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A Theory of Governance

STUDIES IN GOVERNANCE

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1. *Institutionalizing Unsustainability: The Paradox of Global Climate Change Governance,* by Hayley Stevenson
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A Theory of Governance

MARK BEVIR

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To Lawrence

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Preface

I hope that this book highlights interconnections among my arguments and, in doing so, makes a persuasive case for a postfoundationalism that is not postmodernist. Too many social scientists believe that the only alternative to positivism is the relativism and totalizing critique they associate with postmodernism. I aim to show, in contrast, that postfoundationalism can make a more positive contribution to governance theory.

Rod Rhodes did much of the heavy work of showing me how governance chimed with my interests. Later, as I thought and wrote about governance theory, Rod and I coauthored several books that applied my ideas: *Interpreting British Governance* (2003), *Governance Stories* (2006), and *The State as Cultural Practice* (2010). I had the immense good fortune of seeing my ideas applied to present-day governance by a scholar who combines a superb empirical sense with a willingness to use his seniority to explore new ideas with verve and imagination. Some readers will be familiar with my ideas because Rod has brought them to life in our coauthored books with their interpretive approach and their textual and ethnographic studies.

Although the ideas I present in this book have guided my work with Rod, I hope that by bringing them together here independent of empirical fieldwork, I will help to draw the attention of social scientists to themes in my work that I think they should take seriously irrespective of whether or not they are sympathetic to interpretive social science and to textual and ethnographic methods. I discuss these themes in the introduction, but let me briefly mention them here. First, debates about governance are impoverished by a lack of philosophical thought. For example, social scientists cannot properly debate whether networks are proliferating in the absence of a clear social ontology indicating what a network is. Second, postfoundationalism, like many other philosophical theories, implies that the leading concepts in social theory are reifications. An analysis of these concepts thus requires some kind of nod toward a historicist constructivism. Third, as arguments about governance necessarily make philosophical assumptions, so these same assumptions necessarily have normative implications. Social scientists should be more aware of the implications of their arguments for the desirability and possibility of democratic ideals.

Introduction

Philosophy, Organization, and Politics

Governance refers to all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market, or network; whether over a family, tribe, corporation, or territory; and whether by laws, norms, power, or language. Governance is a broader term than government because it focuses not only on the state and its institutions but also on the creation of rule and order in social practices.

As governance is a broad term, so the literature on it is diffuse. Different scholarly communities use "governance" to discuss issues across fields such as development studies, economics, geography, international relations, planning, political science, public administration, and sociology. Each community adds something to the literature. Social theorists use "governance" to conceptualize abstract analyses of social coordination and organization. Other social scientists debate changes in patterns of governance across corporate, public, and global affairs. Ideally, a theory of governance should cover both abstract analyses of hierarchy, market, and network as types of organization, and more empirical debates about the changing nature of social and political life.

This book advances a decentered theory of governance. Current accounts of governance are generally too attached to reified concepts and formal explanations. In contrast, decentered theory emphasizes the diversity of governing practices and the importance of historical explanations of these practices. Governance is seen as a set of diverse practices that people are constantly creating and recreating through their concrete activity. Governance is explained by the narratives that the relevant actors first inherit as historical traditions and then revise in response to dilemmas.

Because the literature on governance is broad, this decentered theory contributes to several conversations. One prominent conversation concerns social organization. Parts of the literature on governance discuss the laws, rules, and norms that coordinate people's actions in ways that give rise to formal and informal organizations. Decentered theory emphasizes the contingency and contestability of all such governance.

Another prominent conversation concerns the changing nature of politics. The relevant literature discusses the consequences for public organization and action of the emergence of markets and networks as alternatives to hierarchic bureaucracy. Decentered theory, with its emphasis on contingency and contestability, offers a distinct perspective on this new politics. On the one hand, the new politics embeds narratives and forms of knowledge that are rooted in modernist social science. Yet, on the other, the new politics is extraordinarily diverse in part because people draw on various traditions to interpret and to resist these narratives and forms of knowledge.

Because this book provides a general theory of governance, it necessarily engages several literatures and audiences, trying to show each audience what decentered theory contributes to its conversation, and trying to point each audience to related conversations that are taking place elsewhere. For a start, Part I of this book addresses philosophical debates about postpositivism with particular reference to the study of governance. The relevant chapters make the general case for decentered theory through discussions of broad schools of thought rather than a specific body of literature. This part of the book speaks most obviously to postfoundationalists and their discussions about the nature of a postpositivist social science. Other audiences might benefit from seeing the relevance of these discussions for their conversations about governance.

Part II of the book on social organization applies decentered theory to the analysis of the state, nation, network, and market choice. The relevant chapters are about more specific topics and they are usually grounded in more substantive discussions, such as those about the changing nature of the state, the future of national histories, and the analysis of change in policy networks. Participants in these discussions might benefit from having their concerns cast in postfoundational terms and placed alongside debates about the analysis of related social concepts.

Finally, Part III of the book on the new politics uses the same decentered theory to provide a historicist account of the changing nature of public organization and action. The relevant chapters are about more empirical topics, and although some of them are again grounded in concrete discussions, they aim mainly to give a new history of the present.

Social scientists interested in changes in public organization and action might benefit from the way this narrative draws explicitly on postfoundationalism with its decentering of social concepts such as the state, network, and choice.

PHILOSOPHY

This book makes the case for a decentered theory of governance by moving from postfoundational philosophy through theories of social organization and on to an account of changing patterns of public organization and action. Unfortunately, social scientists rarely think about philosophical questions, let alone respond to them and modify their scholarship accordingly. Disputes in social science exhibit, instead, a hypersensitivity to methods. Methodological differences and methodological claims have supplanted philosophical reflections about the ontology of social objects and about the types of explanation appropriate to social objects. Even on those rare occasions when social scientists explicitly foreground philosophical questions, they regularly get sidetracked into methodological debates. Philosophical debates get displaced onto methodological terrain.

Clearly, however, the nature and relevance of methodological rigor cannot be assumed without any thought begin given to the relevant philosophical issues. On the contrary, if social scientists ignore philosophy, their work is seriously impoverished, for they know neither what they do nor why they do it. For example, social scientists cannot intelligently discuss whether or not networks are spreading unless they have a clear idea of what a network is, where the ontology of networks is a philosophical matter, not a methodological one. Social scientists can certainly operationalize the concept of a network in order to measure networks, but the adequacy of the concept they thereby create is a matter for philosophical analysis, and if their operationalized concept lacks philosophical plausibility, their findings are liable to be trite or false.

Although social scientists rarely think about philosophical questions, their work often exhibits a lingering positivism that is most apparent in a naïve form of realism and especially a predilection for formal explanations. Of course, positivism often has a more specific association with a belief in brute facts. Consequently, "modernism" is perhaps a better word for the broader lingering positivism found in much social science, especially as "modernism" better reflects the historical narrative defended in this book. Chapter 1 argues that this modernism, or lingering positivism, lacks philosophical plausibility. Present-day philosophy is dominated by a wide-ranging postfoundationalism and more particularly by meaning holism.

Meaning holism states that propositions, meanings, and beliefs can be understood only in the context of wider language games or webs of belief.[1] This meaning holism precludes—save as an explicit oversimplification—the atomistic stance that isolates a particular belief so that it can act as a variable. Meaning holism also precludes—save as an explicit oversimplification—the objectivizing stance that uses social categories and social locations as markers for particular beliefs. More generally, meaning holism thereby challenges both the reifications associated with a naïvely realist social ontology and the classifications, correlations, and models that are constitutive of formal social explanations. Meaning holism leads, instead, to a humanist concern with the ways in which people forge webs of belief, and to a historicist concern with the ways in which these webs of belief reflect contingent historical circumstances.

Some social scientists are clearly committed to a reified ontology and to formal explanations. Other social scientists—perhaps more insidiously—are vague or just plain confused about their commitments. Even when social scientists pay lip service to a more decentered approach, they still often oscillate between humanism and historicism, on the one hand, and a reified ontology and appeals to formal explanations on the other. Sometimes they explicitly treat "ideas" as a variable alongside "interests" in a way that clearly gestures toward formal explanations based on correlations between variables and outcomes.[2] More generally, social scientists characteristically appeal to mechanisms, structures, and institutions not only to describe the patterns that arise out of activity but also to suggest that these patterns explain the relevant activity.[3] They use these concepts in explanations and generalizations that allegedly operate either irrespective of agency or, more usually, through the impact of institutions, mechanisms, norms, or a universal rationality on the relevant agents. These concepts thus entangle them with reification and determinism. For a start, social scientists then treat mechanisms and norms as reifications that have core properties divorced from the specific influences of time and place. Only by doing so can they suggest that the pattern is anything more than a contingent result of concrete activity. In addition, they treat concrete activity as determined by the relevant reified category. Only by doing so can they suggest that the pattern itself explains why people act so as to produce the pattern.

The issue here is not whether institutions exist. On the contrary, there obviously are patterns in contingent activity, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong about labeling these patterns "institutions," although social scientists would do better to use the label "practice" if only to remind themselves of the dangers of reification and determinism.[4] The issue is whether or not these patterns explain anything. Even when social scientists acknowledge the role of meanings and agency, they are tempted to ascribe explanatory power to institutions and processes. As a result social scientists drift toward reification and determinism. Their explanations appeal to the alleged logic of institutions or mechanisms. The institution or mechanism may be located in history, so the explanation may be temporal in the sense of taking time to unfold, but the explanation is not historical in the sense of appealing to a specific context in order to account for what happened next. To avoid reifications and determinism, social scientists have to adopt historical explanations. Proper historical explanations explain social phenomena not by evoking reified institutions and mechanisms but by putting contingent patterns of action in their specific contexts. These explanations are not only temporal in that they move through time; they are also historical in that they locate the phenomena at a specific moment in time.

Decentered theory challenges reification and determinism because it is committed to historicism and humanism. So, although decentered theory overlaps with other types of postfoundationalism, it differs from them in that it deploys aggregate concepts that make clear this commitment to historicism and humanism. Chapter 2 discusses the relevant differences and concepts. The concept of a tradition captures the impact of the historical background on individuals, their actions, and the practices to which their actions give rise. The concept of a dilemma suggests that people are situated agents who possess an ability to innovate for reasons of their own against the background of inherited traditions. Decentered theory thus explains types of governance as the contingent results of situated agents acting on beliefs that they reach by drawing on inherited traditions to respond to dilemmas. People adopt new beliefs that lead them to modify their actions, and their new actions coalesce in organizations and new patterns of public action.

Postfoundationalism requires social scientists to decenter governance. Social organization is not a matter of formal institutional types characterized by fixed essences. Changes in governance are not products of ineluctable social processes. On the contrary, governance, whether conceived as social organization or as a new politics, is a series of disparate social practices that are constantly being created and recreated through concrete and meaningful human activity.

Decentered theory combines a humanist appreciation of the diversity of the relevant meanings and actions with a historicist appreciation of their contingency. To decenter organizations is to recognize the diversity and contingency of the activity within them. A decentered theory of governance thus moves social scientists away from modernist reifications and toward a constructivist and historical ontology. Similarly, to decenter the new politics is to recognize its diversity and contingency. Again, a decentered theory of governance moves social scientists away from formal explanations and toward narratives and genealogies.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Some social scientists use the term "governance" to refer to abstract patterns of organization. Typically these social scientists focus on how order and coordination are possible especially in the absence of effective hierarchical government. Chapters 3 through 6 contribute to these conversations in social theory. These chapters suggest that postfoundationalism can inspire not just critique but also, just as importantly, a distinct social theory. Postfoundationalism decenters social formations such as the state, nation, network, and market choice, drawing attention to the diverse actions of which these social formations consist. The result is a constructivist and historical ontology in which organizations are conceived as products of contingent historical processes in which people make and remake the world through their local reasoning and their situated agency.[5]

For much of the twentieth century, societies across the globe valorized two forms of social organization—the market and state planning.[6] All too often the market and the state appeared as polar opposites. Proponents of the market portrayed it as a natural and spontaneous form of order in which the free activities of individuals are coordinated for the public benefit by an invisible hand. Proponents of the state portrayed hierarchical planning as a rational and just form of order by which humans take control of their activity and overcome the irrationality and exploitation of unbridled capitalism. Today there are growing doubts about each of these visions and the dichotomy they seem to instantiate. Of course, there remains a prominent neoliberal discourse that holds to an idealized vision of the market as a spontaneous coordinating mechanism that will operate for the public good provided only that individuals are left to exchange freely with one another. Nonetheless, there is also a blossoming new political economy that points to the superficialities and blindspots of this idealized view of the market. The new political economy draws on transactional, institutional, and evolutionary economics to argue that all economic institutions, including markets, are necessarily established and transformed in the context of political, social, and cultural authorities.[7] All economies are governed through complex patterns of rule that order and regulate economic actors and their interactions. Neither the state nor the market is a separate and self-sustaining institution. The new political economy has thus broadened discussions of social organization, giving prominence to networks as an alternative to markets and hierarchies.[8]

Generally, however, the new political economy draws on midlevel social theories that reify norms and structures to sustain formal ahistorical explanations. In contrast, Chapters 3 through 6 extend decentered theory to abstract analyses of social organization in state hierarchies, national cultures, policy networks, and civic choices. These chapters emphasize that organizations consist of human activity, where this activity is inherently contingent and changeable. Of course, both actors and observers can identify patterns—including, for example, states, nations, networks, and markets—arising from people's actions. Nonetheless, as was suggested previously, the patterns are practices, not institutions. The patterns are merely the results of the relevant actions; they do not fix the actions. Further, the patterns are neither monolithic nor static; people are constantly breaking out of them and opening them to contestation and transformation.

Chapter 3 presents the state as a cultural practice. The state is a practice because it is contingent activity. The state is a cultural practice because this activity is meaningful. A decentered theory of the state contrasts with the literatures on network governance and on metagovernance. Compared with these literatures, decentered theory depicts a stateless state. The hollow state and the state as metagovernance are reifications. They abstract the state from meaningful activity. They postulate the state as an entity that determines practices and explains outcomes. Decentered theory suggests instead that the state is merely an aggregate descriptive term for a vast array of meaningful actions that coalesce into contingent, shifting, and contested practices. The state is stateless in that it has no essence, no structural quality, and no power to decide the actions of which it consists. These actions are explained instead by the beliefs that actors inherit from traditions and then change for reasons of their own.

To decenter the state is to present it as arising out of meaningful activity and so, in a sense, to conceive of the state as a product of social life. Chapters 4 through 6 explore different theories of the social basis of the state—that is, different ways in which social organization can arise out of society itself. These chapters look at nations, networks, and markets, arguing that social scientists should not reify these organizations, but rather treat them, like the state, as fluid and contingent products of meaningful action. For a start, nations are not based on anything like a fixed cultural core or shared language; they are always constructed, transnational, differentiated, and discontinuous. Ideas of a nation are simplifications based on networks of peoples. In addition, networks are neither tightly bounded nor defined by something like the number or closeness of their members; they are the fluid products of peoples' contingent and conflicting actions. Appeals to policy networks are simplifications that tame a chaotic world of multiple actors creating policies through their reasoning, choices, and activity. Finally, market choices cannot be equated with self-interest or any other fixed set of preferences. People's choices reflect an open-ended process of local reasoning carried out against a historically specific tradition. Reductions of choice and consumption to self-interest simply ignore vast swathes of the complex emotions, decisions, and actions that make up everyday life.

In general, decentered theory turns from reified analyses of social organization toward narratives. The term "narrative" plays a dual role here. Narrative refers, first, to the stories by which the people social scientists study make sense of their worlds. Narrative refers, secondly, to the stories by which social scientists make sense of the narratives and actions of those they study. In organization studies, there is a growing literature on storytelling that is consistent with this idea of narratives as an insightful way of analyzing governance.[9] Further, most, if not all, civil servants will accept that the art of storytelling is an integral part of their work. Such phrases as: "Have we got our story straight?", "Are we telling a consistent story?", and "What is our story?" abound. Civil servants and ministers learn and filter current events through the stories they hear and tell one another. Their stories explain past practice and events and justify recommendations for the future.

Practitioners' storytelling often includes a language game, a performing game, and a management game.[10] The language game identifies and constructs the storyline, answering the questions of what happened and why. The resulting story has to be reliable, defensible, accurate, and reconcilable with the department's traditions. The performing game tells the story to a wider audience, inside and outside the department. Civil servants test the facts and rehearse the storyline in official meetings to see how their colleagues respond. They have to adapt the story to suit the minister, and both ministers and civil servants have to judge how the story will play publicly. They then perform the agreed story on a public stage to the media, legislature, and public. Finally, there is the management game, which implements any relevant policy changes and, perhaps more important, lets those involved get on with "business as usual" as quickly as possible.

THE NEW POLITICS

Social scientists use the word "governance" not only to discuss abstract theories of social organization but also to describe a new politics. Governance here refers to a shift in public organization and public action from hierarchic bureaucracies to markets and networks. This shift can be overstated: hierarchy almost certainly remains the most common form of public organization. Nonetheless, there clearly has been some such shift or at least attempts to create some such shift. From the late 1970s onward, governments at the local, national, regional, and global levels have experienced a vast array of reforms associated with marketization, contracting out, new management fads, joining up, and partnerships.

Governance is associated, therefore, not just with greater sensitivity to networks as a type of social organization but also to the spread of networks in a new politics. Many social scientists argue that the neoliberal reforms of the public sector both increased the membership of existing networks and created new networks. As a result present-day governance increasingly involves private- and voluntary-sector organizations working alongside public ones. Complex packages of organizations deliver most public services today. The resulting fragmentation means that the state increasingly depends on other organizations to implement its policies and secure its intentions. Further, the state has swapped direct for indirect controls. Central departments are no longer invariably the fulcrum of policy networks. The state sometimes may set limits to network actions, but it has increased its dependence on other actors. State power is dispersed among spatially and functionally distinct networks. Phrases such as "hollow crown," "core executive," and "differentiated polity" all suggest that the center is constrained and splintered.[11]

Chapters 7 through 10 use decentered theory to provide a historicist explanation of this new politics. Chapter 7 locates the new politics in a broad historical narrative. The narrative sets out against the backdrop of the nineteenth century when social theorists relied largely on developmental histories. Social theorists believed that national histories unfolded in accord with principles and toward a defined endpoint. The clearest examples of this developmental historicism were national histories that recounted the progress of a prepolitical people toward national consciousness, civil society, statehood, and liberty. By the early twentieth century, these developmental histories were losing their hold on the social imagination. In their stead there rose modernist social science with its reliance on formal and ahistorical explanations couched in terms of models, correlations, functions, systems, and structures.

For much of the twentieth century, many social scientists viewed the bureaucracy as an institutional home for modernist expertise and as a check on the problems associated with representative government. By the late 1970s, however, the bureaucratic state confronted a number of dilemmas. Policymakers responded to these dilemmas in terms derived from modernist social science. Ideas linked to neoclassical economics and rational choice theory encouraged policymakers to turn to markets and private-sector management techniques. Ideas linked to institutionalism and other midlevel theories encouraged them to turn to networks, partnerships, and joined-up arrangements. Chapter 8 continues this historical narrative, relating it to those that describe present-day governance as either network governance or a neoliberal governmentality.

Like other genealogies, Chapters 7 and 8 offer not only an explanation of their object but also a critique of the forms of knowledge embedded in that object. Recall that narrative refers both to the stories with which social actors make sense of the world and the stories by which social scientists make sense of social actors. As narrative has this dual meaning, so social science is not just a way of describing the world but also potentially a way of transforming it. To state the same point differently: as social scientists necessarily rely on philosophical assumptions, so these assumptions have normative implications. Whether social scientists are aware of it or not, their studies tacitly point policymakers toward some types of knowledge and some approaches to decision making and away from others. Their assumptions about human action and social science spill over into the ways people conceive of effective and legitimate public policy. Theories of governance are not just academic; they constantly touch on the viability and desirability of particular democratic practices and innovations.

Chapter 9 explores tensions between modernist social science and democratic ideals. Governments have begun to adopt democratic innovations inspired by those modernist theories that suggest that building civic spirit, social capital, and multisector and multijurisdictional networks can help to solve legitimacy problems. Again, governments have begun to adopt the language of dialogue, participation, consensus, empowerment, and social inclusion. All too often, however, this "democratic" turn is an elite project based on expert assertions that democratic innovations will promote efficient and effective governance. The result resembles neocorporatist incorporation more than a genuinely dialogic process. The state aims almost wholly at the involvement of organised groups of stakeholders and it retains control over which groups are involved. Further, the state restricts participation to consultation, for even those organized groups that the state recognizes as stakeholders are not themselves given decision-making powers.

Although social scientists might support participatory and dialogic innovations, decentered theory cautions them against defending these innovations in modernist terms. Any attempt to base deliberation, self-governance, and other democratic innovations on modernist expertise is more or less doomed to fail. When social scientists rely on modernist expertise, they reinforce a false belief in formal expertise at the expense of a more dialogic and democratic ethos. Further, when policymakers adopt dialogic and participatory reforms because modernist experts assure them of certain outcomes, the policymakers are likely to overturn the reforms should the reforms not actually have those outcomes. Finally, if democratic reforms are premised on modernist expertise, dialogue drifts into consultation and participation drifts into incorporation.

Social scientists need an alternative to modernist studies of when and where to introduce democratic innovations. One alternative is the kind of open-ended menu provided in Chapter 10. That chapter draws attention to attempts to promote dialogue and participation throughout the policy cascade. During the stage of opinion formation, social scientists might look at examples of participatory learning and action, deliberative polling, and mini publics such as consensus conferences and town hall meetings. During the decision-making stage, they might explore examples of decentralized development planning, participatory budgeting, and citizens' assemblies. During the implementation stage, they might highlight innovative forms of coproduction and self-governance. Finally, they could examine participatory and dialogic approaches to regulation and dispute resolution, including peer mediation.

CONCLUSION

This book draws on postfoundational philosophy to develop a decentered theory of governance as social organization and as a new politics. Some readers may think that governance and postfoundationalism are strange bedfellows. Governance is commonly associated with practical and policy orientated voices; postfoundationalism with critical and theoretical ones. The literature on governance focuses on institutions and policies; postfoundationalists typically concentrate on meanings and discourses. Studies of governance often rely on formal ahistorical modes of explanation; postfoundationalism sometimes encourages historical genealogies.

Nonetheless, readers should not overstate the differences between the literatures on governance and on postfoundationalism. For a start, these literatures share important themes, most notably a concern to open up the black box of the state. Parts of both literatures explicitly oppose the idea that the state is a monolithic entity capable of acting unproblematically as a dependent or independent variable. They disaggregate the state, drawing attention to the diffusion of political power and the variety of political action, and so exploring the porosity of the border between state and civil society. In addition, the literatures on governance and postfoundationalism have shown some signs, at least at their margins, of moving closer to one another. On the one side, the governance literature has begun to pay greater attention to beliefs and traditions. Policymakers are no longer treated straightforwardly as rational pursuers of power or as cogs in institutional wheels. Some of the governance literature recognizes that policymakers draw on historically contingent webs of meaning. Then, on the other side, the postfoundational literature has begun to extend beyond its roots in the particular ideas of poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault.[12] Even some governmentality theorists define neoliberalism in ways that seem less indebted to Foucault's lectures on biopolitics than to the governance literature's accounts of marketization and the new public management.

So, the literatures on governance and postfoundationalism are surprisingly promising bedfellows. They have enough similarities to be able to speak to one another about overlapping theoretical perspectives and empirical concerns. But they have enough differences to be able to learn from one another—hopefully to the enrichment of both.

PART I

Philosophy

1 A Decentered Theory

In 1992 the World Bank introduced "good governance" as part of its criteria for lending to developing countries.[1] Governance here referred to those neoliberal reforms of the public sector—marketization and the new public management—that the World Bank believed led to greater efficiency. In contrast, the Local Government and Whitehall Programmes of the British Economic and Social Research Council used "governance" to describe a new pattern of relationships between the state and civil society. Governance here referred to networks defined in contrast to hierarchies and markets.[2] People's understanding of governance varies with the narratives they tell and with the prior theories they use in constructing those narratives

When social scientists take the concepts of prior theory and narrative seriously, they imply that the world is not given to people as pure perception. People perceive the world differently in part because they hold different theories. All perception is theory laden. This postfoundational insight informs a decentered theory of governance. This decentered theory stands at odds with the familiar alternatives upheld by the economists of the World Bank and the social scientists who headed the Local Government and Whitehall Programmes. A decentered theory analyzes governance in terms of contingent meanings embedded in activity.

Before describing a decentered theory of governance more fully, however, this chapter first examines the leading narratives of governance in relation to rational choice theory and institutionalism, thereby opening up a space in which to push and pull those theories closer to an interpretive social science. Then this chapter introduces a decentered theory of governance, indicating the distinctive answers it gives to questions about governance, and examining its implications for public policymaking and democracy.

POSITIVIST THEORIES

Many social scientists became interested in the concept of governance in response to neoliberal reforms of the public sector. Neoliberals understand governance in terms of the increased efficiency allegedly brought to the public sector by relying on markets, contracting out, cutting staff, and budgeting under strict guidelines. The neoliberal narrative emphasizes bureaucratic inefficiency, the burden of excessive taxation, the mobility of capital, and competition among states. Neoliberals condemn the hierarchic approach to the provision of public services as inherently inefficient. They argue that the state should not itself deliver services but rather develop an entrepreneurial system based on competition and markets. "Less government" and "more governance" is a prominent neoliberal slogan.[3]

The neoliberal narrative of governance overlaps with rational choice theory. Both draw on neoclassical economics, which derives formal models of social life from microlevel assumptions about rationality and profit maximization. The neoliberal narrative of governance deploys neoclassical economics to promote reform programs such as the new public management. Rational choice theory extends neoclassical ideas from economics to politics. The economic approach to politics, as it is also known, presupposes that actors choose a particular action (or course of actions) because they believe it to be the most efficient way of realizing a given end, where the ends actors seek are associated with their utility functions.[4]

Among social scientists, the most prominent alternative to the neoliberal narrative of governance is that of governance as networks. This latter narrative depicts a massive proliferation of networks following as an unintended consequence of neoliberal policies.[5] Neoliberal reforms fragmented service delivery and weakened central control. Instead of establishing functioning markets, neoliberal reforms created networks. The Local Government and Whitehall Programmes generally suggest, for example, that the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s undermined the capacity of the state to act but the reforms failed to establish anything resembling the neoliberal vision. In this narrative, the state acts as one of several organizations that come together in diverse networks to deliver services. Often the state is incapable of effectively commanding others;

instead it must rely on limited steering mechanisms and diplomacy. Governance is thus characterized by power-dependent organizations that come together to form semiautonomous and self-governing networks.

Just as the neoliberal narrative overlaps with rational choice, so the narrative of governance as networks overlaps with institutionalism.[6] As with many neoliberal theorists, the proponents of institutionalism typically accept that problems associated with globalization, inflation, and state overload brought about neoliberal reforms. However, in contrast to neoliberal theorists, institutionists then suggest that embedded institutional patterns meant that the reforms did not operate as neoliberals had hoped. Institutions, they argue, create a space between the intentions informing policies and the unintended consequences of those policies. Institutions allegedly explain the gap between the market vision sought by the neoliberals and the emerging reality of networks. An institutional theory thus shifts attention from an allegedly inexorable process fuelled by the pressures of globalization, capital mobility, and competition among states to the ways in which institutions generate diverse responses to these pressures.

By no means do all uses of the word "governance" fit within the neoliberal story about markets or the institutionalist story about networks. Nonetheless, these two stories remain the dominant ones. One way to introduce an alternative decentered theory of governance is thus to explore the relationship of institutionalism and rational choice theory to concepts—such as narrative—that imply that people's perceptions of the world vary partly according to their prior theories. These concepts suggest that people's perceptions always incorporate theories. They are, in this respect, postfoundational.

Postfoundationalism has become increasingly common in philosophy since the 1960s. In philosophy the atomistic theories of the logical positivists have largely given way to a widespread meaning holism.[7] This holism asserts that the meaning of a proposition necessarily depends on the paradigm, web of beliefs, or language game in which it is located. What would have to be the case for a proposition to be true (or false) necessarily depends on the other propositions one holds true. The meaning of an idea or the content of an experience necessarily depends on the contingent background theories one holds. For meaning holists, therefore, even everyday accounts of experiences embody realist assumptions, such as that objects exist independently of individual's perceptions, that objects persist through time, and that other people can perceive the same objects. The ineluctable place of people's prior theories in their perceptions does not mean that people's theories determine the sensations they have. It means only that people's categories influence the way they experience the sensations they have.

Although positivism was subjected to forceful philosophical criticism as early as the 1950s, institutionalism and rational choice fail to take seriously the consequences of rejecting a positivist belief in pure experience. Many social scientists cling tenaciously to the positivist faith in explaining human behavior by reference to allegedly objective social facts about people. In doing so, they remove the interpretation of beliefs and meanings from their visions of social science. Indeed, when social scientists repudiate positivism, they are usually distancing themselves from the idea of pure experience without intending thereby to repudiate the goal of a social science that eschews interpretation. They may renounce a narrowly defined positivism, but they remain firmly enmeshed in a broader modernism.

Modernist social scientists generally try to avoid direct appeals to the beliefs of the actors they study by reducing those beliefs to intervening variables between social facts and actions. Instead of explaining why people voted for the British Labour Party by reference to their beliefs, for example, a modernist social scientist might do so by saying that the relevant voters were working class. Similarly, as this explanation creates an anomaly of workers who vote for the British Conservative Party, so a modernist social scientist might explain that anomaly not by examining the workers' beliefs but by referring to something such as religious affiliation, gender, or housing occupancy. Few social scientists would claim that class and the like generate actions without passing through human consciousness. Rather, they imply that the correlation between class and action allows them to bypass beliefs. The implication is that belonging to a particular class gives one a set of beliefs and desires such that one acts in a given way. To be working class in Britain is, for example, allegedly to recognize that one has an interest in, and so desire for, the redistributive policies historically associated with the Labour Party.

When postfoundationalists argue that there are no pure experiences, they undermine the modernist dismissal of the interpretation of beliefs. A rejection of pure experience implies that social scientists cannot reduce beliefs and meanings to intervening variables. When we say that a person X in a position Y has given interests Z, we necessarily use our particular theories to derive their interests from their position and even to identify their position. So, someone with a different set of theories might believe either that someone in the position Y has different interests or that X is not in position Y. The important point is that how the people we study see their position and their interests inevitably depends on their theories, which might differ significantly from our theories. A person X might possess theories that lead her to see her position as A, rather than Y, or to see her interests as B, rather than Z. For example, some working-class voters might consider themselves to be middle class, with an interest in preventing further redistributive measures, while others might consider themselves working class but believe redistributive measures are contrary to the interests of workers.

To explain peoples' actions, we implicitly or explicitly examine their beliefs, their desires, and their consequent interests. A rejection of modernism implies that social scientists cannot properly explain people's actions by reference to allegedly objective social facts about them. Instead, social scientists must explore the theories and meanings against the background of which people construct their world, including the ways in which people understand their location, the norms that affect them, and their interests. Because people cannot have pure experiences, their beliefs and desires are saturated with contingent theories. Thus, social scientists cannot deduce beliefs and desires from allegedly objective categories such as class. Instead social scientists have to interpret beliefs and desires by relating them to other theories and meanings.

Of course, institutionalists and rational choice theorists have grappled with all of these issues. Although some institutionalists and rational choice theorists seem to remain wedded to a modernist dismissal of interpretation, others do not. However, the more they disentangle themselves from this modernism, the further they depart from the principles that give their approaches content. Social scientists can avoid the problems that come from an entanglement with modernism only by allowing considerable latitude for interpretation—so much latitude that it is unclear that what remains of their approaches can be helpfully described as institutionalism or rational choice theory.

Institutionalists attempt to explain actions and social trajectories by reference to entrenched institutions. Typically they define institutions, in the words of James March and Johan Olsen, as "the collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend interest." Institutionalists imply that there are operating procedures, understood as rules or norms, which explain the actions of individuals and that even, again in the words of March and Olsen, "constitute" social and "political actors in their own right."[8] However, considerable ambiguity remains as to how we should conceive of institutions. On the one hand, the concept of an institution often takes on an unacceptably reified form that elides its contingency, inner conflicts, and social construction. Institutions appear as the allegedly fixed operating rules and procedures that limit—or, for some, arguably even determine—the actions of the individuals that operate within them. On the other hand, institutions are sometimes opened up to include cultural meanings in a way that suggests institutions themselves cannot fix meanings or therefore the actions of the individuals operating within them. If social scientists open up institutions in this way, however, they cannot treat institutions as given. Instead they have to ask how meanings, and so actions, are created, recreated, and changed in ways that create and modify institutions.

By and large institutionalists like to take institutions for granted. They treat them as if the people within them were bound to follow the relevant rules; the rules, rather than contingent agency, produce path dependency. However, to reify institutions is to rely on the outdated and mistaken modernist eschewal of interpretation. Institutionalism, so conceived, assumes that allegedly objective rules prescribe or cause behavior so that people who are in a position X subject to a rule Y will behave in a manner Z. The problem with this assumption is not just that people can willfully choose to disobey a rule but also, as has just been argued, that social scientists cannot read off people's beliefs and desires from their social location. People who are in a position X might not grasp that they fall under rule Y, or they might understand the implications of rule Y differently from the social scientists, and in such circumstances they might not act in a manner Z even if they intend to follow the relevant rules.

Faced with such considerations, institutionalists might open up the concept of an institution to incorporate meanings. They might conceive of an institution as a product of actions informed by the varied and contingent beliefs and desires of the relevant actors. We should welcome such an opening up, or decentering, of institutionalism. Even while we do so, however, we might wonder whether or not we should still think of the approach as, in any significant sense, institutionalist. All the explanatory work would be done not by allegedly given rules but by the multiple and diverse ways people understood and reacted to conventions. Appeals to institutions would thus do no real work. They would just be misleading shorthand for tacit assumptions about, or explicit studies of, the beliefs and desires of the people who acted so as to maintain and modify institutions in the ways they did.

The preceding discussion of institutionalism suggests that a rejection of modernism leaves institutionalists desperately needing a microtheory.

Institutionalists can avoid engaging beliefs and preferences only if they assume that social scientists can read these things off of people's "objective" social locations, but, of course, that is exactly what a rejection of modernism suggests social scientists cannot do. The lack of a microtheory in a postpositivist world does much to explain the vulnerability of institutionalism to the challenge of rational choice theory. Similarly, the fact that rational choice theory constitutes a microtheory does much to explain the ways in which social scientists have sought to bring it together with institutionalism.[9] Turning to rational choice theory, however, one finds that it too confronts a choice between an unacceptable modernism and a more interpretive approach.

Because rational choice theory conceptualizes actions as rational strategies for realizing the preferences of the actor, it seems to reduce the motives of political actors to self-interest. However, as most rational choice theorists would recognize, social scientists have no valid grounds for privileging self-interest as a motive.[10] Even if an action happens to have beneficial consequences for the actor, social scientists cannot conclude that the actor acted in order to bring about those beneficial consequences. Besides, a theory predicated solely on self-interest cannot properly make sense of altruistic actions. These obvious problems with reliance on self-interest have led rational choice theorists to expand their notion of preference so as to move toward a "thin" analysis of preferences that requires motives only to be consistent.[11] The problem with thus reducing all motives to an expanded concept of preference is that it is either false, or valid but of limited value. If rational choice theorists use an expanded notion of preference merely as a cloak under which to smuggle back in a naïve view of self-interest, it is false. If rational choice theorists extend the concept of preference to cover any motive for any action, they leave the concept devoid of useful content.

Given that a valid concept of preference is one devoid of content, the problem for rational choice theorists becomes how to fill out a concept of preference on particular occasions. Sometimes they do so by appealing to a quasi-analytic notion of self-interest, even if they also pay lip service to the problems of doing so. More often, they attempt to do so in terms of what they suggest are the more or less self-evident (natural or assumed) preferences of people in certain positions. For example, bureaucrats supposedly want the increased power that comes from increasing the size of their fiefdoms. Typically, as in this example, the relevant preferences are made to appear natural by a loose reference to self-interest in the context of an institutional framework. Obviously, however, this way of filling out the concept of preference falls prey to the general criticisms of modernism. Even if social scientists assume that the dominant motivation of most bureaucrats is to increase their power—an awkward assumption as many bureaucrats probably also value things such as time with their families and interesting work—social scientists cannot blithely assume that bureaucrats understand and judge their institutional context as the social scientists do.

Faced with such considerations, rational choice theorists might decide to return to a largely empty notion of preference. Rational choice theorists would then conceive of people's actions as products of their beliefs and desires without saying anything substantive about the content of these beliefs and desires.[12] Once again, we should welcome this opening up, or decentering, of rational choice theory, but also wonder whether or not we should still think of the approach as, in any significant sense, rational choice theory. All the explanatory work would now be based not on assumptions of self-interest, but on the multiple and diverse beliefs and desires that motivated the actors. The formal models developed by rational choice theorists would thus be heuristics or ideal types, save when empirical interpretations of the beliefs and preferences of actors showed these corresponded to those informing the models.

The purpose of these theoretical reflections is not to undermine all appeals to institutions or rules, nor is it to preclude appeals to self-interest or the use of deductive models, nor yet to deny that quantitative techniques have a role in social science. To reject any of these things outright would be far too hasty, partly because approaches to social science are not monolithic, and partly because social scientists inspired by a particular approach often do work that manages to overcome the limitations of the theories to which that approach explicitly appeals. The preceding theoretical reflections suggest only that social scientists need to tailor their appeals to institutions, rationality, models, and statistics to recognize that social science is inherently interpretive.

The overlapping nature of different approaches to social science opens up at least three ways of locating a decentered theory of governance. First, one might equate decentered theory with a rational choice theory that remains properly agnostic about the preferences at work in any given case, and so aware of the need to interpret the beliefs and desires of the actors. Alternatively, one might equate decentered theory with an institutional theory that takes seriously the contingent nature of institutions, and so treats institutions as products of human agency informed by diverse beliefs and desire. Finally, one might suggest that decentered theory offers such a radical challenge to the dominant concepts of preference and institution that it constitutes a distinct alternative to both rational choice and institutionalism.

THE DECENTERED ALTERNATIVE

An adequate theory of governance should eschew modernism and recognize the interpretive nature of social science. The neoliberal and network narratives of governance suffer from difficulties that mirror, respectively, those that have just been identified in rational choice theory and institutionalism. The neoliberal narrative, with its overlap with rational choice theory, defines governance in terms of a revitalized and efficient public sector based on markets, competition, and management techniques imported from the private sector. This narrative relies on neoclassical ideas about preference formation, utility, rationality, and profit maximization. The argument is that because social democracy, with its Keynesianism and bureaucratic hierarchies, did not allow for such ideas, it ran aground on problems of inflation and overload. Neoliberal reforms are allegedly needed to restructure the state in accord with neoclassical ideas.

Within the neoliberal narrative of governance, there are difficulties with the concepts of preference, utility, and rationality that mirror those in rational choice theory. Typically, neoliberals rely more or less explicitly on a fairly naïve view of self-interest; they treat preferences, utility, and rationality as unproblematic. Only by doing so can they conclude that reforms such as the new public management will lead to greater efficiency without regard for the particular circumstances in which the reforms are introduced. Perhaps neoliberals might deploy a richer notion of self-interest in order to allow that people have all sorts of motivations based on their particular contingent beliefs. However, if neoliberals adopted this expanded notion of self-interest, they would have to allow particularity and contingency to appear in both the workings of hierarchies and the consequences of neoliberal reforms. They would have to tell a far more complex story of governance. They would have to decenter governance by unpacking it in terms of actual and contingent beliefs and preferences.

Institutionalists often define governance as self-organizing interorganizational networks. Behind this definition lurks the idea that the rise of governance embodies functional and institutional specialization and differentiation. The argument is that entrenched institutional patterns ensured that neoliberal reforms led not to markets but to the proliferation and differentiation of policy networks in an increasingly hollow state.

Within this narrative of governance as networks, there is an ambiguity that mirrors that in institutionalism. On the one hand, differentiation can evoke recognition of differences (or the specialist parts of a whole) based on function. This concept of differentiation leads to a modernist account of governance. Governance appears as a complex set of institutions and institutional linkages that are defined by their social role or function. Appeals to the contingent beliefs and preferences of agents are irrelevant. On the other hand, differentiation can evoke recognition of differences and contingent patterns that are based on meaning. If advocates of the narrative of governance as networks understood differentiation in this way, they would move toward a decentered account of governance. They would unpack the institutions of governance through a study of the various contingent meanings embedded in the actions of individuals.

Whereas the leading narratives of governance embody modernist commitments, decentered theory arises out of postfoundationalism. Decentered theory thus echoes several themes that are shared by those social scientists who apply postfoundationalism to governance. Poststructuralists such as Mitchell Dean, pragmatist constructivists such as Chris Ansell, practical philosophers such as James Tully, and democratic pluralists such as Henrik Bang share a focus on meanings, a sympathy for bottom-up approaches, and a recognition of contingency—themes that are also widespread among social scientists who advocate postfoundational approaches to public administration more generally.[13]

Postfoundationalists share, most obviously, a concern to take seriously the languages, meanings, and beliefs that shape governance. Typically, postfoundationalists believe that forms of governance arise out of people's actions, and that social scientists can adequately explore these actions only by reference to the languages, meanings, or beliefs animating them. Social scientists cannot properly apprehend a form of governance solely in terms of its legal character, its class composition, or the patterns of behavior associated with it. On the contrary, all these things, like the form of governance itself, can be adequately understood only in terms of meaningful activity.

The concept of action that informs postfoundationalism is, at least in some respects, commonplace. Our standard everyday way of explaining actions is by reference to the beliefs and desires of the relevant actors. What distinguishes postfoundationalism is arguably an insistence on carrying this standard form of explanation into the academic study of governance. Other students of governance often remain indebted, explicitly or implicitly, to a modernist commitment to explaining human actions in terms of allegedly objective social facts. Although these social scientists accept that individuals act on beliefs, they attempt to avoid direct appeals to beliefs by reducing them to either a formal rationality or intervening variables between social facts and actions.

Postfoundationalism undermines the modernist program of reducing languages, meanings, and beliefs to mere intervening variables. A rejection of the possibility of pure experience leads to a recognition of the way in which people actively construct the content of their experiences. Allegedly objective norms and interests are never simply given to people. Different individuals variously construct the norms and interests associated with their social roles by drawing on different languages, discourses, and traditions. Properly to explain different forms of governance, social scientists have to pay attention to the various webs of meaning against the background of which people act.

A second theme shared by postfoundationalists concerns their sympathy for bottom-up forms of inquiry. This sympathy has strong links to the postfoundational rebuttal of modernism. A rejection of pure experience implies that people in the same social situation could hold very different beliefs because their experiences of that situation could be laden with very different prior theories. Thus, social scientists cannot assume that people in a given social situation will act in a uniform manner. Aggregate concepts, such as an institution or a class, cannot be adequate markers for people's beliefs, interests, or actions. On the contrary, these aggregate concepts can only be abstractions based on the multiple and complex beliefs and actions of the individuals who others place under them. Postfoundationalists often conclude, therefore, that the study of governance requires bottom-up accounts of the beliefs and actions that constitute practices. There are, however, differences of degree among postfoundationalists here. Pragmatist constructivists are more willing than many other postfoundationalists to bypass bottom-up studies and to focus on the ways in which institutions operate and interact in particular settings. That said, even when pragmatists postulate institutional unity, they generally conceive of this unity as an emergent property of individual actions guided by intersubjective norms that at least in principle could be contested. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that postfoundationalists favor bottom-up studies of the ways in which forms of governance are created, sustained, and transformed through the interplay and contest of the meanings embedded in human activity.

A third theme shared by postfoundationalists concerns their emphasis on the contingency of social life. This theme too has strong links to the postfoundational rebuttal of modernism. Once social scientists accept that people in any given situation can interpret that situation, and also their interests, in all sorts of ways, social scientists are pressed to accept that people's actions are radically open. In other words, no practice or institution can itself fix the ways in which its participants will act, let alone the ways in which they might innovate in response to novel circumstances so as to transform it. Practices are thus radically contingent in that they lack any fixed essence or any predetermined path of development. This emphasis on contingency explains why postfoundationalists often denaturalize alternative theories. In so far as other social scientists attempt to ground their theories in allegedly given facts about human life, the path dependence of institutions, or the inexorability of social developments, they tend to efface the contingency of different forms of governance. Postfoundationalists try to expose the contingency of those aspects of governance that other social scientists represent as natural or inexorable.[14]

The overlapping themes shared by postfoundationalists help to explain the content that they characteristically give to the concept of governance. Postfoundationalists, as with other social scientists, identify governance with a form of rule in which markets and networks operate at and cross over the boundary of state and civil society. However, postfoundationalists then depart from modernist social scientists in ways that reflect their distinctive theoretical positions. For a start, postfoundationalists explore the rise of markets and networks in relation to changing patterns of meaning or belief. In addition, their sympathy for bottom-up studies prompts postfoundationalists to explain the origins and processes of modes of governance by referring not only to the central state but also to multifarious activities in civil society; they have examined the operation of governance in practices such as child care and accountancy.[15] Finally, postfoundationalists stress the contingent and contested nature of all modes of governance; they explore the diversity of beliefs and discourses about techniques of rule, they trace the historical roots of different traditions, they examine the varied policy prescriptions associated with particular discourses, and they ask about the relations of power by which certain techniques come to dominate.[16]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A decentered theory of governance departs from both the neoliberal narrative and the narrative of governance as networks. Decentered theory encourages social scientists to understand governance as something akin to a political contest based on competing and contingent narratives. The rest of this book gives more details to this decentered theory. This section focuses solely on the implications of decentered theory for some of the questions that have bedeviled modernist theories of governance.

Is Governance New?

Modernist social scientists sometimes suggest that the emergence of markets or networks in the public sector is a new phenomenon characterizing a new epoch. Their skeptical critics argue that markets and networks are not new and even that governance is no different from government. In reply to such skeptics, proponents of one or another governance narrative might then accept that neither markets nor networks are new while still insisting that both of them are now noticeably more common than they used to be. The difficulty with this debate about the novelty of governance is, of course, that it gets reduced to the facile and no doubt impossible task of counting markets and networks in the past and present.

A decentered theory of governance casts a new light on this debate. For a start, decentered theory encourages social scientists to treat hierarchies and markets as meaningful practices created and constantly recreated through contingent actions informed by diverse webs of belief. Governance is not new, therefore, in that it is an integral part of social and political life. The allegedly special characteristics of networks appear in hierarchies and markets as well as in governance. For example, the rules and commands of a bureaucracy do not have a fixed form but rather are constantly interpreted and made afresh through the creative activity of individuals as they constantly encounter at least slightly novel circumstances. Likewise, the operation of competition in markets depends on the contingent beliefs and interactions of interdependent producers and consumers who rely on trust and diplomacy as well as economic rationality to make decisions. Once social scientists stop reifying hierarchies and markets, they will find that many of the allegedly unique characteristics of networks are ubiquitous aspects of social organization. In addition, however, a decentered theory of governance encourages a shift of focus from reified networks, now recognized as an integral part of political life, to the beliefs of political actors and the stories told by social scientists. Governance is new, therefore, in that it marks and inspires a significant change in these beliefs and stories.

Is Governance a Vague Metaphor?

Skeptics who argue that governance is nothing new often go on to denounce the concept as uninformative and inelegant. Peter Riddell has said, for example, "every time I see the word 'governance' I have to think again what it means and how it is not the same as government." He complains that "terms such as 'core executive,' 'differentiated polity' and 'hollowed out executive' have become almost a private patois of political science."[17]

Presumably social scientists should defend concepts on the grounds that the concepts provide a more accurate and fruitful way of discussing the world than do the alternatives. However, Riddle opposes the language of governance not because he thinks it inaccurate but because he thinks it lacks clarity. To respond to his concerns, one might begin by asking: What gives clarity to a concept? Postfoundationalism suggests that concepts derive meaning from their location in a web of concepts. All concepts are vague when taken on their own. Just as the concept of governance gains clarity only by being filled out by ideas such as networks, the hollow state, and the core executive, so the older concepts associated with the Westminster system gained clarity only in relation to others such as the unitary state and cabinet government. No doubt people who are unfamiliar with concepts such as the hollow state will benefit from having them explicitly related to processes such as the erosion of state authority by new regional and international linkages. Equally, however, people who are unfamiliar with the concept of a unitary state might benefit from having it explicitly related to the creation of a single transnational authority or the contrast provided by federal systems.

Although the terminology of governance can sound metaphorical, that need not be a worry. The language of governance is metaphorical only in that it applies novel terms, such as "hollow state," to describe perceived processes and practices. Further, most aggregate concepts begin as metaphors in just this sense; they begin as novel terms, such as "loyal opposition," for perceived processes and practices, and only later do they acquire a familiarity such that they no longer have the unsettling effect they once did. The once unfamiliar language of governance is rapidly becoming as much a part of our everyday vocabulary as are the concepts associated with the Westminster system.

Is Governance Uniform?

Neoliberals portray governance as consisting of policies, such as marketization and the new public management, which are allegedly inevitable outcomes of global economic pressures. Institutionalists argue that the consequences of these neoliberal policies are not uniform but rather vary across states according to the content and strength of entrenched institutions. Decentered theory suggests, in addition, that the pressures are not given as brute facts; the pressures are constructed as different dilemmas from within particular traditions. Decentered theory implies that the policies a state adopts are not necessary responses to given pressures but a set of perceived solutions to one particular conception of these pressures.

Decentered theory thereby raises the possibility of continuing diversity of inputs and policies as well as of outputs. As a result, decentered theory might even prompt some social scientists to query the value of the concept of governance. Governance typically refers to a set of shared inputs, policies, and outputs tied to economic and technological developments from the 1970s onward. Once social scientists challenge the necessity, and so commonality, of not only the outputs, as do institutionalists, but also the inputs and policies, they will be wary not only of any straightforward dichotomy between governance and government but also of any attempt to use abstract ideas of governance to explain particular developments in particular states. The relevance of an omnibus concept of governance will depend on empirical studies that explore the ways in which different states have constructed their public sectors. How similar are their conceptions of the relevant dilemmas, the policies they have adopted, and the consequences of these policies? How far have different state traditions fed through into diverse inputs, policies, and outputs?

How Does Governance Change?

The question of how governance changes is far more difficult for network theorists than it is for neoliberals. Neoliberals can unpack change in terms of the self-interest of actors. Network theorists, in contrast, often deploy an institutionalism that remains ambiguous about the nature of change. In order to avoid the need to interpret beliefs and desires, institutionalists often reduce individual behavior to the following of rules that constitute institutions. For example, Dave Marsh and Rod Rhodes effectively dismiss the way in which individuals constantly create and recreate the networks of which they are a part by emphasizing that networks create routines for policymaking.[18] However, if individuals merely follow rules, individuals cannot be the causes of change. In order to explain change, therefore, institutionalists often appeal to external factors. For example, Marsh and Rhodes identify four categories of change—economic, ideological, knowledge, and institutional—all of which they define as external to the network. However, external factors can bring about change in an institution only if they lead the relevant individuals to modify their activity, and social scientists can explain why individuals modify their activity only by interpreting their beliefs and desires. Despite such problems, most network theorists and institutionalists stubbornly persist in trying to explain change in terms of external causes.

Decentered theory, in contrast, draws attention to the fact that in order to explain how external factors can influence changes in networks and governance, social scientists have to understand the ways in which the relevant actors themselves understand those factors. Although change can be of varying magnitude, decentered theory portrays it as continuous in that it is built into the very nature of political life. Change occurs as individuals interpret their environment in ways that lead them constantly to modify their actions. Social scientists can explain change, therefore, by reference to the contingent responses of individuals to dilemmas, many of which will be produced by new circumstances such as those created by the actions of others.

Is Governance Failure Inevitable?

The neoliberal narrative of governance leans heavily on the claim that public bureaucracies have failed. Neoliberals appeal to bureaucratic inefficiencies and state overload to justify their calls for the new public management and marketization. The narrative of governance as networks leans equally heavily on the idea that the neoliberal reforms have failed. Its proponents argue that the neoliberal reforms ignored the need for trust, diplomacy, and accountability in the public sector. Some advocates of the narrative of governance as networks present networks as the solution to the failings of both bureaucracies and markets. Others argue that networks create problems of their own; networks are often closed to outsiders, unrepresentative, and relatively unaccountable, and they can serve vested interests as well as being difficult to steer and inefficient.[19] The latter analyses appear to imply that no governing structure works for all services in all conditions. Governance failure can thus seem inevitable.

Decentered theory compliments and challenges the prevailing accounts of governance failure. A focus on contingent meanings offers an explanation for why all forms of public organization and public action are likely to fail. The outcomes of policies and institutions depend in part on the ways actors variously respond to the relevant directives. Because these responses are inherently diverse and contingent, reflecting the traditions and agency of the relevant actors, the center cannot have secure prior knowledge of the way policies and institutions will operate. Thus, the unexpected pervades governance. All policies are likely to have unintended consequences that prevent them from perfectly fulfilling their intended purpose. Also, decentered theory draws attention to the diverse beliefs and desires of the actors in a network thereby challenging the way many modernist accounts of governance failure blithely take government intentions as their yardstick. Modernist studies typically aim to improve the chances of a policy's success in terms defined by the state. But street-level bureaucrats and citizens can deliberately attempt to prevent policies from having the effects the state intends. From their standpoint, policy failure might be a success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKING AND DEMOCRACY

Decentered theory also differs from the leading modernist theories of governance in its implications for policymaking and democracy. By resisting the teleological accounts of neoliberals, and to a lesser extent the apolitical ones of institutionalists, decentered theory creates a space in which to think creatively about different ways of understanding contemporary social and political life, and so to devise different responses to them.

Most of the policy-orientated work on governance seeks to improve the ability of the state to manage the markets, contracts, and networks that have flourished since the late 1970s. Typically, this work exhibits a modernist tendency in that it treats networks as more or less objectified structures that governments can manipulate using appropriate policy tools.[20]

Decentered theory points toward a rather different way of thinking about the management of governance. As all forms of organization are products of the contingent actions of the various participants, there can be no simple set of tools for managing governance. As governance is constructed differently, contingently, and continuously, there is no defined tool kit for managing it. Decentered theory thus shifts attention from techniques and strategies of management toward the possibility of learning by telling stories and listening to them. Although statistics, models, and claims to expertise all have a place within stories, policymakers should not be too preoccupied with them. On the contrary, these claims to expertise are actually just narratives or guesses about how people have acted or will react given their beliefs and desires. No matter what rigor or expertise policymakers bring to bear on a problem, all they can do is tell a story and judge what the future might bring.

One important lesson of this view of expertise derives from the diversity and contingency of traditions. The fate of policies depends on the ways in which civil servants and citizens understand them and respond to them from within all sorts of traditions. Even if policymakers kept this firmly in mind, they still would not be able to predict the consequences of their policies. Nonetheless, they might forestall some of the unintended consequences of their policies or at least be better prepared for such unintended consequences. More generally, policymakers might allow that the management of networks is largely about trying to understand and respond to the beliefs, traditions, and practices of those they hope to influence.

To recognize how providers and customers of services affect policies is to prompt a further shift of focus away from the state. Modernist debates on the management of governance typically focus on the problems confronted by managers rather than street-level bureaucrats or citizens. In contrast, decentered theory reminds social scientists that there are various participants in markets and networks, all of whom can seek to manage those networks for diverse purposes. By reminding social scientists of the significance of political participation in this way, a decentered theory of governance also raises issues about democracy. Whereas modernist accounts of governance often concentrate on the ability of the state to steer, decentered theory locates this problem in the context of democratic participation and accountability. To emphasize the extent to which people make patterns of governance through political contests is to encourage creative thinking about how to conceive of and respond to the relevant issues. One aspect of this creative thinking is the impetus given to policymakers to reflect on their activity. Another is the opportunity to reimagine democracy.

A greater interest in markets and networks suggests that there is a need to reflect on how best to balance diverse forms of devolution and participation with central control and with clear lines of accountability. Although the tension between these different demands cannot be resolved here, there is something to say about how this tension appears from the view of decentered theory. Markets and networks allow citizens to express more nuanced preferences in a more continuous way than they do in electing representatives. Governance opens up new possibilities for participation and devolution in democracy. Equally, however, social scientists should remain aware of the ways in which markets and networks often embed inequalities and impose identities upon people in a way that then might require the state to act as a guarantor of effective agency and difference. Still, social scientists might look to a time when states will be less concerned to control through laws and regulations and more concerned to persuade through all sorts of interactions with groups and individuals. This shift toward persuasion would fit well alongside an understanding of policymaking that highlights contingency and diversity—telling stories and listening to them—rather than certainty and expertise—devising rules designed to have definite outcomes.

Governance might provide more active and continuous opportunities for political involvement to citizens. Yet, as many social scientists have pointed out, the forms of devolution and participation offered by markets and networks raise special problems of political control and accountability. An emphasis on agency might lead the state to rely more on influence than imposition. In a similar fashion, the state might seek to steer markets and networks more by looking toward setting a framework for their conduct than by relying on rigid rules. The relative power of the state might even make one wary of the danger that its attempts to influence will be so heavy handed that they will undermine agency and participation. Equally, however, social scientists should not forget that markets and networks respond primarily to levels of wealth and organization in ways that can undermine the equality and fellowship characteristic of a democratic community. A growth in the use of markets and networks to manage and deliver public services should be accompanied, therefore, by attention to suitable lines of political accountability. Nonetheless, social scientists might look to a time when the state will rely less on moral rules that impose requirements and restrictions and more on an ethic of conduct that constitutes a practice through which citizens negotiate their relationships to such requirements and restrictions. Once again, of course, this emphasis on conduct would fit well alongside an understanding of policymaking that highlights contingency and diversity—a sensitivity to agency informed by various traditions—rather than certainty and expertise—rules that require or prohibit certain behavior.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary philosophy is dominated by a postfoundationalism or meaning holism that poses important questions to social science. Unfortunately, however, scholars of governance rarely think about the relevant questions, let alone respond to them and modify their scholarship accordingly. To be harsh, the study of governance is in danger of becoming the realm of dull technicians. The technicians may be able to apply the techniques that they learn from statisticians and economists, but perhaps they fail to appreciate the philosophical issues entailed in decisions about when they should use these techniques, the degree of rigor they should want from them, and how they should explain the data they generate. The technicians may be capable of running a regression analysis or producing a formal model, but perhaps they forget that their numbers refer to people and their activity, and that their correlations and models are just more data in need of a narrative.

A decentered theory of governance would locate the technical work of studying governance in a more plausible philosophy. So, although decentered theory is compatible with all types of methodological techniques, including statistical analysis and formal modeling, it breaks decisively with the outdated modernism that lingers in much rational choice theory and much institutionalism. Indeed, decentered theory explicitly draws on postfoundationalism in order to encourage a focus on meanings, sympathy for bottom-up approaches, and sensitivity to contingency. The next chapter further specifies decentered theory by contrasting it with other explicitly postfoundational theories of governance. Unlike these alternatives, decentered theory is resolutely humanist and historicist.

2 The Implications of Postfoundationalism

Philosophy has moved away from the modernism and positivism of the midtwentieth century toward holism and postfoundationalism. The previous chapter suggested that a rejection of modernism might lead to a decentered theory of governance. There are, however, several postfoundational approaches to governance in the existing literature. Two important questions thus warrant consideration: What are the implications of postfoundationalism for the study of governance? How does decentered theory relate to, overlap with, and differ from other postfoundational theories?

Postfoundationalism is a broad category that covers not only postmodernism and poststructuralism but also prominent developments in pragmatism and postanalytic philosophy. Postfoundationalists reject the idea that people have either pure experiences or a pure a priori reason on the basis of which they could justify their beliefs as certain. Postfoundationalists differ among themselves largely because they have different reasons for rejecting such certainty. Poststructuralists argue that there is always a space between a sign and that which it purports to represent. Many echo the structuralist claim that signs gain their content from a system of signs, although they add a novel stress on the open and fluid nature of these systems of signs. Pragmatists argue that knowledge comes from action and from problem solving rather than from correct representation. Postanalytic philosophers are generally meaning holists who argue that the meaning, and so truth conditions, of a proposition depend on its use and its place in a larger web of beliefs. Postfoundationalism can take any of these different forms.

Given this broad conception of postfoundationalism, there are many ways of tackling its implications for governance. This chapter focuses on studies that explicitly use the word "governance," generally foregoing discussion of the work of philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty, or of the attempts—often inspired by them—to define a postmodern public administration.[1]

So, what are the implications of postfoundationalism for governance theory? The previous chapter went some way toward answering this question by identifying themes that are shared by social scientists who apply postfoundational philosophies to the study of governance. Poststructuralists, pragmatists, practical philosophers, and others all share a focus on meanings, sympathy for bottom-up approaches, and recognition of contingency. However, these shared themes leave a number of questions unanswered. The three main questions correspond to the three shared themes. The questions are: How should social scientists analyze meanings? How can social scientists recenter their accounts of governance? Do social scientists have grounds for ethical judgments? These questions concern, respectively, the composition of governance, the recentering of governance, and the ethics of postfoundationalism. The distinctiveness of decentered theory lies in its answers to these questions.

Postfoundationalists do not often discuss these questions explicitly and the dividing lines between their implicit views are often blurred. Nonetheless, in broad terms, postfoundationalists are split between two responses to these issues. The first response derives from the structuralist hostility to humanism and agency. Among students of governance, this hostility to agency is found mainly among poststructuralists such as Mitchell Dean, but also among scholars with a debt to systems theory such as Henrik Bang.[2] Among students of public administration more generally, this hostility to agency is also found among scholars inspired by Derrida, including, for example, David Farmer.[3] The second response draws more on the intentionalism and action theory of some forms of hermeneutics and pragmatism. Among students of governance, it is associated with pragmatists such as Chris Ansell and practical philosophers such as James Tully.[4] Among those who study public administration more generally, it is associated with other scholars inspired by pragmatism including O. C. McSwite.[5] This chapter expands on decentered theory by tying it to positions closer to the second tendency than to the first.

THE QUESTION OF COMPOSITION

Postfoundationalists agree on the need to approach governance through a study of the meanings that inform it. However, they at best disagree, and at worst are confused, about the nature of meaning. "There was no agreement on the role of the individual," as Peter Bogason wrote about postmodern theories of public administration generally.[6] Poststructuralists sometimes appear to suggest that meanings derive from quasi-structures that possess a semiotic logic or that respond to random fluctuations of power. In contrast decentered and other interpretive theories typically conceive of meanings in intentionalist terms as the beliefs of individuals, and they then conceive of discourses as clusters of intersubjective meanings. Postfoundationalists differ in their conception of meaning because they have different views of the relationship of conduct to context. On the one hand, the structuralist legacy evident in poststructuralism can generate an apparent ambition to avoid all appeals to human agency by reducing it to discursive contexts. On the other, the debt of interpretivists to hermeneutics and pragmatism inspires an overt concern with the intentionality of situated agents.

Although postfoundationalists disagree about the question of composition—of whether meanings derive from quasi-structures or from situated agency—they almost always reject the idea of the autonomous individual. Postfoundationalism undermines the idea of autonomous individuals who are prior to their social contexts. The chief argument is that if all experience and all reasoning embody theories, people can adopt beliefs only against the background of a prior set of theories, which initially must be made available to them by a social language or tradition. However, this rejection of the autonomous self does not entail a rejection of situated agency. Postfoundationalists can accept that people are always situated against the background of a social tradition, and still conceive of people as agents who are capable of acting in novel ways for reasons of their own and thereby transforming both themselves and the traditions they inherited. Situated agency entails only the ability creatively to transform an inherited language, discourse, or tradition. It does not entail an ability completely to transcend one's social context. To say that people are situated agents is to say only that their intentionality is the source of their conduct; they are capable of using and modifying language, discourse, or tradition for reasons of their own. It is not to say that their intentionality is uninfluenced by their social context.

So, postfoundationalism implies that individuals are necessarily situated in social contexts, but this leaves open the possibility that individuals are creative agents, capable of innovating against the background of such contexts. Even after postfoundationalists reject autonomy, therefore, they still confront the question of composition, that is, the question of whether to conceive of people as situated agents or as passive constructs of discourse. On the one hand, postfoundationalists might depict people as situated agents who use words for conscious or unconscious reasons of their own. Postfoundationalists would thus imply that to understand the meaning of an utterance social scientists need to recover the relevant speaker's intentionality. On the other hand, postfoundationalists might imply that discourses constitute, or at least limit, the intentions that people can have. Postfoundationalists would thus imply that to understand the meaning of an utterance social scientists need to reconstruct the internal—albeit unstable—structure, relations, or logic of the relevant discourse.

Poststructuralists sometimes try to straddle these two incompatible positions. Poststructuralists are prone in particular to pay lip service to actors' capacity for agency, but at the same time to write empirical studies that concentrate entirely on the ways in which social discourses and practices create forms of subjectivity to the exclusion of the ways in which situated agents themselves create those discourses and practices. For example, the introduction to an edited collection tells the reader that techniques of power do not dominate people so much as operate through their freedom; but the studies that follow it include virtually no examples of particular agents applying norms in creative ways that transform power relations.[7] Decentered theory attempts to clear up this ambiguity. If readers believe that poststructuralists reject agency as well as autonomy, they can treat decentered theory as an alternative form of postfoundationalism. If readers instead believe that poststructuralism adequately allows for agency, they can treat decentered theory as an account of how it can do so—an account that stands in contrast to those provided by people who think it cannot do so.

Social scientists can best answer the question of composition by distinguishing three different ways of conceiving of the relationship of context to conduct. First, context might influence people's activity without setting limits to what they can seek to accomplish by that activity. This relationship would not negate situated agency. If context only influenced performance, social scientists could not properly invoke it to explain even the parameters to conduct. Social scientists would have to explore the situated agency as a result of which people come to act in a particular way against the background influence of any given context. Second, context might restrict conduct by establishing identifiable limits to the forms it could take without fixing its more specific content within these limits. This relationship would sustain only a partial downplaying of situated agency. If context restricted performance, social scientists could invoke it to explain why actions remained within certain limits, but social scientists would still have to appeal to situated agency to explain the ways in which conduct unfolded within those limits. Third, context might determine conduct in each and every detail no matter how small. Only this relationship would imply a rejection of situated agency. If context somehow fixed every feature of conduct, social scientists could give complete explanations of conduct by reference to context; situated agency would thus be irrelevant.

Postfoundationalists often debate the question of composition through discussions of the relationship of language to the self. The poststructuralist tendency to repudiate autonomy gets expressed here in the argument that language constitutes the self. If one treats language simply as a vehicle for expressing beliefs, this argument entails only the entirely unexceptionable claim, which even many foundationalists would accept, that people's thoughts and actions embody their beliefs. The postfoundational version of this argument builds in to it a rejection of autonomy by using the word "language" precisely to suggest that people's beliefs are formed in the context of particular discourses and traditions. The postfoundational claim is that people's thoughts and actions embody their beliefs, which arise against the background of a social context. Unfortunately, however, this postfoundational claim reflects the ambiguity over agency described earlier. On the one hand, the postfoundational claim might reject autonomy but not situated agency. The claim would then be that people's thoughts and actions embody their beliefs, where these beliefs arise against the background of a tradition, but where people are situated agents who can modify the beliefs they thus inherit. On the other hand, the postfoundational claim might reject situated agency as well as autonomy. The claim would then be that people's thoughts and actions embody beliefs, where these beliefs arise against the background of a social tradition that fixes the beliefs they go on to adopt. Here too postfoundationalism entails the first claim, but there is no reason why postfoundationalists need be seduced into defending the second one. On the contrary, postfoundationalists will defend the second one only if they want to use words such as "language" and "discourse" to invoke quasi-structures that constitute intersubjectivity without also being emergent properties of it.

The question of composition thus comes down to that of whether or not conduct is entirely determined by context. If poststructuralists really want to reduce beliefs to social discourses defined by the relations among semantic units, they have to argue that the content of utterances and intentionality is fixed in every detail by something akin to a structure. But this argument that context determines every feature of conduct faces the seemingly impossible task of explaining itself. Besides, context just does not determine conduct in this way. On the contrary, because individuals can adopt different beliefs and perform different actions against the background of the same context, there must be an undecided space to the fore of any particular context. There must be a space in which individuals might adopt this or that belief and perform this or that action as a result of their situated agency. Situated agency manifests itself in the diverse activity that can occur within any given context. Even if a tradition provides the background to people's utterances and a social structure provides the background to their actions, the content of their utterances and actions does not come directly from these contexts. It comes from the ways in which they replicate or develop these traditions and structures in accord with their intentionality.

Decentered theory decides the question of composition in favor of situated agency rather than quasi-structures. Some poststructuralists appear to be tempted to downplay situated agency because they want to deny that intentionality is autonomous; they want to insist on the theory-laden nature of the reasoning and experiences through which people form their beliefs. However, postfoundationalists can deny autonomy without renouncing situated agency. Postfoundationalists can say that people formulate the beliefs they do through their agency but always against the background of a social tradition that influences them. In this view, people's intentions are the product of local and situated reasoning but not autonomous and universal reasoning.

Some poststructuralists appear to be tempted to downplay situated agency in an attempt to gain critical purchase on modernist theories of governance. It is, therefore, worth briefly revisiting some arguments from the previous chapter to show that a rejection of autonomy suffices to sustain postfoundational critiques of modernist theories. One target of postfoundational critique is the account of the individual implicit in rational choice theory. Rational choice theorists often imply that individuals are (or at least fruitfully can be treated as) atomized units who have almost perfect knowledge of their preferences and situation, and who act so as to maximize their utility. In most rational choice models, neither discourses nor the unconscious interfere in the process of forming beliefs, deliberating, and acting. To reject this rational choice theory requires only a repudiation of autonomy. To argue that people's views of their interests and contexts are always infused with their particular theories is to challenge the assumption that actors can ever have pure knowledge of their preferences and situations.

Another target of postfoundationalism is the way in which institutionalists drift from the bottom-up stance of constructivism toward a focus on apparently given rules and norms. For some institutionalists, the beliefs and actions of individuals are defined by their social roles or by the norms that govern the institutions in which they participate. These institutionalists elide the contingent and contested nature of social life by implying that the content and development of institutions is fixed by the rules or by a path dependency inherent within them. To reject such institutionalism requires only a repudiation of autonomy. Once one allows that people's understanding of their world, including the rules and norms that apply to them, is inherently theory-laden, one opens the possibility of different people grasping or applying a rule or norm in different ways, and one thereby draws attention to the contest and contingency that institutionalists sometimes appear to elide.

Postfoundationalists explore human activity in relation to the meanings that animate it. However, they disagree as to whether these meanings should be understood in terms of the abstract and structural relations among signs or in terms of the situated agency of individuals. Although poststructuralists, for their part, sometimes appear to adopt the former position, postfoundationalism, taken more broadly, undermines only the notion of autonomy. Postfoundationalists can and should allow for situated agency. To do so, they would not have to give up all reference to social languages and discourses; they would have only to unpack their references to such things in terms of the beliefs and actions of individuals, where the content of these beliefs and actions partly reflects the influence of a contested social inheritance on those actors. The main implications of this proposed resolution of the question of the composition of governance concern the proper treatment of aggregate concepts and our ability to sustain ethical judgments. It is to these implications that this chapter now turns.

THE QUESTION OF RECENTERING

The bottom-up orientation of postfoundationalists encourages them to focus on the multiplicity of conflicting actions and micropractices that come together to create any contingent form of governance. Postfoundationalists often paint a picture devoid of any inherent logic. They suggest that patterns of governance arise almost accidentally out of diverse and unconnected activities. In so far as modernists favor more parsimonious accounts, they often ask postfoundationalists how they would connect these accounts of governance to macrolevel accounts of social and political life. The disagreements and ambiguities among postfoundationalists on the question of composition reappear in their responses to the question of how to recenter bottom-up studies of governance. On the one hand, just as the structuralist legacy in poststructuralism leads to a reduction of situated agency to a semiotic code within a discourse, so poststructuralists sometimes use concepts such as discourse and power/knowledge to recenter their accounts of governance. On the other hand, the emphasis of postfoundationalists on contingency and particularity inspires an overt concern to challenge all recentering concepts, presumably including discourse and power/knowledge. Critics can point, therefore, to an apparent contradiction between some postfoundationalists' use of an "undertheorised meta-narrative" and their stated opposition to all meta-narratives.[8]

Postfoundationalists disagree as to whether they should condemn all totalizing concepts or invoke their own. At times poststructuralists in particular appear to want to straddle these incompatible positions. They write of the need to replace narratives of governance that appeal to social forces with a focus on "singular practices" only then to assimilate the singular practices to an apparently monolithic concept of "individualizing power." For example, although Dean rightly complains that "the problem with contemporary sociological accounts is that they are pitched at too general a level and propose mysterious, even occult, relations between general processes and events (e.g., globalisation, de-traditionalisation) and features of self and identity," he seems unaware of the extent to which his narrative relies on the equally mysterious, even occult, impact of an overarching "individualizing power" on the particular practices and actions that this power allegedly generates.[9] At other times poststructuralists pay lip service to the importance of contingency and particularity while writing empirical studies that explain the content or existence of speech acts and practices in terms of an episteme or other quasi-structure that operates as a totalizing concept. Some poststructuralists appear, for example, to portray discourses or regimes of power as contingent particularities only then to present conduct as a manifestation of just such discourses and power relations rather than as itself contingent and particular. Today postfoundationalists disagree as to whether they legitimately can recenter their accounts of governance, let alone what concepts they should use to do so.

In a sense, postfoundationalists, as with everyone else, should use those aggregate concepts that they believe best describe the world. If they believe that networks are multiplying, they might appeal to a "network society." If they believe that people are increasingly dealing with risk through personalized health plans, private pensions, and the like, they might invoke an "individualizing power." If they believe that certain people express similar ideas about freedom, markets, the importance of the consumer, and the need to roll back the state, they might refer to a "discourse of the New Right." All such aggregate concepts describe broad patterns in the world. The worth social scientists attach to any such concept will depend on whether or not they believe the pattern exists.

Postfoundationalists should have no particular problem adopting aggregate concepts to describe patterns in the world. Even if postfoundationalists are perhaps more concerned than modernists to highlight exceptions that do not fit under these descriptive concepts, they can still accept that aggregate concepts capture patterns. However, abstract concepts that describe patterns do not necessarily do explanatory work. Descriptions of patterns of action, practices, power, and governance do not necessarily reveal anything about either why those patterns have arisen or why they have the particular content they do.

The question of recentering becomes awkward for postfoundationalists with respect to explanatory concepts, not descriptive ones. The more postfoundationalists emphasize the contingency and particularity of governing practices, the harder it becomes for them to explain these practices by reference to broader social processes. When poststructuralists use aggregate concepts such as discourse and power to do explanatory work, these concepts are likely to exhibit the failings of too strong a repudiation of situated agency. For example, when discourse purports not only to describe a pattern of belief or speech but also to explain that pattern, it is often conceived as a quasi-structure composed of units whose relations to one another define its content. Meaning thus gets reduced to the allegedly inherent relationships among abstract semantic units as opposed to the diverse and contingent beliefs that agents come to hold against a social background.

When poststructuralists use their aggregate concepts to do explanatory work, they confront a number of problems as a consequence of this neglect of situated agency. For a start, poststructuralists confront an obvious problem in accounting for change. If individuals arrive at beliefs and construct themselves solely in accord with social discourses, presumably they lack the capacity to modify that discourse; change thus appears inexplicable. (Although poststructuralists sometimes criticize structuralists for exhibiting just such determinism, thereby implying that they themselves now conceive of such transformations in terms of an instability inherent within the structure—an instability that threatens the structure and puts it into contradiction with itself—they thereby elide questions of whether social scientists are to understand such instability, contradiction, and transformation as necessary qualities of a disembodied quasi-structure or as contingent properties and products of situated agents.) In addition, the location of meaning within discourses is unclear. Meaning appears to be tied to relations among semantic units, where these relations are given independently of individuals and their agency. But surely this disembodied view of meaning contradicts the postfoundational concern with contingency and particularity. Although the rise of a discourse might be contingent, the disembodied view of meaning implies that the content of that discourse is anything but contingent; it comes from the fixed relations among semantic units. Likewise, although discourses might be singular, the disembodied view of meaning reduces the diverse and particular beliefs that people might hold about anything to a single pattern derived from the relations among semantic units.

At the moment postfoundationalists struggle adequately to recenter their studies of governance in ways that possess explanatory power. Decentered theory encourages them better to do so by adopting aggregate concepts based on the contrast between situated agency and autonomy. To reject autonomy is to accept that individuals necessarily experience the world in ways that reflect the influence of a language, discourse, or tradition. Thus, explanatory concepts should indicate how social influences permeate beliefs and actions even on those occasions when speakers and actors do not recognize such influence. However, to accept situated agency is also to imply that people possess the capacity to adopt beliefs and actions, even novel ones, for reasons of their own, where these beliefs and actions can then transform the social background. Decentered theory thus conceives of social contexts in terms of traditions rather than languages and discourses. The concept of a tradition evokes a social context in which individuals are born and which then acts as the background to their beliefs and actions even while they might modify, develop, or reject much of their inheritance.

How might postfoundationalists fill out an explanatory concept of tradition? Because tradition is unavoidable only as a starting point, not as something that defines later performances, it is not an inevitable and constitutive presence in all beliefs and actions. Tradition is an initial influence on people. Its content will appear in their later performances only in so far as their situated agency has not led them to change it, and every part of it is in principle open to change. Because tradition is unavoidable only as a starting point, not a final destination, traditions do not possess a fixed content to which social scientists can ascribe variations. There may be occasions when social scientists can point to the persistence of a core idea in a tradition over time. Equally, however, social scientists may identify a tradition with a group of ideas that were widely shared by a number of individuals even though no one idea was held by all of them. Alternatively, social scientists might equate a tradition with a group of ideas that passed from generation to generation, changing a little each time, so that no single idea persisted from start to finish.

As an explanatory concept, tradition has the advantage over discourse in that it allows properly for situated agency and so change. Change arises here as a result of people's ability to adopt beliefs and perform actions for reasons of their own. To conceive of change in this way is to get away from suggestions that traditions contain an inner logic that fixes their development. It is to say, instead, that the ways in which people change their beliefs and actions depend on their reasoning. Thus, explanatory concepts should indicate how change arises from a type of reasoning that is neither random nor fixed by logical relations or given experiences. Postfoundationalists should think of change, in other words, as arising from situated agents creatively responding to dilemmas from within their existing beliefs. A dilemma arises for individuals whenever they adopt new beliefs that stand in opposition to their existing ones thereby forcing them to reconsider the latter. In accepting a new belief, people at least tacitly pose to their existing beliefs the question of how they will accommodate it. People respond to dilemmas, implicitly or explicitly, by changing their beliefs to accommodate the newcomers.

The concept of a dilemma provides postfoundationalists with a way of analyzing agency and change in terms of situated, local, and contingent reasoning. Although dilemmas can come from people's experiences of the world, they also can come from people reflecting on their existing beliefs. Besides, even when dilemmas come from experiences of the world, these experiences are not simply given but rather constructed in the context of a prior set of theories. People do respond to the world; the world does have an impact on their beliefs. Nonetheless, the idea of a dilemma forestalls social scientists from simply reading off someone else's beliefs and actions from their own views of that individual's situation and interests. Postfoundationalists can thus use the idea of a dilemma to challenge attempts to postulate a rational and predetermined path of development for languages, discourses, and traditions. People respond to dilemmas in an open-ended process. There are always multiple ways in which people might modify their existing beliefs to accommodate the newcomer.

The concepts of tradition and dilemma provide postfoundationalists with a means of recentering their accounts of governance. Postfoundationalists can explain the rise of new patterns of governance by reference to the intersubjective traditions and dilemmas that inform the changing activities of various clusters of situated actors. They might even be able to relate the relevant dilemmas to what they take to be facts about the real world, although equally they might conclude that some dilemmas were mere figments of the imaginations of those who responded to them. Nonetheless, because the concepts of tradition and dilemma embody recognition of the contingency and particularity of social life, they can only do so much recentering. These concepts do not refer to mechanisms or large-scale social processes of which forms of governance stand as mere symptoms. Rather, these concepts invoke abstractions that do explanatory work only in so far as social scientists can unpack them in terms of contingent and intersubjective beliefs and actions. As abstractions, moreover, these concepts characteristically enable social scientists to recenter accounts of governance only at the cost of ignoring or marginalizing those contingent beliefs and actions that fall outside the dominant patterns these concepts capture. If social scientists forgot this cost, they would neglect the critical perspective provided by postfoundationalism—a critical perspective that this chapter will now examine more closely.

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS

Although some social scientists aim at an understanding of governance for its own sake, many postfoundationalists seek to understand forms of governance primarily to bring them into question. When postfoundationalists highlight the meanings that make a practice possible, they seek to reveal the contingency and contestability of those meanings and so to prompt new thinking about alternatives. Here postfoundationalists unpack modes of governance as embodying intersubjective beliefs about human nature, right conduct, social inquiry, and the good. These intersubjective beliefs are often more or less taken for granted by the participants in the relevant form of governance. That is to say, these shared beliefs are unquestioned assumptions against the background of which problems are conceived and addressed. Postfoundationalists reveal the historical contingency and contestability of these shared beliefs, showing that they rose against the background of particular languages, discourses, and traditions. Because postfoundationalists believe that any justification for a practice must occur within the framework of a set of prior theories, they portray practices as devoid of transhistorical rationality.

Many postfoundationalists adopt a critical perspective because their emphasis on contingency denaturalizes alternative narratives and casts doubt on the ethics and policies associated with them. Critique is properly effective, however, only if it is conjoined with support for alternatives. Because people have to act in the world, they cannot renounce their current activity no matter how much they come to doubt it unless they believe that an alternative pattern of action would be preferable. Unfortunately, the disagreements and ambiguities among postfoundationalists on the question of composition reappear here in their ethical views. On the one hand, postfoundationalists might appeal to visions of a situated self, agency, and freedom to defend an alternative ethic. On the other, the structuralist legacy in poststructuralism can seem to preclude all appeals to agency, freedom, or the good, leaving only critique. Critics thus accuse poststructuralists both of lacking passion and commitment and of lacking any justification for their passions and commitments.[10]

Postfoundationalists oscillate between critique of all visions of freedom and championing their own vision. At times, postfoundationalists seem to want to straddle these incompatible positions by appealing to critique as a pathway to new thinking and yet not advocating any particular path. They suggest that their contestation of other theories of governance "might require us to think about how we are asked to constitute ourselves today and how we might think differently about that request," but they do not propose that we think differently in any particular way.[11] Alternatively, they suggest that contestation and an open discourse somehow will remove from the agenda questions such as those of legitimacy.[12] At other times, postfoundationalists ignore the gap between a meta-ethical recognition of the partiality of all actions and the ethical question of how one should act. As Simon Critchley has argued, they confuse recognition of the ubiquity of hegemony with an argument for democratic hegemony, when what is clearly needed for the latter is an account of why one should prefer democratic hegemony to other forms of hegemony.[13] Today postfoundationalists disagree about whether or not they have epistemic grounds for advocating ethical positions, let alone the specific ethic they should advocate.

One of the lessons of postfoundationalism is surely that no set of philosophical commitments leads unquestionably to any one ethic. Postfoundationalism, as with all other philosophical perspectives, can inspire a wide variety of ethics. Nonetheless, the contrast between situated agency and autonomy provides postfoundationalists with the resources not only to sustain critique but also to defend alternatives in the way that is necessary if that critique is to bite.

Many narratives of governance present some beliefs and practices as necessary. In this view, people are compelled by inexorable historical or social forces, the dictates of a universal reason, or even human nature itself to adopt or contemplate a limited range of modes of governance. Globalization, for example, appears in many narratives as an inexorable social process that requires states to adopt neoliberal reforms. In contrast, postfoundationalists can think about forms of governance as products of situated agents modifying inherited traditions in response to dilemmas. Forms of governance are thus contingent and contestable. They are contingent in that people who are influenced by other traditions might construct them differently. They are contestable in that there are no inherently correct responses to dilemmas even from within the perspective of a shared tradition. For postfoundationalists, therefore, narratives that present forms of governance as necessary are actually contingent and contestable. When postfoundationalists explore these other narratives, they engage in critique. In the first place, postfoundationalists challenge the self-understanding of the people who expound such narratives. They reveal to these people the contingent historical conditions of their beliefs, thereby undermining the notion that these beliefs are inevitable. In the second place, postfoundationalists thereby open for people the possibility of alternative narratives, actions, and practices. They free people from the dominant modes of thinking and acting that define current modes of governance in a way that provides an opportunity to govern differently.

Postfoundationalists unsettle assumptions of the naturalness, inevitability, and rightness of governing practices. They thereby create a space in which people might think creatively about other ways of understanding the present situation and responding to it. It is unclear, however, whether or not postfoundationalists provide any moral guidance about how to think and respond to the present situation. Poststructuralists, in particular, sometimes seem to move from a rejection of agency to the argument that all freedoms are illusory and so any guidance would be an illegitimate imposition of power. In contrast, if postfoundationalists accept the idea of situated agency, then assuming they regard agency as valuable, they can begin to supplement denaturalizing critique with some form of ethical guidance.

The previous chapter suggested that decentered theory highlights practical reasons for adopting dialogic approaches to policymaking: policy is likely to be more effective if it is based on an engagement and negotiation with the concrete activities and struggles of governance in the field. Here I want to argue that a postfoundationalism that recognizes situated agency also provides ethical support for dialogic modes of governance.

Historically, democratic theory has often rested on appeals to universal or natural freedom. Democratic institutions, the rule of law, and popular sovereignty have ethical value because they treat individuals as free and equal and because they guarantee civic freedoms. Postfoundationalism suggests that these practices of freedom are contingent products of the ways in which situated agents responded to dilemmas so as to modify inherited traditions. Freedom is dependent on the ways in which the state has come to discipline and regulate its citizens. Postfoundationalists thus challenge the idea of a universal and natural freedom because it presupposes the illusion of an autonomous self. Nonetheless, postfoundationalists can still defend an ideal of freedom couched in terms of situated agency.

This alternative ideal of freedom has several implications for governance. For a start, viewing agency as situated rather than autonomous reveals freedom to be inherently embedded in particular contexts. Historically, democratic practices have generally tried to protect an autonomy that allegedly exists beyond society. In contrast, postfoundationalists often understand freedom as participation in the concrete practices of self-making and self-government—a vision of freedom that also pervades postfoundational approaches to pubic administration more generally.[14] Few postfoundationalists repudiate liberal rights and liberties; but they do believe that these rights and liberties need supplementing.

Freedom, postfoundationalists might suggest, is not only abstract rights and liberties under the rule of law; it is, at least as importantly, a concrete practice in particular circumstances. Liberal institutions need supplementing with practices of participation and cooperation in partnerships and networks.[15] Freedom has to be enacted as a shared project in a community. Further, a postfoundational emphasis on the contingency of beliefs and actions implies that this shared project of freedom is a politics of becoming rather than one that aims at stasis. The role of the state thus cannot be that often ascribed to it by liberals—the protection of a prior autonomy. Instead, the state plays the democratic role of enabling and facilitating the participation of citizens in processes of governing. In this way, postfoundationalists might rethink freedom in terms of situated agency and thereby offer ethical as well as practical reasons for adopting a dialogic and bottom-up approach to public policy.

DECENTERING GOVERNANCE

Postfoundationalists characteristically explore governance, whether or not they take it to be a new phenomenon, through bottom-up studies of the contingent sets of meanings that it embodies. Within this shared agenda, however, several theoretical issues are avoided, debated, or dealt with in a confusing manner. Decentered theory resolves these issues by recognizing people's capacity for situated agency even as it rejects the idea of autonomy. If social scientists adopt this decentered theory, they will unpack the composition of governance in terms of the beliefs of individuals, where these beliefs are necessarily influenced by a social inheritance; they will recenter accounts of governance by reference to the traditions and dilemmas against the background of which people form the beliefs they do; and they will begin to provide both ethical and practical justifications for more dialogic and democratic approaches to governance.

The broad contours of a distinctive decentered theory of governance should now be clear. In sum, decentered theory encourages social scientists to examine the ways in which governance is created, sustained, and modified by individuals acting on beliefs that are neither given by an objective self-interest nor by an institution, but rather arise from a process in which the individuals modify traditions in response to dilemmas. Because social scientists cannot simply read off people's beliefs from knowledge of social facts about them, social scientists have to explore both how traditions prompt people to adopt certain meanings and how dilemmas prompt people to modify traditions. A tradition is a set of theories, narratives, and associated practices that people inherit and that then forms the background against which they hold beliefs and perform actions. A dilemma is a new belief, often itself an interpretation of an experience, that stands in opposition to people's existing beliefs and so requires them to modify their view of the world.

Once social scientists unpack governance in relation to various traditions and dilemmas, they challenge the notion that governance rose from given inputs and policies just as much as the claim that the relevant policies necessarily had the outcomes expected by neoliberals. Policymakers construct their understanding of the relevant pressures or dilemmas, and also the policies they adopt in response to them, in different ways depending on the traditions against which they do so. Some institutionalists already emphasize the unintended consequences of neoliberal reforms. Decentered theory adds the recognition that the reforms and the responses to them reflect contests of meaning between actors inspired by different traditions.

Decentered theory highlights the importance of dilemmas, traditions, and political contests for the study of governance. Any pattern of governance has failings, although different people typically ascribe different content to such failings. When people's perception of a failing is such that it stands at odds with their existing beliefs, it poses a dilemma that pushes them to reconsider their beliefs and so the tradition that informs those beliefs. Because people confront such dilemmas from within diverse traditions, there arises a political contest over what constitutes the nature of the failings and so over what should be done about them. Exponents of rival political positions seek to promote their particular theories and policies in the context of laws and norms that prescribe how they legitimately might do so. This political contest leads to a reform of governance—a reform that stands as the contingent product of a contest over meanings.

The pattern of governance established by this complex process will exhibit new failings, pose new dilemmas, and be the subject of competing proposals for reform. So there arises a further contest over meanings, a contest in which the dilemmas are often significantly different, a contest in which the traditions usually have been modified as a result of accommodating the previous dilemmas, and a contest in which the relevant laws and norms might have changed as a result of simultaneous contests over their content. Further, although social scientists can distinguish analytically between a pattern of governance and a political contest over its reform, they rarely can do so temporally. The activity of governing continues during most contests, and most contests occur within practices of governing. A continuous process of interpretation, conflict, and activity generates an ever changing pattern of governance. Social scientists can begin to explain a mode of governance by taking an abstract snapshot of this process and relating it to the varied traditions and dilemmas that inform it.

A decentered theory of governance shifts the emphasis of attempts to understand governance at the global, national, and local levels. Social scientists might begin by examining how diverse state traditions have led to different interpretations and practices of governance. They could then ask, for example, whether the Danish emphasis on local government and popular participation has highlighted efforts to keep changing and perhaps multiplying markets and networks under democratic control. Similarly, they could ask whether the Germanic tradition, with its emphasis on the importance of a legal framework to official action, has encouraged particular ways of controlling markets and networks at one level while remaining highly tolerant of their diversity at other levels. If social scientists found continuity, moreover, they would not assume that they could explain it by a vague appeal to institutional patterns. Instead, they would recognize the importance of unpacking institutional patterns by reference to political conflicts and compromises between groups inspired by diverse beliefs. In the German case, for example, social scientists might explore the alternative interpretations of the country's postwar development offered by a liberal tradition, a tradition of social partnership, and a radical democratic and environmentalist tradition.[16]

CONCLUSION

Decentered theory differs from some postfoundational theories in its resolute commitment to humanism and historicism. The humanism of decentered theory appears in its concept of individuals as agents who make the world by acting on their beliefs and who can reflect on and so modify their beliefs. Although decentered theory is humanist, it presents individual agents not as autonomous but as situated. Thus, decentered theory is also historicist. The historicism of decentered theory appears in that it explains practices, actions, and beliefs by locating them in contingent diachronic traditions.

The rest of this book applies this decentered theory to governance as both social organization and a new politics. First, the ensuing chapters on social organization rely on a humanist and historicist ontology. They decenter reified theories of the state, nation, network, and market choice. Social organization appears here as a product of contingent human activity informed by competing and contested beliefs and traditions. Next, the later chapters on the new politics rely on historicist genealogies to explain present-day trends. They argue that present-day governance reflects the impact on public policy of modernist social science, specifically institutional theory and rational choice theory.

PART II

Social Organization

3 The Stateless State

Decentered theory provides a humanist and historicist perspective on governance as social organization. When social theorists exhibit a lingering modernism, they reify social formations such as the state, implicitly or explicitly treating them as akin to natural kinds. Decentered theory leads to a more constructivist and historical social ontology. First, it implies that social formations emerge from competing and conflicting patterns of activity and the meanings embedded therein. Second, it implies that the relevant meanings emerged historically as parts of wider shifts in ideas, concepts, and thought.

The study of politics has long concentrated on the state as a sovereign authority. The state is conventionally defined as "a set of institutions with a dedicated personnel" and "a monopoly of authoritative rule making within a bounded territory."[1] This concept of the state rose gradually and contingently in the Renaissance and the Reformation, culminating in the great texts of Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes.[2] However, once this concept of the state as a sovereign authority had arisen, it proved remarkably powerful and resilient. Political actors remade the world in its image, most famously in the Treaty of Westphalia, which enshrined it as a principle of international relations. Further, as this concept of the state became more and more entrenched in political life, many students of politics began to take it for granted, treating it as a natural development and object for study.

This chapter does not provide a historical review of the origins and development of the state, nor a survey of the extensive and varied literature on social science theories of the state.[3] This chapter focuses instead on recent developments in state theory within the literature on governance. More specifically, it focuses on various claims concerning the perceived change in the pattern and exercise of state authority from government to governance. Has there been a shift from a hierarchic or bureaucratic state to governance in and by networks? There are at least two different narratives in the literature discussing the changing state: those emphasizing network governance and metagovernance. Decentered theory inspires a third narrative, suggesting that the state is stateless.

The narrative of network governance concentrates on the institutional legacy of neoliberal reforms of the state. Social scientists generally trace the origins of network governance to the neoliberal reforms associated with the contracting out of the delivery of public services in the context of globalization. These reforms eroded the hierarchic bureaucracies that had flourished for much of the postwar era. They established a new politics of markets, quasi-markets, and networks. The process of contracting out fragmented the state by increasing both the range of public agencies involved in public service delivery and the dependence of these agencies on a growing number of private- and voluntary-sector actors. Network governance describes a world in which state power is dispersed across various networks, each of which is composed of various public, voluntary, and private organizations.

The second narrative of the changing state accepts the idea that there has been a shift from bureaucracy to markets and networks but disputes the claim that this shift has resulted in a significant dispersal of state authority. This narrative focuses instead on metagovernance understood as "the governance of government and governance."[4] Metagovernance is an umbrella concept that describes the role of the state and its characteristic policy instruments in the new world of network governance. The new world is one in which governing is distributed among various private, voluntary, and public actors, and in which power and authority are decentralized and fragmented among a plurality of networks. The role of the state has thus shifted from the direct governance of society to the metagovernance of the several modes of intervention. From this perspective, the state returns as an important policymaker, albeit one that relies less on command and control through bureaucracy than on the indirect steering of relatively autonomous stakeholders.

Decentered theory challenges the idea that inexorable and impersonal forces are driving a shift from government to network governance. Instead, it includes a constructivist and historical ontology that implies the state is stateless. Decentered theory focuses on the social construction of practices through the ability of individuals to create and act on meanings. To decenter is to unpack a practice into the disparate and contingent beliefs and actions of individuals. This chapter uses this decentered theory to challenge the reified theories of the state associated with network governance and metagovernance. It argues, in their place, for the analysis of the various traditions that have informed the diverse policies and practices by which elite and other actors have sought to remake the state.

This decentered analysis of the state has clear implications for definitions and explanations of governance. Decentered theory challenges a craving for generality that characterizes much of the literature on governance. Governance can be defined instead by a series of family resemblances, none of which need be always present. There is no list of general features or essential properties that characterize governance in every instance. Rather, there are diverse practices composed of multiple individuals acting on changing webs of beliefs rooted in overlapping traditions. The state and its authority arise as diverse and contingent practices out of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the beliefs of agents influenced by competing traditions.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE

The first narrative of the changing state focuses on a network governance consisting of something akin to a differentiated polity characterized by a hollowed-out state, a core executive fumbling to pull rubber levers of control, and most notably, a massive growth of networks.[5] Of course, social scientists define network governance in all kinds of ways. Nonetheless, many appeal to inexorable and impersonal forces to explain the shift from a hierarchically organized state to governance by markets and especially networks. Social scientists appeal, more particularly, to logics of modernization, such as the functional differentiation of the modern state or the marketization of the public sector. In their view, neoliberal reforms led to the further differentiation of policy networks in an increasingly hollow state. Social scientists typically use a concept of differentiation to evoke specialization based on function. Their approach is modernist, treating institutions such as legislatures, constitutions, and policy networks as discrete and atomized objects to be compared, measured, and classified. They use comparisons across time and space to uncover regularities and to offer probabilistic explanations that can be tested against allegedly neutral evidence. In particular these modernists treat the changing state as characterized by self-organizing and interorganizational networks, that is, as a complex set of institutions and institutional linkages defined by their social role or function. They thereby make any appeal to the contingent beliefs and preferences of the agents largely irrelevant.

In Britain this narrative of the changing state challenges a longstanding Westminster model. It claims in particular to capture recent changes in the British state in a way that the Westminster model does not. According to Rod Rhodes, for example, "the differentiated polity identifies key changes which reshape that political tradition"; it "focuses on interdependence, disaggregation, a segmented executive, policy networks, governance and hollowing out."[6] The Anglo-governance school starts out from the notion of policy networks composed of groups clustered around a major state function or department.[7] These groups commonly include the professions, trade unions, and big business. The Anglo-governance school suggests that the state needs the cooperation of such groups to deliver public services. The state allegedly needs their cooperation because it rarely delivers services itself; it uses other bodies to do so. Also, because there are supposed to be too many groups to consult, the state must aggregate interests; it needs the legitimated spokespeople for that policy area. The groups in their turn need the money and legislative authority that only the state can provide.

Policy networks are a long-standing feature of the British state. They are its silos or velvet drainpipes. The Conservative governments of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sought to reduce their power by using markets to deliver public services, bypassing existing networks and curtailing the "privileges" of the professions, commonly by subjecting them to rigorous financial and management controls. However, these corporate management and marketization reforms had unintended consequences. They fragmented the delivery of public services, creating pressures for organizations to cooperate with one another. In other words, marketization multiplied the networks it aimed to replace. Commonly, diverse packages of organizations now deliver welfare state services. The first narrative of the changing state thus concentrates on the spread of networks in and around the state. It tells us not only that fragmentation creates new networks but that it also increases the membership of existing networks, incorporating both the private and voluntary sectors. It also tells us that as the state swapped direct for indirect controls, central departments are no longer either necessarily or invariably the fulcrum of a network. The state can set the limits to network actions—after all, it still funds the services—but it has increased its dependence on multifarious networks.

The Anglo-governance school conceives of networks as a distinctive coordinating mechanism, notably different from markets and hierarchies rather than just a hybrid of them. These social scientists associate networks with characteristics such as interdependence and trust. In their view, trust is essential because it is the basis of network coordination in the same way that commands and price competition are the vital mechanisms respectively for bureaucracies and markets.[8] Shared values and norms are the glue that holds the complex set of relationships in a network together. Trust and reciprocity are essential for cooperative behavior and therefore the existence of the network itself.[9] With the spread of networks there has been a recurrent tension between, on the one hand, contracts (which stress competition to get the best price) and, on the other hand, networks (which stress cooperative behavior). Trust and reciprocity are, it is said, essential to reduce this tension.

According to the Anglo-governance school, multiplying networks means that state (or core executive) coordination is modest in practice. Coordination is largely negative, based on persistent compartmentalization, mutual avoidance, and friction reduction among powerful bureaus or ministries. Even when coordination is cooperative, anchored at the lower levels of the state machine, and organized by specific established networks, it is sustained by a culture of dialogue across vertical and horizontal relationships. The state only rarely achieves strategic coordination. Indeed, almost all state attempts to create proactive strategic capacity for long-term planning have failed.[10] The Anglo-governance school explains the reforms of Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour governments as an attempt to promote coordination and strategic oversight and to combat both Whitehall's departmentalism and the unintended consequences of managerialism.

So, the Anglo-governance school tells a story of fragmentation confounding centralization as a segmented state seeks to improve horizontal coordination among departments and agencies and vertical coordination among departments and their networks of organizations. An unintended consequence of marketization and of the later search for central control has been a hollowing out of the state. The state has been hollowed-out from above by international interdependence, from below by marketization and networks, and from sideways by agencies. The growth of markets and networks has further undermined the ability of the state to act effectively and made it increasingly reliant on diplomacy. The British state was already characterized by baronies, policy networks, and intermittent and selective coordination. It has been further hollowed-out by the unintended consequences of marketization, which fragmented service delivery, multiplied networks, and diversified the membership of those networks, and by membership in the European Union and by other international commitments. As Rhodes explains, "central government is no longer supreme"; instead, there is a "polycentric state characterized by multiple centres."[11]

METAGOVERNANCE

Critics of the first narrative of the changing state characteristically focus on the argument that the state has been hollowed-out. For example, Jon Pierre and Guy Peters argue that the shift to network governance could "increase public control over society" because governments "rethink the mix of policy instruments." As a result, "coercive or regulatory instruments become less important and . . . 'softer' instruments gain importance," one example being the growth of steering through brokerage.[12] In short, the state has not been hollowed-out. A second narrative of the changing state thus focuses metagovernance, that is, the ways in which the state has reasserted its capacity to govern by regulating the mix of governing structures, such as markets and networks, and by deploying indirect instruments of control.

Metagovernance refers to the role of the state in securing coordination in governance and in particular to the state's growing use of negotiation, diplomacy, and informal modes of steering. As Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing suggest, "by understanding autonomy not as the absence of power but as a particular form of power-freedom relation, a space is cleared for analysing the diverse instruments of mobilizing, forming and thereby governing the capacities of networks to undertake particular tasks, functions, and services 'on their own.'"[13] Metagovernance suggests that the state does less "rowing"—the direct provision of services through bureaucratic organizations—and more "steering"—the regulation of the networks of organizations that provide services. Other organizations undertake much of the actual work of governing; they implement policies, they provide public services, and at times they even regulate themselves. The state governs the organizations that govern civil society; the governance of governance. Further, the other organizations characteristically have a degree of autonomy from the state; perhaps they are voluntary or private-sector groups or perhaps they are governmental agencies or tiers of government separate from the core executive. The state thus cannot govern them solely by the instruments that work in bureaucracies.

Nonetheless, there are several ways in which the state can steer the other actors involved in governance. First, the state can set the rules of the game for other actors and then leave them to do what they will within those rules; the other actors work in the shadow of hierarchy. So, for example, the state can redesign markets, reregulate policy sectors, or introduce constitutional change. Second, the state can try to steer other actors using storytelling. The state can organize dialogues, foster meanings, beliefs, and identities among the relevant actors, and influence what actors think and do. Third, the state can steer by the way in which it distributes resources such as money and authority. The state can play a boundary spanning role; it can alter the balance between actors in a network; it can act as a court of appeal when conflict arises; it can rebalance the mix of governing structures; and it can step in when network governance fails. Of course, the state need not adopt one uniform approach to metagovernance. It can use different approaches in different settings at different times.

This summary implies much agreement about metagovernance. But social scientists are beginning to distinguish among approaches to metagovernance. Sørensen and Torfing identify four approaches: interdependence, governability, integration, and governmentality.[14] Interdependence theory focuses on the state managing networks by means of a more indirect set of policy instruments.[15] Governability theory stresses that metagovernance and network management occur in the shadow of hierarchy.[16] Integration theory stresses the formation and management of identities.[17] Governmentality theory focuses on the regulation of self-regulation and so on the norms, standards, and targets that set the limits to networks.[18] This categorization may seem odd given, for example, that proponents of integration theory and governmentality never talk of metagovernance. Nonetheless, distinguishing these approaches does help to identify different accounts of the extent and form of state intervention and control.

Proponents of interdependence theory argue that manipulating the rules of the game allows the state to keep much control over governing without having to bear the costs of direct interference. Proponents of governability theory stress the resources the state has at its disposal for metagovernance. They argue that the state can easily deploy these resources to manage other policymakers. Proponents of integration theory argue that the viewpoints and interests of different actors are so diverse that the core task is managing identities through, for example, storytelling about best practices and successful cooperation and coordination. Storytelling can create coherent social and political meanings and identities that soften the tensions among competing viewpoints and interests. Proponents of governmentality theory identify the complex of rules, norms, standards, and regulatory practices that extend state rule more deeply into civil society by regulating the ways in which civil society self-regulates. In this view, accountancy, performance management, and other management techniques are not just ways of achieving the 3Es—economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are also ways of measuring, approving, appraising, and regulating the beliefs and practices of network actors.[19] Of course, the approaches are not mutually exclusive; state actors deploy a different mix of approaches in different contexts.

COMMON GROUND

For all their different emphases and the debate between the several proponents, the first two narratives of the changing state share much common ground. For a start, proponents of metagovernance take for granted the characteristics of network governance. They accept that states are becoming increasingly fragmented into networks based on several different stakeholders. Also, they accept that the dividing line between the state and civil society is becoming more blurred because the relevant stakeholders are private or voluntary sector organizations. So, for example, Bob Jessop concedes that "the state is no longer the sovereign authority"; it is "less hierarchical, less centralised, less *dirigiste*."[20]

So, there is a shared modernist description of the characteristics of network governance. Narratives of metagovernance often recognize that nonstate actors can have the power to self-regulate. Also they have to distinguish these nonstate actors from the state in order to make it possible to conceive of the state exerting a higher level control over their self-regulation. The state governs the other actors involved in network governance. In other words, metagovernance heralds the return of the state by reinventing its governing role. This return to the state makes it possible for social scientists to present themselves as having a formal expertise with which to offer policy advice on the practice of metagovernance.

The narratives of the changing state thus share a concern with providing advice on network governance. Both assume that the role of the state is to manage, directly and indirectly, the networks of service delivery. Much of the literature on metagovernance is thus devoted to such topics as governing the performance of networks, institutional design, network management, and the possibilities for public authorities to shape network outputs.[21]

Both narratives of the changing state rely here on a reified notion of structure. Many of the proponents of the first narrative are modernists who explicitly operate with a reified notion of structure rooted in an explicit formal theory of functional differentiation. Likewise, the proponents of metagovernance continue to claim that the state is a material object, a structure, or a social form. Although they often appeal to critical realist epistemology and such notions as "emergence" and "mechanism" ostensibly to guard against the charge of reification, the discussion of institutionalism in Chapter 1 suggested that their position has a closer affinity to modernism than they realize or care to admit.[22]

Modernists sociologists often rely on reified concepts such as institution, structure, state formation, and system to offer explanations that transcend time and space. They appeal to ideal types, institutions and structures as if they are natural kinds. Rational choice theory, with its debt to modernist economics, challenges these reifications and raises the issue of microtheory. Modernist sociologists could respond in three ways. First, they could adopt a decentered theory. They could view social life solely as activity, reject reifications, and avoid rational choice theory by emphasizing contingency. But typically they do not like this response because it requires them to give up their ideas about expertise and social science. Second, they could recast their reifications as if they were consequences of rational actors behaving more or less as rational choice theory suggests. This response is common in the United States but not with critical realists in Britain.[23] Critical realists prefer to appeal to structure, emergence, and mechanism. They claim that these sociological concepts do not involve reification, but they avoid the microlevel questions that would show how this is so. Thus, they often shift back and forth between using the old reifications of modernist sociology and paying some lip service to the microtheories associated with rational choice theory and decentered theory. For example, Stuart McAnulla argues that structures are emergent or temporal mechanisms rather than reifications, but he never explains how these structures differ from practices, or how these structures determine individual actions without passing through intentional consciousness.[24] He provides no clear account of why agents cannot change emergent structures. On the contrary, the structure emerges from actions, so presumably if all the relevant people changed their activity, they would thereby change the alleged structure. But, if this were so, then the emergent structures would be better understood as practices, for they would consist solely of what a bundle of people do and the unintended consequences of these doings. Of course, critical realists might be using the word "structure" merely as a metaphor for the way activity coalesces into patterns and practices. But such metaphors often have a bewitching effect. People treat them as real reified entities, as, for example, does Dave Marsh in his analysis of the British political tradition.[25] In short, critical realism and the analysis of metagovernance all too often rely on the reifications of modernist sociology.

The idea of the state as a structure is useful only if social scientists unpack it into the specific notions of tradition, dilemma, practice, and unintended consequence. The state might refer to traditions, that is, to inherited webs of belief that influence what people do. The state also might refer to a subset of the dilemmas that actors face, that is, specifically to intersubjective views about how the nature of the political world precludes or impels certain actions. Another possibility is for the state to refer to cultural practices, where although these practices arise from people's actions, they confront the individual as if they are objective social facts over which the individual has no control. Alternatively the state might refer to the intended and especially the unintended consequences of public policies, where these consequences are the meaningful actions that people typically adopt in reaction to those policies.

Both narratives of the changing state share, finally, the aspiration to provide a comprehensive account of the state's role in present-day governance. Social scientists typically aim to provide a general account of what network governance and metagovernance look like and why they do so. For example, network governance is often characterized as a shift from bureaucratic hierarchies to multiplying networks. This defining feature is then said to explain other characteristics of network governance, such as the need for indirect diplomatic styles of management and the search for better coordination through joint ventures, partnerships, and holistic governance. Defining network governance and metagovernance by one or more of their essential properties, such as multiplying networks, implies that these properties are general and characterize all cases of governance; so, for example, there is governance if and only if there is a spread of networks. Further, these essential properties explain the most significant features of network governance and metagovernance.

A comprehensive account of governance makes sense, even as a mere aspiration, only if governance has some essence. Social scientists should seek a comprehensive account only if the way to define and explain network governance and metagovernance is to find a social logic or essential property that is at least common to all its manifestations and ideally even explains them. But why would social scientists assume that network governance and metagovernance have one or more essential feature? Why would they postulate such a reified ontology rather than a constructivist and historical one?

The search for comprehensive accounts arises from a preoccupation with the natural sciences. Although this search may be appropriate in the natural sciences, it is counterproductive in the social sciences. Human practices are not governed by necessary logics or lawlike regularities associated with their allegedly essential properties. They arise instead out of the contingent activity of individuals. Therefore, when social scientists seek to explain particular cases of governance, they should do so by reference to the contingent activity of the relevant individuals, not a necessary logic or lawlike regularity. Social scientists should explain practices, including cases of governance, using narratives that unpack the contingent actions that embody beliefs informed by contested traditions and dilemmas. The contingent nature of the links between traditions and their development undermines the possibility of a comprehensive account that abstracts from historical contexts formally to relate any one practice to a specific set of social conditions. If social scientists explore these possibilities, they will be adopting a decentered theory that refutes the first two narratives of the changing state.

THE STATELESS STATE

A decentered theory of the state highlights the contingent meanings that inform the actions of the individuals involved in all kinds of practices of rule. The first narrative of the changing state focuses on issues such as the objective characteristics of policy networks and the oligopoly of the political market place. It stresses power-dependence, the relationship of the size of networks to policy outcomes, and the strategies by which the center might steer networks. The second narrative about the changing state focuses on the mix of governing structures, such as markets and networks, and on deploying various instruments of control, such as changing the rules of the game, storytelling, and changing the distribution of resources. In contrast to these comprehensive and reified views, decentered theory focuses on the social construction of the state through the ability of individuals for meaningful action.

Decentered theory changes the concept of the state. It encourages social scientists to examine the ways in which patterns of rule, including institutions and policies, are created, sustained, and modified by individuals. It encourages social scientists to recognize that the actions of these individuals are not fixed by institutional norms or a social logic of modernization, but on the contrary, arise from the beliefs individuals adopt against the background of traditions and in response to dilemmas.

This decentered theory of the changing state entails a shift from institutions to meanings in action and so a shift from social logics to narratives. The narrative of network governance reduces the diversity of state formations and activity to something like a social logic of modernization, institutional norms, or a set of classifications or correlations across networks. Its proponents tame an otherwise chaotic picture of multiple actors creating a contingent pattern of rule through their diverse understandings and conflicting actions. The narrative of metagovernance compounds this mistake by reintroducing the idea that the state is an entity that exerts effective control over other organizations. In contrast, a decentered approach to the changing state shows how governance arises from the bottom up, as conflicting beliefs, competing traditions, and varied dilemmas give rise to diverse practices. A decentered approach replaces aggregate concepts that refer to objectified social laws with narratives that explain actions by relating them to the beliefs and desires that produce them.

What does this decentered approach reveal about governance and the changing state? There are two main answers. First, definitions of governance should be couched in terms of family resemblances, where instead of craving generality and aspiring to comprehensiveness, social scientists should allow that none of these resemblances need always be present. Second, although network and metagovernance fail as comprehensive theories, both of them usefully describe family resemblances that characterize state activity in present-day governance.

A decentered theory of the changing state contrasts sharply with comprehensive accounts that seek to unpack the essential properties and necessary logics of network governance and metagovernance. Neither the intrinsic rationality of markets nor the path dependency of institutions decides patterns of state activity. Rather, the state and its activities are explained as the contingent constructions of several actors inspired by competing webs of belief and associated traditions. A decentered approach explains shifting patterns of governance by focusing on the actors' interpretations of their actions and practices. It explores the diverse ways in which situated agents change the boundaries of state and civil society as their beliefs change leading them constantly to remake practices. As social scientists cannot explain cases of network and metagovernance by reference to a comprehensive theory, they cannot straightforwardly define the changing state by its chief features. Social scientists can define governance only for particular cases. Further, the absence of a comprehensive theory of either network governance or metagovernance implies that there need be no feature common to all the cases of state activity to which social scientists would apply the term "governance." It is often futile to search for the essential features of an abstract category that denotes a cluster of human practices. Worse still, the search for allegedly common features can lead social scientists to dismiss the particular cases that are essential to understanding the abstract category. When social scientists provide a definition or general account of the changing state, it should be couched as a set of family resemblances.

Ludwig Wittgenstein famously suggested that general concepts such as "game" should be defined by various traits that overlap and crisscross in much the same way as do the resemblances between members of a family—their builds, eye color, gait, personalities.[26] Wittgenstein discussed various examples of games to challenge the idea that they all possess a given property or set of properties—skill, enjoyment, victory, and defeat—by which to define the concept. Instead, he suggested that the examples exhibit a cluster of similarities, at various levels of detail, so that they coalesce even though no one feature is common to them all.[27]

People do not master family resemblance concepts by discovering a theory or rule that tells them precisely when they should and should not apply that concept. The grasp of a family resemblance concept consists, rather, in the ability to explain why it should be applied in one case but not another, the ability to draw analogies with other cases, and the ability to point to the crisscrossing similarities. Knowledge of "the changing state" or "governance" is analogous to knowledge of "game" as described by Wittgenstein. It is "completely expressed" by our describing various cases of governance, showing how other cases can be considered as analogous to these, and suggesting that one would be unlikely to describe yet other cases as ones of governance.

Some of the family resemblances that characterize the changing state derive from a focus on meaning in action and so apply to all patterns of rule. Decentered theory highlights, first, a more diverse view of state authority and its exercise. All patterns of rule arise as the contingent products of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the varied beliefs of situated agents. Narratives of network governance suggest that the New Right's reinvention of the minimal state and the more recent rediscovery of networks are attempts to find a substitute for the voluntaristic bonds weakened by state intervention. Decentered theory suggests that the notion of a monolithic state in control of itself and civil society was always a myth. The myth obscured the reality of diverse state practices that emerged from the contingent beliefs and actions of diverse actors at the boundary of state and civil society and so escaped from the control of the center. The state is never monolithic and it always negotiates with others. Policy always arises from interactions within networks of organizations and individuals. Patterns of rule always traverse the public, private, and voluntary sectors. The boundaries between state and civil society are always blurred. Transnational and international links and flows always disrupt national borders. In short, state authority is constantly remade, negotiated, and contested in widely different ways within widely varying everyday practices.

Decentered theory suggests, second, that these everyday practices arise from situated agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by traditions and expressed in stories. Every state department contains departmental traditions, often embodied in rituals and routines. These traditions might range from specific notions of accountability to the ritual of the tea lady. Actors pass on these traditions in large part by telling one another stories about "how we do things around here" and about "what does and does not work." For example, British civil servants are socialized into the broad notions of the Westminster model, such as ministerial responsibility, as well as the specific ways of doing things around here. They are socialized into the idea of a profession, and they learn the framework of the acceptable. The state is not a set of essential properties and their necessary consequences. It is the stories people use to construct, convey, and explain traditions, dilemmas, beliefs, and practices.

A decentered approach also might help to highlight a third family resemblance that characterizes the British state but might not characterize state activity in other times or at other places. In Britain, the reforms of the New Right and New Labour have brought about a partial shift from hierarchy to markets and networks. Although this shift is widely recognized, decentered theory suggests, crucially, that it takes diverse forms. For the police, the shift from hierarchy to markets to networks poses specific dilemmas. They know how to rewrite the rulebook, manage a contract, or work with a neighborhood watch, but they struggle to reconcile these ways of working, believing that they conflict with and undermine one another. For doctors, the equivalent shift poses different dilemmas; the critical issue is how to preserve the medical model of health and medical autonomy from managerial reforms that stress hierarchy and financial control.

A fourth family resemblance is that the central state has adopted a less hands-on role. State actors are less commonly found within various local and sectoral bodies, and more commonly found in quangos concerned to steer, coordinate, and regulate such bodies. Once again, a decentered approach suggests, crucially, that such steering, coordination, and regulation take many diverse forms. In Britain, the preeminent example is joining-up with the government seeking to devise policy instruments that integrate both horizontally (across central government departments) and vertically (between central and local government and the voluntary sector).

So, decentered theory highlights family resemblances that contribute to a general characterization of the changing state. Nonetheless, a decentered approach disavows any necessary logic to the specific forms that the state takes in particular circumstances. A decentered approach resolves the theoretical difficulties that beset earlier narratives of the changing state. It avoids the suggestion that institutions fix the actions of the individuals acting within them, rather than being products of their actions. It replaces bewitching phrases such as "path dependency" with an analysis of change rooted in the beliefs and practices of situated agents. Yet it still allows social scientists to offer aggregate studies by using the concepts of tradition and dilemma to explain how people come to hold widespread beliefs and perform intersubjective practices.

A decentered approach to the state rejects both comprehensive theory and the related idea that the state is a material object or emergent structure or social form. It undercuts the claim that the "*preexistence* [of social forms] implies their *autonomy* as possible objects of scientific investigation; and their *causal efficacy* confirms their *reality*."[28] It leads, on the contrary, to a stateless theory in the sense that it rejects the idea of the state as a preexisting causal structure that can be understood as having an autonomous existence and causal effects over and apart from people's beliefs and activity. Studying the changing state is not about building formal theories; it is about telling stories about other people's meanings; it is about providing narratives of other people's narratives.

CONCLUSION

The first narrative of the changing state introduced governance as an account of a shift from hierarchic patterns of organization to markets and then networks. Decentered theory brings about the death of this first narrative, for it implies that there is no single and uniform account of the changing state, only the differing constructions of several traditions. Decentered theory also announces the death of the second narrative with its focus on metagovernance not only because it relies on many positivist assumptions but also because it argues for a top-down narrative of state regulation and control. From the perspective of decentered theory, there is no logical or structural process determining the form of network governance or the role of the state in the metagovernance of governance. None of the intrinsic rationality of markets, the path dependency of institutions, or the state's new toolkit for managing the mix of governing structures and networks properly explains patterns of state activity and how they change.

Decentered theory announces the arrival of a third narrative, couched in terms of the stateless state. Decentered theory suggests that the state consists of diverse actions and practices inspired by varied beliefs and traditions. The state is the contingent product of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the beliefs of agents rooted in traditions. This decentered approach seeks to explain social life by reference to the meanings that infuse the beliefs and practices of individual actors. It encourages social scientists to shift their attention from reified concepts such as state, institution, power, and governance, and to focus instead on the social construction of practices through the ability of individuals to create and act on meanings. It is to unpack a practice into the disparate and contingent beliefs and actions of individuals. It is to reveal the contingent and conflicting beliefs that inform the diverse actions that constitute any domain of social life. It involves challenging the idea that inexorable or impersonal forces, norms, or laws define patterns and regularities in the social world. Instead, it implies that the social world in general and the state in particular are constructed differently by many actors inspired by different ideas and values. People's stories and actions construct and reconstruct the stateless state.

4 Narrating the Nation

A decentered theory of governance suggests that it consists of contingent and contested patterns of meaningful activity. The state is thus stateless in that it lacks any essence. The state is just the overlapping, fluid, and fraught cultural practices that emerge from the actions of diverse social actors. A rejection of modernism should lead social scientists to forego formal analyses of the state and to pay greater attention to its social and historical construction. The question arises, therefore, of how social scientists should conceive of the society in which the stateless state is embedded. How should social scientists conceive of nations, networks, and civic choices?

Perhaps the failings of modernism will suggest to some readers that social scientists should return to something akin to the developmental historicism that dominated the nineteenth century. Developmental historicists typically viewed states as the political expression of nations, which in turn were understood in terms of historical narratives. These histories presented the state as both reflecting and molding the national consciousness. From this perspective, modes of governance might seem to embody historical stages in the development of a nation.

This chapter asks the following: How should social scientists today conceive of nations and their histories? How helpful are national histories as a means to understanding states and governance? This chapter argues that instead of looking longingly to classical national histories, social scientists should decenter the nation as well as the state. Instead of returning to developmental historicism, social scientists should adopt decentered theory with its postfoundational historicism.

THE LURE OF NOSTALGIA

Several recent books express an aura of nostalgia for national histories. Stefan Collini, Peter Mandler, and Julia Stapleton have all written wistfully about classic national histories, their role in national life, and even the nation itself. Their nostalgia has varying tones. Stapleton adopts the most belligerent tone; she seeks to champion the work of intellectuals who wrote in and of the nation even as national histories went into decline during the twentieth century; she asserts the importance of local and concrete affiliations as opposed to multiculturalism and universalism.[1] Mandler has a more upbeat and revisionist tone; he argues that popular history flourishes today, but he distinguishes this popular history from academic history, and he suggests that the latter is more marginal than it once was; he renounces the myths of national destiny, but his narrative suggests that such myths gave academic history a glorious and yet perhaps irretrievable position in national life.[2] Collini adopts an aloof tone of ironic and even scornful detachment; he is dismissive of the alternatives to national histories and yet also of the viability of the classic national history; he defends the public voice of the historian, while arguing that this voice needs be more essayistic and selective, and while hinting that the result will be a better, less mythical, and more cultivated understanding of the national character and its history.[3] Nostalgia for national history may have varying tones, but it is widespread.

Why, one might ask, do accounts of the decline of national histories give off an aura of nostalgia for just such histories? The nostalgia arises partly because the authors offer external social and historical explanations for the decline of those histories. National histories have waned, they imply, less because of their own failings than because of changes in society. In addition, the nostalgia arises because the relevant changes in society are ones about which the authors are at best ambivalent. National histories have waned, they suggest, because society has gone awry. Once one dissects the aura of nostalgia in this way, one is better able to appreciate how seductive it can be. Even if one finds it easy to brush off Stapleton's apparent hostility to multicultural Britain, one might still have some emotional sympathy for Mandler and Collini's ambivalence about intellectual populism, the professionalization of historical studies, modern social science, the mass media, and dumbing down.

The seductive nature of such nostalgia should not obscure the fact that one is not being given valid arguments for the revival of classic national histories. It is one thing to debate whether or not historical conditions have altered so as to leave little space for the production and consumption of classic national histories. It would be quite another thing to offer a philosophical analysis of the intellectual validity of national histories. Empirical accounts of the decline of national histories and even nations do not usually have philosophical and normative implications for the validity and desirability of national histories and nations. The fact that one does not like an X that has replaced a Y does not of itself constitute a reason to revive Y. One would have a reason to revive Y only if one believed that Y itself was good, intellectually valid, or at the very least better than X in a situation where it and X were the only alternatives.

Of course, Collini, Mandler, and even Stapleton do not pretend to offer a philosophical defense of classic national histories. On the contrary, they are typically rather vague on the intellectual validity of such histories. However, this vagueness is itself connected to their nostalgia and their apparent sympathy with national histories. They have complex relations to British traditions of Whiggism. Unlike much Whig historiography, their works do not present history as an ineluctable progression toward given ends, nor do they read the past as a prelude to the present in a way that leads to clear anachronisms. But Collini, Mandler, and Stapleton remain attached to other Whig ideas, notably a belief that history and politics are arts rather than sciences, and a sense of the value of a British political tradition characterized by a moderate and understated liberalism. So, on the one hand, Collini, Mandler, and Stapleton share a Whiggish distrust of abstract principles and so of formal assessments of the validity of different approaches to history. But, on the other, the impression that they are sympathetic to classic national histories only gains additional credence from the ways in which their views echo both the Whiggism that pervades so many national histories and the vision implicit therein of the role of history in national life.[4]

So, the question remains: How valid are national histories as a means of exploring states and governance? This chapter answers this question in a way that continues to engage the nostalgia of Collini, Mandler, and Stapleton. Their nostalgia owes much to their ambivalence about not only populism and the mass media but also modern social science and technocracy. This chapter begins by reinforcing this ambivalence by offering a philosophical analysis of the failings of social science history. However, this ambivalence toward what has replaced the classic national histories does not itself validate national histories. This chapter thus goes on to argue that although the failings of social science history should inspire a return to narrative as a form of explanation, these narratives should eschew apparently given principles of character, nation, and liberty. Decentered theory offers, instead, a postfoundational historicism.

ON HISTORY

There is a fairly common account of the fate of national histories. This account begins by emphasizing the extent to which national histories emerged as instruments of nation building. It highlights the extent to which the master narratives found in so many national histories of the nineteenth century embodied grand principles of nation, liberty, and progress. This account of the fate of national histories goes on to suggest that these master narratives fell out of favor during the twentieth century for various reasons. One reason was that the academic discipline of history became increasingly professional. Historians demanded greater rigor and adopted narrower temporal and topical foci. Another reason was that the wider public lost interest in the past, at least as a guide to identity or action. The elite turned to social science for guidance. The masses turned to new forms of popular entertainment. History has become a form of entertainment that people consume as heritage, computer game, family genealogy, and commemorative celebration.[5]

Historical accounts appeal to various causes for the apparent decline in national histories. Many of these causes are independent of the reasonableness of the idea of a national history. The epistemic reasonableness of a historical narrative does not vary, for example, according to whether or not consumers would want to read it. However, one of the proposed causes does raise epistemic issues. Historians point to the replacement of history by the social sciences as the inspiration for attempts to understand and to direct social life.[6]

Modernist social science had a dramatic impact on history itself. Modernist social science inspired new ideas of historical evidence, new sources of evidence, new methods of analyzing evidence, and new theories with which to account for evidence. Arguably, the impact of modernist social science extended from practices that were self-consciously labeled "social science history" to the rise of social history as an alternative focus to elder political and diplomatic histories. The more important point is, however, that the rise of social science history raises epistemic issues for the classic national history. An argument showing the validity of social science history might suggest that national histories declined precisely because the modern social sciences offer superior forms of knowledge. Alternatively, an argument showing that social science history is invalid might provide reasons to reconsider the merits of national histories even if not to be nostalgic for them.[7]

Care must be taken in characterizing social science history. Scientific aspirations certainly appeared before the purported decline in national histories. In Britain, for example, David Hume's *History of England* was an attempt to instantiate a skeptical and scientific approach to history in accord with Enlightenment ideas and in opposition to notions of the ancient constitution, contract, and resistance.[8] Social science history, as a threat to national histories, rose only later along with modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although many Enlightenment thinkers associated a scientific spirit with a search for generalizations across societies, typically they prescribed a historical method as that by which to reach generalizations; they sought to provide scientific accounts of the historical development of societies. In contrast, modernists later adopted more atomistic and analytic modes of inquiry. Modernists took an atomistic stance to particular institutions and practices, separating them out from their national context and then analyzing them in comparison with similar units from other nations in order to generate correlations and classifications that were thought to explain them. The rise of modernism appears, for example, in the changing arrangements of Herman Finer's books. In 1921 Finer organized his *Foreign Governments at Work* state by state, with chapters on France, Germany, and the United States. He located the various institutions of any given state in the context of that state's other institutions. He relied on readers using an analytical index of topics to themselves do the work of locating institutions in comparison with similar institutions in other states. In 1932, however, Finer adopted a more modernist approach in his major work, *Theory and Practice of Modern Government*. He organized much of this book topic by topic with chapters on constitutions, parties and electorates, and legislatures. He thus placed far greater emphasis on treating each institution in relation to similar institutions in other states rather than in the context offered by other institutions in the relevant state.[9] Social science history can refer, therefore, to those approaches to history that draw more or less heavily on techniques of analysis and concepts of explanation that are derived from modernist social science.

Social science history prompts distinctive approaches to both the study of earlier national histories and the crafting of new ones. In both cases, the emphasis falls on the importance of cross-national regularities and classifications, ideally supported by quantitative studies and correlational analysis. Consider the study of earlier national histories. Social science history encourages attempts to develop systematic accounts of the construction of national histories across a number of states. These accounts might correlate the number of such histories produced or some of their allegedly chief features with, for example, the year in which statehood was established or the level of economic development. Perhaps social science historians might explain the production of master narratives by reference to their correlation with specific institutional conditions. Perhaps they might explain the demise of master narratives by means of a correlation with the rise of professional associations of historians or the entry of women into the profession. Similarly, social science history encourages attempts to craft new national histories based on comparative forms of analysis. These analyses might explain the rise and development of nations by reference to correlations and typologies that provide macro-historical contexts for diverse cases. Perhaps the rise of the nation state might be explained, for example, by means of a correlation with the increasingly capital intensive nature of warfare.[10]

The epistemic validity of social science history depends on the implicit notion that correlations and classifications constitute valid forms of explanation in modernist social science. Typically, the relevant correlations and classifications are ones that rely on social categories such as class, economic interest, or institutional position. Social science history thus depends, at least implicitly, on the modernist faith in explaining human behavior by reference to allegedly objective social facts. This modernist faith leads social science historians to postulate explanations that more or less bypass the meanings and beliefs embedded in action. It leads them to treat beliefs as mere intervening variables that can drop out of their explanations. Modernism encourages social science historians to explain why people wrote master narratives not by reference to the beliefs and the traditions informing those narratives but by pointing to the alleged functional dictates of nation building. Similarly, modernism encourages social science historians to explain why people forged nation states not by reference to beliefs and desires but by saying that the nation state was better able to generate the capital needed for warfare. As social science history rests on a modernist reduction of beliefs and desires to mere intervening variables, so it falls foul of the postfoundational critique of modernism offered in Chapter 1.

Social science history rests on a flawed concept of historical explanation. It bypasses the contingent beliefs and meanings that inform actions. It implicitly assumes that the concept of causation found in the natural sciences also suits human action. This modeling of history on a scientific concept of causation seems to have two main attractions. Sometimes it represents an attempt to claim for a favored approach to history the prestige of natural science: talk of explaining nations, actions, and the like by causal laws can sound impressively rigorous when compared to less formal approaches. At other times, it springs from lax thinking: its proponents rightly recognize that there is a universal feature of explanation such that to explain something is to relate it to other things, and this leads them wrongly to assume that the relationship between *explanans* and *explanandum* also must be universal, where the prestige of natural science ensures that they identify this universal relationship with the scientific concept of causation. The main attractions of social science history derive, therefore, from the prestige of the natural sciences. Surely, however, the success of natural science does not preclude other forms of explanation.

The scientific concept of causation is inappropriate for the social sciences because beliefs and desires cannot be reduced to intervening variables. Social scientists can explain actions and practices properly only if they appeal to the beliefs and desires that inform those actions and practices. When social scientists explain actions as products of reasons, they imply that the actors concerned in some sense could have reasoned differently, and if the actors had done so, they also could have acted differently. Because actions and practices often depend on the reasoned choices of people, they are the products of conscious or subconscious decisions rather than the determined outcomes of laws or processes; after all, choices would not be choices if causal laws fixed their content. Social science thus instantiates a concept of rationality that precludes explaining actions and practices in a way modeled on natural science. Social scientists must allow, instead, for the inherent contingency of the objects they study, including governance and nations and their histories.

NARRATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The nostalgia of much recent writing about national histories derives in part from ambivalence about social science history. If the rise of social science history and technocratic policymaking were wrong turnings, perhaps the social scientist should turn back and recreate a lost era of public intellectuals and national histories. Again, if social scientists cannot properly elucidate the rise and changing governance of nations using correlations, models, and classifications, perhaps they should turn back to narratives of their development. Yet, the emphasis here should fall on "perhaps."

Questions about the validity or desirability of a Y that has replaced an X may provide reasons to reconsider X, but they do not necessarily provide reasons to champion X. Nostalgia for classic national histories is justified, in other words, only if such histories are philosophically valid. The classic national histories instantiated a developmental historicism in which narratives rested on the principles of nation, liberty, and progress. The rest of this chapter briefly describes developmental historicism before arguing that although narrative is a valid form of explanation, social scientists should not frame narratives by reference to such principles.

Developmental historicism inspires distinctive approaches to the crafting of national histories and also to the study of earlier national histories. In both cases, the emphasis falls on fidelity to the inherited and arguably inherent characters and traditions of particular nationalities. In this view, a nation embodies a specific and typically unique character or spirit that manifests itself in particular traditions and customs. The British nation is often portrayed, for example, as restrained, tolerant, pragmatic, and more social than political. Developmental historicists do not attempt to reduce any given national history to a broader generalization based on cross-national correlations or classificatory systems. They rely instead on a narrative form of explanation. They tell narratives that explore national histories in terms of the local characters and traditions of the relevant nations.

Similarly, developmental historicism encourages accounts of previous national histories as expressions of the character and tradition of a nation. Stapleton suggests, for example, that "national attachment and commitment have often been an essential springboard to effective critical effort, and a crucial basis of trust, respect and influence between intellectuals and the wider public."[11] In this view, the master narratives of old were written by historians who drew sustenance from the very identities that informed their histories. These historians mined the character and traditions of their nation so as to find wisdom therein, and they thereby acted as the guardians of the national spirit. In the case of Britain, developmental historicists might argue, for example, that the grand historians of the nineteenth century—A. V. Dicey, Leslie Stephen, J. R. Seeley, and others—shared an affinity for the British identity they reproduced in their writings; they shared the strong moral sense, the love of liberty, and the respect for justice and fair play that they found exhibited in British history. Developmental historicists might add that even in the twentieth century historians such as Arthur Bryant, G. M. Trevelyan, and A. L. Rowse captured in their work similar ideas about a British character, ideas that were important in fostering the national spirit exhibited during the World War II. In this view, when national histories are well conceived and well written, they are part of the cultural foundations of the nations whose histories they tell. Developmental historicists might conclude, therefore, that a proper narrative explanation of these national histories should refer to just those identities and traditions that they themselves invoke as the guiding principles of the nation.

In considering the epistemic reasonableness of developmental historicism, it is important to distinguish a general commitment to narrative as a form of explanation from a specific commitment to narratives based on national principles, characters, and traditions. People can reject modernist social science and social science history and conclude that a proper grasp of human actions requires something akin to narrative without also concluding that these narratives should be framed by appeals to certain principles.

Postfoundationalists reject the modernism that informs social science history, with its attempts to explain historical particulars by reference to midlevel or universal laws. Some postfoundationalists thus return to a historicism in which particulars are explicated by being placed in appropriate contexts composed of yet other particulars. However, although these postfoundationalists thereby return to narrative explanations, they need not return to the developmental historicism of the classic national histories; they need not center their narratives on apparently given principles, characters, or traditions.

Developmental historicists relied on apparently given principles to guide their narratives. Typically they treated nations as organic peoples constituted by common traditions associated with ethical, functional, and linguistic ties as well as a shared past. They implied that these traditions embodied principles that provided a basis for continuity as well as for gradual evolution in the history of a nation. Some of them postulated a racial or biological basis to national traditions. Others conceived of these traditions as products of geographical and other contexts that were supposed to have provided favorable settings for the emergence of particular character traits and social practices.[12] The history of Britain was often narrated, for example, in terms of a national character that was supposed to encompass individualism and self-reliance, a passion for liberty, a willingness to pursue enterprise and trade, and a no-nonsense pragmatism, all of which in their turn were sometimes traced back to Teutonic roots among tribes and village communities in Northern Europe. In addition, developmental historicists often framed the unfolding of national characters, traditions, and principles using organic metaphors and evolutionary theories.[13] At times they even postulated a more general process of evolution, locating different nations and civilizations at various stages of this process. They implied that all civilizations followed a similar path of development but that different contextual factors had given rise to varied characters and traditions such that some were currently further along this path than others. One fashionable reason for comparing different nations was precisely to clarify the nature of this general path of development.

Postfoundationalism highlights the importance of a concept of tradition to capture the importance of contexts in explaining beliefs and actions. Because people cannot arrive at beliefs through experiences unless they already have a prior set of beliefs, their experiences can lead them to beliefs only because they already have access to tradition. A tradition constitutes the necessary background to the beliefs people adopt and the actions they seek to perform. Nonetheless, postfoundationalists need not adopt the particular concept of tradition that typically informs developmental historicism. On the contrary, a counterfactual argument undermines the idea that traditions define limits to the beliefs people later might go on to adopt. Imagine counterfactually that we could identify limits imposed by traditions on the beliefs individuals could adopt. Because traditions would impose the limits, they could not be natural limits transcending all contexts. Further, because one could identify these limits, one could describe them to those individuals who inherited the relevant traditions; so, assuming they could understand us, they could come to recognize these limits and thereby understand the beliefs they allegedly could not adopt. However, because they could understand the sorts of beliefs these limits preclude, and because there could not be any natural restriction preventing them from holding these beliefs, they could adopt these beliefs, so these beliefs could not be beliefs they could not come to hold. Perhaps one aspect of this counterfactual argument might still appear to need justifying—the assumption that the individual affected by a limit could understand our account of it. Surely, however, there is no reason to assume that people cannot translate between webs of beliefs no matter how different the webs might be. When the individuals concerned first heard our account of the limit, they might not have the requisite concepts to understand us; but surely they would share some concepts, perceptions, practices, or needs with us, and surely they could use these as a point of entry into our worldview so as eventually to understand us.

The foregoing counterfactual argument establishes that traditions are only an influence on the beliefs that people adopt and the actions that people attempt to perform. Traditions do not determine or limit the beliefs that people can come to hold. So, traditions must themselves be products of situated agency. The ability to develop traditions is an essential part of people's being in the world. People are always confronting slightly novel circumstances that require them to apply tradition anew, and a tradition cannot fix the nature of its application. Whenever people confront an unfamiliar situation, they have to extend or modify their inheritance to encompass it, and as they do so, they develop this inheritance. Every time someone applies a tradition, they reflect on it, whether consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously. They try to understand it afresh in the light of the relevant circumstances, and in doing so, they open it to innovation. Change thus occurs even when people think that they are adhering to a tradition they regard as sacrosanct.

Although tradition is unavoidable, it is, therefore, only a starting point, not something that determines or limits later performances. Social scientists should be wary of representing tradition as an inevitable presence in all that the individual ever does lest they should leave too slight a role for agency. In particular, social scientists should not imply that a fixed tradition is in anyway constitutive of the beliefs people later come to hold or the actions people later seek to perform. Although individuals must set out against the background of a tradition, they later can extend or modify that tradition in a way that might make it anything but constitutive of their later beliefs and actions.

This analysis of tradition as a starting point but not a destination undercuts the fixity and essentialism of the principles evoked by developmental historicists. Developmental historicists equate traditions with fixed cores to which they ascribe temporal variations and even a progressive unfolding. But once social scientists accept that traditions do not have fixed cores, they undermine attempts to narrate national histories in terms of apparently given character traits or principles. Social scientists can no longer appeal to fixed principles to define the past and relate it to the present in a continuous process of development. National characters, national traditions, and nations themselves can no longer appear as the outer expressions of given traits. On the contrary, the principles associated with any particular nation now appear as the contingent consequences of the various ways in which people have adopted, modified, and rejected their inheritances. Nations do not embody fixed principles that determine their nature, their governance, and the ways in which they develop. Nations are, instead, the constantly changing products of contingent activity.

DECENTERING NATIONS

The present day is a critical juncture in the study and production of national histories. Neither social science history nor developmental historicism has epistemic legitimacy. Faith in them has dwindled along with belief, respectively, in modernism and ineluctable progress. Social science history has fallen before a revived historicism: the beliefs and actions people adopt are saturated with their particular prior theories, so social scientists can properly explain these beliefs and actions only by relating them to specific contexts, not by appealing to ahistorical correlations and classifications. Developmental historicism has fallen before a growing sense of contingency: human agency is indeterminate, so social scientists can properly narrate shifts in contexts only by depicting them as open ended, not as determined by allegedly given principles. Social scientists thus require ways of studying earlier national histories and crafting new ones that allow appropriately for both historicism and contingency. Decentered theory suggests here that they need a postfoundational historicism.

Consider the prospects for studies of earlier national histories. Here social science history, on the one hand, suggests that social scientists should seek to correlate the production of national histories with other alleged social facts (such as the level of economic development), while developmental historicism, on the other hand, suggests that social scientists should understand the content of earlier national histories as itself a reflection of the character of the relevant nation. Both suggest that their own perspective is neutral, whether as science or as the expression of a shared tradition. In contrast, decentered theory prompts social scientists to offer critiques of national histories; it encourages us to debunk earlier national histories by narrating them as contingent products of specific historical contexts.

Of course, social science history and developmental historicism can inspire criticisms of earlier national histories. A social science historian might argue, for example, that an institution that national historians represent as a product of the national character is in fact explained by a transnational correlation covering similar institutions in other nation states. Similarly, a developmental historicist might argue that a national historian has misinterpreted the character and tradition at the heart of their nation, maybe seeing tolerance where really there is class prejudice. However, even if social science history and developmental historicism can inspire such criticisms, these criticisms resemble a kind of audit more than they resemble the critiques prompted by decentered theory.

An audit embodies a concern to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a national history with respect to specific facts or judgments. Although an audit can be a perfectly acceptable mode of evaluation—notably if it is aware of its own historicity and contingency—it still limits criticism to a kind of faultfinding. The critic lists one or more faults, big or small, in a national history in order to pass judgment on its merits from a perspective that at least gestures at a given set of facts or judgments from which that history departs.

Decentered theory supplements such faultfinding with critique. It certainly finds fault, suggesting, for instance, that many of the histories told by social science historians fail adequately to elucidate people's motivations because the historian assumes that their motivations can be read off from correlations. Further, decentered theory suggests that the master narratives of developmental historicists fail properly to acknowledge the diversity of the characters, identities, customs, and traditions found in a nation. Nonetheless, decentered theory, as will now be argued, takes historicism and contingency seriously in a way that goes beyond mere faultfinding, situating it in broader critiques.

Consider the implications of the particularity of the social scientist's perspective as a critic of any given national history. Once social scientists allow that their criticisms are not based on given facts, but rather infused with their theoretical assumptions, they might become more hesitant to find fault; they might be wary of treating their particular theoretical perspective as a valid one from which to judge others. This hesitation might give rise to self-reflexive moments in their presentations of their studies of earlier national histories, and these moments might suggest that their criticisms arise against the background of theoretical commitments and concepts that others might not share. Social scientists might thus show a greater reflexivity about the source of their authority, for while they cannot avoid taking a stance in a way that commits them to the epistemic authority of some set of beliefs, they might at least recognize that this authority is provisional and justified within a contingent set of concepts, and they might even recognize that they are offering a narrative that is just one among a field of possible narratives. In this way, social scientists would move from faultfinding to critique. Instead of evaluating others in terms of apparently given facts, judgments, or concepts, they would find themselves either juxtaposing rival narratives or asking what should follow from a set of concepts that they happen to share with those with whom they are engaging.

Consider now the implications of the particularity of any given national history as the object of critique. All too often national histories present themselves as given or neutral narratives based on secure empirical facts or scientific theories. Critique consists less of an audit of its object than in the act of unmasking its object as contingent, partial, or both. Critique might unmask the contingency of its object by showing it to be just one among a field of possible narratives. Critique might unmask the partiality of its object by showing how it arises against the background of an inherited tradition that is held by a particular group within society and perhaps even serves the interests of just that group. Here critique almost always overlaps with other kinds of faultfinding, for by unmasking the contingency and partiality of national histories, it typically portrays them, even if only tacitly, as being mistaken about their own nature or even as eliding their own nature in the interests of a group or class.

So, critique privileges unmasking over faultfinding. Unmasking typically occurs through either philosophical analysis or historical genealogy. Critique can deploy philosophical analysis to unpack the conceptual presuppositions of a national history and to highlight elisions, contradictions, and gaps in these presuppositions. Much of this chapter has been an attempt to sketch such a philosophical critique of modernism in social science history and of essentialism in developmental historicism. However, critique also can deploy historical genealogies to unpack the roots of these presuppositions and other related ideas in particular traditions, debates, or other contexts. When national histories attempt to ground their correlations or narratives in allegedly given facts about social or national life, they efface the contingency not only of the practices of which they tell but also of themselves as particular modes of knowing. Genealogy can show how these modes of knowing—developmental historicism and social science history—are themselves historically contingent. It can show how representations of the nation that present themselves as neutral or scientific are in fact temporally and culturally circumscribed. Social scientists move from faultfinding to critique, in other words, when they shift their attention from an audit of a national history in terms of a given set of facts or judgments to the use of philosophical analysis and historical genealogies to bring into view the concepts and theories that inform it. Arguably, such critiques already appear in various studies of the production of national identities in the heritage industry, the history of historiography, national imaginaries, and popular culture.

Decentered theory does not entail a pernicious relativism. Although the claim that all narratives embody particular perspectives undermines the ideal of absolute certainty, postfoundationalists can relinquish this ideal and still avoid a pernicious relativism. Postfoundationalists can defend the reasonableness of some narratives, and not others, by reference to shared normative rules and practices by which to compare rival accounts of agreed propositions.

To argue that decentered theory does not entail relativism is to raise the question: What alternative national histories might social scientists craft? This question gains further importance from two related considerations. First, critique typically lacks purchase unless it is combined at least tacitly with an appeal to a better alternative. Because people have to act, they have to hold a web of beliefs on which to act, so they cannot forsake their current beliefs unless better ones are available. Second, postfoundational critiques of earlier national histories typically make the claim that these earlier histories failed to capture all of the varied identities and practices adopted by peoples, and this claim, in its turn, relies at least implicitly on the evocation of narratives revealing more of the plurality of these identities and practices.

Decentered theory returns to narrative forms of explanation akin to those of developmental historicists, but its narratives eschew the old appeals to apparently given principles, characters, and customs. Decentered theory replaces an overly essentialist concept of tradition with a more postfoundational and pragmatic one. What difference might this make for the national histories that social scientists craft? One difference arises over what it means to conceive of identities, traditions, or nations as concrete social realities. Although decentered theory allows that traditions are embedded in practices, which are, of course, part of concrete social reality, it does not concede that particular identities, traditions, or nations are natural kinds with definite boundaries by which to individuate them. There are no natural or given limits to particular nations by which to separate them out from the general flux of human life. The border of a nation does not clearly appear with those who are descended from some group, who live within some territory, who are citizens of some state, who speak some language, or anything else of the sort.

The problems of individuating nations are most clear when distinguishing nations from states, for nations can aspire to a statehood they do not possess, and states can cover only part of a nation or be multinational.

National identities are typically based on ethnicities, symbols, memories, myths, and other constructions whose salience crosses geographical borders. But decentered theory suggests that social scientists cannot treat as natural kinds even those nation states with fairly clear territorial domains, such as Britain with its maritime boundary. Of course, states have borders associated especially with the limits to their sovereign authority over a population and their commercial and other activities. Nonetheless, social scientists need to learn to conceive of a state's borders as porous and vague. Even populations and commerce constantly escape any one political authority, as in weak states or states with multilevel governance, and as with much migration and trade.

Where social scientists locate the border of a nation, and so how they conceive of that nation, is a pragmatic decision that they can justify only by reference to the purposes of their so doing. Social scientists postulate borders so as to demarcate the domain of their historical inquiries or to draw attention to those features of the flux of human life that they believe can best explain one or more object or event. When postfoundational historicists craft national histories, they are thus likely to pay special attention to the production and crossing of borders. Boundaries appear as constructed and porous, not natural and fixed. Postfoundational historicists highlight, first, the constructed nature of borders. Their national histories might include accounts of the processes by which national identities have been constructed in concrete historical contexts. Genealogical critiques are, in this respect, a contribution to alternative national histories that narrate the ways in which peoples construct nations through the production of a historiography and also historical images and myths in other media such as novels and films.[14] Postfoundational historicists highlight, secondly, the porous nature of borders. Their national histories might include accounts of transnational flows, including diasporas and exiles. The history of the British state can be told as that of at least four nations, to which might be added additional exchanges especially with Europe and empire.[15]

Another difference between decentered theory, with its pragmatic concept of tradition, and developmental historicism, with its more essentialist one, appears in their characteristic analyses of the conventions, shared understandings, or interactions that are found within traditions, practices, or nations. No doubt practices exhibit conventions, and no doubt nations often have relatively stable customs. However, social scientists can conceive of these conventions and customs as emergent entities, not as determining or structuring the relevant practices or nations. Social scientists can accept that the members of a nation or the participants in any social practice often seek to conform to the relevant conventions or customs, but social scientists also might point out, first, that participants do not always do so and, second, that even when they do, they still might misunderstand the conventions and customs. Thus, social scientists should not take conventions and customs as determining practices or nations. On the contrary, decentered theory holds that individuals are agents who are capable of modifying—and who necessarily interpret—the beliefs that they inherit, and so, by implication, the actions that are appropriate to any practice in which they participate. This argument does not imply that everyone is a Napoleon who, as an individual, has a significant effect on the historical direction a nation takes. It implies only that people are agents who are capable of modifying their inheritance and so acting in novel ways. When they do so, they are highly unlikely to have a significant effect on a nation unless other people make similar modifications, and even then the changes in the nation may be unlikely to correspond to any that they might intend. Nations rarely, if ever, depend directly on the actions of any given individual. They do, however, consist solely of the changing actions of a range of individuals.

All dominant national characters and traditions are constantly open to contestation and change. Instead of determining the nation, they arise as contingent products of processes of contestation and change. So, when postfoundational historicists craft decentered national histories, they are likely to pay special attention to these processes. National characters and traditions appear as diverse and discontinuous. So, postfoundational historicists highlight not just the production and crossing of borders, but also the plurality of the identities and customs found in any nation. When modernists invoke collective categories—the principles, characters, and traditions of developmental historicists, as well as the correlations and classifications of social science historians—these categories are liable to hide, willfully or otherwise, the diverse beliefs and desires that motivated individuals. Peoples include differences of, for example, race and gender, and also differences within races and genders, and all these differences are neglected if social scientists lump them together in a unified nation.[16] So, postfoundational historicists might explore the ways in which dominant identities elide others and even define themselves against these others. The rise of some British identities can be told, for example, in terms of an overt opposition to a Catholicism associated with the French.[17] Postfoundational historicists highlight, fourthly, discontinuity as identities are transformed over time. Shifts in the British nation appear, for instance, to involve novel projections back on to the past rather than a continuous development of core themes. Prominent national identities changed dramatically from a sense of Englishness forged during Tudor times, through the Britishness that appeared during the wars against France, on to the invention of an Imperial mission, the elegiac invocation of the shires, and more recently still, New Labour's vision of "Cool Britannia."[18]

CONCLUSION

Because decentered theory represents the nation as constructed, transnational, differentiated, and discontinuous, the result can be described as a history beyond or without the nation. The nation is nation-less in much the same sense as the state is stateless. Narratives of social construction denaturalize the nation, showing it to be the imagined product of specific historical processes. Narratives of transnational flows disperse the nation, highlighting the movement of ideas, customs, and norms across borders. Narratives of difference fragment the nation, exhibiting some of the plural groups within it. Narratives of discontinuity interrupt the nation, revealing ruptures and transformations through time. Is a denaturalized, dispersed, fragmented, and interrupted nation even remotely close to what is normally meant by a nation? Far from being nostalgic for national histories, perhaps it is time for social scientists to start telling the histories of networks of peoples. Perhaps social scientists should craft histories of all sorts of overlapping groups only some of whom attempted, more or less successfully, to construct national imaginaries and to impose those imaginaries on others.

5 Network Theory

To decenter the nation is to fragment its unity. Society does not appear, as it did for much of the nineteenth century, as a unity defined by fixed properties or a fixed path of development. Society no longer resembles an organic whole with a common interest emerging out of the shared culture, language, and past of a people. Decentered theory suggests, on the contrary, that society is composed of diverse groups performing all kinds of conflicting actions in pursuit of their varied aims. This decentered view of society superficially resembles some of the pluralist theories of the twentieth century. As with these earlier pluralisms, decentered theory challenges as reifications both the idea of the sovereign state as a unified entity and the idea of a nation, people, or public as having a shared essence, will, or opinion on any given matter.

Pluralism includes a diverse set of theories. Nineteenth-century pluralists often wrote in reaction against utilitarian radicalism. Neville Figgis and F. W. Maitland, following Otto von Gierke, looked back to the Middle Ages and early modern Europe to explore the independent legal and metaphysical status of associations.[1] They argued that groups are, in some senses, persons. Generally they emphasized the role of relationships based on contracts and trust in the formation and maintenance of associations. They argued that these relationships provided the legal basis for the existence of groups as persons who should be free from most types of state control and regulation. Maitland argued that the idea that associations have personalities is not just a legal fiction. He defended the real personality of associations, arguing that they could act for themselves rather being reliant on their individual members to act on their behalf. Maitland and the other nineteenth-century pluralists were holists who believed that a group is in a metaphysical as well as legal sense more than the beliefs and actions of its members. Sometimes these pluralists even implied that the principle good for individuals is the integrity of the groups to which they belong, a view that has now resurfaced in the communitarian literature.

The empirical pluralists of the twentieth century were far less impressed by the metaphysical and legal standing of associations. These empirical pluralists were part of the modernist reaction against the developmental historicism and organicist holism of the nineteenth century. Social scientists such as Graham Wallas and Arthur Bentley rejected those approaches that they believed to be overly philosophical and legalistic.[2] They typically argued (sometimes explicitly echoing the utilitarian radicals) that the state consisted solely of the processes of government. In addition, they argued that these processes of government depended on the activity of competing groups in society, and that this activity often bore little resemblance to that prescribed by constitutions and formal laws. Their pluralism thus consisted in their recognition that organized interests often played an important role in modern democratic politics. Constitutional nostrums did not accurately reflect the complexities of modern government.

Decentered theories of the state and nation echo themes from an earlier empirical pluralism that inspired social scientists to study pressure groups and somewhat later policy networks. Policy networks consist of governmental and societal actors whose interactions with one another give rise to policies. The relevant actors are linked through informal practices as well as, or instead of, formal institutions. Typically they operate through interdependent relationships with a view to securing their individual goals by collaborating with one other. Policy networks have long been a topic of study in social science. Recently, however, they have been especially central to the literature on governance, with governance often being defined as rule by and through networks.

This chapter explores the implications of decentered theory for the study of policy networks and network governance. To decenter is to focus on the social construction of policy networks, showing that they arise out of the ability of individuals to create and act on meanings. Decentered theory challenges the idea that inexorable and impersonal forces are driving a shift from hierarchies to network governance. It suggests instead that many different agents acting against the background of diverse traditions are constructing network governance differently.

THE STUDY OF POLICY NETWORKS

Tanja Börzel offers a useful starting point for reviewing the literature on policy networks.[3] She distinguishes between approaches that treat networks as a form of interest intermediation and those that treat networks as a form of governance. To these two approaches might be added one that treats networks as a form of management.

Networks as Interest Intermediation

Social scientists often treat policy network as a mesolevel concept. Policy networks link the microlevel of analysis, which deals with the role of interests and government in particular policy decisions, to the macrolevel of analysis, which deals with broader questions about the distribution of power in modern society. Policy network analysis stresses the importance of organizational rather than personal relationships, and it focuses on the extent to which there is continuity in the interactions between interest groups and government departments. These interactions constitute a process of interest intermediation. A focus on policy networks thus moves beyond a simple model of government as based on firmly defined institutional boundaries and clearly observable power relations. Instead, policy networks are portrayed as sets of interdependent organizations that have to exchange resources to realize their goals.[4] Relationships within policy networks are characterized by their power-dependent nature. Power is not seen as simply concentrated but as distributed horizontally as well as vertically. A focus on policy networks highlights the complexity of the interactions between the different organizations involved in policymaking.

The idea of policy networks as interest intermediation feeds into typologies and lists of the characteristics of different types of policy networks. These typologies suggest that policy networks can vary along a continuum according to the closeness of the relationships among the groups within them. One prominent typology is that of Dave Marsh and Rod Rhodes.[5] This typology postulates a continuum with at one end policy communities (which have close relationships among the relevant organizations) and at the other end issue networks (which have loose relationships). A policy community has the following characteristics: a limited number of participants with some groups consciously excluded; frequent and high-quality interaction between all members of the community on all matters related to the policy issues; continuity over time of values, membership, and policy outcomes; consensus, with the ideology, values, and broad policy preferences shared by all participants; exchange relationships based on all members of the policy community controlling some resources; and a concept of power as a positive-sum game. In contrast, issue networks involve only policy consultation and are characterized by many participants; fluctuating interactions and access for the various members; the absence of consensus and the presence of conflict; interaction based on consultation rather than negotiation or bargaining; an unequal power relationship in which many participants may have few resources and little or no access; and a concept of power as a zero-sum game. Obviously one implication of postulating a continuum is that any network can be located at some point along it.

There is much debate about the literature on policy networks as interest intermediation. For example, Keith Dowding criticizes this literature on three grounds.[6] First, he argues that the concept of a policy network is used as a descriptive metaphor rather than to generate causal explanations. Second, he suggests that the literature does not go beyond offering typologies to actually specify causal relationships. Third, he argues that the analysis of games and bargaining is not only undeveloped but actually hindered by confusing distinctions between the micro- (or individual), meso- (or network), and macro- (or state) levels of analysis. Dowding advocates an approach that would combine rational choice theory with more extensive quantitative network analysis.[7]

Proponents of the idea of policy networks as interest intermediation reject such criticisms. They complain that rational choice theory focuses on agents and does not explore how the structure of networks affects the process of bargaining. Marsh and Martin Smith argue, for example, that network structures shape the preferences of actors so that there is a dialectical relationship between structures and agents.[8] In their view, networks are comprised at the microlevel of strategically calculating subjects whose actions shape policy outcomes, but the preferences and interests of these actors cannot simply be assumed—they must be explained by a mesolevel or macrolevel theory.

Networks as Governance

A more recent literature treats policy networks as the heart of governance. This literature falls into two broad schools, which vary in how they seek to explain network behavior: the power-dependence school and the rational choice school. These two approaches are illustrated below by reference to the work of the Anglo-Governance school and that of the Max Planck Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung.

Power-Dependence

The Anglo-Governance school promoted much research through the Economic and Social Research Council's Local Government and Whitehall Programmes.[9] The Anglo-Governance school uses "governance" as a broader term than "government." They argue that in today's governance public services are provided by complex permutations of government and the private and voluntary sectors. This new governance emerged as the functional differentiation of the state led to greater complexity. Interorganizational linkages have become a defining characteristic of service delivery. The several agencies involved have to exchange resources if they are to deliver services effectively. Networks are a common form of social coordination, and managing interorganizational linkages is as important for private-sector management as it is for public-sector management. Networks are a means of coordinating and allocating resources. They are an alternative to, not a hybrid of, markets and hierarchies, for they rely distinctively on trust, cooperation, and diplomacy.

Actor-Centered Institutionalism

Fritz Scharpf and the scholars at the Max Planck Institut also invoke networks as representing a significant change in public organization and action. They treat networks as structural arrangements that deal with particular policy problems. In their view, networks are relatively stable clusters of public and private actors. The linkages between network actors allow for the exchange of information, trust, and other policy resources. Networks have their own integrative logic. The dominant decision rules stress bargaining and sounding-out.[10]

To explain how policy networks work, Scharpf combines rational choice theory and the new institutionalism to produce actor-centered institutionalism.[11] He argues that institutions are systems of rules that structure the opportunities for actors (individual and corporate) to realize their preferences. Policy arises from the interactions of boundedly rational actors whose beliefs and desires are shaped by the norms that govern their interactions. So, networks are an institutional setting in which public and private actors interact. They are informal and rule governed institutions. The agreed rules build trust and foster communication while also reducing uncertainty. These rules are the basis of nonhierarchic coordination. Scharpf then uses game theory to analyze and explain these rule-governed interactions.

Networks as Management

There is much agreement that governance as networks is a common and important form of public organization and action in advanced industrial societies. The apparent spread of networks has fuelled research on how to manage them. The Governance Club of Walter Kickert, Jan Kooiman, and their colleagues at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, illustrates this strand of research.[12] The basic argument of the Governance Club is that a lack of legitimacy, the complexity of policy processes, and the multitude of institutions involved in policymaking all now combine to reduce the state to only one of many actors. Other institutions are, to a great extent, autonomous; they are self-governing. The state steers at a distance.

There are three main approaches to network management: the instrumental, interactive, and institutional. The instrumental approach is a top-down form of steering. It concentrates on the ways in which the state can exercise its legitimate authority. As such, it typically presumes a state department to be the focal organization in a network. The state is to devise and impose tools that foster integration in and between networks and so enable it better to attain its objectives. One problem with this instrumental approach is, of course, that it relies on the state being able to exercise effective control when the whole study of network governance has exposed the ever present problem of control deficits.

The interactive approach to network management moves away from hierarchic modes of control. It presumes the mutual dependence of the actors operating in networks. Collective action depends on cooperation, with goals and strategies developing out of mutual learning. Management thus requires negotiation and diplomacy. There is a need to understand others' objectives and to build relations of trust with them. Chief executive officers in the public sector are urged to develop interpersonal, communication, and listening skills. This interactive approach is often costly; cooperation is time-consuming, objectives can be blurred, and outcomes can be delayed.

Finally, the institutional approach to network management focuses on the rules and structures against the background of which interactions take place. Management strategies seek to change the relationships among actors, the distribution of resources, the rules of the game, and even values and perceptions. The aim is incremental changes in incentives and cultures. One problem with this approach is that institutions and their cultures are notoriously resistant to change.

DECENTERED THEORY

The above overview of the literature on networks seeks to offer a balanced summary of what are continuing debates. In contrast, this section considers the alternative offered by decentered theory. Most modernist approaches to networks focus on their objective characteristics and the oligopoly of the political market place. They stress the relationship of the size of networks to policy outcomes, and they point toward strategies by which the center might steer networks. To decenter networks is, in contrast, to focus on how they are constructed by individuals acting on conscious, subconscious, and unconscious beliefs and desires.

Decentered theory changes the concept of a network. It treats networks as arising from people acting on the beliefs they adopt against the background of traditions and in response to dilemmas. As a result, a decentered theory of networks entails a shift of topos from institutions to meanings in action. Decentered theory suggests that the existing approaches to networks restrain the centrifugal impulse of the diverse beliefs of social actors. Current approaches reduce the diversity of networks and network governance to a logic of modernization, institutional norms, or a set of classifications and correlations across policy networks. Their proponents tame an otherwise chaotic picture of multiple actors creating a contingent pattern of rule through their conflicting actions.

The Contingency of Networks

There are four main differences between decentered theory and current approaches to networks. First, current approaches often rest on modernist assumptions. In particular they often treat networks as social structures from which social scientists can read off the beliefs, interests, and actions of individuals. The network to which individuals belong, or the position individuals have within a network, allegedly defines the content of their beliefs and interests. In contrast, decentered theory treats networks as enacted by individuals. Rather than the beliefs and actions of individuals being determined by their objective position, their beliefs and actions construct the nature of the network. Decentered theory encourages the researcher to explore the contingent ways in which networks are made and remade through the activities of particular individuals.

Second, current explanations of change in networks rely on exogenous, not endogenous, causes. Marsh and Rhodes argue, for example, that networks create routines for policymaking and that change is consequently incremental.[13] They identify four broad categories of change—economic, ideological, knowledge, and institutional—all of which are external to the network. A decentered theory of networks implies that people construct networks by acting on the beliefs they adopt against the background of traditions. It then emphasizes the need to look for the origins of change in people's contingent responses to dilemmas. By focusing on people's responses to dilemmas, exogenous change is built into the heart of networks, with change taking the form of agents confronting new experiences and responding to the actions of others.

Third, the network literature is characterized by typologies. Decentered theory challenges the idea that network dimensions and characteristics are given. It is probably a commonplace observation that even simple objects are not presented in pure perceptions but are constructed in part by the theories individuals hold true of the world. When attention turns to complex political objects, the notion that such objects are presented as immutable facts appears unsustainable. Individuals construct the facts about networks through the stories they hand down to one another. The study of networks is inextricably bound up with historical narratives.

A final characteristic of the literature on policy networks is that it is practical and seeks to improve network management. A brief survey of the extensive literature on this topic appeared earlier in this chapter. Current approaches to networks treat them as given facts—like cars. Accordingly, the researcher is viewed similarly to the car mechanic as someone who finds the right tool to affect repairs. In contrast, decentered theory posits that networks cannot be understood in this way. It insists that agents and so networks cannot be understood adequately apart from traditions. The people whose beliefs, interests, and actions constitute a network necessarily acquire the relevant interests and beliefs against the background of traditions. In other words, there is no essentialist account of a network, but only the several stories of the participants and observers. Thus, there can be no single tool kit for managing networks. Instead practitioners learn by telling stories, listening to, and comparing them.

The Making of Networks

Decentered theory turns current approaches to networks on their head by insisting that individuals enact networks through the stories they tell one another. Decentered theory uses the concepts of situated agency and tradition to explore the ways people make networks.

Situated Agents

Chapter 2 suggested that there is some confusion among postfoundationalists about the role of aggregate concepts in the study of governance. Poststructuralists sometimes provide aggregate accounts of practices by treating meanings as products of quasi-structures that are defined by the relations among the signs of which they are composed. But these aggregate accounts seem to contradict the postfoundational stress on contingency and particularity; after all, beliefs and actions cannot be contingent if their content is given by the relations among the units within the relevant quasi-structures. The concept of situated agency is a potential way out of this impasse. It highlights the ability of individuals to reason and to act in novel ways against the background of inherited traditions.

Henrik Bang and Eva Sørensen's study of the Everyday Maker provides an example of situated agency.[14] Bang and Sørensen interviewed twenty-five active citizens in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen to see how they engaged with government. Bang and Sørensen observe that there is a long tradition of networking in Denmark. They argue that Denmark has experienced the conflicting trends of political decentralization (which has further blurred the boundaries between public, private, and voluntary sectors) and political internationalization (which has moved decision making upward to the European Union). They describe this shift from government to network governance as prototypical, and they suggest that Denmark currently exhibits a paradoxical mixture of hierarchical government and network governance.

In the context of this new politics, the Everyday Maker focuses on immediate and concrete policy problems at the lowest-possible level. Civic engagement is about finding a balance between autonomous and dependent relationships among elites and lay actors in networks that might be within or beyond the state. The Everyday Maker is self-reliant and capable; perceives politics as a concrete and direct way of handling differences and disputes in everyday life; values community (conceived as the setting for addressing common concerns); and believes that democratic values and procedures apply to high and low levels of politics alike. Thus, Grethe (a grassroots activist in Bang and Sørensen's study) reflects that she has acquired the competence to act out various roles as contractor, board member, and leader. There has been an explosion of issue networks, policy communities, policy projects, and user boards, all involving actors from within and without government. The task of the Everyday Maker is to enter in and to participate at one or more of the numerous available nodes. Political activity has thus shifted somewhat from formal organizing to informal networking. In short, Bang and Sørensen draw a picture of Nørrebro's networks through the eyes of its political activists.

Traditions

One popular explanation for the growth of network arrangements posits that advanced industrial societies grow by a process of functional and institutional specialization and the fragmentation of public organization and action.[15] For some institutionalists and critical realists, this differentiation is part of a larger social process, such as a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism.[16] In contrast, decentered theory stresses the ways in which agents who are situated in different traditions understand and respond to network governance. Networks are understood through traditions. In addition, the participants in networks construct and reconstruct their own traditions. People learn about the network and its constituent organizations through stories of, for example, famous events and characters. Traditions are passed on from person to person. They are learnt. Much will be taken for granted as common sense. Some will be challenged; for example, when beliefs collide and have to be changed or reconciled.

This decentered approach can be illustrated by reference to dominant state traditions. John Loughlin and Guy Peters distinguish the Anglo-Saxon (no state) tradition, the Germanic (organic) tradition, the French (Jacobin) tradition, and the Scandinavian tradition (which mixes the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic).[17] In the Germanic tradition, the state and civil society are part of one organic whole. The state is a transcendent entity; its defining characteristic is that it is a *rechtsstaat,* that is, a legal state vested with exceptional authority but constrained by its laws. Civil servants are not just public employees but also personifications of state authority. The Anglo-Saxon tradition draws a clearer boundary between the state and civil society; there is no legal basis to the state, and civil servants have no constitutional position. The Jacobin tradition sees the French state as the one and indivisible republic, exercising strong central authority to contain the antagonistic relations between the state and civil society. The Scandinavian tradition is organic and characterized by *rechtsstaat,* but it differs from the Germanic tradition in being a decentralized unitary state with a strong participation ethic.

Of course, this account of state traditions is broad. Traditions do not exist as ideal types from which specific instances can be straightforwardly compared. A more thorough account would cover the variety and nuances of traditions as they are learnt. Nonetheless, this broad account illustrates how traditions shape different patterns of policy networks and network governance.

Network Dynamics

The most common and recurrent criticism of policy network analysis is that it does not and cannot explain change.[18] Most current explanations of change in networks appeal to inexorable and impersonal forces such as the functional differentiation of the modern state or path dependency. They rely on exogenous causes, arguing, for example, that networks create routines for policymaking so that change is incremental.[19] In contrast, because decentered theory focuses on the social construction of policy networks through the ability of individuals to create meaning, it encourages us to look for the origins of change in the contingent responses of individuals to dilemmas.

Decentered theory opens the way here to a political ethnography of networks that gives due recognition to individual agency. Networks are constantly being remade and changed by individual actors. One example is a recent study of management reforms in the police. The research draws on focus group discussions and interviews with twenty-seven senior and midlevel officers and managers.[20] The researchers concluded that the police understood the reforms as a shift from a command-and-control bureaucracy through markets and on to networks, and this shift posed some acute dilemmas for the police. The major dilemma was not the limitations of working with contracts or any other governing structure but rather the attempt to balance apparently contradictory demands. Police officers know how to uphold rulebooks, manage contracts, and work with local partners, but they struggle to reconcile these ways of working, believing that they conflict with and undermine one another.

Within the police force, there is commitment to networking by those who see it as the future:

> I think the community policing thing is a good idea—I think it works—the problem of course is that it is hard to keep people in the same place for significant periods, but I think it's good, I think it's good for the community. We come up with lots of initiatives—we are good at that—but we are poor finishers—too many goals really. I think we should hit on three things and do them.[21]

Even other police officers too see some virtue in a more integrated approach:

> A whole of government approach might consider bringing all services under the police umbrella—ambulance, fire, security. So, for example, if there was a major football game, the events planner could ring one number and organise police officers, St John's Ambulance, private security, traffic coordination. A policy like this would give us a better response to things too. The others might not have the powers but they would have the powers to detain until we arrived or at least provide a liaison point with the police on the ground. It would give us much better surge capacity.

However, many police officers believe that networking has limits and that it conflicts with their other ways of working. There is widespread recognition that the police officers want to focus on crime and see networking as soft.

> Police don't want to get into the crime prevention stuff though. No one wants to do these jobs—they want to leave it to the warm and fuzzies. Police want to wear their underpants on the outside and save the world—they want to make the person pay. Culture has changed to some extent but it is still influenced by older people. People who are attracted to the policing role often have that mindset.

Also, police officers perceive a conflict between networking and other recent reforms and concerns. This perception manifests itself in an aversion to change and to criticisms of the leadership. One officer makes the point with brutal simplicity: "Terrorism is a problem—it doesn't go with the ideology of community policing and crime management."

Several accounts of police reform use "police culture" as an explanatory variable.[22] These accounts suggest that police organizations are resistant to change because of "a co-existence of formalized bureaucratic and standardised working practices, with a deeply entrenched and pervasive occupational culture" of hierarchical subordination.[23] A more decentered approach would encourage ethnographers to track the varied ways in which this and other cultures operate through individuals to produce particular dynamics within networks, including those that lead to change.

Implications

How does decentered theory help redefine our understanding of policy networks and network governance? First, decentered theory provides a bottom-up rather than a top-down perspective. Network behavior is understood as rooted in the beliefs and desires of individual actors, and it is explained using the aggregate concepts of tradition and dilemma. Second, the decentered theory offers the possibility of opening up new or alternative research agendas. It poses different questions from those addressed in the existing literature, and it introduces alternative techniques for answering the questions that are typically addressed in that literature. Third, a decentered approach identifies critical theoretical issues that confront the understanding of networks. It offers policymakers distinctive stories about the political environment in which they operate, and in doing so, it challenges the language associated with new public management and the predictive claims made by a number of existing accounts of networks. The rest of this chapter considers these three points in more detail.

A BOTTOM-UP PERSPECTIVE

Much of the literature on policy networks relies on modernist social science. This modernism appears in an inclination to construct explanations of change in networks by appealing to exogenous not endogenous causes, a tendency to offer typologies based on immutable facts, and an assumption that essentialist accounts of networks can give rise to normative prescriptions for improving network management. Decentered theory suggests that each of these elements in the literature is problematic. It encourages an approach to policy networks that views networks as an enactment by individuals based on the stories they tell one another, offers an account of networks that explores their origins and how they have changed, and explains network behavior in terms of the microlevel where the participants in networks act on their beliefs and desires. In short, a decentered approach encourages a bottom-up perspective on meanings in action.

Decentered theory has thus inspired case studies focused on particular networks at the grassroots level. A number of examples are contained in a special issue of *Public Administration* that I coedited with Dave Richards. In one essay Ray Gordon, Martin Kornberger, and Stewart Clegg use a detailed study of a Local Area Command in the New South Wales Police Service as a means to explore corruption and more general issues about the nature of power and rationality.[24] Catherine Durose analyzes neighborhood management networks through a detailed case study of a local government council in Britain. She explores the views of the network that are held by a variety of frontline workers, including health improvement officers, community development officials, and sport and youth workers.[25] Francesca Gains provides an analysis of the nature of local governance by exploring the views of a variety of actors drawn from ten local authorities across Britain.[26] Susan Hodgett and Severine Deneulin tackle general issues around the capability approach to human development by looking more specifically at how the views of local actors shaped the application of the European Union's structural funding in Northern Ireland.[27] Jonathan Davies provides an account of the nature of the local politics of social inclusion and the impact of joined-up approaches to governing in two British cities—Dundee and Hull—through the narratives offered by the stakeholders involved in each respective strategic partnership.[28]

A decentered approach can also inspire studies of policy networks beyond the grassroots level. Catherine Needham provides a revealing exploration of criminal justice in England and Wales.[29] She argues that the language of consumerism and the consumerist approach that have spread so widely through public services remain strikingly absent from criminal justice. Her study relies on a content analysis of pertinent framework documents and of speeches by three important actors—the prime minister, the home office, and local government. Birgitte Poulsen examines the impact of governance on the Danish state, paying particular attention to the rise of new forms of performance accountability in the civil service.[30] Her study rests on accounts of the roles and identities of individuals drawn from three different ministries—the Interior, Employment, and Business.

Clearly these case studies, and indeed the broader literature on decentered theory, overlap with other approaches to policy networks and network governance. In particular, there is a considerable literature on how hierarchical bureaucracies often fail to deliver the outcomes intended by policymakers. The existing literature on implementation explores the nature of policy fields across a variety of terrains, often looking at the views and actions of frontline workers.[31] It suggests that problems of policy delivery may arise because of the role played by "professional norms, work customs and occupational culture" among frontline workers.[32] Policy is rarely based on shared meanings among different actors. Meanings are often vague and unclear in ways that lead to unintended and unforeseen consequences.[33] Although this literature on implementation is not explicitly framed by decentered theory, there are, as this brief discussion suggests, obvious similarities.

The existing literature on policy networks and network governance also includes a wealth of material on how governments seek to govern in an era when the certainties and solidities of modernity are perceived as melting into air. This literature considers strategies for coordination in terms of political economy; the changing role of government in an environment of complex social systems; the realigning of formal and informal government relations between and within transnational, national, and subnational levels; and the emasculation of established mechanisms of command as government shifts from hierarchy to heterarchy. The literature points to the emergence of new patterns of governance and an increasingly complex mix of hierarchy, networks, and markets. This new governance has substantial implications for the understanding of policy networks and how they operate.

Decentered theory echoes many of the themes associated with the literature on this new governance. In particular, a decentered approach highlights the formal and informal processes of coordination among the different and multiple actors in networks. The existing literature on network governance refers to these processes variously as negotiated self-governance, delegated governance, or self-steering networks.[34] It attempts to invoke the complexity, reflexivity, and differentiation of the multiplicity of actors involved in the policy process, pointing, for example, to the emergence of "an order which cannot be externally imposed but is the result of the interaction of a multiplicity of governing and each other influencing actors."[35] Decentered theory provides a potentially fruitful means of exploring this complexity, and especially the dynamics of change within policy networks. It provides stories, case studies, and lessons that may help policy actors to navigate their way through this changing environment.

These reflections suggest that the originality of a decentered theory of networks does not necessarily lie in the questions it poses or in its advocacy of a bottom-up stance, but rather in its explicit focus on understanding the diverse and contingent beliefs of situated agents and its focus on explaining these beliefs by appeals to traditions and dilemmas. One of the original motivations behind the study of policy networks was the perceived need to move beyond the often fixed, monolithic, and inflexible characterizations offered by macrolevel state theories while also avoiding the problems of specificity associated with individual case studies. The concept of a policy network was meant to provide a bridge between macrolevel state theory and particular policy studies. However, as was suggested earlier, the literature on policy networks tends to rely on typologies to make sense of the disparate nature of networks. It is thus open to charges similar to those leveled at macrolevel state theory: for example, the existing literature on policy networks can appear to present networks as inflexible, static, and even torpid phenomena. The problem is that the classifications often present policy networks as defined by their structured settings. Studies of policy networks thus pay virtually no attention to the actual meanings and discourses that inform those networks.

Decentered theory offers a potential corrective to the formalism of the existing literature. It prompts social scientists to recognize that models, typologies, and correlations can do explanatory work only if they are unpacked as narratives. To unpack their formal explanations in this way, researchers have to recover the meanings, traditions, and dilemmas that inspire situated agents. Recognition of situated agency then provides a means of exploring change. Crucially, decentered theory allows the researcher to examine how the various actors involved in policy networks mediate their environment, and thereby to understand the everyday production and reproduction of political power.

NEW RESEARCH AGENDAS

A decentered theory of networks can offer new research agendas through its emphasis on meaning in action as a source of change in the everyday production and reproduction of power. Of particular relevance here is the emphasis of decentered theory on exploring the dilemmas confronted by actors within policy networks, for dilemmas are crucial to explaining change in networks. Decentered theory thus highlights the role of endogenous factors in accounting for change. Whereas much of the existing literature focuses on exogenous variables, a decentered approach concentrates on the beliefs of the relevant actors about the world they live in and the dilemmas they face.

Change is one of the hardest phenomena in social science to analyze and interpret. Social scientists find it difficult to capture the complexity, unpredictability, and multiplicity of the forces involved.[36] Much of the literature on policy networks struggles to account for change over time. It concentrates on synchronic analyses of particular networks at any one moment in time. One attempt to overcome this problem is Marsh and Smith's dialectical model.[37] Marsh and Smith conceive of change in terms of the interaction between the structure of the network and the agents located in it. Their critical realism treats networks as structures that constrain or facilitate but do not determine people's actions. Exogenous factors can alter the nature of a network, but actors continue to mediate change. Networks affect policy outcomes, but at the same time policy outcomes influence the nature of the network. A decentered theory of policy networks might seem to share little common ground with this dialectical model, finding itself at odds in particular with the notion of a network as a structural entity. However, Marsh and Smith would find themselves much closer to a decentered approach if they treated the term "structure" as shorthand for actions that embody the beliefs of the relevant actors about how relations are patterned.

This concept of structure seems close to that implied by an alternative attempt to address the issue of change. Proponents of a strategic relational theory of networks recognize that a critical limitation of the original policy network perspective was its failure to consider the dynamics and processes through which network formation, evolution, transformation, and termination occur.[38] They emphasize the strategic context of networking as a social and political practice and view networks as dynamic institutional forms. Actors seeking to achieve their objectives make strategic assessments of the context they find themselves in. The nature of the context thus gives weight to certain strategies and agents over others. Agents, as reflexive beings, learn from their actions and adjust their strategies, which in turn changes the context. The network is thus imbued with dynamism; it is seen as recursively reconstituted and as constantly evolving as a result of the interactions of strategic actors operating within a strategically selective context. In this view, actors are intentional and strategic, but their preferences are neither fixed nor determined by their material circumstances.

A strategic relational approach suggests that the role of the social scientist should be to seek out the concepts, perceived interests, and preferences of actors, and thereby to understand how they engage in strategic learning. Proponents of the decentered approach, however, may worry that there remains a temptation to reify strategic action. They might worry that strategic action is defined by the apparently fixed interests of actors and the objective context in which they finds themselves. However, if the strategic relational approach treats the concept "strategic" as largely empty, to be filled out by whatever beliefs and preferences actors happen to reach, then it closely resembles decentered theory. The strategic relational approach would come down, then, to two basic claims: first, that agents act in accord with contingent beliefs; and second, that social scientists should recover these beliefs. Decentered theory provides a similar focus on actors responding to contingent beliefs, but it in addition introduces historicist concepts such as tradition and dilemma with which researchers can explain why actors hold the beliefs they do. These historicist concepts are aggregate ones that explain continuities and change even in a contingent world.

Decentered theory presents change as complex and unpredictable. People can make well-informed guesses about what will happen, but no matter how well-informed these guesses are, they still might be proved wrong. The evolution of policy networks remains contested and contingent. Much of the existing literature on policy networks reflects the fact that it is easier for social scientists to focus on a fixed moment in time, or to navigate from a map depicting a static political terrain, than it is for them to explain change over time in a network. By exploring traditions as contingent entities reproduced through the actions of agents, however, the decentered approach's emphasis on identifying and understanding dilemmas offers a way to account for network change.

More generally still, the decentered approach may counter the tendency of the existing literature to overlook the different attributes that different people ascribe to networks. People within a network may have an (understandable) inclination to ascribe to it positive connotations, emphasizing attributes such as efficiency, flexibility, and responsiveness. Equally, interested parties who, for whatever reason, are outside of a particular network may use the term "network" in a pejorative sense, depicting narrow, secretive cliques operating in ways that are contrary to the public interest. The larger points here are that networks are not uncontested and that the decentered approach encourages us to explore the conflicting meanings actors ascribe to them.

IMPORTANT THEORETICAL DEBATES

Just as decentered theory has the potential to establish new research foci, so it also opens up new theoretical debates. There is a growing literature that discusses decentered theory and its associated methodologies.[39] Earlier chapters discussed the philosophical debates found in this literature, including, for example, the nature of structure and agency, the pragmatic nature of explanatory concepts in the social sciences, and the importance of historicism. The earlier discussions of these philosophical issues suggest responses to criticisms of a decentered theory of networks.

A current debate in the policy network literature concerns the extent to which networks have replaced hierarchy as a new governing mode. A number of critics of a decentered theory of networks stress the importance of structure. In so doing, some critics have argued that while it is important to recognize that forces such as globalization, marketization, devolution, and managerialism can have a clear impact on the nature of networks, nevertherless caution should be shown concerning the extent to which networks and markets have suppplanted hierarchical control.[40] These critics caution those embracing a decentred theory not to exaggerate the extent to which policy networks are characterized by diversity, pluralization, and self-steering.

This criticism of a decentered theory of networks can be widened to include broader concerns about how decentered theory addresses issues concerning power, authority, and the state. A decentered approach may engender a surfeit of empirically rich case studies cast predominantly at the subsectoral or grassroots level. Arguably, therefore, the main challenge facing decentered theory is to provide a broad recentered account that shifts from networks to power and the state without appealing to reified institutions. For those who wish to make further contributions to the network literature using decentered theory, there are two suggestions worth considering here. When combined, they offer a way to recenter accounts of power and the state.

The first suggestion is that recentered accounts should deploy aggregate concepts such as tradition and dilemma that refer to meanings but that avoid essentialism. Chapter 2 argued that these historicist concepts potentially offer a way of avoiding the reification of activity. These concepts explain social phenomena not by reference to a reified strategy, context, process, mechanism, or norm, but by locating contingent patterns of activity in their historical contexts. Historicist explanations are not only temporal in that they move through time; they are also historical in that they locate the phenomena at a specific moment in time by using explanatory concepts such as tradition and dilemma.

The second suggestion is that power should be seen as something that flows up and down policy cascades in varying and changeable forms. All kinds of actors are capable of resisting, transforming, and thwarting the hopes and intentions of others. Thus, power and resistance alike are understood as ubiquitous features of people interpreting and reinterpreting one another against inherited backgrounds that contain differences as well as similarities. Power appears wherever people interpret and respond to one another. Every actor is constrained by the ways in which others act. Prime ministers, elected representatives, senior civil servants, street level bureaucrats, and everyday citizens all find their possibilities for action restricted by what others do. Decentered studies of networks can attempt to show how various actors restrict what others can do in ways that undermine the intentions of those others: for example, by seeking to show how the state exerts pressure on local actors to pursue certain policies, or how local actors are able to draw on their traditions to resist the policies being promoted by the state. From this perspective, networks are themselves sites of contingent struggles of power and resistance, with different actors seeking to remake policies and even the network itself in different ways.

CONCLUSION

The concept of a policy network has made a discernible contribution to a variety of fields in social science, including implementation, intergovernmental relations, interest groups, governance, and public policy. The concept originally appeared between the world wars as one of a number of new empirical topics concerned more with political behavior than with formal institutions. Policy networks helped to open up the black box of the state. However, the rise of rational choice theory led to criticisms that the analysis of policy networks lacked a suitable microtheory. Decentered theory offers the literature on policy networks a microtheory based on individuals acting in accord with beliefs and desires forged against the background of specific traditions and dilemmas. It offers a way of building further upon the already extensive and diverse literature on policy networks. In particular, a decentered theory of networks has the potential to provide insightful studies of networks and network mediation at local, national, and intergovernmental levels; a way of addressing the tricky issue of network change over time; multimethod studies of meanings and beliefs, including not only ethnography and textual analysis but also quantitative techniques; and normative lessons to policy actors concerning the nature and functioning of networks.

6 Civic Choices

Decentered theory challenges reified social categories, presenting states, nations, and networks as contingent, changing, and contested products of human activity. This focus on concrete human activity raises the question: How should social scientists conceive of choice and action? Decentered theory resembles neoclassical economics and rational choice theory in conceiving of formal and informal institutions as products of the microlevel of individual action. Where decentered theory differs from neoclassical economics and rational choice theory is in the content of its microtheory. This chapter explores the microlevel of a decentered theory of governance. Given that governance is constructed by people acting on their own reasons and choices, the questions are: How can social scientists explain people's actions and choices? How do consumption and choice relate to citizenship and governance?

Current debates about consumption and citizenship are often conducted between two opposed languages: choice/consumerism versus community/citizenship. This chapter disturbs this simple dichotomy. Much of the recent critical engagement with consumption has reacted against neoliberalism and rational choice theory.[1] After the rise of neoliberalism, choice has become tightly associated with consumerism and markets, and microlevel theories of action have become equally tightly associated with neoclassical assumptions about utility maximization. For its advocates, choice is equivalent to individual freedom in a world of demanding consumers. For its communitarian critics, choice is equivalent to the erosion of shared civic values. For some poststructuralists, choice is a chief vehicle of governmentality in the construction of advanced liberal subjects.

The dichotomy between choice/consumerism and community/citizenship rests on ideal typical abstractions, some of which have been vehemently criticized. In the field of consumption studies, the main critical response has been to question the association between choice and consumption.[2] Historians have emphasized how consumer advocacy and the discourse of the consumer have played a vital role in expanding citizenship and civic life, offering a kind of parallel politics for disenfranchised groups as well as advancing the voice and claims of enfranchised citizens. Against long-standing charges of the selfish qualities and conspicuous nature of modern consumption, anthropologists have retrieved the role of consumption in creating, recycling, and adapting sociality, family, and ethnic networks and cultural bonds. Economic sociologists have shown that there is no inherent conflict for most people between having choice and spending money in relation to parts of emotional life—such as child care—and at the same time having strong feelings for community and family. Sociologists of ordinary consumption have directed attention to the ongoing routines of consumption that continue to take up a major slice of time and money in modern societies, such as washing, cooking, and reading, all of which are neglected in the popular association of consumption with individual choice and shopping. Philosophers have wondered whether the hedonistic qualities associated with modern consumption may not be a source of alternative political and lifestyle projects. In short, a lot of consumption fits badly with a simple characterization of consumerism and choice.

These critical projects deserve recognition, but by joining in one overall direction (away from choice) they risk evacuating the debate about choice and even reinforcing the sense that choice is the monopoly of neoliberals. That would be a mistake. Decentered theory takes the debate in a different direction, reexamining and reclaiming aspects of choice for a more pluralistic understanding of consumers and of consumption in governance. Champions and critics of consumerism alike have left behind an impoverished understanding of the rationalities at work in consumers exercising choice. The task now is not to take sides but to step outside this limited and distorted frame of discussion. Instead of leaving choice and rationality to neoclassical theorists and focusing on other dimensions of consumption, social scientists should reengage what has been and continues to be a major phenomenon in modern societies.

The purpose of this chapter is to chart some of the possible directions, historically and theoretically. This chapter begins with acts of retrieval, showing that the current debate amounts to a considerable narrowing of a broader terrain of choice and rationality. After retrieving some of the altruistic, ethical, and civic dimensions of choice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter goes on to defend a view of local reasoning that recognizes both the creative role of consumers as actors and the contribution of local knowledge. Together these historical and theoretical reflections point to the potential of a more pluralistic view of consumers to transcend the bipolar contrast between consumerism and communitarianism.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

It is tempting to place the current fixation with choice alongside an earlier historical moment. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, questions of individual choice, consumerism, and citizenship moved to the public and academic fore. As in recent years, the turn of the century saw a pronounced acceleration in globalization and major debates about the place of consumption in public life. Further, contemporary neoliberal ideas draw heavily on neoclassical economics, which is rooted in the period from the 1870s through the 1890s. But such parallels also hide important differences, not least by reducing neoclassical economists to the rather simpleminded forefathers of a currently popular economistic mindset. Social scientists can problematize this view of neoclassical economics.

Alfred Marshall (1842–1924) was one of the doyens of the new economic science. However, his views provide a challenge to the popular equation of neoclassical economics with a commitment to individual choice and materialistically minded self-maximizing *homo oeconomicus*. Marshall was among those late Victorian and Edwardian thinkers who pioneered a move away from romanticism, organicism, historicism, and other contextualizing and diachronic approaches to social theory. He helped to introduce more modernist modes of knowing that privileged synchronic analyses based on atomization, formal models, and correlations. Nonetheless, the shift from developmental historicism to modernist social science was not a sudden epistemic rupture. At first these two different modes of knowing often cohabited. For example, Marshall attempted to locate the new economic science within larger historical and ethical frameworks. Even as he established the teaching of economics as a distinct subject, he characteristically emphasized, on the first page of his seminal *Principles of Economics* (1890), that

> Ethical forces are among those of which the economist has to take account. Attempts have indeed been made to construct an abstract science with regard to the actions of an "economic man," who is under no ethical influences and who pursues pecuniary gain warily

> and energetically, but mechanically and selfishly. But they have not been successful.[3]

Marshall argued that, far from being selfish, man endured "toil and sacrifice with the unselfish desire to make provision for his family." Further, if familial affections were recognized, Marshall asked, why should economists not also include other "altruistic motives" as part of "normal action"? Marshall saw his main contribution as giving scientific attention to all those actions that had regular qualities, including ethical qualities. Similarly, Léon Walras, who introduced the mathematical modeling of competitive general equilibrium, was keen to emphasize the role of love, charity, and other selfless emotions in economic life.

The growing dominance of neoclassical economics, with its interest in the individual consumer, has made it easy to forget that the consumer was not the discovery, let alone the monopoly, of neoclassical economists such as Marshall. The consumer had powerful supporters in other traditions, such as historical economics and heterodox underconsumptionism. Indeed, if Marshall had been a historical economist writing on the European continent, he likely would have emphasized the spread of national and social feelings of solidarity as one of the main effects of advancing consumption. Also, the mathematical revolution in economics should not mask the continuity between the classical economists and the early neoclassical economists, especially with respect to their shared concern to protect the consumer against monopolies. A keen interest in such topics as social solidarity, altruism, and civil society was ubiquitous in the culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4]

At that time social, national, and organic conceptions of consumption circulated widely in radical, feminist, historical, and institutional approaches. The idea of the citizen-consumer became increasingly important in popular politics on both sides of the Atlantic. The citizen-consumer appeared in battles for (not against) free trade (freedom of trade, many thought, created democratic government, social justice, and international peace), for the vote for women (if women showed their competence as voters in the marketplace, they should also be able to cast their vote at the ballot box), and against sweat shops and other cruel working conditions (morally just and other-regarding consumers could raise the social conditions of exploited workers). In all of these cases consumption and citizenship were given a positive affinity with one another.[5] These cases thus cast doubt on the assumption that there is some inherent tension between the concepts of consumption and citizenship.

A critic might argue that these cases existed only at the progressive margins of public discourse, and what mattered in the long run was that a different and more individualist logic was pouring forth from a new and more instrumentalist economic mindset. The response to this criticism requires one to advance a little further into the orthodox heart of neoclassical economics, which is often believed to have sponsored an individual selfish consumer whose pursuit of choice threatens community and civic life.

Marshall vehemently rejected the charge, brought by John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, that economics was a "dismal science" in which humans were treated as selfish beasts. Much of the misunderstanding, Marshall argued, could have been avoided if classical economists had more precisely stated that money should be regarded as simply a convenient measure of a person's motives, not the primary motive of action. For Marshall, the individual was "a man of flesh and blood," pursuing business affairs but also sacrificing himself for his family and country—"a man who is not below the love of a virtuous life for its own sake."[6] Few were more Victorian than Marshall in warning contemporaries about the abuses of wealth and the moral dangers of wasteful display. He was, as John Maynard Keynes later put it, rather "too anxious to do good,"[7] He believed that much of economic life was about giving greater scope and energy to this virtuous life, strengthening the bonds of community and civil society.

Marshall and his contemporaries followed earlier economists, particularly J. S. Mill, in their analysis of the role of the consumer in the dynamics of economic and public life. Both generations viewed the consumer as vulnerable and in need of public protection against monopolies and market abuses. But they also shared an optimistic belief in the emancipatory powers of the cooperative movement. Far from believing that the consumer was succumbing to selfish interests or being steamrolled and seduced by emerging brands and department stores, liberal economists had a strong (perhaps even overly optimistic) belief in consumer self-organization. Gradually, through the spread of cooperative culture, consumers would free themselves from abuse and powerlessness and advance into socially responsible citizenship. Associational life would promote nobler economic habits.

The active and creative role of the consumer in the public arena deserves emphasis because it echoes Marshall's more general view of the consumer as an innovator. Much of the critique of consumerism is based on an idea of the consumer as a servile end user, a passive person swamped by mass-produced goods that have been designed, engineered, and made attractive by producers, advertisers, and marketers. J. K. Galbraith penned the most influential picture of this servile consumer written since the World War II.[8] Anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, in contrast, have presented choice over goods as a secondary expression of the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that operate in families, communities, and networks.[9] For Marshall, however, it was activities and practices that shaped a consumer's wants and desires—not the other way around. Consumers themselves constituted a dynamic force in that they wanted better quality and more diverse and distinguished goods and services. Social progress could mount what has been called the "Marshallian ladder of consumption" with its six steps of increased quantity, increased quality, increased variety, the satisfaction of new wants, a demand for distinction, and a demand for excellence.[10]

In Marshall's view, consumers were not being dragged up this ladder of consumption; they were walking up it freely and in their own fashion, adding new steps as they did so. Although much of the upward momentum of consumers was driven by an innate desire for distinction, it did not lead to a fixed hierarchy of distinct status groups. On the contrary, for Marshall, the active pursuit of new wants and consumer practices made consumers seek out new social associations. Choice, in other words, was a mechanism through which consumers changed their identities, personal desires, affiliations, and social practices. Marshall's view is now echoed in the recent practice turn in the social sciences, which has led sociologists to focus on the active role of consumers in shaping, developing, adapting, and terminating practices of consumption, such as home improvement and new leisure practices.[11]

Marshall's view is very different from what has become standard modern consumer theory. The consumer, for Marshall, is a social actor who shapes demand and is responsible for coevolving products and services and their uses. This view of the consumer as an active and creative human agent points to an open and fluid social life and away from a conception of community as fate. Stated differently, Marshall's trust in the new science of economics did not rely on his viewing it as a neutral recording device for capturing people's pursuit of self-interest; rather, he viewed economics as a key to unlock an upward progression in human desire, practice, and sociality.

The pleas for a new economic science by Marshall and his contemporaries were not merely theoretical interventions in a secluded ivory tower. Economists and their ideas provided consumer leagues with scientific authority and debating power in their battles for "white lists" and against socially degrading products and working conditions. One example is Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, who was Carl Menger's successor at Vienna University and one of Ludwig von Mises's last teachers. Today von Böhm-Bawerk has become a darling of neoliberal think tanks such as the von Mises Institute. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, his theories of capital and rent were used by the Christian Social Union (CSU), a social movement of about 5,000 members with plenty of connections and ambition, to justify the claim that consumers had the power to transform capitalism by moralizing their consumption behavior.[12]

Historically, Marshall's attempts to correct a mistaken view of economics as a science of selfish material motives proved unsuccessful. His influence lay instead in establishing the professional credentials of new neoclassical approaches to economics over the less mathematical and more institutional alternatives. Nonetheless, the critics of neoclassical economics did not simply accept defeat and vanish, leaving nothing interesting or positive said about choice. The debate about the limits of utilitarian and mathematical models led instead to significant attempts to reclaim choice from the bosom of the new economic science and for the aims of progressive politics. One critical moment in this development was the debate about ethics and choice among consumer advocates and theorists in interwar America.

The Home Economics movement established itself in interwar America, alongside consumer-testing agencies, as a popular national network of consumer education and advocacy. The American Home Economics Association was formed in 1899. By the 1930s, it had more than 12,000 members. Home economics courses became established parts of secondary school teaching and further education and of discussion outside schools, such as in women's clubs. By 1928 there were 322 four-year degree programs in home economics producing 27,619 majors. Courses on "consumer buying" taught students about prices and product quality, ranging from health and home to banking and art.

The main mission of the home economics movement was to create a nation of discriminating consumers who would reflect on their individual needs and desires and thereby cultivate social values and responsibilities. Hazel Kyrk, an influential home economist at the University of Chicago, explained how consumption combined the exercise of choice with the creation of new and higher needs and values. In her view, individuals combined the identities of buyer and consumer.[13] Buying was about the technologies of consumption and about practicing efficient purchasing decisions. Buyers were concerned with fair prices and with saving their money and time. Consumption, in contrast, was about the normative and ethical universe in which these purchasing decisions took place. Consumption involved the evaluation of choices and the setting of standards. It affected questions of motives, values, and ends. "Wise consumption choices"—the goal of the home economics movement—thus depended on both material needs and moral values; it required the cultivation of individuals who could both make shrewd decisions in the marketplace and choose forms and practices of consumption that would stimulate the mind and create bonds of affection and social networks.

American historians have recently retrieved the political dimensions of an advancing citizen-consumer in the era of the New Deal. This new consumer power operated through new institutional linkages and open encouragement by the state. It exposed profiteering, attacked producer oligopolies, and attempted to secure fair prices.[14] The ethical revaluation of choice was an important source of this embrace of the consumer as citizen. Kyrk, for example, had little sympathy or patience with the neoclassical understanding of the individual as a utility maximizer. Her prize-winning book, *Theory of Consumption* (1923), began as a demolition job on marginal utility theory, especially as expounded by W. S. Jevons. She argued that to treat economics as a mere theory of exchange value was to fail to provide any understanding of the attitudes that shaped choice. Instead of leaving choice to neoclassical economists and moving on, Kyrk went on to reclaim choice as integral to a new and positive account of civic consumption.[15]

This expanded appreciation of choice drew on John Dewey's philosophy of knowledge through practice. Dewey attacked the psychology associated with a marginal utility theory of choice. Neoclassical economics suggested that knowledge originated in sensations and that intelligent action was a result of cost-benefit calculations. Dewey argued that this view of knowledge and action ignored the influence of habits, customs, and impulses:

> The baby does not move to the mother's breast because of calculation of the advantages of warmth and food over against the pains of effort. Nor does the miser seek gold, nor the architect strive to make plans, nor the physician to heal, because of reckonings of comparative advantage and disadvantage. Habit, occupation, furnishes the necessity of forward action in one case as instinct does in the other.[16]

For Dewey, neoclassical economists mistook nature of the deliberation that preceded choice. "Deliberation is not calculation of indeterminate future results," he explained; "the present, not the future, is ours." When deliberating about choices, individuals do not calculate future events; rather, they apply memory and experience in "constructive imaginative forecasts of the future." Life was all about choosing and developing a reflective habit that helped individuals to make sense of, assess, and order an otherwise messy set of probable actions:

> The moral is to develop conscientiousness, ability to judge the significance of what we are doing and to use that judgement in directing what we do, not by means of direct cultivation of something called conscience, or reason, or a faculty of moral knowledge, but by fostering those impulses and habits which experience has shown to make us sensitive, generous, imaginative, impartial in perceiving the tendency of our inchoate dawning activities.

Deliberating choices required people to reflect on their impulses and habits. Thus, Dewey concluded, "the important thing is the fostering of those habits and impulses which lead to a broad, just, sympathetic survey of situations."[17]

Choice looks very different in Dewey's presentation from how it appears in most current discussions. Today choice typically appears either as an instrument of maximizing future satisfaction or as a terrifying ordeal that swamps individuals with too many self-centered decisions and that distracts them from a world of values and commitments lying outside the mechanical and narrow arena of the marketplace. In Dewey, choice appears, in stark contrast, as a wonderful lifelong opportunity to practice, revise, and perfect one's habits of reflection, keeping activity alive well beyond the instant in which a decision is taken. In other words, choice allows individuals to connect past and present, to search, experiment, and reflect—to play a role in actively shaping their destiny and identity. Choice raises the human self above the level of the machine and the animal. As Dewey explained, reflection on and choice of an action "keeps that act from sinking below consciousness into routine habit or whimsical brutality"; and "it preserves the meaning of that act alive, and keeps it growing in depth and refinement of meaning."[18]

Irrespective of whatever people today think of Dewey's instrumentalist version of pragmatism, his approach to deliberation, choice, and practical reasoning highlights alternative approaches to choice that have been lost as the circle of debate has narrowed into a dichotomous battle between consumerism and communitarianism. Dewey's concept of choice also points to some of the different avenues available to citizen-consumers. It is no coincidence, for example, that Dewey became one of the founders of the League for Independent Political Action, a third-party movement set up in 1929. Dewey was no friend of the New Deal. But his view of practical reason—his belief that seeing, knowing, and doing form one inseparable process—clearly favored a view of the choosing consumer as someone who established, by trial and error, ways of coping with experiences and challenges and of developing more enlightened paths of action. He believed that the lack of choice in mindless routines and rigid hierarchies stifled the experimental freedom through which individuals attained their humanity. To limit choice was like chaining an individual to a pole of fixed habits and expectations kept in place by others. Dewey had a different starting point from Marshall, but he too arrived at an account of the consumer as a potentially creative individual.

One does not need to follow all of Dewey's ideas to appreciate an important insight: choice is not only about markets; it is integral to people's ability to realize their creative humanity through intelligent and reflective action. Although choice changes in scope and function across time and cultures, there is choice in everyday human life in all systems of governance. As neoliberal champions of choice would do well to interrogate their version of choice by remembering the workings of choice outside the market, so their communitarian critics would do well to recall the local reasoning involved in choices in everyday life, a local reasoning that is all too easily forgotten in attacks on choice in public services or choice in the shopping mall.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Some perspectives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer an interesting challenge to an instrumentalist view of choice. Consumers appear less as responding to external stimuli and more as changing those stimuli and their future sensations through their actions. These older perspectives have intriguing implications for more recent inquiries into consumption. Sociologists interested in the formation, revision, and termination of routine consumption practices might benefit from considering the role of local reasoning and reflexivity at work. Anthropologists exploring dimensions of morals and sociality in shopping and other consumption might benefit from considering the reflexive arc of evolving deliberation developed by Dewey. There are implications for economists, too. In the past thirty years, some economists have used psychophysics to question the standard model of economic utility with its assumptions of coherent preference curves and matching decision and experience values. These economists look less to preferences than to attitudes. One example is Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's prospect theory, with its emphasis on risk aversion and the centrality of gains and losses instead of states of wealth.[19] Dewey made powerful criticisms of cognitive psychology that have not been adequately taken on board by these behavioral economists in their approaches to deliberation. Behavioral economists replicate many modernist tropes. They concentrate on offering formal models—often legitimated by statistical correlations or purportedly universal cognitive theories—of widespread human "errors" or other departures from a fixed rationality. They do not offer contingent narratives of the local reasoning and situated agency of individuals who remake themselves and their environments against the background of specific traditions and practices.

Instead of pursuing these potential avenues of inquiry here, however, I want to consider more general issues about rationality. Decentered theory breaks free of the dominant frameworks associated with modernist social science and its emphasis on atomization and synchronic analysis. However, instead of dumping rationality altogether, decentered theory includes a presumption of consistency in the local reasoning of situated agents. Communication is possible only if people presume that one another are consistent, for if they did not, they would be unable to make sense of utterances by relating them to one another. Indeed, they would be unable to assume that someone believing and saying one thing did not preclude that person believing and saying the exact contrary thing. Equally, however, a presumption of consistency does not require that social scientists ultimately conclude that people's beliefs and reasoning were consistent, let alone conscious and rational. A presumption of consistency thus takes social scientists away from formal models and toward studies of the historical contexts of reasoning, the active role of agents in constituting decisions and norms, and the presence of varying and conflicting values. The result is a more pluralist vision of both citizenship and consumption.

Crucially, a presumption of consistency differs from both the economic (choice/consumerism) and the sociological (community/citizenship) perspectives that have already been discussed in this chapter. Unlike contemporary economic views of choice, a presumption of consistency does not require anything like autonomy or self-reflexivity. Consistency allows, on the contrary, that people accept a large number of their beliefs on the authority of others, and that they hold yet other of their beliefs only subconsciously. More generally still, a presumption of consistency makes rationality a feature of webs of beliefs, rather than a personal disposition or a feature of actions. A presumption of rationality is, after all, not an axiom. This presumption does not rule out the possibility that people might be irrational. Social scientists merely start out by looking for a consistent pattern among people's beliefs before perhaps concluding that those people are inconsistent.

The concepts of local reasoning and situated agency also distinguish decentered theory from what has been the main critique of the utility-maximizing individual in the last century, that of modernist sociologists. This critique has come from two main traditions. The first is a prominent tradition of sociologists expressing fear over an almost totalitarian spread of selfish, acquisitive, and instrumental reasoning and action in modern capitalist and consumerist societies. Max Weber, Herbert Marcuse, and Michel Foucault all made major contributions to this tradition. The second is an equally prominent tradition of sociologists insisting that, far from being utility-maximizers, individuals follow social norms and act out established social roles. At times these two traditions combine in broad condemnations of modernity, capitalism, or consumerism for spreading selfish and instrumental norms and thereby wrecking elder forms of solidarity and community. Recently, for example, communitarians have made much of the idea that the spread of instrumental rationality, a rights mentality, and consumerism have undermined community and democracy.[20]

Significantly these sociological traditions, with their alternative concept of rationality, often date, as does neoclassical theory, from the late nineteenth-century shift away from historicism, with its emphasis on the organic, and toward modernism, with its emphasis on the synchronic, atomization, and analysis. Modernist sociologists may reject the idea of using axioms in order to construct deductive models, but they too compartmentalize aspects of social life so as to manage and explain facts. They too seek to make sense of the particular not by locating it within a temporal narrative but by reducing it to midlevel or even universal generalizations that typically operate across time and space. Modernist sociologists may not favor deductive models, but they replace narratives with appeals to classifications, correlations, functions, and ideal types. Indeed they typically rely on ideal types and the allegedly necessary relations among social phenomena to sustain their critiques of effects of conspicuous consumption, fears of a universal materialistic consumerism, and narratives of the advancing dependence of modern and late modern societies on utilitarian and market-based systems of order and coercion.

A reliance on modernist social science means that these accounts in the tradition of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Bronislaw Malinowski have problems allowing adequately for agency. Classifications, correlations, and functions generate forms of explanation that reduce individual choices and actions to social facts. So, when sociologists appeal to rationality as appropriateness, they usually argue that individual actions are governed by social norms and social roles in a way that appears to neglect situated agency.[21] Crucially, if social norms and social roles suffice to explain people's actions, then the implication is that the norms and roles somehow fix the content of people's preferences, beliefs, or reasoning; after all, if they did not do so, one would presumably need to explain people's actions by reference to their preferences, beliefs, or reasoning, not the norms and roles. The idea of situated agency, in contrast, implies that although people set out against the background of particular traditions and practices, they are capable of reasoning and acting in novel ways so as to modify this background. In other words, consumers, as with all human beings, are creative individuals actively engaged in shaping their environment, norms, and practices.

Just as sociological traditions have often struggled to allow adequately for local reasoning and situated agency, so they have often inspired overly simplistic dichotomies between self-interest and altruism or between mass consumer societies and traditional societies. They treat self-interest and selfless social norms as being fixed and defined against each other. Such dichotomies arise in part because modernist social scientists hide agency within monolithic and often reified concepts that are defined by apparently fixed essences or properties that allegedly explain other features or effects. Modernist social scientists thereby elide the different and contingent patterns of belief and desire that lead people to act in overlapping ways so as to create the social institutions and practices to which these apparently monolithic concepts refer.

It is true, of course, that some sociologists have argued that consumption has become, in the late twentieth century, about services, experiences, and identities. All too often, however, these sociologists locate their ironic postmodern consumers and postmodern social formations as the historical successors of the utility-maximizer and mass consumption, which in turn are supposed to have replaced premodern peoples and traditional societies.[22] For example, the strong thesis in recent writings on governmentality—that the advanced liberalism of the past few decades has hollowed out citizenship by constructing the persona of the active and self-reliant consumer—presumes, indeed requires, a strong view of an earlier time when citizens were active and when consumers were either passive or altogether absent.[23] As decentered theory suggests, however, such monolithic historical contrasts tend to reify concepts and so to ignore the historical circulation, modification, and contestation of plural rationalities and diverse cultures of consumption. Their totalizing assumptions about a new consumer discourse are also, of course, at odds with the multiple, conflicting identities that continue to circulate in everyday life in defiance of the discourse of advanced liberalism championed by governments, business, and the media.[24]

One reason to defend a presumption of rationality is, therefore, to draw attention to agency and the way it unsettles the dichotomies associated with much sociological theorizing, allowing social scientists to recognize major questions about the emergence, development, and contestation of diverse practices. The local quality of reasoning deserves emphasis. Local reasoning typically consists in people pushing and pulling at their existing beliefs and at a new experience or idea so as to bring the two into some kind of coherent relationship. The new set of beliefs then appears in their decisions and actions as their situated agency. This agency embodies people's capacities for creativity. People reason creatively in that there is no rule defining how they will modify their prior beliefs so as to accommodate a new experience or idea. The creative nature of local reasoning is, of course, precisely what prevents social scientists offering formal models of it. Instead of fixed models or outcomes, there are diverse and contingent outcomes. Instead of formal analyses of a fixed rationality, social scientists require complex accounts of the circulation of diverse rationalities.

So, the concepts of local reasoning and situated agency enable social scientists to step outside the needlessly self-imprisoning frame of analysis that has led many of them to cast civic life and consumer culture as mutually exclusive systems locked in a struggle of survival. Questioning the dominant narrative of a transition from passive to active consumers does not need to involve suspending critical moral or political properties. Similarly, a recovery of historicist themes from previous centuries need not lead to a Whiggish celebration of progress. Far from it, attention to the many complex and shifting relationships between consumption and citizenship highlights the different moral and political positions that consumers have occupied in the past but that have effectively been written out of the canon of the modern social sciences with their fixation on the selfish, acquisitive, and ultimately anomic qualities of modern life. In the past, consumption could serve as a kind of parallel politics for groups formally excluded from citizenship, such as the many women's consumer leagues and cooperatives on both sides of the Atlantic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the appeal to an active consumer could also be tied to the cultivation of an imperially minded shopper, who built the British Empire by consuming imperial products, as in interwar campaigns for imperial development in Britain.[25] Nor should social scientists presume some kind of ethnocentric Western monopoly for such political incursions into the mental and material landscape of consumption. Enormous national product exhibitions in China after the 1911 revolution sought to foster a patriotic culture of consumption, and they easily equaled the projects possible in the British Empire where the metropolis still adhered to free trade.[26] Instead of postulating some grand global transition from citizenship and community to consumption and individuation, social scientists should recognize that these coexisted in different combinations at the same time in modernity.

The concepts of local reasoning and situated agency might enable social scientists still further to disaggregate the concept of the consumer into its various changing parts. By highlighting diversity and contingency, they also might help social scientists to avoid the provincial and presentist image of consumers as resisting global capitalism. History reveals that organized groups who saw themselves as citizen-consumers in the past have also helped to shape the global capitalist order, as in the case of citizen-consumers rallying to support free trade before the World War I. Instead of posing a grand historical narrative—of Americanization, of Westernization, of McDonaldization, or of the rise of one-dimensional man—attention to local reasoning and situated agency might lead social scientists to inquire about the evolution of different species of material culture and economic rationality from different centers and to inquire into their uneven flow and interaction across the globe.

Although social scientists should be wary of making any substantive assumptions about the moral, political, or cultural mentality and practices of consumers—be it that of the consumer as dupe, as active and self-seeking, as progressive, or as apolitical—an analysis of consumption in terms of local reasoning and situated agency suggests a somewhat distinctive account of social coordination and social organization. Coordination can occur in society even in the absence of markets. Situated agents intentionally and unintentionally create all kinds of formal and informal associations, and it is these associations that then coalesce into complex patterns of societal coordination and governance. Because this concept of an association refers to contingent, changing, and contestable practices that arise out of situated agency and local reasoning, it differs from the sociological concept of an institution as defined by fixed norms or rules, and from those sociological ideal types, such as networks, which are alleged to have fixed characteristics that explain their other features across time and space.

This analytical point would not have surprised the many consumer groups of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially those in progressive and feminist traditions that saw consumption as a terrain in which people who were excluded or at the margins of society could cultivate their independence, humanity, and democratic skills. This view of the consumer certainly pervaded the consumer cooperative movement. So, for example, G. J. Holyoake, the influential nineteenth-century British cooperator, who spread the message of the Rochdale Pioneers across the world, made much of the emancipatory and pluralist qualities that set cooperative consumption apart from more totalizing social and political projects:

> It is the common mark of the quack mind to pretend that one thing will do everything. The co-operator is not of those who believe ten times more than they can provide, and who can provide ten times more than anyone else can believe. . . . Those who propose to remake the world—as the "wilder sort" of social reformers do—must remove the human race, since the past is in the bones of all who live, and a nihilistic removal of everybody would render the reconstruction of society difficult. In these days of State Socialism it is not the interest of statesmen, or of any who influence public affairs, to discourage the increase of co-operators, who preach no doctrine of industrial despair—who do not hang on the skirts of the State—who envy no class—who counsel no war on property—who do not believe in murder as a mode of progress—as many do in well-to-do and educated circles, as well as among the ignorant and miserable. Co-operators are of a different order of thinkers. They believe that in a free country justice can be won by reason, if the agitators will make but half the sacrifice of time, comfort, money, liberty, and life which have to be made by those who seek social change by civil war.[27]

If it is easy to be critical of the self-limiting political and economic vision propagated here, it would also be easy to underestimate the amount of self-cultivation and social capital that was generated by these consumer movements, several million strong.

But what about consumers in far less liberal systems? Many of the anxieties about, and moral condemnations of, consumerism emerged from critical engagements with Nazi Germany and the impact there of mass culture. Whatever one's view of the merits of the concept of civil society, a civil society Nazi Germany clearly was not. Certainly, there is no reason why social scientists cannot condemn Nazism and at the same time accept that consumption can serve to create new forms of cooperation and to channel creative knowledge. Many readers may be familiar with Theodor Adorno and Marcuse's writings on the crippling, enslaving, and dehumanizing dynamics of a modern mass consumption that left people in the grip of fascist power. What is less well known is the degree to which it was consumption that provided Germans after 1933 with a space relatively separate from and immune to the totalizing ambition of the fascist regime. All of commodity culture, advertising, product design and exhibits, and public relations and advertisers helped to keep alive and openly to encourage dreams of difference. Major companies, such as Henkel, the household products firm, promoted images of a private sphere of convenience, comfort, and even luxury, with shiny new kitchens, plastic bathtubs, and elegant living rooms, that are conventionally associated with exhibitions of the American way of life after the World War II. These images may well have reinforced a sense of a specifically German entitlement to material comfort that would be sustained during the war by the ruthless exploitation, enslavement, and extermination of allegedly inferior races. At the same time, however, they also kept alive ideas and practices of social life that to a degree offered a shelter from a fascistic culture.[28] To provide a moral evaluation of such dimensions of consumption is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the complexities involved and the resilience of local reasoning (however distinct from a domain of formal political engagement) suggest that consumption can involve a circulation of rationalities that sets it apart from both states and markets.

CONCLUSION

By moving beyond the two opposed languages of choice/consumerism and community/citizenship, this chapter has also set the scene for the attempt in Part III of this book to rethink the concepts and practices of present-day governance. Neoliberals equate freedom with participation in a market economy and a consumerist society, and they think of democracy as a way of protecting this freedom. Communitarians often accept such a view of freedom or rights, while also arguing that an excess of rights or autonomy results in dysfunctional communities—hence they often end up seeming to defend somewhat homogenous communities that place restrictions on personal choice in the name of common citizenship. In contrast, to retrieve different languages of civic choice, as this chapter has done here, is to rehabilitate the possibility of creating practices of choice and consumption that can support cooperative civic associations and so community. In addition to private individualistic ways of life, consumers can also choose civic communal ones. Consumers can engage one another in ways that lead them to reflect on their respective value systems and to choose to modify their preferences and actions.

This recognition of the possibilities of civic choice might encourage social scientists to place greater emphasis on the ways in which people actively make their freedom through their participation in a plurality of self-governing practices. For a start, a concept such as local reasoning suggests that citizens often have a knowledge of how they will respond to policies that is not available to experts. It helps social scientists to understand why policies designed by experts at a distance from those they will affect can fail, or have unintended consequences, due to their lack of fit with the lived practice of those very people. Public policies, it suggests, might be more effective in contexts of high levels of civic engagement and public participation. In addition, a concept such as situated agency ascribes to citizens capacities for choice and innovation. If social scientists value those capacities, they will have an ethical reason for seeking to promote self-governing practices. Thus, these concepts encourage social scientists to retrieve a pluralist ambition to secure popular deliberation, voice, and influence through various associations in civil society. They encourage social scientists to look to consumer groups, worker participation, and local bodies as sites and means for extending democracy in present-day governance.

PART III

The New Politics

7 A Genealogy of Governance

Governance can refer not only to abstract accounts of social organization but also to more specific accounts of today's politics. Governance then describes one of the most important trends of recent times. Social scientists, especially those who work on public administration and local government, believe that public organization and action has moved from hierarchy and bureaucracy toward markets and networks. Doubts remain, however, that some scholars overstate the shift: after all, bureaucratic hierarchies surely remain widespread and probably the most common form of public organization. Questions also remain about the nature of the shift: Have governments become less capable of getting things their way or have they merely altered the ways in which they do so? Despite such doubts and questions, however, there is a widespread consensus that "governance" captures a shift in public organization and action toward markets and networks.

Decentered theory provides a humanist and historicist perspective on governance as a new politics of markets and networks. Decentered theory encourages social scientists, first, to recognize the diversity of present-day public organization and action; and second, to explain the new politics less by formal analyses and more by historical genealogies. Social scientists cannot adequately explain changes in governance generally or present-day governance in particular simply by appealing to allegedly objective rationality or reified social mechanisms and processes. Instead, social scientists should explain governance through historical narratives. Narratives are a form of explanation that works by relating actions to the beliefs and desires that produce them. They depend on the conditional connections between beliefs, desires, and actions, and they locate the resulting webs of beliefs, desires, and action in historical context. So, to explain different and changing patterns of public organization and action, social scientists need to situate the beliefs and practices of the relevant actors against the background of particular traditions and as responses to specific dilemmas.

This chapter explores the historical background to governance as a new politics. Because decentered theory inspires historicist analyses of social concepts such as state and nation, the historical narrative of this chapter inevitably revisits themes introduced in earlier chapters. The narrative begins with the decline of developmental historicism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At that time modernist social science seemed to offer a legitimate expertise on which to base public action. For much of the twentieth century, this expertise was located in the bureaucracy. The new governance emerged in response to dilemmas that appeared to undermine the bureaucratic state in the late twentieth century. At that time modernist expertise inspired public-sector reforms that sought to build markets and networks. This narrative is also a critique of the new politics. It is a genealogy that suggests the new politics embodies modernist forms of knowledge that are contingent and contestable in ways they are unable to acknowledge. In addition, this chapter argues that modernism has encouraged forms of public organization and action that undermine democratic ideals and practices.

THE BUREAUCRATIC STATE

The bureaucratic state has long suffered from legitimacy worries. Because the bureaucracy provides little opportunities for participation, its presence raises questions such as "What is the proper relationship of administration to politics in democratic government?" and "Can bureaucracy be a legitimate part of democratic governance." There is, therefore, no shortage of critical theories of the bureaucratic state. Generally, however, these critiques postulate an ontological essence to the bureaucratic state rather than narrating its historical ontology. Some rely on structural and transcendental analyses rather than genealogy. The more acceptable ones move back and forth between a reified ontology and a historical ontology. One recent example is Thomas Catlaw's *Fabricating the People: Politics and Administration in the Biopolitical State*.[1]

Catlaw argues that the problem of legitimacy arises largely from assumptions that the bureaucratic state makes about "the People." He claims that the state behaves as if it were based on a single sovereign entity called "the People," when really there is no such entity. In Catlaw's view, the awkward ontology of the People underlies the difficulties that social scientists have in making sense of the discretion that individual bureaucrats possess given that their role is meant to be one of enacting the public will as expressed by democratically elected representatives. Catlaw's argument is that no "People" and no "Public Will" exists (let alone exists as a unified entity) prior to its representation and construction. Catlaw does not aim, in other words, to defend an alternative form of governance that would properly reflect the will of the People. He wants instead to offer an ontological diagnosis of the legitimacy problems confronting the bureaucratic state.

Arguably few social scientists now believe in a unified popular will. Once social scientists accept that the people as a unity does not exist, the interesting questions become the following: How are fictions of a popular will constructed? What is the ontological nature of a people? In answering these questions, Catlaw sometimes seems to adopt a historicist and genealogical stance, but he also appeals to a more structuralist and ontological stance. His analysis of the problem of legitimacy depends less on historical narratives about the contingent constructions of particular meanings and practices than on quasi-structural propositions about the allegedly inevitable role of differences and exclusions in any system of signs. Other critical theorists are similarly prone confusingly to muddle a historicist and genealogical stance—perhaps inspired by the later work of Michel Foucault—with more structuralist and transcendental ontologies—perhaps inspired by the analyses of language and mind offered respectively by Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Lacan or perhaps inspired by the analysis of the political offered by Carl Schmidt or Chantal Mouffe.

Historicists and quasi-structuralists typically agree that people's assumptions and beliefs are constitutive of political life. In this view, modern representative democracy relies on a set of beliefs, including those about the People as sovereign. Historicists then suggest that these beliefs are contingent and changeable. Over time different contested beliefs about the People give rise to changing practices of citizenship, representation, and democracy. The study of the bureaucratic state and its discontents requires a historical account of these shifts in beliefs and practices.

Sometimes Catlaw appears to be offering such an account, but at other times he invokes quasi-structural and even necessary ontological relations among representation, the People, and unity. At the beginning of his book, for example, he writes, "what we will see is that the fundamental commitment of representation is to a *unity* behind appearance and difference or, in the language of philosophy, that *being is One*."[2] Yet there are few grounds for assuming that these relations are as Catlaw describes them. Why could persons not conceive of themselves as representing (in both a linguistic and a political sense) not a unity but a multiplicity? Surely a People could recognize and treat itself as a bundle of persons that share common features at some levels of abstraction but vary with respect to their other features and at other levels of abstraction.

A similar shift away from historicism and toward a reified and quasi-structural ontology appears in Catlaw's use of Foucault's concept of biopolitics. Foucault conceived of biopolitics in a resolutely historicist manner. He argued that biopolitics is a uniquely modern phenomenon that rose only when states began to regulate their subjects through technologies that operate on bodies and populations. Biopolitics began to emerge as a contingent historical practice only during the eighteenth century. Indeed, biopolitics could not possibly have arisen earlier since it presupposes particular ideas about species and populations, and particular statistical techniques for tracing the demographic patterns among populations, and these ideas and techniques did not became available until the eighteenth century. Foucault identified "a set of processes such as the ratio of births to death, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of the population and so-on." He argued that "it is these processes—the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so-on—together with a whole series of economic and political problems which . . . become biopolitics' first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control."[3]

In contrast, Catlaw conceives of biopolitics in a way that takes it out of history.[4] He defines biopolitics as the imposition of a unified political form onto life, and he then unpacks the nature of biopolitics not by reference to some historically contingent set of technologies, but in terms of a kind of quasi-structural logic of exclusion that appears to be a kind of necessary ontological consequence of the concept of the People. He argues that the People has no content and so necessarily defines itself by reference to the binary other it excludes. Here too, however, there seem few grounds for postulating this quasi-structural logic. A People might conceive of themselves as being made up of individuals exhibiting a complex pattern of similarities and differences, each defined not in terms of what they are not but rather in terms of the relevant context of background theories about, for example, citizenship. Surely a People could conceive of itself as being composed of different degrees and types of citizenship, to each of which are attached different clusters of rights and duties, and each of which is itself open to disputation.[5]

There are few grounds for assuming a People always must appear to itself as a unity. On the contrary, Chapter 4 suggested that this concept of a nation (or People) has a history. The idea of the People, conceived as a unity, was dominant in the nineteenth century when it formed part of a broader developmental historicism that depicted the nation state as emerging out of prepolitical communities that were bound together by language, ethnicity, and culture. Contrary to what Catlaw suggests, therefore, the idea of the People as a unity is not an ontological paradox that inevitably arises as part of any attempt to think about community, politics, or the state. It is, rather, an idea that appeared and flourished only at a specific historical moment.

Further, because the concept of the People as a unity flourished within the developmental historicism of the nineteenth century, it seems implausible to suggest, as Catlaw does, that the bureaucratic state is a symptom of this concept. The bureaucratic state did not properly develop until the early twentieth century following the decline of developmental historicism. The bureaucratic state is, in other words, largely a contingent historical product of the shift from developmental historicism to modernist social science. The bureaucratic state rose because belief in a nation state based on a unified People gave way to bureaucracies based on modernist expertise. From this perspective, the crisis of the bureaucratic state cannot be understood properly as being a result of ontological fallacies in the very idea of a unified People. It needs to be explained, instead, by reference to the perceived failings of bureaucracies that are based on modernist expertise. It needs to be explained by a genealogy of governance.

MODERNISM AND GOVERNANCE

In the late nineteenth century, social theory was dominated by a developmental historicism that inspired grand narratives centered on the People, the nation, the state, and their liberty. Developmental historicism appealed to narratives that situated events and institutions in a larger order of evolving continuity. Examples include Whig history, idealist philosophy, and evolutionary theorizing. The most significant feature of twentieth century social science was, in sharp contrast, the emergence of modernist modes of knowledge that atomize the flux of reality.

The modernist break with developmental historicism had both formal and substantive aspects.[6] In formal terms, modernist social scientists turned from historical narratives to formal models, correlations, and classifications that held across time and place. They explained outcomes by reference to psychological types, functional requirements of systems, a general human rationality, and ahistorical mechanisms and processes. In substantive terms, modernist social science overlapped with new emerging topics, including political parties, interest groups, and policy networks. The substantive and formal aspects of modernist social science often reinforced one another, since the new techniques made it easier to study some of the new topics and the new topics appeared to require new techniques for gathering and arranging data.

Twentieth-century social science was dominated by two varieties of modernism. Although both these varieties of modernism contrast with developmental historicism, they instantiate different concepts of rationality associated with different forms of explanation and so different analyses of governance. On the one hand, modernist economics depends on a concept of rationality that privileges utility maximization; it rose with neoclassical theory and has spread to rational choice theory. On the other, modernist sociology relies on a concept of rationality that privileges appropriateness in relation to social norms; it rose with functionalism and has spread to network theory and communitarianism.

Part of the history of modernist economics was discussed in the previous chapter. For much of the nineteenth century, economists placed the analyses pioneered by Adam Smith within a more organic and historical theoretical frame. Neoclassical economics established its dominance as this developmental historicism gave way to modernist social science. Even then neoclassical economics did not simply obliterate other traditions. Historical and institutional economics continued to thrive, especially on the European continent where economists remained divided about the relevance of utility theory as late as the 1930s. Nonetheless, the spread of modernism gradually saw diachronic narratives of the development of economies, states, and civilizations give way to formal models and statistical correlations.[7]

Neoclassical economics relies on a concept of rationality suited to modernist emphases on atomization, deduction, and synchronic analysis. This economic rationality is conceived as a property of individual decisions and actions; it is not tied to norms, practices, or societies, except in so far as these are judged effective or ineffective ways of aggregating individual choices. In addition, economic rationality is postulated as an axiom on the basis of which to construct deductive models; it is not deployed as a principle by which to interpret facts discovered through inductive empirical research. Finally, the models derived from the axioms of economic rationality are typically applied to general patterns irrespective of time and space; they do not trace the particular evolution of individuals, practices, or societies. A modernist view of knowledge set the scene for the economic concept of rationality, but the concept acquired its more specific content from utility maximization. In neoclassical economics, individuals act in order to maximize their personal utility, where utility is defined as a measure of the satisfaction or happiness gained by the action and its outcome.

The most prominent alternative to modernist economics is, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, a modernist sociology that replaces instrumental rationality with appropriateness. Sociological rationality is about acting in accord with appropriate social norms to fulfill established roles in systems, processes, institutions, or practices. Some sociologists, including Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu, argue that even modern individuals are best conceived not as instrumental actors but as actors following social norms and roles. Others, including Max Weber and Herbert Marcuse, express fears about the spread of selfish, acquisitive, and instrumental norms in modern societies. These two strands of modernist sociology inspire broad condemnations of modernity, capitalism, and consumerism for spreading selfish and instrumental norms that wreck older forms of solidarity and community.

Significantly these sociological traditions, with their alternative concepts of rationality, date, as does neoclassical economics, from the broad intellectual shift from developmental historicism toward modernist social science with its emphasis on synchronic analyses. The commonalities of the economic and sociological concepts of rationality are just as important as their differences. Modernist economists and modernist sociologists compartmentalize aspects of social life so as to manage and explain facts. They seek to make sense of the particular not by locating it in a temporal narrative but by reducing it to formal midlevel or universal generalizations that allegedly hold across time and space. Modernist sociologists may eschew deductive models, but they too reject historicist explanations, preferring formal classifications, correlations, functions, systems, and ideal types. Although functionalist themes appeared in the nineteenth century, these sociological forms of explanation properly flourished only with the rise of modernist social science. It was Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski, not Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, who distinguished functional explanations that refer to the synchronic role of an object in a system or social order (a type of explanation they considered to be scientific) from both the psychological question of motivation and the historical question of origins.

The shift from developmental historicism to modernist social science altered the concept and nature of the state.[8] As modernist social scientists rejected historicism, so they challenged the idea that the state rose out of a nation bound together by a common language, culture, and history. Modernist social scientists turned to formal patterns, regularities, and models of action and institutions across space and time. Thus, when they turned away from a substantive focus on the state toward topics such as political parties, interest groups, and policy networks, these institutions were studied in terms of laws and regularities derived from, for example, the function of the institutions in abstract systems. Even when modernist social scientists continued to study the state, they increasingly portrayed it as fragmented into factional interests associated with different classes and parties.

Modernist social science challenged the idea that representative democracy was a way of electing and holding to account politicians who would act in accord with the common good of a nation. Representative democracy was thus in danger of losing much of its legitimacy. However, modernist social science also opened up new ways of making and legitimating public policy in representative democracies. In particular, modernist social science inspired a new belief in formal expertise. The suggestion was that public policy might be legitimate if it were based on the formal knowledge of modernist social science. Elected representatives would no longer need to express a shared national character and a common good. They could just define policy goals and check the activity of experts. Social scientists, professionals, and generalist civil servants would use their expertise to devise rational scientific policies in accord with these goals. Modernist social science thus helped to create the conditions for the bureaucratic state.

One important justification for the creation of an increasingly insulated and centralized bureaucracy was the need to deal with abuses and irrationalities in democratic processes. Modernist social scientists, such as Mosei Ostrogrorski, Graham Wallas, and W. F. Willoughby, wrote of the factionalism, propaganda, and financial extravagances to which democratic governments were prone. Modernist social scientists often argued that an insulated and centralized bureaucracy could preserve democracy while removing its worst features—instability, irrationality, and sectarianism—from the day-to-day activities of governing. Corporatism and the welfare state were, to some extent, bureaucratic responses to factionalism and irrationality. Within corporatism, the bureaucracy reached out to organized interests and brokered their disputes.[9] The corporatist state gave some associations a privileged status as the representatives of social and economic groups. These privileged associations were involved in the formulation of public policies, and in return they helped to ensure the implementation of those policies. The bureaucracy also reached out to individual citizens, assuming greater responsibility for their welfare.[10] The welfare state took control of the individual's interests in education, pensions, and unemployment insurance. The welfare state developed policies not only to redistribute resources but also to ensure that these resources were used rationally to meet the needs of citizens.

Governance, conceived as a new politics, rose in large part out of a crisis in the modernist state. Oversimplifications will abound in any attempt to differentiate the plethora of ideas that fed into narratives about the crisis of the state in the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, one way of approaching these narratives is to see them as products of the different strands of modernist social science. Some narratives of the crisis of the state challenged bureaucracy, corporatism, and social welfare in terms set by modernist economics. Neoclassical microlevel assumptions informed, for example, narratives that tried to show that fiscal crises were a pathology built into the nature of the welfare state. These narratives went as follows.[11] Citizens, being rational actors, try to maximize their short-term interests. Accordingly, they privilege welfare policies that are of benefit to themselves as individuals over the long-term, cumulative, and shared effects of rising state expenditure. Similarly, politicians, being rational actors, try to maximize their short-term electoral interests. Accordingly, they promote policies that will gain the votes of these rational citizens rather than pursuing fiscal responsibility. Narrow political considerations thereby trump economic imperatives. Given groups of voters demand more and more welfare benefits, and politicians repeatedly pass welfare legislation on behalf of them. A growing proportion of the national product therefore goes toward welfare, making fiscal crises inevitable. These narratives of state overload and state crisis pointed to a clear solution—fiscal austerity, monetary control, and a rolling back of the state.

Other narratives of the crisis of the state drew on modernist sociologies and their analyses of changes in the world.[12] These narratives characteristically implied that the state had to change in response to international and domestic pressures. Internationally, the increased mobility of capital made it more difficult for states to control and regulate economic activity. The state could not go it alone but rather had to pursue coordination and regulation across borders. Industries that had operated within the domain of the state were now becoming increasingly transnational in their activities. The growing number and prominence of transnational corporations raised problems of coordination and questions of jurisdiction. There was a gap between the national operation of regulatory structures and an increasingly international economy. Domestically, the state confronted the rising demands of its citizens. These demands reflected popular discontent with the state's handling of the economy and with its apparent unresponsiveness. Many states were saddled with large debts. Globalization provoked anxieties about competitiveness and wages. Sections of the public worried that the state had lost control. Equally, state actors often found that they were subject to varied and even contradictory demands from the public. Voters wanted better services and lower taxes. They wanted a more effective state but also a more transparent and accountable one. They wanted decisive leaders and yet more popular participation.

A new politics emerged from the interconnected theories and reforms by which policy actors conceived of this crisis of the state and responded to it. These theories and reforms rejected the forms of expertise associated with the postwar state. However, instead of challenging the idea of applying modernist expertise to social life, policy actors turned yet again to modernist social science to sustain forms of expertise. Present-day governance rose here in two analytically distinct waves of public-sector reform. The first wave consisted of reforms inspired by trends in modernist economics—neoliberalism, the new public management, and contracting out. The second consisted of the reforms that drew on trends in modernist sociology—Third Way, joined-up governance, and networks and partnerships.

The first wave of reforms drew on neoliberalism and rational choice theory. It relied on neoclassical ideas to explain, legitimate, and probably foster public dissatisfaction with bureaucracy. Neoliberals compared the state's top-down and hierarchical mode of organization with the decentralized and competitive structure of the market. They argued that the market was superior. They concluded that when possible markets and quasi-markets should replace bureaucracy. A quest for efficiency led them to call on the state to transfer organizations and activities to the private sector. Organizations could be transferred by privatization, that is, the transfer of state assets to the private sector through flotations or management buyouts. Activities could be transferred by means of contracting out, that is, the state could pay a private-sector organization to undertake tasks on its behalf.

Most neoliberals combined their faith in markets with a faith in the idea that the discipline of the market somehow validated the management practices of the private sector. Neoliberals redefined civil servants as managers and service providers, and they redefined citizens as consumers and service users. More specifically, neoliberal reforms of public management often reflected formal analyses. Neoclassical economists first developed principal-agent theory to analyze the problem of delegated discretion in the private sector.[13] They argued that delegating decision making from principals (shareholders) to agents (managers) is risky because the agents may act on their own interests. Economists proposed minimizing this risk by using incentives and market mechanisms to align the interests of the agents with those of the principals. In the public sector, the principals are the voters and their elected representatives, and the agents are civil servants. For rational choice theorists, therefore, just as the basic problem of private-sector corporations was to ensure that the managers acted on behalf of the shareholders, so the basic problem of public organization appeared to be to ensure that public officials worked on behalf of citizens and representative governments. Consequently, neoliberals extended to the public sector the incentives and market mechanisms that economists had proposed to bring the interests of agents into alignment with those of their principals. The result was the new public management.[14]

Popular and neoliberal narratives combined with more formal analyses to produce a paradigm shift within modernism. The new paradigm denounced bureaucracy and public officials, and championed markets and entrepreneurs. It turned away from what was now derided as big government, bloated bureaucracy, and uniform solutions, and toward a private sector that was now lauded as competitive, efficient, and flexible. This paradigm shift was also one from institutional definitions of good government, which emphasized clear divisions of responsibility set in a context of hierarchical relationships, toward new definitions of efficient processes defined in terms of service delivery and outputs, with an attendant emphasis on transparency, user friendliness, and incentive structures.

When social scientists inspired by modernist sociology studied the neoliberal reforms of the public sector, they were usually highly critical. They argued that the reforms had exasperated problems of coordination and steering. Many of them then promoted networks and joined-up government as ways of addressing these problems.[15] The advocates of networks distinguish them from hierarchies as well as markets. The old institutionalists believed that hierarchies made it easier to tackle many problems by dividing the problems into smaller tasks, each of which could then be performed by a specialized unit. The new institutionalists argue that this approach to problem solving no longer suits the contemporary world. Today, policymakers increasingly confront "wicked problems" that are not amenable to older forms of division and specialization. To solve these problems requires networks.

The concept of a "wicked problem" rose as part of modernists sociology with its institutionalism and functionalism.[16] Social democratic governments then picked it up and adopted it to counter the ideas and policies of neoliberals. Wicked problems are generally defined in terms such as the following: a problem of more or less unique nature; the lack of any definitive formulation of such a problem; the existence of multiple explanations for it; the absence of a test to decide the value of any response to it; all responses to it being better or worse rather than true or false; and each response to it having important consequences such that there is no real chance to learn by trial and error. Typically these features strongly imply that wicked problems are interrelated in that one particular wicked problem can be explained in terms of its relationship to others and in that any response to one wicked problem can have an impact on others. Classic examples of wicked problems include pressing issues of governance such as security, environment, and urban blight.

So, many institutionalists accept neoliberal arguments about the inflexible and unresponsive nature of hierarchies, but instead of promoting markets, they appeal to networks as a suitably flexible and responsive alternative based on the recognition that social actors operate in structured relationships. They argue that efficiency and effectiveness derive from stable relationships characterized by trust, social participation, and voluntary associations. Further, although hierarchies can provide a context for trust and stability, the time for hierarchies has passed. Hierarchies do not suit the new knowledge-driven global economy. This new world increasingly throws up wicked problems that require networks and joined-up governance. The new institutionalism thus inspired a second wave of reforms, including many of New Labour's policies in Britain, Australia's whole of government agenda, international attempts to deal with failed states, and post-9/11 security policy in the United States.

MODERNISM CONTRA DEMOCRACY

Whether or not the rise of present-day governance has led to more efficient and responsive public services, it certainly poses problems of transparency and legitimacy. Private-sector actors are not democratically elected, and they are all too rarely directly accountable to elected representatives. Enlarging their role in public organization and action thus raises important questions of accountability.[17]

Some of the most important issues currently confronting democratic governance can be dated back to the rise of modernist social science.[18] The collapse of developmental historicism undermined many of the assumptions that sustained belief in representative democracy. No longer could the state be viewed as an expression of the common interests of a people and a nation. No longer could one assume that responsible politicians and officials would act in accord with a common good. The problem of ensuring that representatives were responsible gave way to that of making them accountable. However, even as modernism revealed cracks in representative democracy, so it papered over then by appeals to an apparently neutral expertise. The new governance has done much the same. The main change has been in the content of the expertise. Today's wallpaper is a blend of rational choice theory and the new institutionalism.

For developmental historicists, representative democracy was a historical achievement. The civil society (or stage of civilization) that was needed to sustain representative democracy served to promote moral ideals and behavior, including those associated with responsible government. Responsibility referred as much to the character of politicians and officials as to their relationship to the public. Politicians and officials had a duty to respond to the demands, wishes, and needs of the people. To act responsibly was to act so as to promote the common good rather than to seek personal advantage. It was to pursue national interests and thereby overcome petty factionalism. Words and concepts akin to "responsibility" in English were equally prominent in other European languages, as with *verantwoordelijkheid* (Dutch), *responsabilité* (French), *verantwortlichkeit* (German), *responsabilità* (Italian), and *responsabilidad* (Spanish). In stark contrast, "accountability" rarely appeared in dictionaries and encyclopedias before the twentieth century.

The concept of accountability appeared alongside modernism. On the one hand, modernism brought a loss of faith in the principles that had sustained belief in the progress of nations toward statehood, liberty, and representative and responsible government. Modernists increasingly portrayed the nation itself as fragmented, and democracy therefore appeared less as a means of expressing a common good and more as a contest among factions and classes. On the other hand, modernism gave rise to new forms of apparently neutral social science. Social science appeared to provide a neutral expertise that might guide policymaking. Social science could dictate what policies would best produce whatever results or values democratic representatives decided on. Modernism thus helped sustain a firm distinction between politics and administration.[19] The political process generates values and political decisions for which ministers are then the spokespeople. Public officials provide the politically neutral expertise that allows for the formulation and implementation of policies that are in accord with these values and decisions. In this context, responsibility, as conceived by developmental historicists, becomes less relevant than both the accountability of public officials to their political masters and the accountability of politicians to the electorate.

The content of the concept of accountability reflects its intimate connection to bureaucratic expertise. The theory, if not the practice, of accountability applies much more firmly to public officials than it does to politicians. In theory, politicians are held accountable through the institutions of representative democracy. Legislators are held accountable to the voters by periodic elections that decide whether or not they will be returned to office once more. The executive, especially presidents in political systems with a strong separation of powers, are also directly accountable to the electorate. Alternatively, the executive, notably prime ministers and cabinets, are held accountable by a legislature that can revoke the authority of the government. However, modernist social science often suggested that these forms of political accountability are in practice fairly weak. Although politicians and governments can be voted out of office, they often control knowledge, agendas, and resources in ways that make them more powerful than those who might seek to hold them to account. Besides, even when politicians and governments are voted out of office, it often seems that their fall owes less to their conduct in office than to broader political and social trends.

The mechanisms for holding public officials accountable appeared comparatively firm in contrast to those applying to politicians.[20] Administrative accountability occurs in bureaucratic hierarchies. Bureaucratic hierarchies are meant to reflect a specialized and functional division of labor. They are meant to specify clear roles for individuals in the decision-making process thereby making it possible to identify who is responsible for what. Typically individual officials are thus directly answerable to their superiors (and ultimately their political masters) for their actions. Such administrative accountability has been increasingly supplemented by a range of ombudsmen and other judicial means for investigating maladministration and corruption.

Although administrative accountability appeared firmer than did political accountability, it was arguably a rather blunt instrument. Administrative accountability provided a theoretical account of how to apportion blame and seek redress in cases of maladministration. But critics of the bureaucratic state complained that administrative accountability did not provide a way of assessing and responding to different levels of performance. The new theories of governance, including rational choice theory and network theory, thus raised democratic concerns that overlapped with the doubts they generated about the performance of the public sector.

Rational choice theory recast accountability as the principal-agent problem. The postulate of rational and self-interested actors undermined the idea that public officials could generally be relied on to act selflessly for the public good. The problem was not to check on how civil servants behaved, but rather to create a framework in which their interests were aligned with those on behalf of whom they acted. Instead of thinking about how to make the relevant agents (politicians or public officials) accountable to the relevant principals (the electorate and ministers, respectively), rational choice theorists suggested that the question was how to get agents to act in the interests of principals, and they answered this question largely in terms of the provision of suitable incentives for the agents.[21]

The new institutionalism and network theories revealed a world in which decision making was a complex process involving diverse policy actors in networks.[22] This complexity suggested that there was something illusory and unfair about the assumption that people further up the bureaucratic hierarchy could be accountable for the decisions and actions of their subordinates. Administrative and political roles and decisions could rarely be distinguished from one another. Ministerial responsibility became too obvious a myth to be taken seriously. Procedural accountability appeared inappropriate and also too limited, especially when conceived as reactive to decisions that already had been made.

New theories of governance have undermined the forms of expertise and accountability associated with the bureaucratic state. But they have also promoted new forms of modernist expertise that inspired alternative approaches to democracy and accountability. Modernist economics has even inspired some social scientists to suggest that society might benefit from less democracy. Neoliberals often contrast democracy (which only allows citizens to express their preferences by voting once every few years and even then only by a simple "yes" or "no" for a whole slate of policies) with the market (which allows consumers to express their preferences continuously, across intensities, and for individual items). Further, rational choice theorists sometimes worry that democracy entails political transaction costs that lead to incessant increases in public expenditure. They argue that the costs of many items of expenditure are thinly distributed across a large population (so individual voters have little reason to oppose them), while the benefits are concentrated in a small proportion of the population (which thus clamors for increased expenditure). Accordingly, they advocate the use of nonmajoritarian institutions to protect crucial policy areas, such as banking and budgeting, from democracy.[23]

It is perhaps worth saying explicitly that "nonmajoritarian" is little more than a euphemism for "undemocratic." There are known reasons why one might want to protect a range of goods, including human rights, from majoritarian decision making. However, rational choice arguments for nonmajoritarian institutions differ from most arguments for constitutional protections of rights in that they rest not on moral values but on modernist social science. They rely on technical analyses of political transaction costs, and of the credibility gap associated with a time-inconsistency problem, to suggest that a delegation of powers to nonmajoritarian bodies reduces the political transaction costs that politicians incur because they lack a reliable "technology of commitment."

Social scientists inspired by modernist sociology are often uncomfortable with the growth of nonmajoritarian and undemocratic organizations. Many of them associate the growing role of such organizations with rising public hostility to politics and government. Institutionalists have responded to the democratic issues raised by new forms of public organization and action by expanding the concept of legitimacy to cover effectiveness, legal accountability, and social inclusion.[24] Sometimes they associate legitimacy with the effectiveness of public organizations in providing public goods. Sometimes they ascribe legitimacy to organizations that are created and regulated by democratic states no matter how long and obscure the lines of delegation: legitimacy persists because the independent organizations are legally accountable, and because a democratic government passed the relevant laws. Finally, they sometimes suggest that the legitimacy of institutions and decisions might rest on their being fair and inclusive. Proponents of this last view emphasize the importance of a strong civil society in securing a form of accountability based on public scrutiny. Voluntary groups, the media, and active citizens monitor institutions and decisions to ensure that they are fair and inclusive and so to give or deny organizations the legitimacy and credibility required to participate effectively in policymaking processes.

The rise of governance has thus been accompanied by concepts of accountability that emphasize performance more than procedure.[25] Performance accountability identifies legitimacy primarily with stakeholder satisfaction with outputs, thereby sidestepping the problems that modernist social scientists now associate with procedural accountability. If the state is judged by its performance or outputs, then there is less need to cling to the mythical distinction between administrative and political domains. Besides, performance accountability makes it less important that the actions of the agent or subordinate be directly overseen and judged by the principal.

One way of conceiving of performance accountability is in terms of quasi-market. Here citizens act as customers, and they express their satisfaction by buying or selecting services delivered by one agency rather than another. Yet public agencies often lack the kind of pricing mechanisms, profit levels, and hard budgets that might make the market an indicator of customer satisfaction. Thus, another way of conceiving of performance accountability is in terms of measurements of outputs. Targets, benchmarks, and other standards and indicators provide a basis for monitoring and auditing the performance of public agencies. A final way of conceiving of performance accountability might be as embedded in horizontal exchanges among a system of actors. Each actor can call into question the performance of any other.

These responses to the problems of democratic governance—the responses of modernist economists and modernist sociologists—are not just academic; they inform much public policy. Just as policy actors introduced two waves of public-sector reform that drew on formal and folk versions of social science theories, so they have responded to the democratic issues tied to the impact of those reforms by clinging to representative institutions supplemented by nonmajoritarian institutions, social inclusion, and performance and horizontal accountability.

The example of central and local government in Britain is indicative. In Britain there has been a continuing adherence to the representative image of democracy, a willingness to hand powers to nonmajoritarian institutions, and the use of public-sector reform to spread markets and networks as a means of promoting legitimacy. For a start, the extensive constitutional reforms of the past twenty years suggest that the dominant vision of democracy focuses almost solely on representative institutions. Successive governments have pursued a liberal vision of multilevel territorial governments, with some electoral experimentation, more or less to the exclusion of alternative forms of pluralism and participation. Representative assemblies and elections remain the focus of reform. Devolution to Scotland and Wales consisted largely of the creation of the new parliaments in Edinburgh and Cardiff. The ill-fated reform of the English regions was all about creating new territorially based legislatures. In Westminster too, the reforms have concentrated on parliament, especially the House of Lords. One other feature of the new assemblies has been the introduction of diverse electoral systems, but that too stays clearly and firmly within the framework of the institutions of long-standing representative democracies.

New Labour, albeit unwittingly, echoed the logic for nonmajoritarian institutions in its first dramatic gesture—the granting of independence to the Bank of England. A similar logic appeared in its judicial reforms. The government responded to dilemmas of efficiency and trust by promoting juridification. It turned to judges as experts who could provide efficient protection of human rights and welfare, and it did so in the hope that judges would create widespread trust in this new pattern of rule thereby giving the state greater legitimacy. Again, by empowering the courts with a new capacity to review domestic legislation—in, for example, the British Human Rights Act (1998)—New Labour effectively welcomed the courts into the policymaking process in a way that, for better or worse, reduced the range of decisions that could be made democratically. The judiciary is a nonmajoritarian institution whose new role restricts (without eliminating) the scope of later democratic decision making.

Although the unwritten nature of Britain's constitution blurs the distinction between constitutional and administrative affairs even more than usual, there remains a clear enough distinction between them. Local government reform can be primarily constitutional or primarily administrative. Recent British governments have flirted with democratic innovations, most notably elected mayors. Nonetheless, their approach to local government has concentrated almost entirely on administrative reforms, including best value, comprehensive performance assessment, and local area agreements. These administrative reforms sometimes reflect the idea that markets and networks can foster a brave new democracy based on expanded choice and social inclusion. More often, however, they are attempts to reassert central control and establish minimum standards.

The more general point, however, is that policymakers often respond to contemporary democratic issues by trying to supplement representative institutions with an expertise based on new modernist theories of governance. Social scientists might distinguish here between two types of expertise. One type of expertise draws on the modernist economics found in neoclassical economics and rational choice theory. It inspires a whittling away of democracy evident in attempts to restrict the scope of democratic decision making in order to deal with alleged collective irrationalities. Public affairs are given over to nonmajoritarian institutions, including independent central banks and courts. Similarly, future democratic decisions are constrained by laws requiring that legislation, for example, balance budgets or respect human rights. A second type of expertise draws on the modernist sociology found in institutionalism and network theory. It inspires a rethinking of democracy that is evident in emphases on horizontal and performance accountability and on social inclusion. Bureaucratic hierarchies are to give way to joined-up networks. Policing, education, and other public services are increasingly to be based on partnerships that include private-sector organizations and community groups.

Policymakers regularly evoke a brave new world of decentralization, public involvement, and empowerment. Many policymakers may genuinely believe that markets and networks can and should promote democratic ideals. Nonetheless, as will be argued in the next chapter, their faith often derives at least implicitly from expert assertions about how inclusive markets and networks can support efficient governance that is perceived as legitimate. As such, there is a possible tension within their brave new world. Are participation and dialogue means to efficient governance and perceived legitimacy or are they means of enacting democratic values? What will happen if the aim of promoting effective governance and perceived legitimacy comes into conflict with that of extending social inclusion and political participation?

CONCLUSION

Governance, conceived as a new politics, replaces one type of modernism with others. Out go bureaucracy, professional expertise, and procedural accountability. In come markets and networks, rational choice theory and network institutionalism, and performance accountability. The changes have been dramatic. Nonetheless, the new politics is still part of a modernism that has long been struggling with the demise of nineteenth-century understandings of the state.

In particular the two waves of governance reform echo the bureaucratic narrative in appealing to modernist expertise. For a start, the reforms rely on formal analyses of reified concepts such as market, network, institution, structure, and social system. In addition, these formal analyses then sustain an allegedly scientific expertise into the apparently more or less necessary properties of certain social and political phenomena. Finally, this alleged expertise then informs advice on how to make the state more effective, how to promote managerial efficiency, and how to steer networks. So, the new politics declares that "bureaucracy does not work, but never mind because managerialism and networks will." It modifies the notion of good governance by introducing new policy instruments (contracting out, performance-based pay, regulation, network management) rather than by reimagining democratic ideals. The next chapter looks more closely at this new politics. Chapters 10 and the Epilogue then return to the critical aspects of this genealogy, exploring the fate and prospects for democracy in this new politics.

8 Governance after Neoliberalism

Political scientists and political theorists have spoken to one another all too little during the past half century. In the 1960s and 1970s, they fought over the scientific pretensions of behavioralism, agreed only to differ, and went their separate ways.[1] Today, however, both political scientists and political theorists are developing powerful accounts of a new politics associated with neoliberal reforms of the state—a new politics in which power operates in and through networks that generally include nonstate actors.

Unsurprisingly, since the 1970s, political scientists and political theorists have become interested in this new politics for rather different reasons. Political scientists typically turned to governance to discuss the new organizations and strategies that states adopted in response to changes in the world.[2] They argue that contemporary states govern in and through increasingly complex organizational forms, including markets, public-private partnerships, policy networks, and transnational groups. They associate governance with the rise of markets and networks alongside bureaucratic hierarchies. Some also ask how civil servants can best respond to this new world of markets and networks. Generally their advice presupposes the top-down perspective of the state itself. They ask how civil servants can steer networks so as successfully to develop and implement policies.

In contrast, political theorists, led by Michel Foucault, initially approached governmentality through early modern ideas about the different techniques governing conduct in various practices.[3] The early moderns explored the specific rationalities they believed applied to objects such as families, populations, trade, prisons, and nations. Often the early moderns were less interested in a politics in which the state acted through law than in a politics in which states used a range of techniques to mobilize people's capacities and to shape people's conduct. Governmentality theorists then extended this view of state power as operating through a range of technologies to cover liberalism and neoliberalism. They depicted liberalism less as a retreat of the state and more as the state relying on social technologies including the market. They depicted neoliberalism less as the promotion of free market choice and more as the state relying on individualizing technologies through which people actively regulated and governed ever more aspects of their lives. For many political theorists, governmentality evokes a world in which power and administrative rationality are dispersed among diverse practices and technologies.

Although political scientists and political theorists have turned to governance and governmentality for different reasons, their accounts of the new politics overlap. For both groups, the new politics occurs through disparate actors and practices located partly in civil society. This chapter uses decentered theory to shape an encounter between the literatures on network governance and neoliberal governmentality. The aim is to craft a research agenda that combines the political scientist's empirical awareness of the diversity of present-day governance with the political theorist's historical breadth. This shared research agenda could inspire a distinctive narrative of governance after neoliberalism.

THE ENCOUNTER

The literatures on both governance and governmentality draw attention to the diffusion of power and ruling throughout civil society. Sometimes these literatures thereby decenter the state; that is to say, they reveal the diverse actors, agencies, and discourses that construct, maintain, and transform ruling. However, the literatures on governance and governmentality are complex. Each encompasses different and arguably contradictory themes. Decentered theory encourages the two literatures to decide among these contradictory themes in ways that might bring them closer together.

Rethinking Governance

A large part of the literature on governance focuses on the changing boundaries between the state and civil society following the neoliberal reforms of the public sector. This literature is an extension of earlier studies of pressure groups and policy networks. Social scientists began to focus on pressure groups in the late nineteenth century and even more so between the two world wars. For most of the nineteenth century, the study of politics concentrated on the theory of the state, constitutional law, and institutional history. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, some social scientists were arguing that this old agenda was inadequate to the type of politics that was then arising in mass societies with broader suffrages. These social scientists began to explore various new empirical topics that were collectively described as "political behavior." They argued that modern democracies could be understood only by paying at least as much attention to public opinion, political parties, and pressure groups as to formal laws and governmental institutions and decisions.

The rising interest in political behavior occurred independently of the much later shifts in methodology and theory that are now described as the behavioral revolution.[4] As early as 1888, James Bryce's pioneering *The American Commonwealth* moved unusually quickly through the historical and legal material in order to devote hundreds of pages to public opinion and political parties.[5] Then, between the wars, the new empirical focus on political behavior combined with a rise in pluralist theories to inspire American scholars such as Peter Odegard and Pendelton Herring to work on pressure groups.[6] By the 1950s, American and British scholars alike were busily reinterpreting British politics by emphasizing the role of networks composed of pressure groups.[7]

Much of the literature on network governance came as social scientists interested in pressure groups and policy networks responded to two challenges during the 1970s and 1980s. First, the rise of neoliberalism entailed concerted efforts to transform the public sector through the spread of markets, market mechanisms, and contracting out. Political science and public administration began to appear less relevant than economics and business. One response to these changes was to argue that these neoliberal policies had the unintended consequence of further spreading networks. Neoliberalism may have created a new governance but it was one characterized less by the emergence of properly functioning markets than by the proliferation of networks, the fragmentation of the public sector, and the erosion of central control.[8] This response refashioned the older ideas of policy networks and pressure groups to make them integral to governance conceived as a new politics.

The second challenge to the elder literature on policy networks came from the rise of rational choice theory. Rational choice theorists called on other social scientists to clarify their microtheory and, in particular, to establish what the concept of a policy network actually explained and how it did so.[9] Some social scientists responded to this challenge by defining their approach in terms of midlevel theories about institutions.[10] Ironically, this response forgot that the study of pressure groups and of policy networks had emerged as part of a broader shift in topic away from midlevel concepts such as institutions, laws, and the state, and toward actual political behavior and the opinions and beliefs that informed it.

So, the literature on governance consists in no small measure of midlevel studies of the institutional legacy of neoliberal reforms of the public sector. Governance often refers to the changing nature of power and the state following the public-sector reforms of the late 1970s. These reforms are said to have precipitated a broad shift from a hierarchic bureaucracy toward a greater use of markets, quasi-markets, and networks, especially in the delivery of public services. The effects of the reforms were intensified by global changes, including an increase in transnational economic activity and the rise of regional institutions such as the European Union. The resulting complexity and fragmentation are such that the state increasingly depends on other organizations to secure its intentions, deliver its policies, and establish a pattern of rule. Governance thereby evokes a new politics in which state power is dispersed among a vast array of spatially and functionally distinct networks composed of all kinds of public, voluntary, and private organizations with which the center now interacts.

The governance literature offers a compelling picture of this new politics. Arguably, however, the literature has forgotten important insights found in earlier studies of pressure groups and policy networks. When the governance literature focuses on changes in the public sector since the late 1970s, it implies that networks are new, and it often even defines networks and network governance in contrast to an elder hierarchic and powerful state. These implications surely overstate the case. Indeed, critics of the governance literature have long complained that the state remains an important, powerful, and often dominant actor within the policy process.[11] Even the governance literature now includes attempts to identify (and perhaps reassert) an "old" statist approach that focuses on the center's dominance and its attempts to control society, as opposed to the "new" approach that often suggests that the state is powerless and that society is self-steering.[12]

Decentered theory does not resolve empirical disputes about the changing power of the central state, but it does suggest that these disputes are of secondary importance to an understanding of the new politics. Once social scientists recognize that the concept of governance is an extension of earlier work on pressure groups and policy networks, they can divorce it from accounts of a hollowing out of the state and a weakening of the core executive following neoliberal reforms. Social scientists are reminded instead that governance and networks are abstract theoretical concepts that point to general features of all sorts of ruling. Further, the governance literature has arguably forgotten that the general features highlighted by these abstract concepts have more to do with informal links and interactions than with laws and institutions. Students of governance forget that the study of pressure groups and policy networks rose as part of a broad shift of focus away from institutions and structures and toward actual behavior, beliefs, and attitudes. Although decentered theory does not preclude appeals to institutions, it does require, as previous chapters have argued, that institutions be analyzed in terms of meaningful activity grounded in people's intentionality.

Scholars of governance might draw on decentered theory to develop a greater awareness of both the theoretical content of their approach and the importance of beliefs and traditions. For a start, decentered theory provides an abstract theoretical analysis of governance as composed of the networks and power relations that connect various parts of civil society to the central state. It suggests that governance concerns all the diverse networks that operate at the boundary of state and civil society, where these networks extend far beyond the core executive to cover the actors and practices that produce certain norms and power relations. In addition, decentered theory and the literature on governmentality suggest that these norms and power relations are not (or not only) institutions or social structures, but rather contingent products of dominant discourses, especially those conveying knowledge and technologies developed by the social sciences themselves.[13]

Rethinking Governmentality

The concept of governmentality—the conduct of conduct—overlaps with governance in that it too relates power and the state to processes, exchanges, and interactions with various practices and actors in civil society. Indeed, etymologically the word *gouvernmentalité* derives from the adjective *gouvernmental* instead of the noun sovereignty.[14]

So, Foucault introduced *gouvernmentalité* to refer to governing as something that happens not only through state action but also throughout society. His focus was less on the formal laws and institutions of the modern state than on the technologies of power that shape, direct, and regulate individuals' beliefs, desires, lifestyles, and actions. Conduct can be governed not only by the state but also by ourselves, others, and social organizations. Indeed, Foucault used governmentality conspicuously to avoid elder ideas of the state and civil society as distinct and reified objects that are defined by equally reified properties and relations such as sovereignty and power. When he introduced these elder concepts, moreover, he defined them anew. In Foucault's view, power is not something that is wielded against people by a central body, such as the state or capital. Rather, power flows throughout all society, producing people as much as controlling them, and power is something that people exercise on themselves as much as something that is imposed on them by external forces. Likewise, in Foucault's view, the state is not a homogenous monolith but rather a dynamic and composite reality that is produced and reproduced by diverse interactions and shifting practices.

Governmentality draws here on a historicist and genealogical approach rather than a structuralist one. Although Foucault earlier appealed to quasi-structuralist epistemes, by the time he was writing on governmentality, he had begun instead to explore more fluid discourses that are composed of endlessly proliferating and shifting meanings. His later genealogies appeal to the contingent and discontinuous processes of becoming that gave rise to present ways of thinking and acting. These genealogies explore modern power and the patterns of rule associated with it.[15]

Foucault traced modern power back to the middle of the sixteenth century at which time the anti-Machiavellian theorists began to explore ways of acting on individuals so as to influence and correct their behavior. The anti-Machiavellians evoked a downward continuity from the well-organized state to an efficient economy and on to well-run families. In the seventeenth century, the concept of police was a broad one that covered all attempts to exert a downward disciplinary power over individuals and their activities. Later, in the eighteenth century, populations were constructed as social objects that possessed properties such as death rates and patterns of growth. The extension of policing to populations gave rise to a biopower composed of new technologies of discipline that sought to increase the health, longevity, and productivity of the population. Finally, Foucault argued that modern power draws on pastoral technologies that initially appeared in the church. Pastoral power requires individuals to internalize various ideals and norms so that they both regard an external authority as concerned with their good and so that they strive to regulate themselves in accord with the dictates of that external authority. For Foucault, the secularization of pastoral power involved the state replacing the spiritual end of salvation with worldly ends such as personal health and well-being.

The governmentality literature offers a compelling account of the rise of modern power. As was suggested in Chapter 3, however, it sometimes remains entangled with structuralist tropes derived from Foucault's earlier archaeologies.[16] First, governmentality theorists appear reluctant properly to recognize local reasoning and situated agency. Of course, Foucault sometimes ascribes to the individual a capacity for innovation and creativity; in particular his late ethical writings suggest that people are capable of a type of self-fashioning. Nonetheless, Foucault often seems to have remained strongly attached to a structuralist opposition to human agency. His concept of pastoral power implies that even when people fashion themselves, they are acting as vehicles for a totalizing power that thereby normalizes them. More generally, empirical studies of governmentality rarely examine agency either as a source of discourses or as evidenced in specific instances of counterconduct. Even the prose of governmentality theorists often shuns agency, relying on passive sentences and abstract nouns to avoid ascribing agency to specific individuals or groups of people. Second, governmentality theorists elide the question of how (or even if) they are explaining social practices and patterns, especially if they really do not want implicitly to appeal to human agency. The historicism informing genealogy presumably requires an account of power in terms of the contingent ruptures and displacements that arise from struggles among agents, albeit not necessarily fully conscious and rational agents. In contrast, the literature on governmentality often treats modern power as a monolith in which state practices fit seamlessly with practices of self-creation. It suggests that modern power rose smoothly, almost as if it were its own cause, acting as a *telos* that brought itself into being. A neglect of agency here means that governmentality theorists characteristically offer reified and monolithic accounts of modern power, with little sensitivity to diversity, heterogeneity, and resistance within and over time.

Governmentality theorists might look to decentered theory for a theoretical perspective that explicitly breaks with structuralism, recognizes the human capacity for situated agency, facilitates the rise of new explanatory concepts, and encourages a greater sensitivity to the heterogeneity of modern power. More generally, by engaging the wider literature on governance, governmentality theorists might liberate themselves from an excessive sense of fidelity to Foucault. They might begin to discuss the provocative theoretical questions that the genealogical stance, with its radical historicism, clearly poses for lingering structuralist tropes in his and their work.

THE AGENDA

An encounter with decentered theory brings the literatures on governance and governmentality closer to each other. The result could be a shared research agenda focused on the diverse meanings embedded in present-day governance. This research agenda would concentrate, as has been emphasized throughout this book, on meaningful activity. It would combine recognition of situated agency with a historicist awareness of the contingent contexts of such agency. It would show people acting for reasons that they form against the background of inherited traditions that influence them.

Crucially decentered theory reminds proponents of network governance and neoliberal governmentality that present-day governance is a historical and cultural practice. Governance is a cultural practice because it is meaningful activity. It is a historical practice because this activity is contingent. Actually, social scientists should say that governance is a set of historical and cultural practices. Governance is clearly not monolithic. It consists of all kinds of practices, from everyday polite exchanges over cups of tea, through symbolic displays of authority and status, to decisions about policies and their implementation. Further, each of these varied practices is anything but monolithic. Polite exchanges over tea do not have a fixed form. Their nature is not determined by some abstract norm. Everyday rituals, like all activity, are contingent, undetermined, and open to contestation.

Again, as I argued in Chapter 4, decentered theory depicts a stateless state. Some theories of governance reify the state; they abstract the state from meaningful activity so as to conceive of it as an institution or structure that determines governing practices and explains policy outcomes. In contrast, decentered theory insists that the state is just an aggregate descriptive term for a vast array of meaningful actions that coalesce in contingent, shifting, and contested practices. The state is stateless in that it has no essence and it does not determine the actions of which it consists. Present-day governance, in this sense, lacks a center.

The historical and cultural practices that make up present-day governance range from the mundane and the ordinary to the grand public performance. These practices have historical roots in contingent traditions and discourses that often conflict with one another. Policy actors struggle to manage the dilemmas that arise from such conflicts. The result is a complex pattern of elite narratives, technologies of power, and popular resistance. In Britain, for example, ministers and senior civil servants persist in trying to rule in terms defined by the court tradition and the Westminster tradition even as they seek the alleged efficiencies of managerial rationalities. Civil servants at all levels struggle to combine these competing demands, often moderating and resisting the imperatives of neoliberal managerialism. Street-level bureaucrats try to apply the resulting discourses and policies and discourses to their own work, again often transforming them and resisting at least some of the aims of policymakers.

Even if proponents of network governance and neoliberal governmentality forged a shared research agenda focused on the stateless state, they still might adopt different methods and foci. The literatures on governance and governmentality certainly privilege different methods as means of exploring apparently different types of meaning. On closer inspection, however, these differences seem more complimentary than antagonistic. The governance literature might encourage the use of ethnography and elite interviews to study the beliefs and motivations of policymakers. The governmentality literature might encourage the use of texts and discourse analysis to study the traditions and dilemmas that provide the historical background to the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious beliefs of policymakers. Bringing these two literatures might produce historicist accounts of the assumptions, knowledge, and convictions embedded in present-day governance.

THE EXAMPLE

By fusing the literatures on network governance and neoliberal governmentality, decentered theory might transform their respective narratives of present-day governance. If the governance literature paid more attention to mentalities, it might describe the extent to which neoliberal reforms, such as the new public management, drew on specific forms of social scientific knowledge to establish various technologies of power. Similarly, if the governmentality literature paid more attention to agency, it might describe the shifting and heterogeneous nature of power/knowledge, and it might recognize the extent to which present-day power often draws on very different forms of social science from those that initially inspired neoliberalism.

Technologies of Power

The literature on governance rose in the context of neoliberal reforms of the public sector. It includes meticulous and detailed studies of the content, implementation, and consequences of policies such as contracting out and the new public management in local government, many states, regional organizations, and comparative contexts. Despite the vast coverage offered by these studies, however, the governance literature might gain additional insights into neoliberalism by attending to work on governmentality.

Accounts of governmentality offer, first, a more general and historical view of neoliberalism, exploring its continuities with elder forms of governance as much as any new hollowing out of the state. Governmentality theorists approach liberalism as a series of technologies of power, developing from the nineteenth century through the welfare state and on to neoliberalism.[17] They portray nineteenth-century liberalism as a political rationality that responded to worries about extensive policing. In this picture, liberalism appears less as a rejection of state intervention and more as a positive political rationality by which to manage complex interactions in society and the economy. Liberalism seeks to produce certain outcomes through dynamics in society and the economy rather than through state action.

Governmentality theorists discuss the rise of the welfare state in relation to the changing problems of liberalism. In their view, modern industrial society gave rise to new social problems, and liberalism then tried to guarantee the security of the economy and the state by addressing these social problems through an array of new technologies that collectively constituted the welfare state. For governmentality theorists, public housing, unemployment insurance, and public health are understood as technologies of power that serve to normalize subjects.

The governmentality theorists' narrative of liberalism sets the scene for their account of neoliberalism and present-day governance. On the one hand, neoliberalism appears as a critique of welfare state liberalism. It promotes market rationalities in society and the economy on the grounds that welfare systems, trade protection, state planning, and Keynesian intervention are unproductive interferences with market relations. On the other hand, however, neoliberalism appears as a range of governmental technologies that actively foster competitive market relations so as to shift responsibility to the individual while also increasing social efficiency.

The literature on governmentality offers, second, a focus on the mentalities or forms of knowledge that inform specific technologies of power. This literature extends Foucault's concern with the ways in which apparently neutral scientific discourses establish particular forms of subjectivity. Indeed, the literature often depicts liberalism, welfare state liberalism, and neoliberalism as composed of policies that seek to normalize subjects by drawing on technical discourses from disciplines such as medicine, the social sciences, statistics, and public health. For example, Niklas Rose argues that the shift from liberalism through welfare liberalism and on to neoliberalism saw the morals and psyche of the individual replace larger units as the main objects of governing rationalities.[18] In his account, early-nineteenth-century liberalism, guided by classical political economy, did not seek to manage individual morality so much as to guarantee the security of economic relations; but then in the middle of the nineteenth century, liberal governments began to regulate the morals of certain segments of the population, and so distinct institutions such as the poor house emerged to discipline and correct people who were seen to have particular pathologies of character.

For governmentality theorists, an even more dramatic change occurred with the rise of the welfare state. Rose argues that early in the twentieth century, statistics, which had been used mainly to calculate national incomes, began to be used to analyze and govern certain characteristics of the population. In his view, an emerging discourse of "social" issues focused on problems that afflicted large portions of the population, and a new governmentality appeared to prevent these problems from further spreading. The welfare state and Keynesianism thus appear as technologies by which experts attempt to govern subjects so as to manage pathologies made visible by new social statistics.

Governmentality theorists argue that neoliberalism constructs and enforces an individualization of responsibility. Whereas the welfare state embodied a collectivist ethos, individuals are now made responsible for their own conduct. Neoliberalism promotes freedom, understood as personal choice, at the same time as it deploys psychology to create new forms of control. Psychological technologies increasingly affect how individuals think about almost every aspect of their lives, including sexual relations, work, health, and consumption choices. Neoliberalism is thus a form of governmentality within which individuals discipline themselves to use their freedom to make responsible choices. Individuals are expected to examine and govern themselves so as to improve their lives in ways that benefit themselves, their community, and the state.

A Second Wave of Reform

The literature on governmentality includes a growing number of studies of the historical rise of modern power and the specific technologies by which it crafts subjectivities. Despite the growing range of these studies, however, the governmentality literature might gain still further insight into neoliberalism and its aftermath by attending more thoroughly to the governance literature. In particular, the governance literature includes far greater sensitivity to agency and heterogeneity. It explores the variety of present-day patterns of governance over place, time, and policy sector.[19] Sometimes it even explores how local traditions inspire resistance all along the policy cascade.[20]

Attention to heterogeneity has led governance theorists to query the rather monolithic account of neoliberalism that dominates the literature on governmentality. Much of the literature on governance now concentrates on a second wave of reforms that has an awkward fit with the category "neoliberalism." The marketization and managerial reforms of the 1980s often have given way to reforms that are focused on institutional arrangements (especially networks and partnerships) and community values (including public service and social inclusion). This second wave of reform initially included several overlapping trends fused under labels such as "joined-up governance," "whole of government," "one-stop government," "service integration," and "*Aktivierender Staat*" (activating state). Over time this second wave of reforms evolved with evidence-based policymaking and service delivery being given a prominent place alongside joining-up. Some commentators even describe this second wave, in contrast to the new public management that preceded it, as a "governance approach."[21]

Several causes lie behind the changing nature of public-sector reform. One is the shifting tide of intellectual and political fortunes. In many industrial democracies the fortunes of neoliberalism ebbed while those of reformist social democracy flowed. The rise of New Labour in Britain was one obvious example of this tide. A second reason is a growing sensitivity to new dilemmas, including terrorism, the environment, asylum seekers, aging populations, and the digital divide, all of which have less to do with efficiency than with the collective goods of security, community, and equity. The main reason for the changing content of public-sector reform lies, however, in the unintended consequences of earlier managerial reforms. Observers emphasized that the new public management had led to a fragmentation of the public sector. They often argued that because public services are now typically delivered by networks composed of a number of different organizations, there is a new need to coordinate and manage those networks. Social scientists inspired by institutionalism and other alternatives to rational choice theory were often highly critical of the first wave of public-sector reforms. The critics argued that the reforms had exacerbated problems of coordination and steering. And they promoted networks and partnerships as tools with which the state could help to establish joined-up government and manage other organizations in the policy process.

Although the second wave of reforms attempted to solve problems associated with marketization and the new public management, it did not try to turn back the clock. The new networks and partnerships were not meant to recreate the kind of hierarchical bureaucratic organizations against which neoliberals had railed. On the contrary, advocates of the second wave of public-sector reforms typically saw networks and partnerships as ways of solving both the problems created by the first wave of reforms and the problems those earlier reforms had been intended to address. In this sense, networks and partnerships might be described as attempts to preserve the legacy of the earlier reforms while building state capacity and oversight. Some commentators even argued that although the first wave of reforms was supposed to create markets, it had actually led to a massive proliferation of networks. Typically they then suggested that these networks were superior to markets, but that the state badly needed to devise and enact new strategies for managing the networks.[22]

In more general terms, partnerships are meant to allow the state to work alongside private-sector firms while retaining oversight of them. They differ from privatization and even outsourcing in so far as these latter tools involve the wholesale retreat of the state from a particular activity. Partnerships are used mainly when problems lie beyond the reach of any single agency and can thus be dealt with only if agencies band together in mutually beneficial ways. Again, the first wave of reforms fragmented the state. The reforms broke up the hierarchies of the welfare state, dividing them into smaller units, and moving some functions entirely outside the public sector. The diverse actors created by this process then tried to regroup in various ways so as to address shared problems. They searched for shared agendas and new ways of creating links with one another. Community groups, private firms, and new governmental agencies all had to be integrated into a coherent policy process. The result was the rise of all kinds of networks and partnerships based on common agendas.

GOVERNANCE TODAY

Decentered theory shows scholars interested in governance and governmentality what they can learn from each other. Scholars of governance can learn to attend to the role of ideas and especially ideas from the social sciences in the construction of present-day governance. Scholars of governmentality can learn to distinguish between two analytically distinguishable waves of reform that have taken place since the late 1970s. By learning these lessons scholars of governance and governmentality could produce a novel narrative of the new politics.

A broad narrative of present-day governance should emphasize the role of knowledge derived from the social sciences while recognizing that this knowledge has been as much about networks as markets. This narrative suggests that the new politics emerged in significant part from the 1970s onward as policymakers responded to a crisis of the state. Policymakers promoted markets and networks as replacements for and compliments to bureaucratic hierarchies. Crucially, their reform agendas were based on a modernist expertise that was linked to formal and folk versions of rational choice theory and the new institutionalism. Present-day governance thus reflects two waves of public-sector reform that have spread across much of the world since the 1980s. Neoliberals promoted the first wave of reforms. They derided the state and public services as inefficient when compared to the market. They tried to rollback the state through marketization and privatization. The second wave of reforms started during the 1990s. Institutionalists, social democrats, and others argued that the neoliberal reforms, far from making the public sector more efficient, had merely fragmented the state, creating a plethora of networks. They tried further to foster these networks—as alternatives to hierarchies and markets—while joining them up with one another to address problems of coordination. The key issue became not how to promote markets but how the state could command and steer the shifting alliances involved in the provision of services formerly delivered by the bureaucratic state.

Decentered theory implies that this broad narrative of the new politics is not a comprehensive theory. This narrative makes sense of both the literature on governance and changing practices of governance, but it does not force their heterogeneity into one monolithic framework. It does not try (and social scientists should not try) to combine different cases into a one-size-fits-all theory, model, or typology. Instead, it tells a story about how different theories have affected public policy in ways that have transformed public organization and action. To state this point differently: modernist social science cannot provide a route to a correct and formal theory of governance, but it has been the source of alleged expertise that has inspired policymakers to try to reform governance in particular ways.

Because this broad narrative of present-day governance is not a comprehensive theory, it can include a wide variety of clashing and competing details. Although the new politics reflects the rise of modernist instruments, particular cases will vary in the extent and nature of, for example, metagovernance, core executive power, and local resistance.

For a start, as was argued in Chapter 3, the new politics includes clashing and competing examples of the hollowing out of the state and of metagovernance. Social scientists should decenter the state, but they need not conclude that the central state necessarily has little or declining impact on policies and their outcomes. On the contrary, there is something misleading about the debate on whether the state has been hollowed-out or just adopted new policy instruments and shifted to metagovernance strategies.[23] Because this debate rests on modernist assumptions, it obscures the variety and contingency of governance. As modernist social scientists characteristically look for comprehensive accounts of today's governance, so they latch on to one or more feature as its alleged essence. Decentered theory suggests instead that social scientists should allow that both the limitations of state action and the instruments and success of metagovernance vary widely from case to case. The new politics is a complex policy environment in which all kinds of actors are forging all kinds of practices by deploying a range of strategies and instruments across multiple jurisdictions, territories, and levels of government. From this perspective, state actors struggle to govern and steer other actors. Analyses of metagovernance reveal the policy instruments and ruling practices by which state actors pursue control and coordination. Equally, accounts of the hollowing out of the state show how state actors are thwarted in their pursuit of control and coordination. State actors confront others that challenge, ignore, or simply misunderstand them. Below them they meet voluntary- and private-sector actors in markets and networks. Level with them they confront other state departments and agencies. Above them they find transnational and international organizations.

A broad decentered narrative of present-day governance is also compatible with clashing and competing levels of state power and control. It can accommodate not only aspects of network governance and metagovernance but also other accounts of the present-day politics, including the asymmetric power model. Advocates of this model believe that the core executive remains the dominant collective policymaker because it has a unique set of resources, including force, legitimacy, and legislation, with which it effectively exercises power over other actors. Dave Marsh argues, for example, that the British state is defined by a "strong government" and a "strong if segmented executive."[24] Elsewhere Marsh and his colleagues accept that the core executive is segmented and characterized by exchange relationships, and they also note the constraints on prime ministers, but they argue that political actors do not have equal resources. They believe that relationships are asymmetric and that "power continues to be concentrated within the core executive and the majority of policy decisions are made at departmental level."[25] Decentered theory suggests that the asymmetric power model may be a good account of some cases at some levels of abstraction. Even if it is, however, it is a reification that needs to be decentered, that is, unpacked in terms of the contingent beliefs and actions of diverse actors.

Marsh's analysis of power in the core executive already has much in common with the literature on governance. For a start, the asymmetric power model concedes the key insights that the majority of policy decisions are made in departments and that baronial politics are a major constraint on a dominant prime minister. In addition, the governance literature does not deny that the core executive can act decisively. Obviously the center coordinates and implements policies as intended some of the time. Arguably, however, the asymmetric power model attaches too little importance to the sour laws of unintended consequences. The governance literature turns the coin over and focuses on the sour laws. The governance literature school explains how centralized government gets confounded, for it suggests that power-dependence characterizes the links among the several ministerial barons and between the ministerial barons and the prime minister.

Decentered theory can reconcile these apparently contradictory views of central control. Instead of seeking a general model of power in the core executive or of the power of prime ministers, a decentered approach promotes narratives of the contingent relationships in core executives. Robert Elgie helpfully suggests that social scientists use several models of core executive politics in prime ministerial and semi-presidential systems.[26] He believes that relationships vary from monocratic government (with personal leadership by the prime minister or president) to collective government by small face-to-face groups (with no single member controlling) and from segmented government (with a sectoral division of labor among executive actors with little or no cross-sectoral coordination) to shared government (with two or three individuals having joint and equal responsibility for policymaking). One advantage of Elgie's formulation is that it gets away from assertions about the fixed nature of executive politics. Even if most of the time only one basic pattern is operative, there can still be fluid transitions as one pattern succeeds another. Another advantage of Elgie's formulation is that it concentrates the mind on the questions of which pattern of executive politics prevails, when, how, and why. Decentered theory opens up Elgie's models even further, for its stress on the beliefs and practices of individuals promotes a political anthropology of the executive's court politics.

Finally, the broad decentered narrative of the new politics can include not only clashing and competing cases of metagovernance and core executive power, but also diverse cases of local resistance. This narrative focuses primarily on the source and formation of policies, not their implementation or effects. Here decentered theory reminds us that although policymakers have drawn on expertise provided by neoliberals, rational choice theorists, new institutionalists, and others, the resulting policies have not worked as intended. The fate of the policies has depended on how other actors—senior civil servants, street-level bureaucrats, and citizens—have interpreted and responded to them. The broad explanation of the new governance may indeed lie in a historical narrative about how elite policymakers drew on modernist social science to respond to the crisis of the state. Nonetheless, if social scientists want to understand a particular governance practice, they need to do more fine grained analyses of the meaningful activity of the relevant actors. Civil servants can tame policy initiatives by interpreting them in terms of more familiar traditions and practices. Street-level bureaucrats can resist and thwart initiatives by drawing on their local traditions. Citizens can stubbornly refuse to remake themselves as the kinds of subjects for which policies call.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored what students of governance and governmentality might learn from one another and from decentered theory. Students of governance might learn to be more attentive to meanings and more sensitive to contingency. Students of governmentality might learn to avoid structuralist tropes and so to become more resolute and consistent in their use of historicist genealogies. Decentered theory could thereby bring the literatures on governance and governmentality together around a shared narrative and a shared research agenda.

Scholars of governance and governmentality might develop a shared narrative of the new politics as a product of the impact of two waves of modernist expertise on public organization and action. Although this narrative focuses specifically on two waves of reform and the social science on which they drew, it is, as the last chapter made clear, part of a broader story about changes in social science, governance, and public policy throughout the long twentieth century. During the nineteenth century, the leading styles of social theory were developmental histories. The twentieth century then saw the rise of new modernist forms of social science that relied on atomization and formal ahistorical explanations. The main strands of modernist social science are neoclassical economics and rational choice theory on the one hand, and institutionalism and midlevel social science on the other. For much of the twentieth century, the bureaucracy was seen as the location of modernist expertise; its task was to provide neutral scientific advice to elected politicians. With the crisis of the state in the 1970s, however, the bureaucracy lost its allure. The two strands of modernist social science ceased to be types of expertise housed within the bureaucracy. They became, instead, two types of expertise that inspired public-sector reforms that attempted to spread market and network principles through the state, society, and governance, as well as through individuals' actions.

This narrative might provide scholars of governance and governmentality with a shared research agenda. This research agenda would concentrate on using ethnographic and textual analyses to recover the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious beliefs embedded in variegated and complex patterns of public organization and action. It would explore the competing and clashing practices of metagovernance, core executive relations, and local resistance that are inspired by or respond to modernist expertise.

9 System and Radical Perspectives

The concept of governance as a new politics refers to a shift in public organization and action from bureaucracy to markets and networks. Historically, bureaucracies have been considered part of a legitimate democratic order because they are subject to control by a legislature that is itself accountable to the electorate. In so far as markets and networks are replacing bureaucracies, questions thus arise about their democratic legitimacy. Perhaps new devices are needed to ensure that these markets and networks are properly democratic. Alternatively, perhaps the concept of democracy needs modifying to make it fit better with present-day governance.

From the local to the international level, normative questions about democratic governance are now widely discussed. When the World Bank added good governance to its lending criteria, it conceived of good governance primarily in terms of liberal democratic norms and practices—representative and responsible government, the rule of law, and an absence of corruption—while also privileging a neoliberal faith in the superiority of market economies and the importance of introducing market mechanisms to the public sector.[1] More recently, various policymakers have promoted a system governance approach. This system governance approach mingles empirical and normative ideas about the following: a shift from hierarchies and markets to networks and partnerships, at least within the public sector; the interpenetration of state and civil society and of national and international domains; a change in the administrative role of the state from intervention and control to steering and coordination; a related change in state activity from laws and commands to negotiation and diplomacy; the incorporation of nonstate actors into the policy process; an emphasis on local self-governance; greater levels of public involvement in decision making; and a reliance on more reflexive and responsive modes of public policy. System governance seems to be committed to ideals of dialogue, participation, consensus, empowerment, and social inclusion.

What are social scientists to make of the ubiquitous rise of system governance? Does it mean that local, state, regional, and international regimes are busily establishing participatory democracy? Alternatively, have these regimes adopted the language of participatory democracy while missing its spirit? If social scientists adopt the latter view, they might ask: What is it that system governance misses? This chapter places system governance in the broad decentered narrative of the new politics that has been defended over the previous two chapters. System governance is an elite project based on modernist social science and expert assertions that it is an efficient and effective mode of governing. Once again this narrative is a critical genealogy. This genealogy suggests that system governance cannot adequately recognize the nature and contingency of the ideas that inspire it. By showing that system governance smothers democracy beneath modernist expertise, this chapter also opens up a space in which to reclaim the spirit of participatory democracy. Here, following the argument in Chapter 2, decentered theory inspires an alternative moral and political vision characterized by participation, pluralism, and dialogue.

SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

Examples of explicit approaches to system governance are increasingly common. They appear within private and voluntary organizations as parts of mission statements and as concerns with corporate governance. They appear within all levels of government, from the local to the state and on to the regional and global. As an example consider a white paper on European governance published by the Commission of the European Communities at the start of the consultation exercise began in 2001. The white paper adopts "governance" as a normative agenda:

> Reforming governance addresses the question of how the EU uses the powers given by its citizens. It is about how things could and should be done. The goal is to open up policy-making to make it more inclusive and accountable. A better use of powers should connect the EU more closely to its citizens and lead to more effective policies.[2]

This normative agenda gets unpacked in terms of five principles: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence. These principles then inspire proposals for change under four headings: better involvement in shaping and implementing policy, better policies and better delivery of policies, contributions to global governance, and refocused institutions and policies. The big idea is to expand democratic participation. "The White Paper proposes opening up the policy-making process to get more people and organisations involved in shaping and delivering EU policy."[3] This goal of greater participation goes alongside a broad shift in the nature and role of governing institutions from command and control in hierarchies to facilitation and negotiation in networks. "The [European] Union must renew the Community method by following a less top-down approach."[4] That is to say, "the linear model of dispensing policies from above must be replaced by a virtuous circle, based on feedback, networks and involvement from policy creation to implementation at all levels."[5]

Although the white paper promotes networks, participation, and inclusion, it does so from a system governance perspective. The view is that of the political system. The concern is with how to make public policies more effective and more legitimate in the eyes of the public.1[6] Networks, participation, and inclusion are promoted as means to these specific ends, not as values in themselves or as part of a participatory democracy. The white paper opens by suggesting that "political leaders" today need to find effective policy solutions to major problems and overcome popular distrust of governing institutions. Later, when the white paper first mentions democracy and the need to connect institutions to citizens, it does so specifically because "this is the starting condition for more effective and relevant policies."[7] Later still, the white paper explains the principle of participation by saying little more than this: "the quality, relevance and effectiveness of EU policies depend on ensuring wide participation throughout the policy cascade—from conception to implementation."[8] The impetus behind system governance is not, it seems, a radical democratic commitment. Rather, it is the belief that "policies can no longer be effective unless they are prepared, implemented and enforced in a more inclusive way."[9]

System governance derives principally from the beliefs that networks are more efficient than hierarchies and that dialogue and consensus can build political legitimacy and so effectiveness. These beliefs typically derive, as was suggested in Chapter 7, from broad trends in social science that are loosely associated with the new institutionalism and communitarianism.

The new institutionalism encourages governance reforms in response to a perceived crisis in an overloaded bureaucracy characterized by centralization and vertical integration. Whereas neoliberals argue that policymakers should respond to this crisis with marketization and the new public management, new institutionalists promote networks and joined-up governance. The spread of rational choice theory and other approaches rooted in neoclassical economics across the social sciences challenged a widespread commitment to a midlevel analysis that concentrated on describing broad institutional and behavioral patterns and producing typologies and correlations between social categories. Although institutionalists generally acknowledge that neoliberal policies have changed the state, they reject the use of neoclassical economic theory to explain this change. They concentrate instead on midlevel analyses of the rules and structures that, in their view, largely settle what happens at the microlevel. The new institutionalism consists of a diverse cluster of attempts to preserve midlevel analysis by emphasizing social embeddedness and so the role of institutions as determinants of social life.[10] Whereas neoliberals often deploy assumptions about utility-maximizing agents to postulate the market as the form of organization, circumstances permitting, that best expresses human rationality, institutionalists often argue that because individuals are embedded in institutions, networks are the organizations best suited to human nature. On the one hand, institutionalists use the concept of a network to capture the inevitable nature of all organizations given human embeddedness—hierarchies and markets are, in fact, networks. Because the concepts of embeddedness and network suggest here that action is always structured by social relationships, they provide institutionalists with a rebuttal of neoliberal approaches to social science.[11] On the other hand, institutionalists typically suggest that networks are better suited to many tasks than hierarchies or markets. The concepts of embeddedness and network are deployed then to suggest that governance should rely on networks not markets, trust not competition, and diplomacy not the new public management.[12] Typically institutionalists combine these two ways of conceiving of networks by suggesting that although all organizations take the form of embedded networks, those that best resemble the ideal type of a network reap the benefits of so doing.

Institutionalists accept neoliberal arguments about the inflexible and unresponsive nature of hierarchies, but instead of promoting markets, they appeal to networks as a suitably flexible and responsive alternative, one that recognizes that social actors operate in structured relationships. Institutionalists argue that economic efficiency and success derive from stable relationships characterized by trust, social participation, voluntary associations, and friendship, at least as much as from markets and competition. Although hierarchies can provide a setting for trust and stability, institutionalists often suggest that the time for hierarchies has passed: hierarchies were useful for the routinized patterns of behavior that dominated Fordist economies, but they are ill suited to delivering the innovation and entrepreneurship that states now have to foster if they are to compete effectively in the new knowledge driven global economy.[13] The new economy requires networks in which trust and participation are combined with flexibility, responsiveness, and innovation. Network theory appeals here to its apparent ability to account for what once appeared to be the most prosperous parts of the new economy—Japanese alliance capitalism and the high-tech sectors in Silicon Valley and north Italy.[14]

System governance derives in part from the institutionalist idea that networks constitute an effective structure for service delivery and other governmental tasks. This idea suggests that governance will be more effective if it is located in a broad set of overlapping institutions incorporating diverse sets of actors. The state might enter into, for example, partnerships with private and voluntary groups within civil society. Thus, proponents of system governance generally advocate increased avenues of participation, beyond those typically associated with representative democracy, in order to bring into being the multilayered networks that they associate with efficient governance. They hope that involving actors beyond professional politicians and civil servants will improve the quality of state activity.

The resulting proliferation of networks should raise worries about accountability. The resulting complexity obscures who is accountable to whom and for what, while there are often few procedures by which to hold accountable the private and voluntary bodies who deliver services.[15] All too often proponents of system governance downplay such worries. Sometimes they argue that multilevel network governance provides alternative avenues for securing democratic legitimacy for actions.[16] At other times they argue that multilevel network governance can match the democratic credentials of other examples of democratic practice.[17] Even when proponents of system governance do worry about issues of accountability, moreover, they typically do so in communitarian terms. That is to say, they seek primarily to promote functional legitimacy rather than increased participation.

Communitarianism reproduces the functionalist and corporatist argument that social order depends on the creation of a consensus over the legitimacy of the political institutions governing it. Functionalists often classified organizations based on the mechanisms by which they maintained social control and the corresponding functions they fulfilled for their members. One common classification classes organizations as coercive, remunerative, or normative, according to the main mechanisms by which they maintained social control and according to the corresponding functions they fulfilled for their members.[18] In this classificatory scheme, coercive organizations have to ensure compliance through force since the people within them tend to resist them, remunerative organizations get individuals to conform to their norms by paying them to do so, and normative organizations manufacture suitable conformity out of the feelings of obligation and commonality of the members who join them in order to pursue goals they believe to be morally worthwhile. Communitarians draw on such classifications to suggest that because democratic states are normative organizations, they have to create appropriate feelings of obligation and commonality among their citizens if they are to maintain a stable and effective order. This account of the state leads to worries that the democratic deficits associated with governance will damage effectiveness if they prevent citizens from accepting the legitimacy of the political institutions that govern them. Communitarianism thus encourages reforms to address popular perceptions of a democratic deficit within multilevel network governance.

System governance derives in part from the communitarian idea that the effectiveness of political institutions depends on the incorporation of stakeholders within decision-making processes so as to secure a social consensus over values, policies, and the legitimacy of the institutions themselves. Thus, proponents of system governance typically advocate increased avenues of participation beyond those historically associated with representative democracy in order to incorporate stakeholders within the policy process and thereby foster the consensus they associate with an effective and stable order. Proponents of system governance worry that declining rates of participation undermine the quality and legitimacy of elite decisions and political institutions. They hope that consulting actors beyond professional politicians and civil servants will make elite policies more acceptable to those whom the policies target. System governance thus approaches participation from a top-down concern with the state securing consensus and legitimacy for its policies. It is dominated by the imperative of preserving established elites and institutions from vulnerabilities associated with poor performance.

The top-down orientation of system governance appears in two of its most significant features. First, system governance offers an almost neocorporatist type of incorporation rather than a more open form of pluralism. It aims almost wholly at the involvement of organized groups or stakeholders, and it leaves the state control over which groups are involved. The European white paper refers, for example, to "interested parties" and "stakeholders" while leaving it to established political institutions to decide which groups to include under such headings.[19] Second, system governance restricts participation to consultation rather than a more active dialogue. Even those groups that the state recognizes as stakeholders or partners are invoked only as vehicles for the delivery of services or as having the right to be consulted in decision making; they are not themselves to be given decision-making powers. Although the European white paper pays lip service to participation at all stages of the policy cascade, for example, its proposals apply only to the agenda-setting phase, with decision making being left wholly, in accord with the community method, to the council and parliament.

So, system governance, for all its talk of inclusion and participation, is primarily about securing consensus for policies and delivering them effectively. Its proposals often contain little that would increase participation by ordinary citizens, as opposed to those sectoral groups that the state recognizes. And sometimes its proposals restrict even these recognized groups to a consultative role as opposed to allowing citizens to make and implement policies themselves.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The preceding genealogy of system governance reveals it as a contingent product of the new institutionalism and communitarianism, rather than an inherently reasonable or neutral set of ideas. This genealogy stands in contrast to the view of those adherents of system governance who portray it as having broken with the old ideological dogmatisms of state and market so as to adopt a pragmatic stance that focuses on the effectiveness of policy instruments in delivering consensual ends. This genealogy suggests, on the contrary, that system governance disguises a bias for the new institutionalism and communitarianism. Although this genealogical critique thereby opens up a space for advocating alternatives, it can be properly effective only if it is combined at least implicitly with the defense of substantive alternatives. One substantive alternative derives from a tradition of participatory democracy that emphasizes people's capacity for situated agency and so self-rule.

System governance often follows the new institutionalism in invoking networks as an efficient form of organization, and it often follows communitarianism in invoking consensus and shared values as the basis of an effective social order. When system governance invokes democratic devices, such as participation within networks or dialogue as a means of building consensus, it generally does so because modernist experts suggest that these devices are means of promoting efficiency and effectiveness. In so far as system governance draws on such expertise, it relies on a broadly liberal account of democracy. System governance depends on an account of democracy as representative government; elected representatives introduce and check policies that are typically designed and implemented by experts, albeit in consultation with stakeholders. Citizens participate through institutionalized processes, notably by voting for parties in periodic elections and by joining structured interest groups. Democracy is, in this view, largely a matter of constitutional protections for the fixed principles of the right or a universal and natural freedom. It consists principally of the rule of law and popular sovereignty, which have normative value because they treat individuals as free and equal. In this view, the practice of democracy rests on established rules and procedures for aggregating interests and adjudicating disputes. Thus, when system governance seeks to extend such democracy, it typically concentrates on ensuring that interests are adequately represented in political institutions, that elite decision makers have adequate information, and that these institutions and elites are accountable to elected representatives and so citizens.

Participatory democrats have historically tended to reject the idea of a universal or natural freedom. They have drawn on a republican notion of freedom as inherently embedded in particular practices.[20] Many liberal democratic norms represent attempts to protect an illusionary autonomy that supposedly exists outside of social practices. One alternative perspective is more concerned with the ways in which people actively make their own freedom through their participation in self-governing practices. This alternative perspective implies that participation is a good in itself. The virtue of democracy lies as much in a way of life or a type of experience as in a set of institutional arrangements. Participatory democracy is, in other words, an attempt to enable people to rule themselves.

A participatory democracy would treat its members as agents capable of deliberating on any prescribed set of values as they conduct themselves within practices defined by their activity. Because people always exist against a social background, their reasoning cannot be isolated from social pressures. The crucial question is, rather, about the nature of these pressures: Are they, for instance, examples of violence or deliberation? Violence arises, in this contrast, whenever an individual or group denies the agency of another. The powerful issue laws and commands. Failure to comply with these laws and commands can result in punishment. The subject of the law or command is treated as an object to be compelled to act in a certain way by the threat of force. Deliberation appears, in contrast, when people are treated as agents who need to be convinced of the rightness of acting in a certain way so that they might then choose so to act. Not all forms of communication constitute deliberation, since bribes, threats, and the like do not attempt to convince others through an appeal to appropriate reasons. Equally, deliberation need not presuppose a prior commitment to reasonableness or to seeking a consensus, since people can treat others as agents even in the absence of such commitments. Deliberation takes the form of continuous persuasion and debate. The process of debate induces people to reflect on their beliefs and preferences, possibly altering them in the light of what others say. People thereby exercise their agency and their capacity for local reasoning so as to consider what ideals and policies they are willing to endorse. What matters is, therefore, less the gaining of consent by the state than the capacity of citizens to consider and voice differing perspectives in debate. Although a participatory democracy surely would include some violence, it should attempt to strengthen deliberation in place of the violence that currently lurks in the coercive power of the state and the financial power of the market.

This emphasis on deliberation over violence points toward a similar emphasis on ethical conduct rather than prescriptive rules. Rules are, in this contrast, proclamations that purport to define how others should or should not act. Rules are typically external to the actor and they are given prior to the action. Ethical conduct arises when the actor interprets, modifies, or challenges a looser, more flexible, and more open-ended set of norms.[21] Whereas moral rules seek to impose requirements and restrictions upon people, an ethic constitutes a practice in which people negotiate their own relationship to just such requirements and restrictions. No doubt a participatory democracy will have to include moral rules, including those that set out, at least provisionally, the constitutional framework for deliberation. Even so, a participatory democracy might seek to ensure that these rules remain flexible enough to leave plenty of room for individuals to devise new forms of ethical conduct and also to bring the rules themselves into question at regular intervals.

PLURALISM VERSUS INCORPORATION

A participatory perspective raises suspicions about the suspension of democratic decision making that sometimes accompanies ideal constitutions. Nonetheless, even if social scientists are not to prescribe ideal constitutional blueprints, they can ask what a participatory democracy that foregrounded deliberation and conduct would look like. There are, of course, several ways of approaching this inquiry. One approach would be to reflect on the nature of the citizenship required by participatory democracy. Participatory democracy surely requires a more active practice of citizenship that those with which most are familiar today. To promote this active citizenship might seem a daunting task, especially when the starting point is a democratic practice that does little to encourage such activity outside of periodic elections. Because these matters of citizenship are so pertinent, it should come as little surprise to find that there have been a number of studies exploring them.[22] Clearly, however, work on active citizenship must be supplemented with studies of the practices in which citizens would play a more active role.

Here participatory democrats might endorse many of the features of liberal democracy. Democracy relies on rights to protect deliberation and conduct; it requires rights of privacy, free speech, and association as well as the right to vote. These rights do not just protect individual difference; they also safeguard public and private spaces for deliberation and conduct. To these rights, democrats might add other principles that also facilitate these things, including a free press, open government, and independent courts of law. Democracy relies similarly on devices to bring deliberation and ethical conduct to bear on our processes of collective decision making, and some of these mechanisms are widespread in liberal democracies, including elected legislatures, public hearings, and procedures for appeal and redress. Although participatory democrats might endorse all these aspects of liberal democracy, they would do so as part of an account of a practice of freedom, where this practice might depart from some other aspects of liberal democracy. Participatory democrats might argue in particular that a suitable practice of freedom requires that citizens can debate and remake even these liberal rights and mechanisms;

it requires rights and devices that extend democracy to other areas; and it requires a decentralized state in which large swathes of governance are handed over to other associations.

To begin, participatory democrats might locate liberal rights and mechanisms in a democratic practice. Democracy does not stand, in this view, as a universally rational order based on a neutral reason or on the allegedly given fact of individual autonomy. Democracy is a historical and mutable construct that people can defend and debate only by using their particular and contingent set of concepts. Even the rights and devices of liberal democracy are thus legitimate targets for reevaluation and critique. When people elucidate or enact a vision of democracy, they are not laying down given maxims so much as interpreting a historical set of intersubjective concepts and practices.

Once participatory democrats conceive of democracy as historically contingent, they open up the possibility of adding to the rights and devices of liberal democracy others that have a more socioeconomic focus. A historically contingent account of democracy implies that rights are social, not natural. As postfoundationalism implies that the individual is not autonomous and prior to society, so there cannot be natural or presocial rights. As individuals exist only in social contexts, so they can bear rights only against a social background. All rights are thus social in that a society grants them to individuals because it holds the relevant liberties and powers to be essential to human flourishing—society postulates rights to protect what it regards as the vital interests of its members, including, for example, their freedom from certain restraints and their access to minimum levels of welfare. So, participatory democrats can place rights associated with social and economic deliberation and conduct on an equal footing with those associated with political deliberation and conduct. Because rights are designed to promote human flourishing, people's view of which rights are most important will depend on their understanding of flourishing, which might lead them to pay as much attention to the economy as to the state.

Participatory democrats might champion various rights and devices that seek to bring democracy to bear on the socioeconomic sphere. Many liberal democrats have favored devices that rely on state intervention to control industry in the interests of social rights; the state has relied on taxation and welfare benefits to ensure rights to education, housing, and a minimum income, and it has relied on various forms of intervention to subject economic groups to the will of representative government. Participatory democrats have proposed supplementing or even supplanting these devices and rights with others. They have proposed popular control of the state and organizations in civil society, with worker ownership and participation, consumer organizations, and local bodies all providing ways of extending democratic practices to economic groups.

A participatory democracy emphasizing deliberation and ethical conduct might devolve aspects of governance to various associations in civil society. These associations could provide policymakers with information, voice the concerns of their members, and play an active role in devising and implementing a range of policies. A pluralist democracy of this sort might be appealing as a way of improving the effectiveness of public policy. It seems likely, for example, that involving diverse groups and individuals in the process of policymaking would bring more relevant information to bear on the policies, and also give those affected by policies a greater stake in making them work. A pluralist democracy also might be appealing, however, as a way of fostering opportunities for participation, deliberation, and ethical conduct. By devolving aspects of governance to various groups in civil society, participatory democrats would increase the number and range of organizations through which citizens could enter into democratic processes. Citizens could get involved through a diverse cluster of identities and concerns, perhaps as members of a religion or race, as people living in a city or region, as people engaged in some occupation, or as consumers. Associations might act as sites for the development of a civic consciousness that fostered deliberation on policy and participation in its formulation and enactment. What is more, because these associations could be self-governing, they need not be bound tightly by rules laid down by the state. Their members could interpret, develop, and even modify democratic norms through their own conduct. Associations might act as sites for citizens to exercise their agency so as to enact and remake democratic practices.

The involvement of groups in the policy process raises the risk of a self-serving factionalism in tension with popular sovereignty and political equality, as many critics have pointed out. To lessen this risk, participatory democrats might invoke norms in relation to which groups and their members should conduct themselves. No doubt the most important norm would be that individuals should be free to join and leave groups as they wish. Even groups that conceive of themselves as being based on objectified identities would have to open themselves up to those who fell outside of the criteria by which they sought to define themselves. More generally, groups pose less of a threat to political equality if they are organized democratically, so that they are neither highly centralized nor too reliant on market mechanisms. Groups should provide many and varied opportunities for participation, and they should have strong lines of accountability based on indirect and direct representation and even outright ownership. Clearly, the more participatory democrats made such norms compulsory and the more detailed their specification of them, the more they would undermine the value of such groups as sites of ethical conduct. Nonetheless, even when the state foregoes legislation—and there might be times when legislation is appropriate—it still could deploy administrative codes, taxes, and subsidies to encourage open and democratic groups.

Pluralist democracies would also run the risk that the most wealthy and powerful groups in society would exercise a disproportionate influence upon public policy. Participatory democrats might argue that this risk is, or would be, just as present in all other democratic societies. Even so, they also might seek to reduce this risk by invoking norms in relation to which the state should conduct its relations with other groups. No doubt the most important norms would be general ones of importance in all democracies, including norms that sustain open and accountable government. In addition, however, the state again might deploy a range of administrative controls, tax incentives, subsidies, and even legislation in order to equalize somewhat the resources and influence of relevant groups.

A pluralist democracy might ascribe a role in governance to a wide range of democratic groups in civil society as well as the state. Because these are fuzzy boundaries rather than sharp dichotomies, this vision echoes some features of system governance, notably in devolution programs and the use of partnerships between the public sector and the voluntary and private sectors. As well as these echoes, however, there are important contrasts. In general, system governance remains wedded to a liberal institutionalism, albeit with networks as the preferred vehicle for service delivery. A pluralist democracy attempts, in contrast, to develop and extend a contingent democratic practice to producers, consumers, and others. So, whereas system governance often privileges a liberal agenda of constitutional and electoral reform, a pluralist vision encourages the creation of yet other fora in which citizens can deliberate and conduct themselves in relation to the state and also other organizations. Whereas system governance privileges indirect representation of citizens and the incorporation of organized interests within the institutions of the state, a pluralist democracy seeks to assign aspects of governance to democratic associations other than the state. Similarly, whereas system governance promotes networks in which the state plays an active role, even seeking to regulate and control outcomes, a pluralist democracy hands over aspects of governance to associations other than the state. Whereas system governance adopts networks that aim to deliver services more effectively with little concern for the inner workings of the organizations with which the state cooperates, a pluralist democracy is committed to extending democratic principles to businesses, unions, and other groups within civil society.

A pluralist democracy would also differ from the communitarianism with which system governance compliments its liberal institutionalism. System governance often appears to believe that there is—or at least that there ought to be—consensus on public policy such that the state can acquire legitimacy through consultations designed to reveal and foster agreement. A pluralist democracy attempts, in contrast, to embrace that ethical pluralism that it postulates as perfectly legitimate. It allows various groups to establish different clusters of responsibilities. It appeals to deliberation and compromise, not an ideal consensus, as the means of addressing any tensions between the responsibilities established by different groups. So, whereas system governance emphasizes the importance of consulting people, democratic pluralism concentrates on increasing their opportunities to remake their collective practices and limiting the requirement that they do so in any given way. Whereas system governance implies that the goal of consultation is consensus, democratic pluralism focuses on the processes of decision making without postulating a substantive concept of the common good against which outcomes might be measured. Whereas system governance implies that people must reach a consensus for there to be an integrated society, democratic pluralism relies on deliberation and compromise to resolve differences among individuals and groups and so to establish a more decentralized social order.

DIALOGUE VERSUS CONSULTATION

Participatory democrats defend an open community in which freedom consists of agency within particular practices and so is associated with participation, deliberation, and ethical conduct rather than the protection of a spurious autonomy. Further, they can promote these possibilities by means of a pluralism in which aspects of governance are transferred from the state to other democratic associations. Even if democrats decentralized the state by giving such a role to other groups, however, they would do well to ask: What spaces do the state and these other groups offer for participation, deliberation, and ethical conduct?

Here too participatory democrats might endorse features of liberal democracy. Liberal rights and devices often safeguard private and public spaces for participation, deliberation, and conduct. They also help to bring deliberation and conduct to bear on processes of collective decision making. Democracy benefits from rights to free speech and to the vote, and from devices such as elected legislatures and the rule of law. In particular, participatory democrats might endorse the emphasis on elected legislatures acting as vehicles of popular sovereignty to direct and oversee administrative agencies, although if they are pluralists, they will favor a wide diversity of such legislative fora. No matter how much reliance participatory democrats place on deliberation and ethical conduct, there will be moments when decisions have to be made, and at those moments majority rule through a legislature can be an appropriate way of closing discussion and reaching a collective decision. Similarly, no matter how many avenues for participation participatory democrats establish in administrative agencies, complex modern societies appear to require a division of labor between the legislative fora that make laws and the agencies that implement them. Any such division of labor seems to require, in turn, that the legislatures constrain and oversee the agencies: democracy would be a sham if administrative actors were not accountable to the legislative bodies that authorize them to act. So, when participatory democrats envisage rights and devices to extend deliberation and conduct in the formulation and implementation of public policy, they should also bear in mind that these rights and devices are supposed to support, not supplant, existing opportunities for legislative oversight and judicial review.

The importance of liberal rights and mechanisms does not imply that they are sufficient. On the contrary, a focus on democracy as a practice suggests that these devices pay insufficient attention to participation, deliberation, and ethical conduct in the stages of collective decision making that come before and after elections and the legislative act. Whereas liberal constitutions often treat people as autonomous beings with incorrigible preferences that need merely to be represented adequately at the moment of legislative decision, a concern with democratic practice conceives of people as agents who construct and modify their preferences and beliefs through deliberation and conduct. Whereas liberal constitutions often distinguish sharply between policy issues and managerial ones, with the latter being left to administrative agencies, a concern with democratic practice suggests that reasoning typically involves a reflexivity in which people further specify the ends when they choose the means by which to realize those ends.

Democratic practices consist of stages of public debate, legislative decision, and implementation. Proposed laws and policies emerge out of public debate before then being drafted by legislators who also decide whether to enact them. If enacted, the policies are then implemented by agencies, which, in the process, typically specify the policies' content still further. Theoretically the stages of legislation and implementation are subject to various modes of feedback and oversight to keep them subject to popular will as expressed in debate. Each of these stages can be opened up to greater participation, deliberation, and ethical conduct through a variety of rights and devices. So, although elected legislatures are arguably the organizations most open to influence by the public, and although they might thus have primacy, a concern with democracy as a practice might encourage the use of additional rights and devices to bring democratic values to bear on public debate and policy implementation. For participatory democrats, these rights and devices are not fixed principles and strategies derived from pure reason, but rather contingent and invented possibilities. Democratic practices are the sites at which people decide which inventions to adopt and which to reject.

When participatory democrats renounce ideal constitutions designed to protect an alleged autonomy, when they look instead to practices that allow for agency, they free themselves to invent, modify, and reject rights and devices in the stages of public debate, legislative decision, and administrative implementation. They might propose for the stage of public debate modes of deliberation and conduct such as public hearings and deliberative polls. They might propose for the stage of legislative decision modes of deliberation and conduct such as the citizens' initiative and referendum; they might even suggest that decisions sometimes be made by citizens' juries or deliberative polls, with all citizens having an equal right or opportunity to participate. In general, they might promote more face-to-face forms of debate leading to more direct forms of decision making.

Although participatory democrats might propose a range of devices for the stages of debate and decision, their focus should extend to the stage of implementation. Many liberal devices cover the stages of debate and decision whereas that of implementation is often left in liberal democracies to an unelected civil service. Besides, concerns about governance characteristically stress democratic deficits in the agencies—commissions, departments, and public-private partnerships—that are involved in the implementation of public policy. For these reasons, the focus should fall on the promotion of a dialogic public policy.

Once again, democratic principles suggest that agencies should operate within a liberal framework including the rule of law and fidelity to legislative decisions. Within this framework, however, participatory democrats can promote processes of dialogue that seek to bring popular voices into agencies. Here the stage of implementation itself can be divided into substages such as those of publicity, decision, and review. In the substage of publicity, agencies could not only make known the rules and decisions on the basis of which they intend to act, but also invite comments on them from citizens, and even commission surveys, deliberative polls, and the like to garner opinion on them. During the stage of decision, agencies might involve citizens through all sorts of rarely used mechanisms. They could create committees as sites for face-to-face negotiations between agency representatives and various citizens, and they could provide citizens with places on the drafting committees that define their operating rules and procedures. Citizens thereby might help to make decisions and to draft rules at all administrative levels, from the central civil service to local benefit offices. In the stage of review, the agencies could be accountable not only to the legislature but also directly to citizens. Accountability could be enhanced by means such as the requirement to report to committees of citizens and even by the direct election of agency officials.

Dialogic modes of public policy are said by critics to allow particular groups to dominate or capture agencies. Participatory democrats might argue that this risk is equally present in all other forms of administrative organization as well. Even so, they also might seek to lessen this risk by appealing to norms in relation to which agencies should conduct themselves. No doubt the most important norms would be those associated with publicity and accountability, which enable citizens to monitor and challenge the conduct of agencies. In addition, a norm of openness might preclude agencies from restricting the participants in negotiating and drafting committees to a given list of stakeholders, requiring them instead to involve all citizens who make a case that they have an interest in any given issue, or maybe even to involve all citizens who express such an interest. Perhaps a diffuse public voice could be added to such committees by introducing a norm of service akin to that which currently operates with respect to juries. Likewise, a norm of fairness might require agencies to offer financial or technical support to groups or individuals who want to be involved in negotiating or drafting committees but who would be at a disadvantage because of their lack of these resources. Here too, of course, if participatory democrats made such norms compulsory or specified their content in too much detail, they might undermine much of the value of agencies as sites of ethical conduct. What matters is that a range of administrative codes, procedures, and subsidies ensure that a dialogic policymaking process remains open and democratic.

A participatory democracy might make use of a dialogic public policy process instead of a reliance on allegedly neutral experts. Although this vision finds echoes in the communitarian themes that characterize system governance, notably in the widespread belief that policy should be made in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, there are also important differences here. Whereas system governance typically privileges a liberal democracy in which public policy is implemented by managerial elites who are subject to direction and supervision by political elites who in turn are accountable to the popular will through elections, a dialogic approach promotes deliberation and ethical conduct throughout the policymaking process, including the stage of implementation. Whereas system governance typically relies on the assumption that administration can be a purely neutral or technical matter of implementing the will of the legislature, a dialogic approach allows for popular involvement in the processes by which administrative agencies actively interpret and define the will of the legislature.

A dialogic approach to public policy also offers a contrast to the way in which system governance, with its debt to an institutionalist approach to networks, often brushes aside democratic values in its rush to promote efficiency, effectiveness, and best value. Institutionalists, who acknowledge that networks have their own typical problems, often try to improve the capacity of the state to manage networks simply by devising appropriate "tools." System governance too adopts a technical approach to network management, even adopting many of the tools advocated by institutionalists. It assumes that the center can devise and impose devices that foster integration within networks and thereby realize its own objectives. The resulting policies have a centralizing thrust in that they attempt to coordinate departments and local authorities by imposing a new style of management on agencies. For example, when the center establishes Health Action Zones to target health inequalities by getting social care and health agencies to form partnerships, the Zones and partnership operate and are evaluated by criteria defined by the center. In contrast, a dialogic approach undercuts the idea of a set of tools for managing networks. As networks are constructed differently, contingently, and continuously, there can be no tool kit for managing them. Participatory democrats forsake the supposed tools of network management for a practice of learning by telling stories and listening to them.

CONCLUSION

Governance, conceived as a new politics, invokes a widespread shift in public organization from a monolithic bureaucratic hierarchy toward multilevel markets and networks. Representative liberal democracy appears to leave large democratic deficits in many areas of governance so conceived. System governance represents a response to these deficits, but it is a top-down response that uses the concepts of inclusion and participation to refer only to the incorporation of existing groups and to processes of consultation. System governance might be a valuable supplement to representative democracy. Nonetheless, social scientists should be wary of the stronger claims that are sometimes made on its behalf. System governance should not be treated as a viable substitute for representative democracy, as if a process of top-down consultation with organized interests where enough to offset the democratic deficits associated with multilevel networks.[23] System governance certainly should not be mistaken for a participatory democracy that fosters pluralism and dialogue.

System governance generally consists of attempts to improve the effectiveness of established institutions by means of officially sponsored and managed participation. At best, it elides the tensions between the goals of broadening participation and preserving existing authorities. If it ever succeeded in genuinely broadening participation, it would run up against the possibility that citizens and associations would act as catalysts for change, overturning existing norms, practices, and institutions, instead of enhancing their supposed legitimacy and effectiveness. System governance typically forecloses this possibility by tightly limiting the form and content of participation. When system governance includes initiatives to promote greater participation, the initiatives are characteristically defined in terms of the perceived needs of existing elites and institutions. Citizens and associations have to transform themselves in accord with the institutionalist and communitarian agenda of system governance or else they get excluded from these initiatives.

Participatory democracy attempts, in contrast, to foster pluralism and dialogue in ways that do not require citizens and associations to conform to the perceived needs of existing elites and institutions. No doubt participatory democracy cannot be entirely insulated from the problems that beset system governance. Indeed, when participatory democracy is defined in a way that eschews all attempts at active facilitation from above, it seems to fall prey to a defeatist purism according to which it is inherently fugitive, transient, or unrealizable as it can neither be specified as a constitution nor sustained as a practice.[24] To avoid this defeatist purism, participatory democrats may have to accept aspects of system governance. Nonetheless, their vision still will differ from system governance by promoting pluralism rather than mere incorporation and dialogue rather than mere consultation.

Whereas system governance typically incorporates recognized groups that are thought to represent objectified interests, participatory democracy relies primarily on solidarities and networks that operate in everyday life so as to minimize dependence on established institutions and objectified identities. People's everyday lives are replete with overlapping cultures of religion, kinship, consumption, and work. These cultures give rise to diverse and changing solidarities, all of which are potential resources for citizenship. A participatory democracy can include a plurality of self-governing democratic associations based on different solidarities that arise within civil society. This pluralism would itself encourage politicians and civil servants to engage such associations in dialogue rather than just consulting them. More importantly, perhaps, politicians and civil servants who sought to facilitate such a participatory democracy would need at a minimum to be prepared to let go. They would have to accept that their efforts might lead to results radically different from those for which they had hoped. They might even need to confront themselves as sources of pressure for conformity to existing norms and practices. They might have to interrogate and perhaps transform their beliefs and actions within the democratic process. They too would then be, in this sense, part of a participatory democracy in which situated agents remake themselves through self-governing practices.

10 Democratic Innovations

Democratic governance is a pressing concern. Successive waves of public-sector reform have raised concerns about the state of democracy. The reforms mark a shift in public organization and action from bureaucracy toward a greater use of markets and networks involving both state and nonstate actors. This shift has coincided with an increase in transnational exchanges and with the rise of regional institutions such as the European Union (EU). The result is complexity and fragmentation. Programs and policies more often involve both nongovernmental actors and transnational actors. Many states increasingly depend on other organizations to secure their intentions and to deliver services. All kinds of tiers of government have become increasingly interdependent. Collectively these changes present a challenge to democracy, for the involvement of diverse actors in formulating policies and delivering services blurs historic lines of accountability, making it increasingly difficult to say who should be held responsible for what.

Amid these concerns for democratic governance, are some grounds for cautious optimism. One reason for optimism is that some policymakers have become worried about declining rates of legitimacy and participation. Many have begun to look at ways of reversing the decline. Some appear willing to experiment with democratic innovations. True, as the last chapter argued, their primary aim often seems to be to shore up the perceived performance and legitimacy of existing institutions rather than to promote the self-governance of citizens. Nonetheless, democrats still might take heart from the growing awareness of the need to innovate. Even limited reforms may be a valuable supplement to long-standing representative institutions, and limited reforms may open up space for further innovations that promote greater participation and dialogue.

Democrats might also look with cautious optimism to the margins of recent public-sector reforms. Although these reforms have often eroded public service ethics and accountability, they also have brought new actors into governance and, at least occasionally, led to innovative practices of collaborative governance, where collaborative governance refers to practices in which policymakers work in partnership with stakeholders and the general public.

As decentered theory recognizes the variety of present-day governance, so it enables social scientists to highlight innovative democratic practices. This chapter describes some democratic innovations throughout the different stages of the policy cascade. These innovations give more concrete content to the participatory and dialogic of the last chapter. No strong claim is made about the extent of these innovations or the likelihood of their spreading widely. The aim is merely to describe some democratic innovations from public opinion formation, through decision making and implementation to oversight. This chapter describes democratic innovations at various territorial levels, from the neighborhood to the transnational, and some that link these levels. It describes cases in which experts and civil servants play various roles, from directing and controlling to supporting and facilitating citizen involvement. The result is less a blueprint of an ideal democracy than a menu of democratic options. If the menu looks appetizing, it might encourage people to experiment further with these and other democratic innovations.

PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION

Informed public opinion is necessary if citizens are to make good choices and also if they are effectively to oversee other policymakers. Deliberative democrats believe that informed public opinion develops through dialogue and collective deliberation. They have devised several innovative practices, often focusing on widening fair and inclusive deliberative engagements in the informal public sphere. These innovations attempt, first, to make public opinion more informed through collective deliberation and, second, to bring informed opinion to bear on public issues. They almost always involve lay citizens and particularly stakeholders, but they often also give a role to experts. Some use informational pamphlets or lectures before or during the deliberation period. They vary dramatically in the number of participants and in the length of their duration. Many emphasize the goal of reaching a consensus. Examples of these deliberative innovations include mini-publics, deliberative polling, and deliberative mapping.

Mini-Publics

Mini-publics are forums that involve a segment of the population in organized public deliberations. The number of participants can range from a dozen to thousands. The general aim is to get around the difficulties of creating deliberation within large populations by instead concentrating on a smaller group that is representative of the larger population. One important issue confronting the creation of mini-publics is thus how to ensure that the participants are an appropriate sample of the larger population. Organizers typically want the participant group to represent the demographic diversity of the larger community. Organizers initiate and change their selection process with this goal in mind. For example, they might compare the profile of those who have already registered to participate with their demographic targets and then make a particular effort to recruit members of underrepresented categories.

Different mini-publics vary widely in their impact on decision-making processes. Some are academic experiments that have no real impact. Others are ways in which activists or scholars seek to create a legitimate expression of opinion that they hope will get media attention and have an impact on policymakers. Yet others are sponsored by decision-making bodies in the hope of finding out more about considered public opinion.

One type of mini-public is the 21st Century Town Meeting. America*Speaks* regularly sets up mock town hall meetings involving thousands of citizens.[1] The participants are divided into groups of ten to twelve. Each group also includes a trained facilitator. The group discussions first cover broad ideals and visions. Next they turn to the main policy options. Within each group a volunteer notes the key points of the discussion on a computer. As the computers are linked up, facilitators can read these key points and use them to generate messages or topics that they can then feed back into the group discussions.

Another type of mini-public is the citizens' panel in which a group of citizens meet to discuss one or more policy issue. The panels are loosely modeled on the jury system. The panel often confers with an expert panel composed of academics and others who are particularly well informed about the relevant issue. In addition, the panel meets in closed sessions to develop further questions for the experts and to discuss what they have learned. At the end of the process the citizens produce a coauthored report summarizing their main recommendations. They might also present their report to the wider public, the media, and appropriate decision makers.

From January through June 1996, the North Blackforest Region's Center for Technology Assessment in Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany, sponsored a citizen panel to decide where to locate a waste incinerator and two waste disposal plants.[2] The organizers divided the 191 participants into ten different groups, four discussing the incinerator and six discussing the disposal plants. Each group worked with two expert moderators. The deliberations lasted six months. The participants read and listened to testimony from experts, visited each of the potential sites, and examined waste incinerators and disposal plants. At the end of the process the decisions and advice of the panels were adopted as suggestions for the builders of the waste sites. In this case, the citizens' panels educated the participants and influenced the decision-making process. Clearly, however, the panels were set up by the state primarily to build legitimacy around a controversial decision.

Deliberative Polls

Deliberative polling is an explicit attempt to correct the perceived lack of information in conventional polling.[3] It seeks to poll not what people think but what they would think if they were better informed. Unlike most deliberative experiments, these polls do not aim at consensus, but rather seek simply to examine whether or not people change their opinions as a result of informed deliberation. Typically deliberative polls allow voters to hear and compare contrasting views while recording any consequent changes in their opinions.

The selection of participants for deliberative polling begins with invitations, often made through phone dialing, to random individuals that approximate the larger target population in their relevant characteristics. Although the final participants are obviously a subset of those contacted, statistical analysis suggests that the resulting discrepancies are minor. Before the deliberative process begins, the researchers interview the participants. The participants receive a package of information before joining in weekend conferences, moderated small-group discussions, and meetings with experts, during which they listen to people discuss all aspects and sides of the issue. The researchers then conduct another set of interviews with the participants to see if the process has led to changes of opinion.

In April 1994, 301 British citizens met one weekend in Manchester to deliberate over Britain's rising crime rate.[4] All the participants had already been given a questionnaire to assess their predeliberation opinions. The participants were broadly representative of the population in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics. On the Friday evening they were given information on the rising crime rate. During Saturday and Sunday they listened to experts and representatives from all Britain's major political parties, and they discussed alternative policy proposals. At the end of the weekend the participants answered another questionnaire so that researchers could see how their views had changed. The questionnaires contained some questions that sought to discover the participants' opinions about policies and other questions aimed more at assessing the participants' factual knowledge of politics, crime, and the legal system.

This British study revealed significant changes in participants' opinions as a result of the deliberative process. The main changes were in response to five of the questions. The percentage of participants agreeing with the statement "Sending more offenders to prison is an effective way of fighting crime" fell from 57 to 38 percent. The percentage agreeing with the statement "The rules in court should be LESS on the side of the accused" rose from 42 to 52 percent. There was also a rise form 36 to 50percent in those agreeing with the statement "Suspects should have the right to remain silent under police questioning." When asked whether "The police should sometimes be able to 'bend the rules' to get a conviction," 37 percent strongly disagreed before deliberation whereas 46 percent did afterwards. Finally, the largest alteration concerned the statement "A first time burglar, aged 16 should be sent to an ordinary prison," with the percentage of respondents who were strongly against the statement rising from 33 to 50 percent. The study concluded that the deliberative process had given participants better tools with which to make informed decisions.

Deliberative Mapping

Other innovative approaches to opinion formation merge deliberation with other approaches to interactive learning, participation, and public engagement. For example, deliberative mapping provides a way of building public opinion in areas dominated by technical and scientific knowledge.[5] It provides a bridge between, on the one side, science, calculation, and experimentation, and on the other, democracy, participation, and deliberation. The mapping process aims to get stakeholders and local citizens involved in the attempt to identify and assign numerical weight to things they value that might otherwise be ignored in a straight cost-benefit analysis of a policy issue. Like almost all deliberative innovations, deliberative mapping is meant to improve the quality of public opinion and to bring it to bear on policy decisions, but in practice the resulting opinion is typically treated not as a basis for decision so much as a yardstick against which to judge decisions made elsewhere.

Deliberative mapping has been used in recent years to deal with organ transplantation. There is currently a global organ shortage both because the number of candidates for transplantation has risen and because there has been a decline in the number of donors judged acceptable.[6] Policy options include the following: improved transplantation services, altruistic living donation, presumed consent, xenotransplantation, embryonic stem cells, healthier living, improved kidney machines, adult stem cells, rewarded giving, and accepting death. In this case, deliberative mapping was used to allow citizens to participate with scientists in deciding an issue that raised strong moral intuitions. Participants were asked to determine what was at stake in the problem and then to assess and assign scores to the various policy options. To produce the actual map, the participants were divided first into experts and citizens and then again by gender. The experts' scores were treated as displaying the best and worst case outcomes. The citizens' scores were used to show the variability believed to be present within the option.

During the deliberative process, the citizens met on their own in small groups to learn about each possible solution and to develop criteria by which to judge among these solutions. Next the citizen groups met with the specialist group for a full-day workshop during which the actual deliberations took place—polite discussions as well as heated debates. The opinions of the citizens altered significantly as a result of their interactions with the experts. There was also clear evidence of consensus building as the participants engaged and reasoned with one another in an attempt to promote common ground. The technology-based alternatives of embryonic stem cell and xenotransplantation achieved the worst scores among participants. The best scores overall went to improved services and healthier living. At least in this case deliberative mapping appears to have enabled participants to engage with both scientific realities and moral issues, to have educated both citizens and experts, and to have fostered consensus.

DECISION MAKING

Democratic innovations often aim not only to develop public opinion but also to bring citizens' considered judgments directly to bear on decision-making processes. Typical the institutions of representative democracy rely formally on elected politicians to make policy decisions on behalf of citizens. However, there are also devices that enable citizens themselves to play an active role in decision making. Some of these devices—for instance, referenda—are familiar and long standing. In recent years, however, there has been an upsurge in the use of other devices. Two good examples are participatory budgeting and decentralized development planning.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a process of democratic deliberation and decision making in which citizens decide how to allocate part of a municipal budget. Participatory budgeting was first introduced in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where local civil society activists and civil servants jointly designed it.[7] Since then participatory budgeting has spread to numerous other Brazilian municipalities as well as to various tiers of government in other states.

One example of participatory budgeting is the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC).[8] The TCHC, which was established in 2002, is the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America. It houses about 164,000 tenants in more than 350 apartment buildings and 800 houses. Roughly half of the TCHC's annual revenues are from government and half from rent payments. The TCHC operates at arm's length from the city of Toronto, which is the company's sole shareholder.

TCHC worked with tenants to design a participatory budget process. Its first budget cycle involved 6,000 participants. Tenants allocated $10 million in capital expenses. In 2004, the tenants established an advisory committee to work with the TCHC to refine the process. The Tenants Advisory Committee proceeded to develop clearer criteria for the distribution of funds. In 2005 through 2007, tenants allocated $7.2 million per year to Community Housing Units (CHUs). Funds were distributed within each CHU according to priorities established during inclusive and democratic meetings among tenants and TCHC staff. During each cycle an additional $1.8 million was allocated during one-day democratic forums involving delegates from all of the twenty-seven CHUs.

Tenants begin each budgetary cycle by working with local TCHC staff to identify priority capital projects for their apartment building or their group of houses. Tenants then use secret ballots or dots on a flip chart to rank the projects. During these planning meetings tenants also elect delegates to their CHU tenant council. Each CHU council then meets to deliberate on all of the projects in its community. Each council identifies projects that can be covered by the CHU's resources and selects ones requiring external funding from the $1.8 million. At this time each council also elects representatives and delegates to attend the Inter-Community Housing Unit (ICHU) meeting, where they deliberate collectively on allocating the $1.8 million. The CHU representatives and staff then develop a draft budget for their projects and submit it to the TCHC's Application Review Committee, which includes both tenants and staff. This committee reviews each proposed budget to ensure that it contains appropriate quotes, clearly identifies the scope and nature of the project, and does not contravene building codes or other policies related to health and safety. CHU representatives and staff then prepare to present their project to the ICHU.

After each CHU makes its presentation, ICHU delegates deliberate among themselves and vote by secret ballot for the projects they believe should receive funding. The delegates consider not only the merits of each project but also the needs of all of the CHUs. Based on the results of their vote, the ICHU group recommends which capital projects should receive funding. The chief executive officer of the TCHC then finalizes the list of specific projects to receive funding and forwards the final budget to the TCHC's board of directors for approval. The local CHU monitoring committees oversee the implementation of the projects in their communities.

Decentralized Planning

If participatory budgeting illustrates one way in which citizens can be nested into governance institutions, decentralized planning shows how local citizen deliberations and problem-solving exercises can be nested into planning activities that span a whole state. This decentralized planning is a sequence of participatory meetings in which citizens have a direct role in shaping projects and policies.

Decentralized planning is almost always an attempt to promote local participation and informed decision making. More recently, decentralized planning has also been championed as a bulwark against corruption and elite capture at the local level. These features make versions of the practice appealing to institutions such as the World Bank. One example is the Kecamatan (Subdistrict) Development Project (KDP) in Indonesia, which encourages villages to use local information to weed out less efficient projects as they distribute funding among themselves.[9] KDP funneled more than a billion dollars to more than 30,000 villages in the first ten years after its introduction in 1998. By 2003 KDP accounted for almost half of the World Bank's lending to Indonesia. More generally, the World Bank promoted KDP as a model project, and between 1996 and 2003 it doubled its loans to similar Community Driven Development programs to the point where these loans constituted 40 percent of its total lending.

KDP began as a small program in 1998, but by 2001 it had grown to cover 15,481 villages in 984 subdistricts, and by 2006 it covered more than 34,000 villages with a combined population of more than 35 million. The Indonesian state aims eventually to include every one of its nearly 70,000 villages at some point. Each subdistrict (and so all the villages in it) participates in KDP for three consecutive years before rotating out. Although a village can get funding each year of its participation, there is no requirement that each village receive funding in a given year or even over a phase of KDP. Block grants are awarded to subdistricts according to their populations. There are two main levels of grant: almost 60 percent of the subdistricts receive $125,000, and most of the remaining subdistricts receive $93,750.

The planning of village projects begins in hamlets. The villages themselves are formal institutions composed of multiple hamlets—nearly four on average. The hamlets in a village can be several kilometers apart and vary widely in their standard of living. Participating villages have KDP-trained facilitators responsible for informing them about the program and for organizing meetings to plan village projects. A village-wide meeting is held to decide which projects to present to the subdistrict's intervillage council. The choice of projects is based on an open menu. There is a small list of prohibited projects, including paying the salaries of officials, purchasing weapons, cultivating tobacco, and buying pesticides. The majority of project proposals involve roads, bridges, irrigation, and microcredit. Each project proposal includes an account of the project; a request for an amount of KDP funding; a statement of the amount of funding, labor, or supplies that the village will contribute to the project; and estimates of how many men, women, and poor people will benefit from the project. The projects are bundled together into a proposal to compete with the proposals from other villages. Proposals are mandated to be between $4,375 and $18,750. Villages may submit two proposals, but if they do so, the second must be suggested by women.

Once villages have submitted their proposals, a team of community leaders and technical staff examines the feasibility of the projects. This verification team can only make recommendations to improve projects; it cannot reject projects. The verification team focuses on these questions: Are the projects economically feasible? Do they benefit large numbers of people, especially the poor? Do they meet project requirements, including, for example, maintenance plans for infrastructure? Did people genuinely participate in forming the proposal? Do people contribute labor, materials, or money?

The recommendations of the verification team are reviewed by a district level engineer. This review process provides the basis for discussion of how the subdistrict funds will be allocated. The village head, an additional village officer, and three other representatives from each village in a subdistrict meet to decide which projects will receive funding. According to the KDP operations manual, the meeting attendees should break into groups with a representative from each village in the group, each group should rank each of the proposals, and their rankings should be combined to produce the final ranking that determines funding decisions.

IMPLEMENTATION

Participatory budgeting and decentralized planning can provide citizens with an active role in the implementation of public policies. Alternative examples of participation in implementation can be linked to changes brought about by the widespread public-sector reforms begun in the late 1970s. Of course, state agencies continue to provide some public goods and services predominantly or exclusively through their own activities. In other cases, however, nonstate actors exclusively provide goods and services. In still others, diverse networks of state agencies and other organizations are responsible. The range of networks is extraordinary. At times, an activity traditionally performed by the state is contracted out to an organization that does not itself consume the good or use the service it provides. Other cases actively involve beneficiaries in the creation of the goods they consume or the management of the services they use.

When the state withdraws—entirely or in part—from the direct provision of a good or service, space for democratic innovations sometimes emerges and substantial forms of collaborative governance and citizen self-organization take root. In discussing collaborative governance, social scientists might distinguish among coproduction, community production, and community governance. These categories are neither exhaustive nor sharply distinguished from each other. They merely suggest varying degrees of citizen involvement and autonomy from the state in the implementation of policy. That said, there are good reasons to distinguish among these categories. Much of the existing literature defines both collaborative governance and coproduction so broadly that they cover any form of service delivery in which citizens play a part.[10] The literature thus blurs the distinction between, on the one hand, the state engaging citizens in partnerships in which the state still dominates and public-sector workers still provide the service, and on the other, the state handing over the day-to-day running of a service to the community itself. This distinction matters because the first category typically collapses into the system governance discussed in the previous chapter.

Coproduction

Coproduction occurs when state actors work with citizen groups to decide on, to deliver, and to oversee services to local communities. States give citizens and voluntary organizations a role in the implementation of public policies and especially the delivery of public services. Relevant services can include schools, policing, transportation, and communication. Coproduction varies in the extent to which citizens are involved. Some cases have the state making the decisions and citizens helping implement them. Others involve citizens in decision making and the oversight of the service while leaving the delivery of the service to the state. Coproduction also varies in the extent to which the state and citizens' organizations work together or in parallel. In most cases state and private organizations form day-to-day partnerships. Sometimes, however, the private organizations operate independently—perhaps gathering opinions from their members, producing goods, or overseeing state actors—before then engaging with state actors in periodic meetings.

Local School Councils (LSCs) in Chicago are an instance of coproduction. They enable citizens to participate in making and implementing decisions about the services provided by local schools. The program rose out of a grassroots movement of parents, teachers, and voluntary organizations.[11] The reformers eventually ensured the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, which shifted power and some responsibility from the centralized city headquarters to individual schools. The School Reform Act set up the LSC system. Each LSC has eleven members: six parents, two teachers, two community representatives, and the principal of the school. (At the high school level, a nonvoting student is also included.) The LSC is the main governing body of the school. It is responsible for hiring, firing, evaluating, and determining the job definition of the principal. It approves the school budget. It also devises the School Improvement Plan (SIP), which specifies targets and actions, covering three years, for things such as attendance and graduation rates. After the LSC passes the SIP, the principal implements it, while the LSC monitors progress.

Apart from the school principals, members of LSCs are elected for a two-year term of office. The hope was that the elections would help to involve and mobilize the local community. In practice, LSC meetings usually have an attendance of ten to twenty, and although those present can include curious parents and community members, they are mainly elected officials and others already involved with the LSC. Further, participation has slowly tapered off since the program was begun in 1988. After a heady beginning, the number of citizens attending meetings and running for office has fallen dramatically. Some observers have suggested, however, that the falling rates of participation reflect a decline in funding from government and so in outreach activities.

Government funding and support are clearly important for the LSCs. The Chicago Board of Education provides direct funding to the LSCs. Further, following some initial problems with some of the LSCs, the Board of Education now supports LSC members by giving them training in decision making, guidance to recognize good principals, and general help with budgeting and goal setting. Government actors also offer advice and support to LSC members when they have to deal with external legal, political, and administrative issues. For example, when LSCs responded to teacher's requests about scheduling, government actors helped them to address the teacher unions' rules on working hours. Government does not just facilitate the LSCs, it also monitors them and holds them accountable. LSCs have to fill in relevant forms, respond to complaints, and prepare for inspections from city officials. They must, for example, submit their SIPs at the end of each year.

Community Production

Community production occurs when the state transfers the day-to-day running of services to those citizens who directly benefit from them. The state may play a role in creating and overseeing community production and it may help to fund it, but the local community makes policy decisions, implements those decisions, and thereby manages the relevant good. Community production is often used to maintain and to allocate natural resources. Typically the natural resources are common goods on which the local population relies for its livelihood.

Taiwan's water management system is a form of community production.[12] The state created the system and continues to supervise it. Also, although the farmers fund the system by paying water fees, the state has been paying a lot of the water fees on their behalf since the 1990s. It is, however, the farmers who maintain and operate the system through the irrigation associations they own and operate. The farmers' representatives in the irrigation associations and local irrigation groups decide where and how the water fees are spent.

Farmers in relatively close proximity form irrigation associations, and it is these associations that operate and manage the irrigation system. The irrigation associations have both a headquarters and field offices. The individual farmers elect representatives who oversee the irrigation association. These representatives elect a chairperson who sits atop the organizational headquarters. The chairperson appoints the general manager and chief engineer who oversee the daily affairs of the association. The headquarters are responsible for overall planning, large-scale maintenance, management of water sources, and water delivery at the system level. The field offices are the heavy lifters of the system. Their main tasks are to collect the information on which overall plans are based, to oversee local planning, to deal with local disputes, and to distribute water to individual farmers. The field stations include both local officials and local irrigation groups made up of farmers. The field stations are thus the main sites at which individual farmers interact with irrigation associations.

Field offices have local autonomy. They include both management and working stations. The management stations collect the information needed to plan irrigation, and they manage the implementation of the resulting plans. The working stations concentrate on daily operations. Although they are not formally involved in decision making, they provide insights into how the system is functioning and tips on how to improve it. Most field offices contain seven to ten officials. They have close contact with the local farmers. Individual officials at the station are responsible for particular geographic areas and they work closely with the relevant farmers. The officials are held individually responsible for what happens in their particular areas, but there is also close cooperation among the officials because they are held collectively responsible should anything go wrong within the field office as a whole. The local officials and the leaders of the farmers' irrigation groups are usually members of the local community.

Every year, at the start of planting season, local officials and irrigation groups meet to plan irrigation operations for that year. The main issue is the estimated demand for the season. Estimates of demand reflect cropping patterns and field geography. The working stations cooperate with the farmers to compile information about the farmers' demands. This information goes to the irrigation associations' headquarters. If the estimated demand exceeds the amount of available water, the association has to decide which areas will get how much water. The resulting irrigation plan is very detailed. Water delivery itself is, however, the responsibility of the working stations.

So, the farmers' representatives in the irrigation groups vouch for the amount of water the farmers need. The irrigation association then determines the amount of water to be given to each local group. It is then up to the farmers themselves, through their local irrigation groups, to decide how to allocate the water among the relevant farms. Local officials and irrigation groups develop plans for how much water each farm receives. The working stations follow these detailed plans. They employ "water guards" to carry out the water allocation plans.

Community Governance

Community governance occurs when citizens create their own voluntary practices. Examples of community production, such as water management in Taiwan, show that collaborative governance can involve domains of autonomy in which participants are largely self-organized. Examples of community governance illustrate how citizens can address public problems through voluntary self-governing associations rather than state-sponsored ones. Like community production, community governance is becoming particularly common as a way of managing natural resources. Many of the best examples draw on the historic practices of local communities, but they count as democratic innovations in so far as policymakers have begun to discover their virtues and to encourage communities to revive them.

Among the indigenous communities of the Bolivian Andes, water has historically been a community resource.[13] The Aymara and Quechua peoples treat water as common property; water is tied to a territory that belongs to the whole community. Although families and individuals own private land—which can be bought, sold, rented, and sharecropped—most land is held as communal territory and cultivated by the community. At the turn of the twentieth century, this historic system of water governance faced the looming threat of the privatization of water. Peasant and indigenous social movements protested, appealing to indigenous customary law, Usos y Costumbres (UC), which had been recognized in Bolivia by the 1994 Law of Popular Participation. As a result of the water wars, UC has been applied extensively to water management, as in the 2004 Irrigation Law.

UC provides a very general framework for water governance. It brings official recognition to practices that are repeated, habitual, and regular; based on thorough and intimate knowledge of the social and environmental context in which irrigation takes place; and voluntary and mutually agreed upon within the relevant social context. UC is saturated, following indigenous practice, by the principle of communal property. And UC does not include any specific guidelines on how to manage or distribute water; rather, the general framework of UC allows particular practices to vary according to historical customs, geographical and ecological settings, and water availability and crop types.

During the water wars, local irrigation associations advocated for indigenous groups. A National Association of Irrigators built networks across Bolivia to assert their rights. However, the National Association, like UC, effectively promotes decentralized governance rooted in local practice. Communities themselves are thus responsible for governing water use. In the local communities the exchange of labor, goods, and services between individuals, households, and the community is loosely governed by a norm of reciprocity. In addition, irrigation associations can establish work parties to undertake labor for the benefit of the whole community. These work parties are fairly obligatory as a result of the costs and benefits of participating in them. Households earn a right to a share in the water available as a common resource through their participation in this common work. Failure to participate can result in sanctions, fines, and even a loss of water rights. Active participation can result in access to extra food and water.

The irrigation associations oversee the cleaning of canals, the distribution of water, planting schedules, and agricultural cycles. Association meetings take place about once a month and they are open to the public. The participants in the meetings are usually the heads of households. Indeed, it is sometimes expected that every head of a household will hold office in the association. Most of the time association meetings try to reach a consensus.

OVERSIGHT

Typically the state still oversees and regulates governance even when there has been a turn toward deliberative opinion formation, participatory decision making, and collaborative implementation. Oversight is, however, another part of the policy cascade in which democratic innovations can be found. Historically both oversight and conflict resolution have been left largely to the courts and formal administrative institutions. Citizens have brought their grievances before a court or to a government agency, but they have not played an active role in deciding the outcome of the relevant judicial and administrative processes. In contrast, some innovations in citizen oversight and community mediation have allowed citizens to participate actively in regulatory bodies and conflict resolution.

Citizen Oversight

Citizen oversight bodies can take several forms, varying in their powers, the roles they give to citizens, and their independence from the state. Watchdogs can be created by citizens' themselves but they then often have relatively little authority. Many of these watchdogs just monitor an area of governance and provide citizens with free information about it. Nonetheless, even if they have no privileged access to the organizations and activities they monitor, they have the expertise and resources needed to get and publicize information that individual citizens find it hard to access. The Sunlight Foundation in the United States is one example. Among its projects is The Earmark Watch, a website that provides data for the earmarks tied to some congressional bills. Clearly, these kinds of citizens' bodies illustrate the ways in which social movements can try to promote accountability within the political process. Sometimes similar watchdogs can take on more formal and encompassing roles. For example, the citizens of Sabanagrande, Honduras, voted in an open town meeting to create a social audit and oversight body to promote transparency and fight corruption, their initiative gained the support of the municipal government, and in February 2003 they created the Transparency Commission of Sabanagrande, which has since provided formal oversight of local government.

Many citizen oversight bodies are established with the support of the state. They can be formed either by the agency they are to oversee or by some other tier or branch of government. Their members are generally volunteers, and while they can be chosen by a governmental agency, they can also be popularly elected by stakeholder organizations or by the general public. Crucially, once they are created, they act as independent panels or committees. One critical issue is, of course, the extent and nature of popular participation in these oversight bodies. The Bolivian Law of Popular Participation led to the creation of local vigilance committees to monitor the activities of elected local government bodies as well as to participate in budgets and planning. The members of the vigilance committees come from established peasant associations and indigenous communal groups. Although these groups can use all kinds of selection processes to place people on the vigilance committees, the participation of nonelites is strongly encouraged. Vigilance committees have considerable powers. If they suspect a local council of wrongdoing, they can begin a legal complaints procedure that leads to a special committee of the Senate reviewing the case. If the local council is then found to have acted inappropriately, its funding is suspended.

Citizens themselves can use democratic instruments to create oversight bodies that have state support. For example, when in November 2006 voters in Fresno County, California, approved the ballot to extend Measure C, they required their local government to create a Citizens Oversight Committee, which was duly formed in July 2007. Measure C provides for funding of transportation policies. The Citizens Oversight Committee informs the public about these policies and ensures that the funding is spent as promised. It reviews independent financial and performance audits and also recommends action based on these audits. It leads an annual review of the ways receipts from the relevant sales tax are being spent and it publicizes the results of these reviews. The committee has thirteen members. Seven members represent a variety of community organizations. The other six are public members and they must include at least one resident from each of the five Fresno County supervisorial districts.

Community Mediation

Citizens can, of course, play an active role in all kinds of processes of conflict resolution. Nonetheless, the rise of citizen participation has been most noticeable in mediation. During mediation a third party seeks not to impose a binding agreement on the disputants but to enable them to reach a voluntary agreement. Mediators facilitate the process of reaching a settlement, but the outcome—the content of the settlement—is agreed upon by the disputants themselves. Mediators can be state and judicial actors in governmental agencies and the courts, but they can also be professionally trained volunteers in civil society. Democratic innovations characteristically involve shifting the process from the former to the latter. Indeed, community mediation usually relies solely on trained volunteers, not governmental actors; it takes the state out of the process of conflict resolution.

Most community mediation occurs within community mediation centers or peer mediation programs. Community mediation centers often provide an array of services.[14] In addition to general community mediation programs, they provide specific programs in areas like family mediation, they run training programs for public schools and criminal justice groups, and they facilitate citizen marriages. The San Francisco Community Board Program, which is now known as Community Boards, is an example of a grassroots community justice program that provides community mediation and conflict resolution education. Community Boards was formed in 1976 to provide citizens with empowering and cost effective means of resolving disputes. Today Community Boards contains 150 trained volunteers and more than 400 permanent mediators. Since 1976 Community Boards has trained 16,000 citizens as volunteer mediators, assisted 46,000 residents with their disputes, and provided peer mediation program training and development to more than 3,000 programs across the United States.

Community mediation centers, such as Community Boards, play the leading role in training peer mediators for local institutions and especially schools. Community centers provide student mediators with an average of about fifteen hours of training. The training covers knowledge about types of conflict, skills such as active listening, and role-playing exercises. Researchers have proposed measuring the success of peer mediation by reference to the percentage of cases in which disputants reach an agreement with which they are satisfied. One meta-study found that an agreement was reached in 93 percent of cases, and that the disputants were satisfied with the agreement in 88 percent of cases.[15] The same study suggested that peer mediation has other more diffuse benefits; it reduces aggressive behavior, improves perceptions of conflict, and changes students' attitudes on social issues, making them more tolerant and accepting.

CONCLUSION

The democratic innovations reviewed in this chapter are not a panacea for the ills of modern governance. When policymakers attempt to implement a particular democratic innovation—for example, participatory budgeting—in dissimilar contexts, widely divergent outcomes sometimes emerge, as some comparative research has amply demonstrated.[16] At times the drawbacks of certain participatory practices might perhaps outweigh their benefits. Perhaps, for example, a move toward self-governing institutions in natural resource management might lead in some cases to the degradation of common pool resources. Clearly, the relevant publics and organizations need always to weigh the values potentially advanced by innovative practices against those values the practices might undercut. In doing so, suitable measures to balance competing priorities will sometimes emerge. Faced with the prospect of natural resource depletion, for example, rights of use or property rights to a common pool resource might be conferred only on the condition that the resource remains uninjured or undiminished. At other times, suitable compensatory measures might not immediately emerge, and in such cases, more participatory arrangements might even be temporarily forgone.

Rather than focusing on abstract debates about the relationship and relative weight of democratic and other values, however, this chapter has sought primarily to expand the democratic imagination. It has described participatory and dialogic practices that can promote important democratic values, and that some participants and close observers regard as highly effective. It has indicated how direct participation throughout the policy cascade can be sporadic or more continuous, involve consultation or actual decision making, and operate at multiple geographical scales. Some of the cases have also indicated ways that citizens might craft their own rules for participation, monitor those rules and the policies they help generate, and cooperatively implement their own local policies. Many extensions of the above practices—both vertically (into higher levels of governance) and horizontally (into new policy areas)—are conceivable. Participatory budgeting might be scaled up to the state level and perhaps beyond. Permanent citizens′ assemblies with rotating members might replace or supplement traditional legislatures at different jurisdictional levels. Citizens′ assemblies could regularly be used to provide voters with balanced views on ballot initiatives and recall or other referenda. Deliberative polling might be used to democratize party candidate selection. These are but a few of the possibilities.

Today, markets and networks are emerging alongside, and sometimes even replacing, older forms of public organization; accountability is increasingly becoming a formal fiction; and the public is losing trust in its political representatives. The resurgence of democratic ideals may depend on participatory and dialogic innovations that give citizens a direct role in the policy process. The time may have come to give greater scope to practices such as deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, and self-governing schemes of collective resource management.

Epilogue. Future Prospects

This book has presented a decentered theory of governance rooted in postfoundational philosophy and covering both organization theory and changing patterns of public organization and action. Postfoundationalism undermines the reifications and atomization that characterize many alternative approaches to governance. Human action is a product of meaningful beliefs, not social structures or a universal rationality. Further, the nature of these beliefs necessarily depends on broader webs of belief, so human action can be properly understood and explained only by being placed in this broader context.

Decentered theory is, therefore, humanist and historicist. It is humanist in presenting social life as human activity informed by the agency and reasoning of the relevant actors. It is historicist in presenting agency and reasoning as occurring against specific historical backgrounds that necessarily influence them. The humanism and historicism of decentered theory inspire a realistic and naturalistic theory of governance in contrast to the more rationalistic and formalistic theories of modernist social science. Whereas modernist social science characteristically isolates atomistic aspects of human life, decentered theory pursues the complexities of an interconnected reality. Similarly, whereas modernist social science characteristically locates its atomized units in formal abstract patterns—including models, correlations, and classifications—decentered theory pursues naturalistic histories of concrete activity.

A decentered theory highlights the importance of beliefs, practices, traditions, and dilemmas for the study of governance. Any existing pattern of governance will have some failings. Different people will have different views about these failings, for the failings are not simply given by experience but rather tradition-laden interpretations of experience. If people's perceptions of the failings of governance conflict with their existing beliefs, they face a dilemma that prompts them to reconsider their beliefs. Because people confront these dilemmas against the background of diverse traditions, there arises a political contest over what constitutes the nature of the failings and what should be done about them. This contest leads to a reform of governance. The reformed pattern of governance poses new dilemmas, leading to a further contest of meanings and policy agendas. All these contests are governed by laws and norms, which prescribe how they should be conducted. Sometimes the relevant laws and norms have changed because of simultaneous contests over their content and relevance. What we have, therefore, is a complex and continuous process of interpretation, conflict, and activity that produces constantly changing patterns of governance.

To decenter is to show the diversity of the meaningful activity that creates a pattern of governance and also to locate that activity in its contingent historical setting. When decentered theory is applied to the sociology of organizations, it inspires a constructivist and historical ontology. Social formations are properly grasped not as formal abstract patterns but as the products of varied and contingent activity. Similarly, when decentered theory is applied to the study of changing patterns of public organization, it encourages historical narratives of the varied ways people have responded to dilemmas against the background of traditions. Present-day governance is properly explained not by a reified institutional or functional logic but as the product of local reasoning and situated agency. This epilogue highlights some of the significance of these decentered perspectives for an understanding of the present and for possible responses to it.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Governance scholars usually agree that public organization and action relies increasingly on market mechanisms and especially networks. Indeed, network is an ever more popular organizational idea. Public-, private-, and voluntary-sector organizations not only find themselves in ever more networks; they actively seek to create and strengthen networks. Although some governance scholars emphasize the hollowing-out of the state and others stress metagovernance, they all agree on the importance of networks. Other social scientists are, however, somewhat skeptical of the claims that governance scholars make about network governance. They argue that the concept of a network is unhelpfully vague and that a focus on networks can obscure the continuing power of the state. Both governance scholars and their critics generally rely on formal explanations. So, for example, governance scholars explain the rise and content of network governance by appealing to a functional logic of differentiation. Decentered theory replaces such formal explanations with historicist genealogies and narratives. It thereby enables governance scholars to respond to the main challenges they face but in doing so it transforms their account of governance.

One challenge facing governance scholars dates back to the criticisms made by rational choice theorists of the literature on policy networks. Rational choice theorists asked: What does a policy network refer to other than the actions of individuals? How do policy networks explain anything?[1] These questions are about social ontology and social explanation. Governance scholars typically respond to these philosophical questions by appealing to institutionalism and midlevel theory as alternatives to rational choice and microlevel theory.[2] Unfortunately they do not spell out the philosophical content of their midlevel commitments. Sometimes they just wave the flag of "critical realism"—as if that phrase itself could magically answer the awkward philosophical questions. At other times they just evoke institutionalism as a long-standing and common approach—as if longevity and popularity could substitute for philosophical argument. Generally they appear to want to wish away the philosophical questions posed by rational choice theory in order to return to familiar empirical topics. Nonetheless, the implicit commitments of their midlevel theories are fairly clear. Midlevel theories involve a commitment to institutions or structures as existing apart from actors and their activity and as exercising a causal influence on actors and their activity. Midlevel ontologies typically reify norms, conventions, ideal types, and structures. Midlevel explanations typically appeal to formal systems, formal functions, ahistorical logics, and ahistorical mechanisms.

Too many governance scholars try to ignore the awkward questions about microtheory that rational choice poses. They cling forlornly to midlevel theories that drift inexorably toward reification and formalism. In contrast, decentered theory unpacks governance as meaningful activity. To discuss and explain this meaningful activity is to ascribe desires and beliefs to the relevant actors. Actions can be understood only in terms of the conscious, unconscious, and subconscious intentionality of the actors. Unlike rational choice theory, however, decentered theory emphasizes the holistic and contingent nature of intentionality. Social scientists have to do the empirical work of finding out what beliefs and desires people actually hold in any given case. They have to rely less on formal models than on contextual and historical explanations. Thus, decentered theory concentrates not only on the construction of practices as people act on beliefs but also on the narratives and traditions that provide the context and historical background to people's beliefs and actions. Decentered theory provides governance scholars with an alternative microtheory to that associated with rational choice theory.

Another challenge facing governance scholars is the analysis of power. Midlevel theorists often want to ignore the microlevel and to focus on institutions and structures precisely because they believe that power is an important structuring force within social relations. Some midlevel theorists argue that concepts such as "differentiated polity" and "network governance" do not allow for the way in which power structures governance.[3] Postfoundationalism offers a response to this challenge in so far as it encourages social scientists to rethink power as a force lacking any center.[4] If power refers to the ways in which the actions of others define what any individual can and cannot do, then power appears throughout governance. Power appears wherever people interpret and respond to one another. Every actor is both enabled and constrained by the actions of others. Prime ministers, senior civil servants, doctors, local police officers, and everyday citizens all find their possibilities for action restricted by what others do. Viewed from this perspective, the governance literature emphasizes the diverse ways in which all kinds of actors thwart the intentions of high-ranking policymakers. The governance literature shows how local actors—ministerial barons, Whitehall bureaucrats, doctors, and police officers—are able to draw on their different inheritances so as intentionally and unintentionally to resist the core executive.

While decentered theory responds to criticisms of the existing accounts of a new politics of network governance, it also transforms these accounts. This transformation has taken place throughout this book. Here I briefly highlight some of its most important features. First, the decentered narrative of present-day governance is not based primarily on policy networks. It is based more fundamentally on the idea that modernist social science inspired two waves of reform—first markets and contracting out, and networks and joining-up—and that these reforms produced complex patterns of public action and organization. This account of present-day governance is less an abstract model of an emerging pattern of rule than a historical story about the diverse patterns of rule to have emerged from the impact of modernist expertise on public organization and action. Because decentered theory presents the new politics as a product of modernist social science, it can allow for the varied consequences of public-sector reforms irrespective of whether, in any given case, they do or do not include the fragmentation of the state and the proliferation of networks.

Second, when decentered theory invokes a fragmented state or differentiated polity, therefore, it is not appealing to anything like a functional logic of increasing specialization. Decentered theory points instead to a postfoundational critique of reified concepts of the state for their neglect of the varied contingent meanings and activities that make up the state. The argument is, in other words, less that bureaucracy has declined and networks grown than that the state is and always has been stateless. States have no essence, structural quality, or power to determine the actions of which they consist. The state is just an aggregate description for a vast array of meaningful actions that coalesce into contingent, shifting, and contested practices. For decentered theory, therefore, the core executive is not defined in functional terms by its core tasks within a system. The core executive is a descriptive concept that captures the fluid and varying actors involved in central decision making. Core executives are characterized less by their institutions and functions than by their beliefs, practices, protocols, and rituals.

Third, when decentered theory addresses changes in the state, it does not really engage the rather odd debate about whether the number of networks has grown and the number of hierarchies declined. It is primarily interested instead in how the spread of new ideas about markets and networks has led to changes in public organization and action. On one level, decentered theory here engages issues of governmentality, notably the discourses and policies of political elites. On another level, however, decentered theory encourages studies of the myriad ways in which local actors have interpreted these discourses and policies, responded to them, resisted the intentions of the elites, and forged their own practices of governance. Social scientists can better explore the diversity of present-day practices of governance by observing ministers, civil servants, street-level bureaucrats, and citizens in action. The new governance is not confined to the core executive; it also includes departments and their secretariats, local authorities and local agencies, and public services and those who operate and use them.

Finally, decentered theory transforms the literature on network governance in a way that blurs the distinction between that literature and other leading accounts of present-day politics, including, for example, asymmetric power models. Many social scientists treat accounts of network governance and asymmetric power as if they cut nature at the joints to capture the essence of the new politics. In contrast, decentered theory rejects the idea that the new politics has an essence. Decentered theory implies that present-day politics is disparate, containing various fluid examples of network governance, the hollowed-out state, metagovernance, and asymmetric power.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Decentered theory replaces formal modernist accounts of the new politics with a historical narrative of focused on modernist social science and the crisis of bureaucracy. This historical narrative is a critical genealogy that suggests, first, the currently dominant approaches to social organization embody a contingent modernist form of expertise, and second, this modernist expertise is flawed in that it does not adequately allow for its own historicity. Decentered theory thus breaks with the modernist social science that informed social organization for so much of the twentieth century. The modernist social theories of the twentieth century inspired formal defenses of state planning, markets, free markets, and, most recently, networks. Modernist social theories suggested that one or other of these organizational types was, at least under specified circumstances, ideally rational. In sharp contrast, decentered theory foregrounds the inherent contingency and contestability of human activity and so the variety and unpredictability of organizations.

As decentered theory is an alternative to rational choice theory and the new institutionalism, so participation and dialogue are alternatives to hierarchic bureaucracy, marketization, the new public management, joined-up networks, and the enabling state. A historical ontology shows that modes of knowledge and social practices are contestable. It raises the possibility of transforming current ways of life. Instead of moving from procedural to performance accountability, social scientists might bolster procedural accountability, perhaps making it less about reacting to decisions that already have been made and more about citizens holding people accountable during processes of decision making. Instead of appealing to a fallacious expertise, social scientists might explore the possibility of more direct involvement and control by citizens throughout the policy cascade; social scientists might advocate thicker roles for citizens and their knowledge within democratic practices.

Decentered theory provides no great optimism about the prospects for this democratic alternative. On the contrary, much of the narrative in Part III of this book suggests a bleak vision of a misguided modernist expertise colonizing more and more of life. The developmental historicists of the nineteenth century could appeal to teleological principles that they believed were guiding history to a benevolent end. In contrast, postfoundationalists have no philosophical grounds on which to postulate agents or processes of change that will put an end to modernism. They may hope that the constant failures of modernist expertise eventually will lead policymakers to try more democratic alternatives, but that hope resides mainly in its performance as an argument.

Still, there is a bit more to say about what postfoundationalists might hope for. Because decentered theory rejects the mantle of modernist expertise, it cannot inspire a utopian blueprint in which a particular type of organization or action provides a cure-all. If social scientists want individuals to make choices for themselves, social scientists should typically leave it to the relevant actors to decide how best to promote participation and resolve policy issues. The decentered vision of a democratic future is thus a largely unspecified one. It has specific content mainly as a result of its involving a break with modernist expertise. A world after modernism requires a new type of knowledge. Social scientists should adopt a noticeably more interpretive approach in which practices appear as patterns of contingent activity explained by reference to the meanings within them and the historical contexts of these meanings. They should champion participation and dialogue as interpretive approaches to decision making more than as particular practices and institutions. This democratic future would not necessarily involve an end to bureaucracy. It would just require bureaucracies, or whatever replaced them, to rely on historicist and humanist ways of knowing rather than modernist ones. Policymakers should treat people as agents who can act for reasons of their own, rather than as dupes acting in accord with a fixed economic or sociological rationality. Policymakers should recognize the contingency of the stories they tell, and they should engage the targets of their policies in dialogue.

A more detailed democratic theory might do as much harm as good. Much of the existing literature prescribes detailed institutional arrangements and concrete practices. There is, for example, a growing literature that attempts empirically to identify causal factors that allegedly determine if and when deliberative democracy and collaborative governance are effective.[5] This literature has an ambiguous relationship to decentered theory and its democratic ideals. Almost all of this literature is sympathetic to these democratic ideals. Some of it may be compatible with them. Nonetheless, parts of the literature on deliberative democracy and collaborative governance ape the modernist expertise of which decentered theory would rid us. Some democratic theorists seem to aspire to formal classifications and correlations between deliberation, self-governing institutions, and specific outcomes. They claim that deliberation and self-governance have such and such effects at least under such and such conditions. They cloak themselves in the mantle of modernist expertise.

A menu of democratic innovations instead leaves it to democratic actors to decide which innovations to adopt in which contexts. Social scientists can just describe the innovations without purporting to have identified formal correlations and underlying mechanisms that explain the success and outcomes of these innovations. Instead of offering policymakers laws and models that seem to prescribe what practices or policies they should adopt to get certain outcomes, social scientists can encourage policymakers to learn by analogy from particular cases and stories. Although the stories might involve generalizations about practices, the generalizations can be descriptive and historical rather than attempts at a formal and comprehensive theory.

Of course proponents of democratic innovations may need to show relevant constituencies that these innovations work. However, decentered theory leads to a different view of how to show that an innovation works. The case for an innovation can be made by telling stories about cases and learning analogically from those stories. Even correlations and models do not offer secure predictions, but rather are themselves best thought of as stories. Whatever limits social scientists build into their predictions, people could arrive at new beliefs and actions outside those limits. So, social scientists cannot make predictions. All they can offer are informed conjectures that seek to explain practices and actions by pointing to the conditional connections between actions, beliefs, traditions, and dilemmas. Their conjectures are stories, understood as provisional narratives about possible futures.

Decentered theory encourages democratic innovations partly because it draws on an open historical ontology rather than a formal structural one. Indeed, while decentered theory involves historical genealogies of contingent activity, some postfoundationalists analyze democracy in quasi-structural terms. Jacques Derrida in particular has inspired some postfoundationalists to identify democracy mainly with extraordinary moments and eruptions that allegedly reveal aporias inherent in political life, such as the way law and authority inevitably carry traces of their absence.[6] These postfoundationalists define democracy in terms of antagonistic struggles that forge and institutionalize stable regimes or that challenge seemingly stable regimes. They neglect democracy as an everyday activity of collective decision making. Derrida viewed collective decisions as leaps of madness lacking any justification, and his followers often treat collective decisions as products of agonistic struggles that cannot be adjudicated by fair procedures and shared moral values.[7] In contrast, decentered theory focuses on the contingent beliefs on which people have acted to make and remake the organizations and practices through which they reach collective decisions. Democracy thus appears as a series of changing everyday practices (lacking any quasi-structural essence) by which people make collective decisions about how to govern themselves.

Decentered theory thus differs from some postfoundationalisms in its implications for the importance and the desirability of democratic reform. Derrida has inspired some postfoundationalists to combine their critical challenge to liberal democratic theory with an acceptance of liberal democratic ideals and practices. Many postfoundationalists insist on the undecidable and agonistic basis of liberal democratic politics, but having done so, they conclude that liberal democratic ideals are nonetheless about as good as it gets.[8] They support radical social movements to advance liberal democratic ideals. Although I have much sympathy with their support for radical social movements, there is a difference: in my view, the new theories and worlds of governance require that we supplement liberal and representative practices with far more participatory and dialogic ones.

In short, democracies are organizations that people form and reform to make collective decisions. Democracies replace the illusion of a divine or metaphysical basis for authority with the recognition that authority is made in history by human action; the ultimate source of legitimacy is the will of the members. Further, democracies treat their members as agents, giving them an active role in decision making; the members practice collective self-rule. Finally, democracies typically embody something like the ideals of fairness and equality. Historically the preferences of different members have been given equal weight through voting systems. Today, however, more emphasis might fall on organizational pluralism, participation, and dialogue.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. These particular forms of holism derive from W. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951), 20–43; W. Quine and J. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970); and L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. Anscombe (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

2. For a review of some of the relevant literature, see V. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), 303–26. A similar fate befalls "identity" when it refers to shared ideas and beliefs. See, for example, R. Abdelal, Y. Herrera, A. Johnston, and R. McDermott, eds., *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

3. The resulting explanations typically rest on either a macrologic that reifies structures or a micrologic that reifies rationality. Examples include, respectively, S. McAnulla, "New Labour, Old Epistemology? Reflections on Political Science, New Institutionalism and the Blair Government," *Parliamentary Affairs* 60 (2007), 313–31; and P. Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

4. Compare K. Johannessen, "The Concept of Practice in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy *Inquiry* 31 (1998), 357–69; and T. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

5. Compare I. Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

6. The classic texts in the debate between the two were F. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 1944); and B. Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1945).

7. For important early statements of these overlapping strands of economics, see respectively O. Williamson, "Transaction-Cost Economics: The Gov-

ernance of Contractual Relations," *Journal of Law and Economics* 22 (1979), 223–61; A. Shonfeld, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1965); and R. Nelson and S. Winter, *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

8. For examples of appeals to networks that draw loosely on transaction-cost economics, sociological institutionalism, and evolutionary functionalism, see, respectively, T. Knapp, "Hierarchies and Control: A New Interpretation and Reevaluation of Oliver Williamson's 'Markets and Hierarchies' Story," *Sociological Quarterly* 30 (1989), 425–40; W. Powell, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behaviour* 12 (1990), 295–336; and R. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997).

9. Examples include B. Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London: Sage, 2004); and Y. Gabriel, *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions and Fantasies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000).

10. R. Rhodes, *Everyday Life in British Government* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

11. See, respectively, P. Weller, R. Rhodes, and H. Bakvis, eds., *The Hollow Crown: Countervailing Trends in Core Executives* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997); B. Peters, R. Rhodes, and V. Wright, eds., *Administering the Summit: Administration of the Core Executive in Developed Countries* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000); and Rhodes, *Understanding Governance.*

12. M. Foucault, "Governmentality," in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 87–104. For his account of neoliberalism, see M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

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1. World Bank, *Governance and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1992).

2. G. Stoker, ed., *The New Management of British Local Governance* (London: Macmillan, 1999); G. Stoker, ed., *The New Politics of British Local Governance* (London: Macmillan, 2000); and R. Rhodes, ed., *Transforming British Government*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2000).

3. D. Osborne and T. Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992).

4. G. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); J. Elster, ed., *Rational Choice* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); and K. Monroe, ed., *The Economic Approach to Politics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

5. R. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance,*

Reflexivity and Accountability (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997); Rhodes, *Transforming British Government*; Stoker, *New Management*; and Stoker, *New Politics*.

6. Both Rod Rhodes and Gerry Stoker, who were respectively the directors of the Whitehall and Local Governance Programmes, evoke institutionalism and unintended consequences in this way. See Rhodes, *Understanding Governance*, chap. 4; and G. Stoker, "Introduction: The Unintended Costs and Benefits of New Management Reform for British Local Governance," in Stoker, *New Management*, 1–21.

7. J. Fodor and E. LePore, *Holism: A Shopper's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992).

8. J. March and J. Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984): 738.

9. Consider, for example, K. Dowding and D. King, eds., *Preferences, Institutions and Rational Choice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995); and R. Grafstein, "Rational Choice: Theory and Institutions," in Monroe, *Economic Approach to Politics*; and E. Ostrom, "Rational Choice Theory and Institutional Analysis: Towards Complementarity," *American Political Science Review* 85 (1991): 237–43.

10. Early exponents of rational choice theory sometimes privileged self-interest in this way. See, for example, A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 27–28.

11. J. Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

12. W. Mitchell, "The Shape of Public Choice to Come: Some Predictions and Advice," *Public Choice* 77 (1993): 133–44; and C. Vicchaeri, *Rationality and Co-Ordination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 221–24.

13. M. Dean, "Culture Governance and Individualisation," in *Governance as Social and Political Communication*, ed. H. Bang (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003); C. Ansell, *Pragmatist Democracy: Evolutionary Learning as Public Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); J. Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30 (2002): 525–47; and H. Bang, "Governance as Political Communication," in Bang, *Governance as Social and Political Communication*. For public administration more generally, see D. Farmer, "Derrida, Deconstruction, and Public Administration," *American Behavioral Scientist* 41 (1997): 12–27; C. Fox and H. Miller, *Postmodern Public Administration: Towards Discourse* (London: Sage, 1995); and C. McSwite, *Legitimacy in Public Administration: A Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 1997).

14. H. Kass and B. Catron, eds., *Images and Identities in Public Administration* (London: Sage, 1990); D. Farmer, *The Language of Public Administration: Bureaucracy, Modernity, and Postmodernity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); D. Farmer, "Social Construction of Concepts: The Case of Efficiency," in *Papers on the Art of Anti-Administration*, ed. D. Farmer (Burke, VA: Chatelaine Press, 1998); C. Fox and H. Miller, "What Do We Mean When We Say 'Real' in Public Affairs? The Modern/Postmodern Dis-

tinction," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 18 (1996): 100–108; and C. Stivers, *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era* (St. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

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16. Stivers, *Bureau Men*.

17. P. Ridell, "Portrait of the Whitehall Programme," unpublished ms.

18. D. Marsh and R. Rhodes, "Policy Communities and Issue Networks: Beyond Typology," in *Policy Networks in British Government*, eds. D. Marsh and R. Rhodes (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), 261.

19. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance*, 29–63.

20. Examples include W. Kickert, E-H. Klijn, and J. Koppenjan, eds., *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector* (London: Sage, 1997); and L. Salamon, ed., *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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1. For a useful survey of this broader literature, see P. Bogason, "Postmodernism and American Public Administration in the 1990s," *Administration & Society* 33 (2001), 165–93.

2. M. Dean, "Culture Governance and Individualisation," in H. Bang, ed., *Governance as Social and Political Communication* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003); and H. Bang, "Governance as Political Communication," in Bang, ed., *Governance as Social and Political Communication*.

3. D. Farmer, "Derrida, Deconstruction, and Public Administration," *American Behavioral Scientist* 41 (1997), 12–27.

4. C. Ansell, *Pragmatist Democracy: Evolutionary Learning as Public Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); and J. Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30 (2002), 525–47.

5. C. McSwite, *Legitimacy in Public Administration: A Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 1997).

6. Bogason, "Postmodernism," 173.

7. C. Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

8. P. Thompson, "Postmodernism: Fatal Distraction," in J. Hassard and M. Parker, eds., *Postmodernism and Organizations* (London: Sage, 1993).

9. Dean, "Culture Governance," p. 126.

10. See, respectively, C. Goodsell, "The Reality of Passion," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 18 (1996), 97–100; and D. Geuras and C. Garofalo, "The Normative Paradox in Contemporary Public Administration Theory," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 18 (1996), 2–13.

11. Dean, "Culture Governance," p. 135.

12. McSwite, *Legitimacy.*

13. S. Critchley, "Ethics, Politics, and Radical Democracy—The History of a Disagreement," in S. Critchley and O. Marchant, eds., *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004).

14. See M. Foucault, "The Ethic of the Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); Tully, "Political Philosophy"; and, for public administration more generally, McSwite, *Legitimacy.*

15. H. Bang and T. Dryberg, "Governance, Self-Representation and the Democratic Imagination," in M. Saward, ed., *Democratic Innovations* (London: Routledge, 2001).

16. J. Ziegler, "Corporate Governance and the Politics of Property Rights in Germany," *Politics and Society* 28 (2000), 195–221.

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3. For historical reviews, see J. Hall and G. Ikenberry, *The State* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1989); Skinner, *Foundations*; and C. Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975). For the contemporary literature, see P. Dunleavy and B. O'Leary, eds., *Theories of the State* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1987); Hay, Lister, and Marsh, eds., *The State*; and B. Jessop, *State Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

4. B. Jessop, "Governance Failure," in G. Stoker, ed., *The New Politics of British Local Governance* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000), p. 23.

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6. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance,* p. 199.

7. For an overview, see M. Marinetto, "Governing Beyond the Centre: A Critique of the Anglo-Governance School," *Political Studies,* 51 (2003), 592–608. For specific examples, see the works cited in footnote 5.

8. The ensuing view of networks is common beyond the Anglo-governance school. See, for example, J. Frances, R. Levacic, J. Mitchell, and G. Thompson, "Introduction," in G. Thompson, J. Frances, R. Levacic, and J. Mitchell, eds., *Markets Hierarchies and Networks: The Co-Ordination of Social Life* (London: Sage, 1991), pp. 1–19; and W. Powell, "Neither Market

nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behaviour* 12 (1990), 295–336.

9. See, for example, R. Kramer and T. Tyler, eds., *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research* (London: Sage, 1996).

10. V. Wright and J. Hayward, "Governing from the Centre: Policy Co-Ordination in Six European Core Executives," in Rhodes, ed., *Transforming British Government*, pp. 27–46.

11. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance*, p. 51.

12. J. Pierre and B. Peters, *Governance, Politics and the State* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 78, 104–5, and 111.

13. E. Sørensen and J. Torfing, "Theoretical Approaches to Metagovernance," in E. Sørensen and J. Torfing, eds., *Theories of Democratic Network Governance* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2007), p. 190.

14. Ibid.

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18. A. Barry, T. Osborne, and N. Rose, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason* (London: UCL Press, 1996).

19. A. McKinlay and K. Starkey, eds., *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory: From Panopticon to Technologies of Self* (London: Sage, 1998).

20. Jessop, "Governance Failure," p. 24.

21. Sørensen and Torfing, eds., *Theories of Democratic Network Governance*, chaps. 10–12. There is also an extensive literature on managing networks, collaboration, and partnerships. I discuss that literature in Chapter 6.

22. See, for example, Jessop, *State Power.*

23. P. Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

24. S. McAnulla, "Challenging the New Interpretivist Approach: Towards a Critical Realist Alternative," *British Politics* 1 (2006), 113–38.

25. D. Marsh, "Understanding British Government: Analysing Competing Models," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18 (2008), 251–68.

26. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. Anscombe (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

27. In his preliminary sketch of his discussion of games, Wittgenstein explicitly contrasts this position with a "craving for generality," that he ascribes to inappropriate attempts to model all knowledge on the natural sciences. See L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1972).

28. B. Jessop, "Critical Realism and the Strategic-Relational Approach," *New Formations* 56 (2005), 42.

CHAPTER 4

1. J. Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001). Also see J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Twentieth Century Britain* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

2. P. Mandler, *History and National Life* (London: Profile Books, 2002). Also see the even more revisionist P. Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

3. S. Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4. It is perhaps relevant here that Mandler's first book was a sympathetic appreciation of Whiggism: see P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830–1852* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1990). Stapleton's was, similarly, a sympathetic appreciation of the political thought of a late Whig: see J. Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Collini's coauthored second book, likewise, conveys sympathy for a Whig approach to the study of politics: see S. Collini, D. Winch, and J. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

5. Mandler is fairly welcoming to the popular consumption of history as entertainment: see Mandler, *National Life*. Collini is less respectful and even rather surprised by such "public fuss": see Collini, *English Pasts*, p. 2.

6. Mandler, *National Life*.

7. It is perhaps relevant that Collini's first books were on an early British sociologist and nineteenth-century notions of a political science, and that they suggested there was something amiss with the ambition to explain social life in terms set by a modernist science. See S. Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *Noble Science*. It is perhaps relevant too that Stapleton's first book, which began as a doctoral thesis supervised by Collini, exhibits a clear sympathy for Ernest Barker's attempt to defend a Whiggish and historical approach to the study of politics in the face of the rise of such modernist science. See Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*.

8. D. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 125–92.

9. H. Finer, *Foreign Governments at Work: An Introductory Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921); H. Finer, *Theory and Practice of Modern Government* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970).

10. C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, 990–1990* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992).

11. See Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals*, p. 5.

12. See, for Britain, P. Mandler, "'Race' and 'Nation' in Mid-Victorian Thought," in S. Collini, R. Whatmore, and B. Young, eds., *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 224–44.

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17. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

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CHAPTER 5

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3. T. Börzel, "Organizing Babylon: On the Different Conceptions of Policy Networks," *Public Administration* 76 (1998), 253–73.

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36. Richardson, "Government, Interest Groups and Policy Change."

37. Marsh and Smith, "Understanding Policy Networks."

38. C. Hay and D. Richards, "The Tangled Webs of Westminster and Whitehall: The Discourse, Strategy and Practice of Networking within the British Core Executive," *Public Administration* 78 (2000), 1–28.

39. Relevant examples include A. Finlayson, ed., "The Interpretive Approach in Political Science—A Symposium," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6 (2004), 129–64; S. McAnulla, "Challenging the New

Interpretist Approach: Towards A Critical Realist Alternative," *British Politics* 1 (2006), 113–38; D. Marsh, "Understanding British Government: Analysing Competing Models," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18 (2008), 251–68; and M. Smith, "Re-Centering British Government: Beliefs, Traditions and Dilemmas in Political Science," *Political Studies Review* 6 (2008), 143–54.

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CHAPTER 6

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Consumer in Orthodox Economic Thought," in Trentmann, ed., *Making of the Consumer*, pp. 31–51.

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16. J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, 1922), pp. 199ff.

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20. Consider, to mention just a few prominent examples, A. Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (New York: Crown, 1993); R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); and M. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996). For historical accounts, see D. Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); and A. Schafer, "German Historicism, Progressive Social Thought, and the Interventionist State in the US since the 1880s," in M. Bevir and F. Trentmann, eds., *Markets in Historical Contexts: Ideas and Politics in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

21. See J. March and J. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989). Governmentality theorists, too, neglect situated agency and local reasoning. They present the consumer as a passive subject-position. Consumers are merely acting out a role given to them by a discourse or a regime of power/knowledge. See P. Miller and N. Rose, "Mobilizing the Consumer: Assembling the Subject of Consumption," *Theory, Culture and Society* 14 (1997), 1–36. Indeed, while governmentality theorists adopt a critical tone when discussing social norms or social reason, they sometimes rely, as the other sociologists discussed, on modernist modes of knowing (synchronic analysis of the relations between signs within discourse) and a hostility to a modern capitalism that they conceive as "totalizing."

22. Examples include M. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991); and A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

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26. K. Gerth, "Consumption and Politics in Twentieth Century Chinga," in K. Soper and F. Trentmann, eds., *Citizenship and Consumption* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008).

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28. S. Wiesen, "Creating the Nazi Marketplace: Public Relations and Consumer Citizenship in the Third Reich," in G. Eley and J. Palmowski, eds., *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 146–63.

CHAPTER 7

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2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. M. Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, trans. D. Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 243.

4. In a footnote Catlaw explicitly distances himself from Foucault's historicism. See Catlaw, *Fabricating the People*, pp. 210–11.

5. Compare E. Cohen, *Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

6. Compare W. Everdell, *The First Moderns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); T. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995);

D. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chaps. 8–10; and M. Schabas, *A World Ruled by Number: William Stanley Jevons and the Rise of Mathematical Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

7. On the history of neoclassical economics and rational choice theory, see respectively Schabas, *World Ruled by Number*; and S. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

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11. See, for example, A. King, "Overload: Problems of Governing in the 1970s," *Political Studies* 23 (1975), 284–96.

12. Compare A. Finlayson, "Third Way Theory." *Political Quarterly* 70 (1999), 271–79.

13. J. Stiglitz, "Principal and Agent" in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics* 3 (1987), 966–71.

14. M. Barzelay, *The New Public Management* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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16. H. Rittel and M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973), 155–69.

17. Compare L. DeLeon, "Accountability in a 'Reinvented Government,'" *Public Administration* 76 (1998), 539–58; B. Radin, *Challenging the Performance Movement: Accountability, Complexity, and Democratic Values* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); and M. Shamsul Haque "The Diminishing Publicness of Public Service under the Current Mode of Governance," *Public Administration Review* 61 (2001), 65–82.

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20. A. Dunsire, *Control in a Bureaucracy* (Oxford, UK: St. Martin's, 1978).

21. For an example of this stress on incentives rather than procedural accountability, see D. Sappington, "Incentives in Principal-Agent Relationships," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5 (1991), 45–66.

22. M. Considine, "The End of the Line? Accountable Governance in the Age of Networks, Partnerships, and Joined-Up Services," *Governance* 15 (2002), 21–24; and M. Minow, "Public and Private Partnerships: Accounting for the New Religion," *Harvard Law Review* 116 (2003), 1229–70.

23. G. Majone, "Nonmajoritarian Institutions and the Limits of Democratic Governance: A Political Transaction-Cost Approach," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 157 (2001), 57–78.

24. Considine, "The End of the Line?"; and Minow, "Public and Private Partnerships."

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CHAPTER 8

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2. R. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997), particularly chap. 3.

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York: Columbia University Press, 1928); and P. Herring, *Group Representation before Congress* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929). For a discussion of American pluralism, see J. Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

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11. M. Marinetto, "Governing Beyond the Centre: A Critique of the Anglo-Governance School," *Political Studies* 51 (2003), 592–608; and A. Taylor, "Hollowing Out or Filling In? Task Forces and the Management of Cross-Cutting Issues in British Government," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2 (2000), 46–71.

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16. Compare the critical discussions in T. Biebricher, "Genealogy and Governmentality," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2008), 363–96; D. Dupont and E. Pearch, "Foucault contra Foucault: Rereading the Governmentality Papers," *Theoretical Criminology* 5 (2001), 123–58; and T. Lemke, "Neoliberalismus, Staat und Selbsttechnologien: Ein Kritischer Überblick

über die Governmentality Studies," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 41 (2000), 31–47.

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18. N. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); Rose, *Inventing Ourselves*; and N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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25. D. Marsh, D. Richards, and M. Smith, "Unequal Plurality: Towards an Asymmetric Power Model of the British Polity," *Government and Opposition* 38 (2003), 323. For other presentations of the asymmetric power model as a counter to the differentiated polity, see D. Marsh, D. Richards, and M. Smith, *Changing Patterns of Governance in the United Kingdom: Reinventing Whitehall?* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001); and S. McAnulla, *British Politics: A Critical Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2005).

26. R. Elgie, "Models of Executive Politics: A Framework for the Study of Executive Power Relations in Parliamentary and Semi-Presidential Regimes," *Political Studies* 45 (1997), 217–31.

CHAPTER 9

1. D. Williams and T. Young, "Governance, the World Bank, and Liberal Theory," *Political Studies* 42 (1994), 84–100.

2. Commission of the European Communities, *European Governance: A White Paper*, Brussels, COM: 428, p. 8.

3. Ibid., p. 3.

4. Ibid., p. 4.

5. Ibid., p. 11.

6. Much the same could be said about many of the academic reports written to advise the Commission on governance. A representative example is N. Lebessis and J. Paterson, *Improving the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of EU Governance: A Possible Reform Agenda for the Commission*, Forward Studies Unit Working Paper (Brussels: European Commission, 1999).

7. Commission of the European Communities, *European Governance*, p. 3.

8. Ibid., p. 10.

9. Ibid..

10. For typological and historical approaches to this diversity, see respectively P. Hall and R. Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies* 44 (1996), 936–57; and R. Adcock, M. Bevir, and S. Stimson, "Historicizing the New Institutionalism(s)," in R. Adcock, M. Bevir, and S. Stimson, eds., *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 259–89.

11. M. Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1985), 481–510.

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13. C. DeBresson and F. Amesse, eds., *Networks of Innovators*, a special issue of *Research Policy* 20/5 (1991); and W. Powell, K. Koput, and L. Smith-Doerr, "Interorganizational Collaboration and the Locus of Innovation: Networks of Learning in Biotechnology," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41 (1996), 116–45.

14. Granovetter, "Business Groups"; and R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

15. M. Considine, "The End of the Line? Accountable Governance in the Age of Networks, Partnerships, and Joined-Up Services," *Governance* 15 (2002), 21–40.

16. G. Majone, "Nonmajoritarian Institutions and the Limits of Democratic Governance: A Political Transaction-Cost Approach," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 157 (2001), 58–77. Tellingly this argument is accompanied by an appeal to the importance of expertise in the relevant state activities such as regulation. See G. Majone, *Regulating Europe* (London: Sage, 1996).

17. A. Moravcsik, "Federalism in the European Union: Rhetoric and Reality," in K. Nicolaidis and R. Howse, eds., *The Federal Vision: Legitimacy and Levels of Governance in the US and the EU* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 161–87. Tellingly this argument is accompanied by an insistence on the importance of empirical expertise as a source of knowledge

about "real-world" democracy—as opposed to "utopian thinking" about "ideal democratic systems." See A. Moravcsik, "Is There a 'Democratic Deficit' in World Politics? A Framework for Analysis," *Government and Opposition* 39 (1994), 336–63.

18. For the development of such classifications within functionalist organisation studies and their later place in communitarianism, see respectively A. Etzioni, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations: On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates* (New York: Free Press, 1961); and A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (London: Profile Books, 1997). For an example of their impact on discussions of governance, see A. Marintelli, "Markets, Governments, Communities, and Global Governance," *International Sociology* 18 (2003), 291–323.

19. Commission of the European Communities, *European Governance*, p. 15.

20. Although the historical recovery of republicanism has perhaps been insensitive to its overlaps with liberalism, there is nonetheless an important contrast between the two. See Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

21. M. Foucault, "The Ethic of the Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 1–20.

22. T. Cooper, *An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1991). There is, of course, a worry that such radical conceptions of an active citizenship might get displaced into a system perspective that seeks to promote citizenship education primarily in order to ensure a consensus about policies and so effective implementation and acceptance of them.

23. Contrast Majone, "Nonmajoritarian Institutions"; and Moravcsik, "Federalism in the European Union."

24. S. Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," *Constellations* 1 (1994), 11–25.

CHAPTER 10

1. C. Lukensmeyer, J. Goldman, and S. Brigham, "A Town Meeting for the Twenty-First Century," in J. Gastil and P. Levine, eds., *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

2. R. Lofstedt, "The Role of Trust in the North Blackforest: An Evaluation of a Citizen Panel Project," *Risk: Health, Safety and Environment* 10 (1999), 7–30.

3. J. Fishkin, "Consulting the Public through Deliberative Polling," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 22 (2003), 128–33.

4. R. Luskin, J. Fishkin, and R. Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," *British Journal of Political Science* 32 (2002), 455–87.

5. J. Burgess, A. Stirling, J. Clark, G. Davies, M. Eames, K. Staley, and S. Williamson, "Deliberative Mapping: A Novel Analytic-Deliberative Method-

ology to Support Contested Science-Policy Decisions," *Public Understanding of Science* 16 (2007), 299–322.

6. G. Davies and J. Burgess, "Challenging the 'View from Nowhere': Citizen Reflections on Specialist Expertise in a Deliberative Process," *Health and Place* 10 (2004), 349–61; and G. Davies, "Mapping Deliberation: Calculation, Articulation and Intervention in the Politics of Organ Transplantation," *Economy and Society* 35 (2006), 232–58.

7. B. Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

8. G. Johnson, "Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42 (2009), 679–703.

9. S. Guggenheim, "The Kecamatan Development Program, Indonesia," in A. Bebbington, M. Woolcock, S. Guggenheim, and E. Olsen, eds., *The Search for Empowerment: Social Capital as Idea and Practice at the World Bank* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006).

10. Examples of the broader definition of collaborative governance include C. Ansell and A. Gash, "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18 (2008), 543–71; and L. Bingham, "Collaborative Governance," in M. Bevir, ed., *The Handbook of Governance* (London: Sage, 2011). Examples of the broader definition of coproduction include T. Bovaird, "Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Co-Production of Public Services," *Public Administration Review* 67 (2007), 846–60; and G. Whitaker, "Co-Production: Citizen Participation in Service Delivery," *Public Administration Review* 40 (1980), 240–46.

11. A. Fung, "Accountable Autonomy Toward Empowered Deliberation in Chicago Schools and Policing," *Politics and Society* 29 (2001), 79–103.

12. W. Lam, "Institutional Design of Public Agencies and Coproduction: A Study of Irrigation Associations in Taiwan," *World Development* 24 (1996), 1039–54.

13. P. Gelles, "Cultural Identity and Indigenous Water Rights in the Andean Highland," in R. Boelens, D. Getches, and A. Guevara, eds., *Out of the Mainstream: Water Rights, Politics, and Identity* (London: Earthscan, 2010); T. Perreault, "State Restructuring and the Scale Politics of Rural Water Governance in Bolivia," *Environment and Planning A* 37 (2005), 263–84; T. Perreault, "Custom and Contradiction: Rural Water Governance and the Politics of Usos y Costumbres in Bolivia's Irrigators' Movement," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98 (2008), 834–54; and J. Strobele-Gregor, "Culture and Political Practice of the Ayamara and Quechua in Bolivia: Autonomous Forms of Modernity in the Andes," *Latin American Perspectives* 23 (1996), 72–90.

14. B. Gazley, W. Chang, and L. Bingham, "Collaboration and Citizen Participation in Community Mediation Centers," *Review of Policy Research* 23 (2006), 843–63.

15. N. Burrell, C. Zirbel, and M. Allen, "Evaluating Peer Mediation Outcomes in Educational Settings: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 21 (2003), 7–26.

16. See, for example, B. Goldfrank, "The Politics of Deepening Local Democracy: Decentralization, Party Institutionalization, and Participation," *Comparative Politics* 39 (2007), 147–68.

EPILOGUE

1. K. Dowding, "Model or Metaphor? A Critical Review of the Policy Network Approach," *Political Studies* 43 (1995), 136–58.

2. Examples include, with particular reference to policy networks, D. Marsh and M. Smith, "Understanding Policy Networks: Towards a Dialectical Approach," *Political Studies* 48 (2000), 4–21; and with particular reference to governance, R. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997).

3. D. Marsh, "The New Orthodoxy: The Differentiated Polity Model," *Public Administration* 89 (2011), 32–48.

4. Foucault explicitly tied this concept of power to his recovery of early modern ideas of government and governmentality. He said

> Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. This word must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. "Government" did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others. The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power), but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, neither warlike nor juridical, which is government.

See M. Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power," in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 220–21.

5. Examples draw variously on economistic and sociological strands of modernism to reach diverse conclusions. See A. Bächtiger and D. Hangartner, "When Deliberative Theory Meets Empirical Political Science: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges in Political Deliberation," *Political Studies*

58 (2010), 609–29; S. Jackman and P. Sniderman, "The Limits of Deliberative Discussion: A Model of Everyday Political Arguments," *Journal of Politics* 68 (2006), 272–83; and D. Landa and A. Meirowitz, "Game Theory, Information, and Deliberative Democracy," *Political Science* 53 (2009), 427–44.

6. For Derrida's views, see J. Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science* 15 (1986), 7–15; and J. Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990), 919–1047. For examples of others drawing on his ideas, see B. Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); and C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

7. Derrida, "Force of Law"; and Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*.

8. Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*. A similar move seems to occur in J. Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. P-A. Brault and M. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

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