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Popular discourse and the ethical deficiency of 'Third Way' conceptions of citizenship

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Abstract

The article is in three parts. The first explores the connections and commonalities between different empirical investigations relating to popular discourses of citizenship and argues that these are constituted through the complex combination of overlapping discursive moral repertoires. The second part considers the discursive moral repertoires that constitute discourses of citizenship within the politics of the 'Third Way' project – as it is espoused in the British context – and argues that while such discourses accommodate notions of civic duty, moral obligation and enforced obedience, they seldom embrace a solidaristic ethic of responsibility. The third part discusses key findings from a more recent study of popular discourses of dependency, responsibility and rights. The findings suggest that what inhibits the translation of popular understandings of human interdependency into wider support for a form of citizenship based on collective responsibility and universal social rights is the hegemonic prevalence of a peculiarly individualistic conception of responsibility that seems to be consistent with Third Way thinking.

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This article is concerned with the ethical/moral basis upon which social rights of citizenship are construed within popular discourse. By social rights, I am referring to rights to human welfare – encompassing, for the purposes of this article, provision for social security, healthcare, education, housing and other social services. Comparative research conducted over a decade ago in the United States and Britain suggested that while Americans then tended to accord most importance, or to give 'primacy', to civil and political rights, Britons gave primacy to social rights (Conover et al. 1991). However, more recent research suggests that young Britons now think about citizenship more in terms of responsibilities than rights, and are unlikely to regard social rights as unconditional (Lister et al. 2003). How should we understand this? In the intervening period 'Third Way' thinking, first associated with the Clinton era in

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the United States, has crossed the Atlantic not only to become the orthodoxy of Britain's New Labour government, but to influence aspects of social policy across Western Europe (Bonoli and Powell 2001; Driver and Martell 2002: ch. 4; Surender and Lewis 2004). Central to the Third Way project is a conception of citizenship in which there can be 'no rights without responsibilities' (Giddens 1998: 65; and see Labour Party 1997; 2001; Dean 1999).

It will be argued that, although the politics of the Third Way can have had only an indirect effect on popular conceptions of citizenship, it none the less represents an important constraint upon the development of social rights. There are two prefatory points that should perhaps be inserted here. First, it is acknowledged that the notion of social rights is in any event ambiguous, and indeed contested (Dean 2002: ch. 1; Powell 2002). While social democratic accounts have championed social rights as a means to achieve substantive equality and republican-communitarian accounts acknowledge them as a means to promote social solidarity, the social rights originally envisioned by Marshall (1950) were rooted as much as anything in social liberalism (see Rees 1995): they were premised on equality of status, not equality of outcome; and upon an individualist ethic that was supposed to displace class-based solidarities. Second, political and popular discourses alike may to differing extents embrace the ideological assumptions that inform each or any of that familiar triumvirate – Liberalism, Communitarian-conservatism and Socialism – that have been characterised in various guises as the basis by which existing welfare regimes and competing models of citizenship may be distinguished – for example, by Esping-Andersen (1990), Janoski (1998) or White (2003). A part of my argument, however, is that such analyses tend either to conflate or to elide a fourth tradition that also competes to inform popular and political discourse: a traditionalist, moral authoritarian or neo-conservative ideology that is in several respects actually inimical to citizenship[1]. What we are concerned with in this article is empirical evidence concerning the shifting tides of discourse that characterise the 'Third Way' era and the implications for the ethical foundations of social rights.

The article is in three substantive parts. The first contextualises the argument by revisiting some earlier research by this author that generated a taxonomy of moral repertoires through which to interpret the ambiguity of public discourse and opinion on issues relating to welfare and citizenship: the taxonomy is applied to findings from other research. The second considers the relevance of the Third Way to contemporary

understandings of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The third outlines and interprets the findings of a more recent study of popular discourses around dependency, responsibility and rights: the findings suggest that while popular discourse is capable of supporting extended social rights of citizenship, it is inhibited by a narrow ethic of responsibility that it shares with Third Way political thinking.

The moral repertoires of popular discourse

A set of in-depth interviews conducted in Britain in the mid 1990s with a stratified sample of 76 people with very widely differing incomes, indicated that although they did not necessarily engage with the term or the concept of citizenship, they were able to talk about the basis of the relationship between the human individual and the social collectivity (and/or the state) in terms of rights and responsibilities; and, in particular, in terms of the issues that arise from the unequal nature of British society (Dean with Melrose 1999). To interpret the discursive data from these interviews a taxonomy was constructed of the moral repertoires through which the participants made sense of the social injustices they witnessed around them, that they themselves experienced, and/or that they were perhaps implicated in perpetuating. The taxonomy did not describe different kinds of participant, but the different discursive repertoires on which they drew – to differing degrees and in a variety of often contradictory combinations – in order implicitly to define the basis of their social citizenship. A revised and extended version of that taxonomy is presented in Figure 1.

The taxonomy is built around two fundamental distinctions or dimensions, represented by the two intersecting axes in Figure 1. At its simplest, the continuum represented in the horizontal axis is concerned with ideological orientations, while the continuum represented in the vertical axis is concerned with normative expectations.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

In the version presented here, the horizontal axis relates to the distinction I would draw between contractarian and solidaristic assumptions about citizenship. It is a distinction that is in certain respects related to that between liberal and civic-republican traditions of citizenship (e.g. Oldfield 1990) or between libertarianism and communitarianism, albeit that contractarianism can, for example, include highly

moralistic and illiberal conceptions of citizenship, whereas solidarism would not necessarily include all the diverse philosophies that describe themselves as communitarian (Driver and Martell 1997), especially not those premised on contractarian 'club rule' principles (see Jordan 1996). Contractarian repertoires are premised on an essentially individualistic view of civil order in which a more or less explicit trade-off or metaphorical contract or covenant is required between competitive and self-interested individuals: aspects of individual sovereignty or freedom must be surrendered in return for a measure of protection against the predations of others. Solidaristic repertoires, on the other hand, are premised on a collectivist view of social order in which the priority is to sustain co-operative solidarity: sovereignty must be pooled or shared within a social group or society in order to achieve internal social cohesion and security against external threats. The repertoires themselves are highly fluid and ambiguous and the terms used to categorise them entail an element of compromise. The intention is that this dimension should capture not simply an ideological continuum, but a dialectical process by which individual identities are established in relation to others in society – by human bargaining on the one hand and by human attachments on the other.

The vertical axis in Figure 1 relates in this version of the taxonomy to a distinction between, on the one hand, the customary and the reflexive and, on the other, between the moral and the ethical. Underpinning these distinctions is the broader sociological distinction between 'life-world' and 'system' (Habermas 1987): between, on the one hand, the sphere of individual agency, moral norms and customary practices that give meaning to human life and, on the other, the sphere of social structure, ethical values and the technical and administrative systems in which self-reflexive subjects must place their trust.

Anthropologists may detect a similarity between the contractarian/solidaristic and the customary-moral/reflexive-ethical dimensions respectively described above and Mary Douglas' (1970) concepts of group and grid. However, whereas Douglas' ground-breaking taxonomies were concerned with the cultural characterisation of individuals and/or peoples, we are here concerned with the discursive repertoires upon which individuals or peoples may draw: repertoires that evolve and are remoulded as much in relation as in opposition to each other[2].

For example, contractarian and solidaristic repertoires are seldom entirely discrete. The defence of market freedoms and individual autonomy demanded by

contractarian repertoires may, paradoxically, have recourse to a celebration of the kinds of stable collaborative institutions that are defended by solidaristic repertoires. Discourses relating, for example, to principles of equality and social justice may draw as much on formal or procedural contractarian repertoires as upon substantively situated solidaristic repertoires. Similarly, discourses that span the customary-moral/reflexive-ethical dimension may exist in dialectical relationship with each other. Reflexive-ethical repertoires founded in ideological or religious doctrine and imposed upon people from the 'top down' may pervade moral repertoires and take on a customary character. Conversely customary-moral repertoires generated in struggle from the 'bottom up' may over time colonise elements of reflexive-ethical repertoires and take on an established doctrinal character. Alternatively, customary-moral repertoires may strategically borrow from reflexive-ethical repertoires (and, in the realm of populist politics, *vice versa*) in order to subvert them.

In practice, as our original empirical findings demonstrated, popular discourse is usually chaotic and often contradictory. We observed it to be composed from the four competing moral repertoires – conformism, survivalism, reformism and entrepreneurialism – defined in the quadrants of Figure 1. The survivalist and conformist repertoires were customary in the sense that they took local circumstances and moral assumptions as given. They drew upon established customs and practices. The survivalist repertoire, however, was contractarian in that its claims established the self-seeking priorities of individuals and/or their households as against other individuals and households. It was a repertoire that regarded poverty as one of life's misfortunes, and survival as an individual struggle. The conformist repertoire, on the other hand, was solidaristic in that its claims were founded upon loyalty to and/or acquiescence within the existing social order. It was a repertoire that accepted, for example, that, though the poor deserve help, poverty is an inevitable if not a natural occurrence.

The reformist and entrepreneurial repertoires were reflexive and ethical in that they admitted universal premises. The reformist repertoire, however, was solidaristic in that its claims stemmed from collective demands on behalf of social groups or communities. It was a repertoire that, for example, regarded poverty as a social injustice and the solution as a matter of public policy and substantive intervention. The entrepreneurial repertoire on the other hand was contractarian in that its claims related to demands for the recognition of individual achievement or potential. It was a

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repertoire that attributed poverty to personal failure or lack of opportunity and the solution as a matter of individual enterprise and procedural fairness.

Our original research demonstrated that contractarian discourses dominated over solidaristic discourses, but that the latter none the less survived within popular discourse. This qualitative study provided significant insights into the apparent ambiguity that is disclosed by quantitative survey data relating to social attitudes towards the welfare state (e.g. Taylor-Gooby 1990; Lipsey 1994; Brook et al. 1996; Hills and Lelkes 1999), which may best be summarised as a mixture of pragmatic instrumentalism and guarded altruism. While enthusiasm for public services and benefits that are received by a majority (such as, in the UK, healthcare and retirement pensions) are more strongly favoured than those that are received by minorities (such as social housing and unemployment benefits), popular opinion tends none the less to accept the need for a welfare safety net. The taxonomy also provides a framework within which to interpret the findings of other qualitative studies that have recently addressed British people's understandings of citizenship.

Peter Dwyer's study (2000) of welfare-service users confirmed, predictably, that users were by and large supportive of social rights, but it also observed – as Convery et al. (1991) had done – a mixture of liberal and communitarian justifications for social rights. My argument, however, is that fully to grasp the complexity of popular discourse requires a more complex range of categories. Dwyer observed that his participants invoked three different principles to justify their right to welfare, which he named – using categories employed not by welfare service users, but by social policy analysts – the 'contributory', 'social assistance' and 'universal' principles. But he additionally observed that, depending on the context of its imposition, his participants were in favour of 'welfare-to-work': the idea espoused by New Labour that more specific kinds of conditionality should attach to the receipt of welfare benefits and services. One way of interpreting this evidence, I would suggest, is:

- To equate justifications premised on the 'social assistance' principle with the *survivalist* moral repertoire. Social assistance is premised on a form of selectivity that had its customary foundations in the Poor Laws; in the idea that those who have not managed successfully to compete in the struggle for survival should be

assisted only if they can demonstrate that, in spite of their failure, they deserve to be helped.

- To equate justifications premised on the 'contributory' principle with the *conformist* moral repertoire. Ostensibly, of course, welfare based on social insurance entails a notional contract between the individual and the state, but most social insurance schemes function in practice on a 'Pay As You Go' basis; on intergenerational mutualism not an actuarial contract. Their foundations are both customary and solidaristic. My own research has repeatedly demonstrated (e.g. Dean and Melrose 1996; Dean with Melrose 1999; Dean and Rodgers 2004) that people resort to the idea that they, or even their forbears, have in some way contributed – in national insurance contributions, in taxes, or in their general contribution to the community or the national effort – and that this entitles them, morally speaking, as members of society, to receive welfare benefits and services.

- To equate justifications premised on the 'universal' principle with the *reformist* moral repertoire. Any universalist principle is quintessentially an ethical doctrine, and it was the redistributive welfare state that gave expression to the egalitarian-solidaristic interpretation of that ideal. Though such a principle has been substantially eclipsed within prevailing political discourse, it still provides the fundamental basis for any argument in favour of substantive social rights in the sense that the social democratic tradition once defined them (e.g. Pierson 2001).

- To equate the acceptance of new forms of conditionality with the *entrepreneurial* moral strategy. As we shall see in the next section, the Third Way is premised on a new reflexive ethic of self-governance (e.g. Bauman 1993; Rose 1996) by which discourses of rights are eclipsed by discourses of opportunity; in which the function of the state is to enable its citizens to compete for survival with one another on an equal footing. The new conditionality identified by Dwyer requires that citizens take up such opportunities.

The research by Ruth Lister et al. (2003) focused on young people. The findings, as indicated above, were striking insofar that the youthful cohorts that were interviewed, representing the citizens of tomorrow, demonstrated little support for the idea of social rights. Lister et al. characterised young people's understandings of citizenship in terms of five 'models', all of which functioned at some distance from social rights

and welfare related issues. The first of these, the 'universal status' model, incorporated a frequently articulated background assumption by which citizenship would seem to have been regarded as little more than a synonym for personhood, or nationality. The other four models, I would contend, may once again be mapped against the moral repertoires outlined above:

- The 'social contractual' model would seen to be a variation on the *survivalist* moral repertoire. The emphasis, though it is not entirely clear, appears to be upon 'the rights and requirements of living within the law' (*ibid*: 239); of doing whatever is necessary to get by.
- The 'constructive social participation' model would appear to be an extension of the *conformist* moral repertoire. The emphasis here was on the responsibility to contribute or to put things back into the community to which one belongs.
- The 'right to a voice' model would seem to have some resonance with the *reformist* repertoire. The emphasis here is on more than participation, but on having a say; on being a part of the democratic process.
- The 'respectable economic independence' model would seem to be a version of the *entrepreneurial* repertoire. The model equates citizenship with having a good job, a house and a family. The emphasis is on being independent and successful.

The picture that emerges is one in which 'young people found it much easier to talk about responsibilities than rights' (*ibid*: 251), a finding that chimes with earlier research by Carlen (1996) who has pointed to the asymmetrical nature of young people's citizenship. As the responsibilities that were demanded of young people during the 1980s and '90s increased, their rights – particularly their social rights – were eroded. The theme of responsibility has become even more central under the Third Way.

Responsibility and the Third Way

It has been argued, most cogently by Roche (1992), that since the crisis of the classic Western welfare state in the 1970s the 'dominant paradigm' of social citizenship came under attack from across the political spectrum as a 'discourse of duty' as well as

rights emerged. This discourse took a variety of forms, ranging from New Right and neo-conservative claims that social rights undermine the responsibilities of citizens to sustain themselves through work and to provide for each other in the family, through to challenges by new social movements – including feminists, ecologists and community activists – who contested the patriarchal, productivist and individualistic assumptions upon which modern frameworks of rights and responsibilities had been constructed. Elements of both kinds of argument appear to have been absorbed into Third Way thinking. The British Labour Party went so far as to change its constitution and for its historic commitment to redistribution, common ownership and popular administration it substituted the aim of creating 'a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties that we owe' (Labour Party 1995 - reproduced in Levitas 1998: 191).

Early supporters of the Third Way envisaged a new kind of 'stakeholder capitalism' in which all could and should participate, but in which the owners and controllers of capital would be forced to observe a set of wider obligations to society as a whole (Hutton 1995). In practice the responsibilities that Third Way governments have chosen to enforce have been those of the poor, not the rich (e.g. Levitas 1998). In the USA Bill Clinton promised to 'end welfare as we know it' with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, which deliberately limits social assistance to the poor (Waldfogel 1997). In Britain, Tony Blair promised to 'refashion the welfare state on the basis of rights and responsibilities, with people helped to help themselves, not just given handouts' (Labour Party 2001: 3). To this end the Department of Social Security has been replaced by a Department for Work and Pensions. Welfare-to-work policies now require that all welfare benefit recipients of working age – including disabled people, lone parents and the partners of unemployed people – must submit to a regime of work-focused interviews as a condition of receiving benefits. Pensions policy is premised on the assumption that the financing of pensions should result mainly from self-provisioning, and even people on low incomes are now enjoined to supplement the minimal state pension by saving through privately administered 'stakeholder pension' schemes.

It must be emphasised that the so-called 'Third Way' is neither a simple compromise between New Right and Old Left thinking, nor a purely pragmatic 'pick and mix' approach (Powell 2000). The term may be applied to a variety of 'political composites' (Driver and Martell 2002) whose immanent logic may draw upon

complex combinations of discursive moral repertoires. Staying with the example of Britain's New Labour government one can see that:

- Underpinning elements of its approach are discourses that draw on the *survivalist* moral repertoire. New Labour prides itself on being able both to combat yet to understand the 'toughness' that epitomises survivalism. Its promise to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' exemplifies its claim to moral authority (see Fairclough 2000). Beyond its mainstream criminal justice policies, New Labour has evinced a range of 'tough' approaches: the benefits sanctions imposed on those (especially the young and long-term unemployed) failing to participate with welfare-to-work requirements; high profile attempts to 'bear down' on social security benefit fraud; attempts to force rough sleepers off the streets and into hostels; draconian measures to control 'anti-social behaviour', including – it has been proposed – the withdrawal of housing benefits (Home Office 2002). New Labour sets out to police our survivalist instincts, sometimes in the name of 'tough love' (Jordan with Jordan 2000).

- Counterbalancing the emphasis on toughness, there are discourses that draw on the *conformist* moral repertoire. New Labour has espoused the cause of promoting active citizenship as part of a call for 'civil renewal'. The government has sought on the one hand to introduce citizenship studies into the secondary school National Curriculum in an attempt to promote political literacy and civic virtues. On the other it is seeking both to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods (SEU 2000) and to promote 'a deepening culture of volunteering and giving' (Treasury/Home Office 2002: 27). The language of citizenship is here generally linked to the language of 'social capital' (cf. Putnam 2000). The emphasis is upon promoting commitment by individual actors to a self-sustaining form of social order.

- Though more quietly voiced there are discourses that call, albeit with some ambiguity, on the *reformist* moral repertoire. This is associated with what the British Chancellor of the Exchequer has called 'the fairness agenda', yet which amounts, in effect to a policy of redistribution by stealth (e.g. Lister 2001). What distinguished 'New' from 'Old' Labour was a commitment not to tax and spend. But, by means of changes in pension fund taxation and to national insurance contributions and through the effects of 'fiscal drag' it has managed to make the

taxation regime slightly less regressive, while also making quite significant increases in cash transfers directed to families with children (Hills 2002; Piachaud and Sutherland 2002). Redistribution that favours children and enhances their future prospects may be interpreted not so much as a means to redress substantive inequality as of levelling the playing field for the most disadvantaged of tomorrow's citizens (see Deacon 2003).

- Finally, the *entrepreneurial* moral repertoire is undoubtedly dominant. The overwhelming pre-occupation of Third Way social policy is with labour market participation on the one hand and the 'modernisation' of public service delivery on the other. It is evident in the welfare-to-work approach, which extends beyond the workfare type initiatives described above to embrace policies intended to 'make work pay' and – by enhancing 'work-life balance' – to make it easier for people to combine paid employment with family life. The former intention has been addressed through the introduction of a modest National Minimum Wage and the enhancement of means-tested in-work cash benefits (re-cast as 'tax credits') to supplement low wages; the latter through a National Childcare Strategy (which remains somewhat underdeveloped) and limited changes in employment laws relating to such issues as parental leave and flexible working. The slogan that peppers New Labour discourse is 'opportunity for all'. Additionally, however, the entrepreneurial moral repertoire is called in aid of New Labour's adoption of the new managerialist cause (cf. Clarke and Newman 1997) and the belief that entrepreneurial practices can make public services more responsive and efficient.

There is a sense in which the survivalist, conformist and reformist moral repertoires on which New Labour's interpretation of the Third Way depends are all inflected towards the cause of the dominant entrepreneurial moral repertoire. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the ways in which New Labour discourses construct the Third Way citizen. In a study of the press releases and advertising materials issued by the New Labour government Shane Doheny (2004) shows how four different kinds of citizen are anticipated or constructed: the recalcitrant citizen; the passive citizen, the good citizen and the heroic citizen. His study was focused on materials relating to a variety of welfare reforms including a clamp down on social security fraud and the introduction of stakeholder pensions (see above).

Recalcitrant citizens are artful and disobedient. They wilfully play the short-term odds to cheat the welfare system without regard for the consequences. In the government's mind, they undermine the authority of an overburdened system and are to be caught and punished. Passive citizens are overly dependent on state provision, apathetic and unnecessarily risk-averse. They need, in the government's mind, a combination of reassurance and strong guidance and to this end the government's television advertising campaign employed the image of a talking sheep-dog – as a metaphor for the state – both protecting its nervous sheep-like subjects and shepherding them in the direction of stakeholder pensions. Good citizens may be responsible, but, to the government's mind, they are unreconstructed and need to be persuaded to detach themselves from inefficient and 'unmodernised' state systems. Here the sheep-dog again comes into play, barking intelligent instructions and encouragement, and showing good citizens the right way to go in order adequately to provide for their retirement. Finally, heroic citizens are autonomous and responsible risk takers, willing to provide for their own welfare. All they need in the government's mind is the right information and they can be expected to seek out the best deal to suit their circumstances.

Doheny uses this analysis to illustrate aspects of a taxonomy of competing discourses of responsibility developed in a different context by this author (Dean 2002: 199-201), but which I should like now to revisit and articulate with the taxonomy in Figure 1:

- Recalcitrant citizens are creatures of the *survivalist* moral repertoire and must be made to behave responsibly through the application of penalties or incentives. Responsibility for recalcitrant citizens is a matter of **conditional obedience**. Self-interested behaviour in the absence of regulation is likely to result in irresponsibility and, in such a context, the function of the state relates not to the promotion of responsibility, but the governance of irresponsibility (cf. Lund 1999; Dwyer 2000). This entails the imposition of penalties and sanctions on the one hand and the identification and stigmatising of irresponsibilities on the other. The governance of irresponsibility under the Third Way has to do with eliciting obedience rather than promoting responsibility.

- Passive citizens are creatures of the *conformist* moral repertoire and should conform 'naturally' to whatever is customary. Responsibility for passive citizens is a matter of **moral obligation**. Responsibility is constructed with reference to collective loyalties and traditions; to moral norms and shared values; to the necessary and incontestable expectations that arise from membership of a particular community. Fulfilment of obligations gives rise to pride and a strengthening of social inclusion, failure to do so in shame and a risk of social exclusion. The Third Way would like – if it could – to harness and direct this kind of moral obligation through the regeneration of communities and the manufacture of participatory customs.

- Good citizens are creatures of the *reformist* moral repertoire. Responsibility for good citizens is a matter of **ethical responsibility**. They believe in universalism, social justice and the redistributive welfare state. The ethic that has traditionally informed even the most solidaristic strands of state welfare capitalism has arguably been premised as much upon Kantian as upon socialist principles: upon a notion of responsibility as innate to an individual having free will within a social context, rather than as a direct expression of the collective interest. This notion of responsibility is essentially rational and democratic. It recognises that responsibilities are shared, as much as individual; that they may sometimes have to be asymmetrically distributed, rather than reciprocal; that they depend none the less on general assent. Ethical responsibility in this sense, if it is not inimical, is largely irrelevant to, Third Way thinking.

- Heroic citizens are creatures of the *entrepreneurial* moral repertoire. Responsibility for heroic citizens is a matter of **civic duty**. The citizen's freedom as a consumer is premised upon such duties as she owes to other citizens that may be necessary to ensure that their freedoms are not infringed. Each person's duty to fulfil or refrain from certain actions thus flows from a system of expectations that are reciprocal and symmetrical, but duties themselves are individualised. Insofar that rights are constructed in terms of individual interests, one's duties arise from the need to ensure, as far as can reasonably be expected, that one's interests can be met without unfairly prejudicing the interests of others. The observance or performance of duties becomes, ideally, a self-regulating process. Rose (1996) contends that in a 'post-social' era, governments seek to promote not only

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personal human capital and individual prudentialism, but the ethical skills
necessary to this process of self-management. What is entailed is a rejection of the
Kantian orthodoxy that informs the ethic of universal welfare, so that what counts
is an individual ethical obligation to the self-governing self (e.g. Hunter 1996). It
is the heroic citizen who is primarily celebrated by the Third Way.

Central to the Third Way's complex assumptions about citizenship is an implication
that dependency and responsibility are incommensurate. Despite the disconfirming
evidence (e.g. Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992), New Labour has perpetuated the myth
promoted by its Conservative predecessors, that state welfare provision promotes a
dependency culture and – together with deliberately heightened concerns about the
prevalence of social security fraud – has pressed this myth into service to stigmatise
the receipt of state benefits (e.g. DSS 1998). The imperative is 'work for those who
can, security for those who cannot' (*ibid*: 3), but even when it comes to the provision
of personal social services for frail elderly and disabled people who cannot work,
rhetorical claims that services promote independence are belied by a tendency to
equate independence with 'self-sufficiency' (Vernon and Qureshi 2000) and a
situation where – in England and Wales – personal care provision continues to be
subject to a stigmatising test of means.

The Third Way prioritises an essentially individualistic ethic of responsibility.
This is reflected in the way in which the language of opportunities has in many
instances now displaced a language of rights. An apparent exception to this, however,
applies in the case of discourses of 'human rights'. In 1998 Britain introduced a
Human Rights Act, which incorporated into domestic law the civil and political rights
provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. Significantly, however, it
did not incorporate the provisions of the ECHR's sister document, the Council of
Europe's Social Charter. The Human Rights Act has implications for the formal
conduct of a variety of public bodies, but it does not of itself extend the provision of
substantive social rights or a rights-based approach to welfare provision. While
proclaiming that it wishes public services to adopt 'a new human rights culture'
(Home Office 1999) the government continues, for example, to insist that it does not
want the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights to be given legal force.
The concern, it would seem, is not with solidaristic rights to public provision, but with

the procedural rights of 'heroic citizens', as the self-seeking consumers of public services, and the further regulation of the conduct of public service providers.

Dependency, responsibility and rights

This was the context in which the author recently undertook a study of popular discourses not of citizenship, but of dependency, responsibility and rights[3]. A full account and other discussions of that research are provided elsewhere (e.g. Dean and Rodgers 2004; Dean 2003; 2004). The research entailed in-depth interviews with 49 working-age adults with widely differing incomes. The sample was drawn from three different regions of England and contained equal numbers of men and women.

The findings suggested that popular discourse does not constitute dependency entirely in accordance with Third Way doctrine. Certainly, most participants equated 'independence' at least partly with material self-sufficiency and, to this extent, the entrepreneurial discursive moral repertoire was indeed ascendant. But beneath the surface a more complex picture emerges. A majority of the sample favoured the view that dependency is an unavoidable feature of the human life course and cannot readily be circumvented. Without doubt, certain kinds of dependency – such as familial dependency – were regarded as quite markedly more acceptable than others, and there were participants who endorsed the Third Way's celebration of independence through labour market participation and who considered that direct financial dependency on the state was inherently debilitating. Younger participants, participants from higher income groups and men were more likely to resist the idea that they were or had ever been dependent, but there was, none the less, wide agreement that there are times in the ordinary course of a person's life – during childhood, sickness or old age – when a degree of dependency on others cannot be avoided. While participants might in certain respects eschew any kind of dependency on the state, they would reluctantly concede, for example:

> Oh yeah, you're dependent on that [public services] aren't you? I mean, we pay us dues and demands, but we're dependent. You know, hospitals – all that sort of thing.

Instances in which participants refused entirely to acknowledge human interdependency as a constitutive feature of the human life course were exceptional

and, in their own way, paradoxical: these participants would deny their own dependency in order to assert their dependability for others, and that it was right that other people should depend on them. One very 'macho' 34 year male breadwinner – a railway worker – described himself as somebody

> who goes out and earns his money and pays his way. Pays my own bills, without getting money off nobody or nothing from anybody. It's all on my own; what I work for.

Yet with immense pride he acknowledged that he was putting food on the family table and paying the bills for his young stepson – 'until he's old enough to go on his own'. Discourse that contrarily embraces, yet eschews, the essential nature of human interdependency is not confined to male providers, but can also apply to female carers. A 52 year old woman – an 'earth mother' figure who was caring, inter alia, for a severely disabled neighbour – explained:

> I do a lot for everybody else, yet you can't find that you depend on them. I don't like depending on people. No matter how I feel, I like to think that I can depend on myself ... I've always been the type of person whose been a strong person, for everybody else to come to.

This observation prefigures a further finding, namely that even among those who were willing to accept responsibility for others, participants' awareness of the nature of human interdependency was not necessarily reflected in any kind of solidaristic sensibility or collectivist commitment. Rather, it would appear that popular discourse constitutes responsibility as a personal or individual matter, as is very much in keeping with Third Way doctrine. The majority of participants interpreted responsibility in an explicitly individualistic manner. There was a minority who looked upon their responsibilities in more holistic or existential ways – equating responsibility, as we have seen, with dependability for others or with 'owning one's own actions' – and therefore acknowledged that responsibility must be socially situated. But notions of *shared* responsibility or of responsibilities that are *constituted* through the individual's social context were rare. They were confined to two middle-aged men on higher incomes, one of whom explicitly espoused a religious commitment and the other left-wing political leanings. Such radicalism is not

necessarily the exclusive preserve of privileged males, but it does appear that notions of collective responsibility are highly marginalised within popular discourse.

Most participants espoused the premise that people have a responsibility to sustain themselves through 'work' (i.e. to participate in the labour market) and to this extent, once again, the entrepreneurial moral repertoire was dominant. However, there was also a majority in favour of the proposition that it is possible to be responsible without working, if one is caring for dependents or 'genuinely' unable to work. This was reflected in a certain level of scepticism towards the government's welfare-to-work policies. Similarly, support for the idea of self-provisioning through private insurance against the risks of sickness, redundancy or retirement was not especially strong (cf. Taylor-Gooby 1994). When it came to defining 'irresponsibility' participants spoke not only about those who do not contribute through 'work' or who fail to support themselves, but those who do not contribute to society in any other way (a characteristically conformist moral repertoire); or they resorted to stereotypes of the 'other' – of the feckless poor, the bad parent or the anti-social neighbour (a characteristically survivalist moral repertoire). Asked what to do about irresponsible people, participants were divided between those who advocated punitive responses and those who struggled to decide how far society (or the state) should provide support:

> They don't wanna be helping them. I don't know, just leave them …Yeah, cut the benefits off if they don't wanna work.

> I think the bare minimum should be provided, but I don't think that in a reasonable society that one should let people be starving or whatever just because they can't be bothered to do anything.

This dilemma goes to the heart of the question of whether social rights may precede social responsibilities. The evidence suggests that popular discourse on the subject of rights remains ambivalent. There was a majority of participants – that included, especially, younger participants and women – who favoured a view that there are at least certain rights that are, or should be, inalienable rather than conditional in nature: rights to dignity, food, clean water, fair treatment and/or the things that people should

have 'by virtue of being human'. This is a view that is not necessarily in step with the implication of Third Way orthodoxy that citizens' responsibilities precede their rights.

None the less, although there was a prevalent sense that there are at least certain basic rights that should apply unconditionally, there were other kinds of rights – which tended explicitly to include some social or welfare rights – were regarded as less universally applicable than others. Instances in which this did not apply were exceptional and confined largely to participants who were unusually tolerant of others' dependency. In the course of the interviews participants were explicitly asked whether they themselves would be comfortable receiving welfare benefits, state pensions or social care, whether they felt that people have a 'right' to such provision and whether such provision is the responsibility of those who pay for it (through national insurance contributions and taxes). The responses (see Table 1) demonstrate the extent to which participants did not necessarily associate rights to welfare with their responsibilities as members of the community that provides welfare. While a substantial majority accepted that we have rights to welfare (albeit subject often to conditions), only a minority accepted that we have responsibilities to contribute to the welfare of others: and, indeed, a majority could not even engage with the question (some indeed were quite flummoxed by it, regardless of how it was phrased or explained for them).

[insert Table 1 about here]

While this finding is consistent with the idea that public opinion exhibits a mixture of pragmatic instrumentalism and guarded altruism (see above), it provides further confirmation that popular perceptions of collective, as opposed to individual responsibility, are substantially constrained. The diffidence expressed by some participants was encapsulated by one young man who said:

> You're paying taxes and that to support the *idea*. It's not so much supporting the people. It's just in case you happen to be in that situation. You've paid your money, you expect that treatment ... Yeah, like [insurance]. But it's not that you're paying your taxes to support other people.

We may conclude that popular discourse about dependency, responsibility and rights, if it does not directly draw upon them, is at least comfortable with the entrepreneurial, conformist and survivalist discursive moral repertoires. It is sceptical about the extent to which Third Way political discourse *privileges* the entrepreneurial moral repertoire, but it shares with Third Way political discourse a diffidence towards the reformist moral repertoire. The reformist moral repertoire is not entirely absent from popular discourse (cf. Dean with Melrose 1999), but it is marginalised.

This does, to an extent, cast some light on the ambiguity of people's attitudes to welfare reform. A majority of the participants believed the welfare state would or indeed had to change, but most were prepared to pay to defend it, and some were plainly apprehensive about the future of welfare provision. Participants appeared mistrustful, if not of New Labour itself, of government in general. The evidence outlined suggests that popular discourse, though it is not finely nuanced, can none the less accommodate an understanding of both dependency and rights that is in many respects wider than that promoted from within the Third Way, but it is fettered by a peculiarly individualistic interpretation of responsibility; an interpretation that nourishes fears about the sustainability of the welfare state. Arguably, therefore, the most significant moral or ideological obstacle to a human rights approach to welfare citizenship is the purchase within popular discourse of Third Way individualism.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought first, to further the argument that although popular discourse will seldom directly engage with the concept of citizenship, it implicitly encompasses four competing constructions of citizenship (see Figure 1). Second, I have contended that all four constructions of citizenship are a reflection of, or else are reflected in, the political discourse of the Third Way. Political discourse, if it does not set out to mould, may otherwise tend to mimic popular discourse. Third, I have been concerned to explore the ways in which the recognition and acceptance of human interdependency and of the responsibilities to which interdependency gives rise may be reflected in ethical claims for, or an ethical appreciation of, social rights.

Third Way discourse promotes individual responsibility and a notion of active citizenship, but its continuing political success would seem in part to rest on a capacity to suppress those residual discursive moral repertoires that are capable of

linking human dependencies to human rights and so sustain a broader ethic of responsibility. Within Third Way thinking responsibility is not construed in terms of the kinds of responsibility that must be socially negotiated over time, within relationships or between generations (cf. Finch and Mason 1993); still less in terms of any 'ethic of co-responsibility' (Apel 1980) through which the global parameters of human interdependency might come to be defined.

One of the earliest statements of Third Way thinking was provided by the report of the Commission on Social Justice, established in the early 1990s by the late John Smith, former leader of the British Labour Party. This advocated a strategy that would 'combine the ethics of community with the dynamics of a market economy' (CSJ 1994: 4). In the event, the Labour Party under Tony Blair has sought to combine the ethics of entrepreneurialism with a moral agenda drawn as much from the survivalist/coercive as the conformist/communitarian moral repertoires. Blair has claimed that 'I want a society in which ambition and compassion are seen as partners not opposites' (Labour Party 1997: 3). Ambition may be squared with an individualist entrepreneurial ethic, but compassion stems from moral norms, not ethical values. Constructing or sustaining a form of citizenship that embraces an expansive notion of social rights requires a different kind of ethic; an ethic that will recognise the collective responsibilities that stem from our status as interdependent beings.

Notes

1. Levitas (1998), in her critique of New Labour in Britain, captures at least certain elements of this fourth tradition when she identifies a 'moral underclass discourse'.
2. Such approaches may be adapted or extended to taxonomies of welfare regimes (Dean 1999; Dean with Melrose 1999: ch. 7) or, for example, models of governance (e.g. Newman 2001).
3. The empirical investigation described in this article, entitled 'Dependency, Responsibility and Rights', was funded under Award Ref: R000239425 by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, whose support is most gratefully acknowledged. The author is also grateful to Kathryn Ellis, his Co-Award Holder, and Ruth Rogers who also worked on the project.

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Figure 1 Taxonomy of moral repertoires and their associated notions of welfare and responsibility
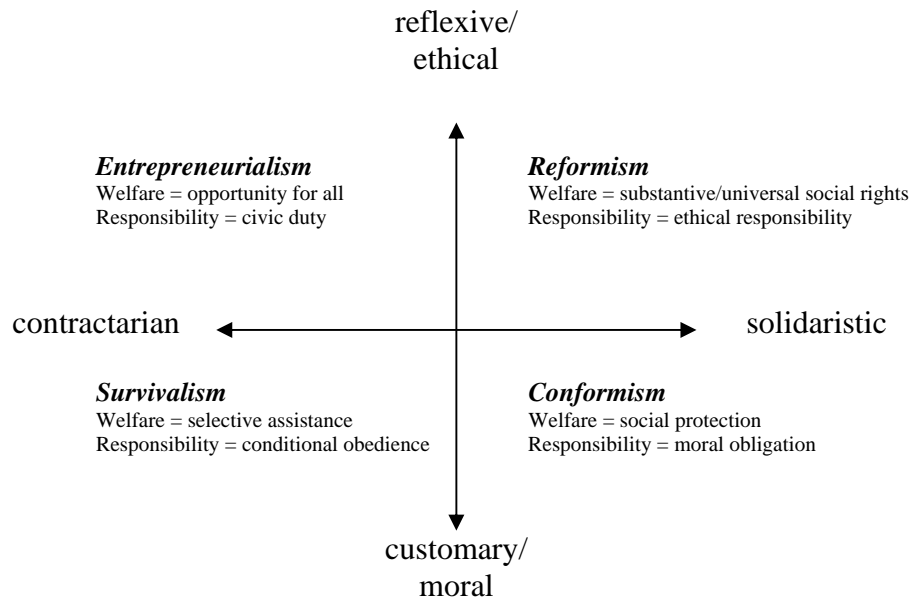

reflexive/
ethical

Entrepreneurialism
Welfare = opportunity for all
Responsibility = civic duty

Reformism
Welfare = substantive/universal social rights
Responsibility = ethical responsibility

contractarian ← → solidaristic

Survivalism
Welfare = selective assistance
Responsibility = conditional obedience

Conformism
Welfare = social protection
Responsibility = moral obligation

customary/
moral

Table 1 Attitudes to welfare entitlement

	yes	yes, with exceptions	no, with exceptions	no	no reply/ don't know	total
Would *you* be comfortable to receive benefits/ pensions/services?	26	15	2	2	4	49
Do people have a 'right' to welfare provision?	23	21	1	2	2	49
Is welfare provision the *responsibility* of those who pay for it ?	11	5	3	3	27	49