governance has become something of a catchword in political (science) circles, its usage has been both loose and universalising. It is, therefore, first necessary to identify the concept's core set of references, especially with regard to its theoretical interests. Drawing on different sets of literature on governance, in the second part of the article I develop a framework to understand and analyse social policy from a governance-related perspective. This is then used to map the main developments under New Labour in the UK. In its third part, the article identifies some strengths as well as shortcomings of governance for the study of social policy. These relate to the qualities and breadth of the perspective as well as the needs of social policy as a discipline. A final, overview section draws the article to a close.

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Governance and social policy

There are two main reasons why it is interesting to explore the relationship between governance and social policy. The first pertains to the discipline of social policy and the second to the concept of governance.

Governance is not a foreign concept to social policy. The discipline has always had an interest in governance, even if it never named it as such. With roots in social administration, an originating interest of the discipline of social policy lay in organisational structures and practices and the sets of relations and experiences to which they give rise. In other words, the discipline focused on means as well as ends. Titmuss, for example, in *Social Policy: An Introduction* (1974: 50–1), depicted social administration as the study of certain human organisations and formal structures (and choices between them) which deliver or provide what are called 'social services'. He went on to define the subject matter of the discipline as 'the structure, history, organisation, practices and principles of collective action (economic, social, political) falling within the area of social welfare' (*ibid.*: 58). David Donnison and Valerie Chapman had a similar understanding of the discipline. In 1965 they defined the territory of social administration as the development of collective action for the advancement of social welfare. Both this and Titmuss's representation of the core of the discipline are remarkably close to one of the most widely used definitions of governance today: the organisation of collective action (Prakash and Hart, 1999: 2). We can conclude therefore that governance resonates with one of the founding interests of the discipline of social policy. However, we must also observe, somewhat ironically, that social policy as a discipline has been moving away from matters of administration. Central to the discipline's self-critique is the view that a focus on administration is unacceptably narrow. Not only does it tend to lead to work which treats policy in isolation from the wider environment in which it operates but it focuses on the means of policy to the disbenefit of the ends. Given this, one could argue that governance would be adjudged as not being of service to the discipline were it to lead back to a focus on administration. Rather, what we would demand of it is that it either connects closely with the contemporary interests of the discipline or that it moves us beyond them. An underlying parameter then has to be the extent to which governance augments and takes forward the interests as well as the capacities of the discipline. Put simply, it has to be more than social administration in a new guise.

The second reason why governance is interesting reaches broader than the discipline of social policy and pertains to the phenomenon of governance itself. Governance is a very contemporary term; one has the sense that it captures a momentum. This is an important reason to focus on it. Apart from this, governance is remarkable in that it is both a political project and a set of ideas being developed within the academic community. While I think it inappropriate to represent governance as a Janus-faced phenomenon,[1] it is accurate to characterise it as

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having two parallel existences – a project that is being promoted by political actors and also a set of ideas/framework that is being advanced by members/sections of the academy. While the relationship between the two would make for an interesting analysis, I confine my attention in this piece to the possibilities of governance as an academic concept or approach. In other words, it is the heuristic properties of the concept which drive this analysis.

In interrogating the utility of governance for social policy, quite large questions have to be posed. The following three appear as the most pressing:

- Does governance as a concept or approach have a remit that extends beyond matters of organisation and management?
- Is governance more than a descriptive concept and if so what is it that the approach is problematising?
- How well does the concept or approach lend itself to an analysis and understanding of the social nature of policy?

Among the issues which governance invites one to analyse are the relationships among local, regional and national levels, the role of the state and its relationship to civil society, the (re)positioning of different interest groups and the framing, orientation and implementation of policies. The underlying argument made here is that, while there is a theoretical and empirical substance and coherence to governance, what one might call its 'social capacities' are unclear. The thrust of the piece suggests that the concept needs to be reworked if it is to advance significantly the analysis of social policy.

The concept of governance and related literature

The origins of the concept

Now widely used, governance emerged in less than a decade from virtual obscurity to take an important place in the social sciences and, partly at any rate, to displace the concept of government. Governance appears to be rivalled only by social capital when it comes to the speed of its rise within the social sciences. The concept has by no means a single set of references however. It is utilised to invoke a wide variety of phenomena. In the arena of politics, governance is most widely employed to refer to the co-ordination of various forms of public–private interactions. Focusing on its academic profile, while some such as Newman (2001) describe it as promiscuous, it is perhaps better to regard governance as an umbrella or portmanteau concept. One common usage differentiates it from government. The latter is taken to be synonymous with a particular mode of societal control (hierarchy) or to refer to the main agent of collective power in society. Governance, on the other hand, is seen to imply a network form of control, to refer primarily to a process and to have associated with it diverse

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agents. The locale and exercise of power are central to governance. When applied empirically, governance is, though, most often used to refer to the changing nature of government and the public sector and how each articulates the distribution of power and control in society. It is especially attuned to a changing set of arrangements wherein there is a possibility that the state may no longer occupy a privileged position.

Governance has at least three disciplinary roots (as against usages):[2] in the field of international political economy and especially in that literature which is concerned with the growth of globalisation and other challenges to the nation state; in the public policy literature which focuses on political and administrative developments occasioned by the European Union (EU) and the growth of international organisations; and in post-structuralist social science.

In the first literature the capacity and competence of governments and representative political institutions to control events within and beyond the nation state is problematised. This literature works with the frame of the state (as the institutions of national power) and its environment and treats governance as the process of state adaptation to changes in its environment. Its departure point is the erosion of domestic political authority and the flow of authority (if not power) away from traditional institutions of government, upwards to transnational bodies and downwards to regions and sub-regions (Newman, 2001: 11). It has had two dominant themes. The first addresses the capacity of the centre of government to exert control over society and the implications of this for the functioning of the state, the articulation and pursuit of collective interest and for democratic and accountable government. Globalisation is the second theme. Here one encounters the notion of the 'hollowed out' state, the emptying of the state of core functions and the shifting of power to international financial markets, global companies and supra-national entities.[3] The primacy of the nation state as a unit of analysis is drawn into question in a context where territorial-based systems of governance may be either obsolete or increasingly unable to perform the functions expected of them. Whether one agrees or not that the power of the nation state is on the decline, it does seem indisputable that a single level structural hegemony (statism, regionalism or multilateralism) can no longer prevail (Cerny, 1999).

In the second set of literature it is argued that the EU is a distinctive if not new form of governance (Sbragia, 2000). Not only does it involve the extension of conventional political space (above the level of the national state) but the Union governs through a form of network organisation and is a pioneer in deliberative democracy. While much of the literature on the EU cannot decide whether the Union is an international organisation or some kind of polity, the EU has given rise to a particular concept – multi-level governance – to characterise policy-making and implementation which span a number of levels (Marks *et al.*, 1996). The EU is distinctive in the first instance in being a collective system of

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governance. As such it involves the enmeshing of the national and the European or the embedding of the national in the European (Laffan, O'Donnell and Smith, 2000: 74). It is also multi-level in that it involves the Union, national governments, international and sub-national actors and interests in the policy process. Thirdly, there are strong deliberative elements to EU governance and policy-making. Representatives and delegates from member states meet in committees, councils and boards in a process of communication which extends beyond interest representation to embrace the setting of goals and standards and the interpretation of values (Eriksen, 1999). In other words, people participate as actors rather than just delegates or representatives (as voice) and argumentation is the currency rather than bargaining from a fixed interest position. It is not an exaggeration to characterise the EU as a negotiated order, operating though the exercise of 'soft power' and using such mechanisms as procedural innovation, the establishment of committees and observatories and engaging in an iterative process whereby bargaining, deals, exceptions, derogations and transition phases are not at all uncommon (Laffan, O'Donnell and Smith, 2000: 76). A major contribution of this literature is to demonstrate how innovative the EU is from a governance perspective. The experience of the EU shows that transnational policy networks emerge when policy-making is depoliticised and routinised, when supra-national agencies are dependent on other agencies to deliver a service and when there is a need to aggregate interests (Rhodes, 2000: 350).

In the third set of literature governance is used in the service of an analysis of the dynamics of power relations within the encounters which make up the everyday experience of individuals. The population, with people as the subjects of governance, is continually being moulded through a series of 'social devices'. This strongly cultural set of approaches juxtaposes questions about how we govern and are governed with matters of the relations between the government of ourselves, the government of others and the government of the state (Dean, 1999: 2). Familiar oppositions such as those between state and civil society, public and private, self and society are thrown open to scrutiny. This literature provides a framework and a language for thinking about the linkages between questions of government, authority and politics and questions of identity, self and personhood (*ibid*.: 13). Governance in post-structuralist hands is the process of attempting to control or manage a known object (such as a relationship, an event, an animate or inanimate object) (Hunt and Wickham, 1994: 78–9). People are subjected to government by the state's array of technologies of government, in which welfare epitomises and realises concerns about populations, their health and longevity, their education and a host of aspects of their conduct. Governance is perpetual because it is about modulating conduct through inculcating a command structure in the constitution of the individual and thereby 'normalising' society and recreating social solidarity (Douglas, 1999: 137–8). In this perspective the current welfare reforms are to be

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understood as seeking to enhance the self-governing capacities of individuals and communities.

With such diverse origins, governance has an impressive span. Although there is no necessary conversation between the three literatures, few concepts in the social sciences can claim such diverse roots. To what extent have any of these literatures focused on social policy or the welfare state? Only in the post-structuralist and political economy literatures has the role of social policy been given attention. In the former the constitutive role of policies in defining both the objects and subjects of governance is emphasised. In particular, governance practices create and reproduce the subjects needed for governance to operate effectively. Foucault, for example, saw 'welfare' as a way of reframing the relationship between the political field and the management of economic and social affairs in which the authority of so-called 'experts' plays a key role (Rose, 1996: 48). Social policy (or perhaps better put societal policy) is therefore accorded a leading role as one of the media through which governance is effected. In (one variant of) the political economy literature, the welfare state is portrayed as being both in crisis and a cause of crisis in the national state. As a system of national economic and social management, the welfare state is regarded as being a barrier to nation states' adaptation to conditions of globalised capitalism. Bob Jessop goes further than most in integrating the form and content of social policy into the analysis. The state is more than a political agent; it is a bearer of certain kinds of social policy packages and it is because of these that its role is changing. Jessop (1999) highlights the role of social policy in the purported failure of the Keynesian welfare state as a mode of governance. This type of welfare state has, according to him, given way to a new form of post-national regime. The 'Schumpeterian workfare postnational regime' promotes competitiveness, subordinates social policy to the demands of labour market flexibility, is post-national in scale and is associated with an increased role for non-state mechanisms in compensating for market failures and in delivering state-sponsored economic and social policies.

The extent to which social policy and the welfare state are theorised in their own right in any of these literatures is questionable though. Jessop's work is exceptional in treating the social policy regime as key in the national configuration of power and agency. More commonly, social policy tends to be more acted upon than actor in the governance literature and the over-riding tendency is for developments in the welfare state to be taken as examples of a change (or not) in governance rather than analysed in their own right for their contribution to governance and as active in political settlements more widely.

It seems then that the task of according social policy a leading role has to be undertaken from within the discipline. This is already under way. Not only is the concept receiving increased attention from social policy analysts but one can see a trajectory in the relevant work from employing the concept in a descriptive sense to using governance to sustain an argument. In the former

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usage, governance most widely refers to management, administration and new ways of co-ordinating welfare-related activities through networks, partnerships and deliberative fora which give users a more central role (Bochel and Bochel, 1998). Another body of work is employing the frame of governance in the service of explanation. I am referring here especially to work on global social policy, that on how new public management and the move to manageralism have affected the social services and work within the Open University[4] to develop a framework to interpret how social policy connects the governance of personhood with that of community, state and nation. Janet Newman's recently published masterly work – *Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society* – is a most thorough consideration of governance and social policy. It has fundamentally informed this article. Taken as a whole, what is first interesting about this more explanatory work is that it seeks to bring together discursive and policy-related practice. Secondly, even though there are variations in how governance is defined and utilised, the concept does seem to provide an over-arching framework to link the policies pursued by the Conservative governments and those of New Labour. With continuity or discontinuity as the departure point for much of the analyses of New Labour, governance appears to be at once both large enough and loose enough to span policies and practices of British governments over the last twenty years.

In the interests of exploring further the utility of governance for social policy, I now attempt to employ the insights of the three perspectives on governance to develop a framework for the analysis of social policy.

Common themes: governance as a framework of analysis

Looking across the three sets of literature, it is possible to identify a number of overlapping points of analysis. These, together with their constituent elements, are presented in Table 1. The following four dimensions lead to the heart of the concept of governance.

1. Governance in the first instance invokes *an analysis of the state and the 'public' sphere more broadly*. A key rationale in the entire field is to ascertain the extent to which a change in governance is associated with or occasions a change in the state itself. The role of the state and in particular its capacities and functions come under scrutiny as do the challenges which increasing social differentiation and the decline of nation state sovereignty throw up for both the state and the centralisation of power. Governance also speaks to matters of democracy and the role of civil society, especially in the context of the challenges to representative democracy associated with a fragmentation of class politics, growing diversity and the clamour for recognition of different interests and identities.

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2. Central to a governance framework also is an interest in *the practice of policy-making*. This is expressed in questions about how policy is framed, the identity and interests of the actors involved as well as the processes of making policy. In a sense, policy-making as social practice, rather than as purely procedure and skill, is brought to the fore as is the degree to which policy-making is inclusive or exclusive (in terms of the actors and processes involved).
3. *Policy implementation* is a further focus. With the structure, form and delivery of services and programmes to the fore, at issue here are matters such as the design and organisation of provision as well as the culture prevailing in the public service. The practice of management, in its own right and juxtaposed to the role and behaviour of professionals, is also of primary concern. Issues of accountability and autonomy and the interface between users and providers of services are also highlighted as significant by a governance perspective.
4. The fourth reference in the concept is to *a set of prescriptions for the organisation of society*. There is a strong normative content in governance. As Newman (2001: 16) points out, governance refers to the ways in which institutions, organisations and individuals should be governed as much as to the manner in which they are governed. Governance therefore has a strong ideological content. In this and other ways, it is interested in identity and the constitution of identity and culture.

Governance is therefore a concept with a broad canvas and the capacity to address large as well as small questions. How well does it serve empirically? The next section considers the extent to which this kind of framework can countenance the policy emphases of New Labour in its first term of office.

Governance under New Labour

If we use the framework to organise the main elements of New Labour policy, we can see that they map fairly readily onto it (see Table 2).

In regard to the nature and role of the 'public' sphere, the most widely used metaphor is of the state as steerer rather than rower. One of the few clear objectives of New Labour's Third Way, for example, is to shift the centre of gravity of governance away from the bureaucratic state and the private market towards civil society and its informal networks and communities (Benington and Donnison, 1999: 60). A central reference is to the nature and practice of control. Hierarchies (characterised by bureaucratic power and vertical relations), markets (characterised by the search for efficiency through competition and relations of contract) and networks (characterised by partnership and horizontal relations) are regarded as representing alternative forms or strategies of governance. It is networks which are prioritised in New Labour parlance. In them the currency is, supposedly, trust as distinct from authority (in bureaucracy) and price competition (in markets)

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(Rhodes, 2000: 361). Government's conception of its relationship with citizens, communities and civil society are all up for discussion as the weaknesses of mainstream liberal democratic institutions become ever more apparent. The meaning of democratic participation (in the words of New Labour 'democratic renewal') and the nature of citizenship are therefore part of governance's sub-text. The discussion is of community involvement whereby the public is empowered to make decisions about policy. Changing governance, some argue, represents a form of co-production between the state and other agencies and citizens themselves (Kooiman, 1993). Third Way philosophy is fundamentally based on a recognition of the limits of conventional politics (and conventional political economy as well).

In regard to the practice of policy, policy-making and its links to an overall strategic project or purpose are emphasised in place of managerial reforms. Moreover, the delivery of outcomes through partnership takes precedence over efficiency and reduced public expenditure. The framing of policy has been altered: it has come to be seen as more complex and co-ordination across policy spheres is emphasised as a desired end. Partnerships and networks are recommended as alternatives to hierarchical power wielded through command and the use of authority. The rhetoric is of relations and interdependence (between civil society, government and economy) and of stakeholders, inclusion and trust. The range and identity of the actors involved is another matter requiring attention in the context of how inclusive or exclusive the policy process is. The picture, if not the reality, is of a differentiated and dispersed policy process involving multiple stakeholders operating through increasingly complex policy networks and funding regimes (Newman, 2001: 80). Although their policies represent in many areas a continuation of those established by the Conservatives, New Labour in its first term was more concerned to forge a better relationship between local and national governance, between the policy and management agendas, to reduce the number of governance-related bodies and to emphasise participation by citizens as stakeholders rather than as users or consumers.

In regard to policy implementation, the talk is of joined-up government, a mixed economy of welfare and policy outputs. The operation of public organisations is also central here as is the conduct of professional practice. Accountability and performance are common themes and the host of practices which have been put in place to measure and improve management gives the analyst much to work with. In short, this aspect of governance raises a whole series of issues about welfare delivery, not just in terms of the identity of those who provide services but also with regard to modes of delivery and matters such as the welfare mix, plurality and so forth.

Finally, in relation to societal incorporation, modernisation is promoted as an end in itself and the impetus of reform is for people to be active in their own self-government. The latter is framed in contradistinction to reliance on

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either the market or the state. Nouns have little currency in this climate; verbs take centre stage as we are enjoined to 'partner' and 'activate'. The essence of the New Labour philosophy is the utility for social integration of the social capital generated by direct interaction. It is in this light that welfare should be understood as a phenomenon to be governed, both at the macro-level and at the level of individual conduct through enhancing the psychological, dispositional and aspirational capacities of those involved. Welfare is a function of particular levels of skill, enterprise, inventiveness and flexibility. People and their micro-communities are to be enabled to become active agents (entrepreneurs even) in their own governance. The turn to civil society is in many ways an appeal to the capability and spaces for social self-organisation (Bagnasco, 2001: 236).

Strengths and weaknesses of governance for social policy

Strengths of governance

In the first instance one could say that a governance perspective, as should be evident from the above, provides an over-arching framework which seems to capture the main developments under New Labour. That is, it fulfils a useful descriptive function in characterising what is happening, in terms of both policy practice and discourse. It also serves to bring developments together and in this it makes connections, some of them quite large scale. For example, a governance perspective helps to situate developments such as devolution, on the one hand showing how they fit into a larger project, and on the other suggesting that they may not be as significant as they are represented to be in political and public discourse.

A further strength of governance, one that is especially relevant to social policy, is that it focuses directly on policy-making. The relationships between the processes of policy-making and implementation, the identity of the actors and the institutional setting form the heart of the concept. It therefore dovetails with one of social policy's classical themes – the functions of social policy and the delivery of services. It also means that governance is well endowed to reveal what John Clarke and others (2000) call the 'organisational settlement around welfare'.

Thirdly, because the locus and exercise of power are central to it, a governance framework provides terms on which to critique and evaluate developments in policy. For example, while devolution and other developments spell a dispersal of some state authority to new settings, governance leads one to question whether this amounts to a loss of power for the state. What one finds in practice is a great deal of central steering of decentralised networks and agencies. Rhodes (2000: 34) suggests that the state has sought to compensate for its loss of hands-on control by reinforcing its control over resources (in his words 'more control over less'). This suggests that if trust is the currency of networks then New Labour and other

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governments which are pushing towards more participative governing have a long way to go because they lack the very trust they seek to inspire. The central focus on power also enables us to understand and locate changes in governance as stemming from, in some respects anyway, what states have to do to build or regain legitimacy. Much of the push towards partnership can be understood as a search for legitimacy through the building of a stronger base rooted in a consensual form of politics (Newman, 2000: 80).

Fourthly, governance is a concept that not only lends itself to different levels of analysis but actually connects different levels. Hence it has the capacity to make linkages among the community, civil society, local and regional governance, the state and the supra-national level (Newman, 2001: 15). As such it can serve to identify interesting trends in governance, one of which is a respatialisation of welfare. The community is replacing the society as the new locus for the administration of individual and collective existence. Public policies increasingly treat us in terms of our allegiances to particular sets of community values, beliefs, and commitments. Community is not only the territory of government, it is also a means of government (Rose, 1996: 335). This fits well with the widespread use of zones and area-based approaches and the discursive appeal to the local. It leads to a particularisation of social exclusion (which is in its origins a general concept denoting relations to society rather than to locality).

Furthermore, a governance perspective has the potential to tell us something about welfare state reform, how it proceeds and why. For example, there is a body of thought which proclaims the significance (if not the primacy) of institutional arrangements for reform. On the basis of the work of Bonoli and Palier (1998) and Paul Pierson (1994) and others, one could make the case that contemporary developments have to be viewed not just in terms of what they achieve as regards the extant state of provision but in terms of the opportunities or context which they set up for future reform. Hence a small change in pension entitlement today – because it alters either normative expectations, the institutional architecture or the politics surrounding social programmes and provision – may pave the way for a more substantial change next year or under the next administration. Because governance places the spotlight on institutional arrangements and, in particular, the conditions undergirding policy and associated political agency, it may lead to innovation in how we study and understand social policy reform.

A further reason why governance could be beneficial to social policy is because it keeps a central focus on the role of the state. Social policy as a discipline has had an ambivalent relationship to the state. More interested in the nuts and bolts of policies, it has been slow to recognise policies and practices as an expression of the state's agency and to address itself to the relationship between the state, public welfare and social services. The welfare state literature has to some extent filled this vacuum, treating policies mainly in terms of their political agency (Pierson, 1991; Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000). Against this background,

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governance could be helpful to social policy in focusing attention on what new forms the pursuit of the collective interest and political organisation take. In this respect one could use it to enquire into, among other things, the type of social policy which is associated with an alteration in the liberal-democratic or other models of the state.

But to establish whether governance is useful for (as distinct from relevant to) social policy, one must do more than just identify areas of mutual interest. More probing questions are required to establish the intellectual resources which the concept or approach provides for social policy.

Some problems or shortcomings

As a perspective governance purports to contain a narrative of change (Newman, 2001: 22). Indeed change provides one of the common themes across the different literatures of governance. Part of the reason why governance is considered interesting is because it is supposed that a new mode of governance is underway. Whether this takes the form of global or transnational governance, a Schumpeterian welfare state or greater networking and partnership, the claim is that a governance approach has the capacity to reveal something new. I suggest that this claim requires careful consideration. While it might be able to identify a change, I cannot see that a governance perspective offers us much in the way of explanation for change. Why do we have the push towards this new form of governance? There is no direct line of analysis in the governance framework to explain this. Hence one has to question whether it takes us somewhere new. After all, we have always known about the power of political actors, just as those of us who work outside of political science have known that political agency is to be considered a departure point for a journey rather than an arrival.

The second doubt or disquiet about governance pertains to the extent to which it can centralise the analysis of social policy. Variation across perspectives notwithstanding, there is a sense of social policy being consigned to a much larger project of governance and control. Only the work of Bob Jessop seeks to theorise the structure and content of social policy. Apart from his work the governance perspective is relatively silent about how and why social welfare is achieved. Moreover there is little in it which renders social policy interesting *per se*. This is disappointing to a discipline which has for long laid a primary emphasis on what one might call the 'fine detail of policy' and the social nature of welfare. Furthermore, governance can be confusing about why states have the social policies they do. There are many possible reasons: for example, one might treat social policy as the outcome of a deliberative process or as contingent on the identity and interests of the actors involved. All of this leads to the fear that a governance perspective may residualise social policy.

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Thirdly, there is a more general question about the place of the 'social' in governance. Some political science concepts treat society as given or as the dependent variable. Governance is not, at face value anyway, one of these. It draws fundamentally on insights about the significance of society-creating measures and some of the work poses questions essential to the management of society. Jon Pierre (2000: 2) represents governance in terms of the search for new forms of exchange between state and society. However the single guiding question in the entire literature is how government is effected and how government (as actor) interacts with its environment. The role of government and of the state are governance's central concern. Society follows from these. Nikolas Rose's work (1996) captures some relevant reservations, even though he is referring to the political project of governance. He argues that governance may spell the death of the social. As evidence he points to the increasing disassociation of economic management from the national, societal level. A further blow to the social is dealt by the focus on particular ties and bonds. We are increasingly governed in terms of our particular relations (to communities of identity, families and so forth) rather than our more general belongingess and our sets of relations to the larger society. One could say that we are being compartmentalised. While it would be an exaggeration to claim that governance as a perspective or approach is asocial, it is difficult to identify its view of society. To be as precise as possible: governance is a state-centred perspective and tends to frame change and development in terms of a rearticulation of the state rather than originating in society.

Overview

I will end by returning to my three initial questions. In reply to the question of whether governance extends beyond matters of organisation, management and co-ordination, the answer appears to be in the affirmative. As Tables 1 and 2 show, governance does locate organisation and management-related matters in a larger setting and draws on a framework in which the state is the central actor. However there is still a nagging doubt that governance's preferred focus of analysis is techniques, tools and procedures.

The second question posed was whether governance is more than a descriptive concept. The answer to this is also affirmative in that the concept problematises the connections between the distribution of power and the nature and role of the state. It has special promise to reveal how these connections are played out in public policy.

The third question queried how social governance is. This is a more nuanced question, one that cannot be answered with a straight yes or no. It is with regard to it that I have most doubts. One of the aspects to be valued about governance from a social policy perspective is that it, in foregrounding a discussion of the state, forces us to consider the extent to which society is bound up with

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TABLE 1. Governance as analytic framework.

Dimension	Referent
'Public' sphere	
Role of the state	Form and type of leadership
The structure and practice of authority/control	Tiers/levels of government System of authority Degree of centralisation
Nature of democracy/civil society	Representation or participation
Policy-making	
The framing of policy	The complexity of policy Degree to which policy is/should be evidence-based
Actors involved	Range, identity and interests
Ways of making policy	Exclusive or inclusive
Policy implementation	
The design, organisation and delivery of programmes and services	Management practices Performance/outputs Respective roles of consumers and producers
Culture of public organisations/ Professional practice	Autonomy and accountability Role of professionals User interface
Societal incorporation[5]	
Ways of thinking/systems of ideas	Ideology and norms
Constitution of subjects	Identity

TABLE 2. The approach of New Labour from a governance perspective.

Dimension	Emphases under New Labour
'Public' sphere	
Role of the state	The state as steerer, enabler, coordinator
The structure and practice of authority/control	Devolution Relations of co-operation (instead of competition) interdependence
Nature of democracy/civil society	Participation Social inclusion
Policy-making	
The framing of policy	Pragmatic reformism
Identity and range of actors involved	Stakeholding
Ways of making policy	Networking/partnership
Policy implementation	
The design, organisation and delivery of programmes and services	Joined up government Mixed economy of welfare Policy outputs
Culture of public organisations/ professional practice	Performance management and evaluation
Societal incorporation	
Ways of thinking/systems of ideas	Modernisation
Constitution of subjects	Responsible, self governance

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the state. However the analytical potential of governance for social policy is more in doubt. There is a sense in which the (analysis of the) state consumes society and community just as some would argue that the problem with the welfare state is that it consumes social capital (e.g. Fukuyama, 1996). Overall while a governance perspective is to be valued because it invokes an analysis of the state, it is in my view only a starting point in conceptualising how social policy connects state and society. There is therefore both a need and a space for more work by social policy researchers.

Notes

1 Because of the implication with the use of 'phenomenon' that it is unitary.
2 Both Hirst (2000) and Rhodes (1997) identify a number of usages or definitions of governance. These include good governance, global governance, corporate governance, governance without government, governance through new public management, new practices of co-ordination through networks, partnerships and deliberative fora, governance as international interdependence, governance as a socio-cybernetic system, governance as the new political economy, governance as networks.
3 However whereas initially globalisation was predicted to render nation states obsolete, the contemporary consensus seems to be that political authority within the international system is becoming more diffuse and that nation states have orchestrated some of the developments. They therefore remain powerful.
4 See *inter alia* Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin (2000); Lewis, Gewirtz and Clarke (2000).
5 I am indebted to Hartley Dean for suggesting this term to me.

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