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## Understanding prevention policy: A theoretical approach

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*'Nowhere is there agreement about quite what prevention is, while everywhere there is agreement that it is a good thing' (Freeman 1992: 47)*

Prevention is almost entirely seen as a good thing. So long as the subject at which it is aimed is negatively connotated, for example ill health, poverty or child abuse, it becomes a 'unifying slogan' which is attractive, politically appealing and apparently without controversy (Billis 1981, Wattam 1999). But Freeman reminds us that despite this consensus there is no consensus on what prevention actually is. In this paper I try to stand back and consider this question.

The paper is concerned only with prevention in public policy. The whole range of preventive activity by individuals, households, businesses, community and third sector bodies is not discussed; though evidently it impacts on and is impacted by government prevention policy. Some current policies seek to incentivise private preventive activity, but it is only the public policy with which this paper is concerned.

A quick online search of various combinations of 'prevention', 'social theory' and 'social policy' shows that preventive discourses dominate in crime, child and adolescent behaviour, family problems, alcoholism and drug use; numerous health conditions, physical and mental, and therapies; cognitive learning, educational achievement, early years intervention and passages into employment. Other policy areas where they feature strongly are development policy and overseas aid programmes, and the whole range of environmental policies.

A distinctive feature of the **nef** report *The Wisdom of Prevention* (Coote 2012) is to analyse prevention across the spheres of society, economy and environment. It recognises that these spheres are inextricably and increasingly linked and interdependent, and must be addressed together to plan for a sustainable future. I shall follow that precept here and try to

survey social policy, climate change policy and economic policy. We shall see that each poses quite different questions and frameworks for thinking about prevention. While the prevention framework is explicitly applied in social policy and environmental policy, it is much less prominent in thinking on economic policy. Yet it can be shown that effective prevention in both the social and environmental domains depends on a major re-orientation of the current economic paradigm. I will therefore address prevention in social and environmental policy first before turning to the economy.<sup>1</sup>

The first section below sets out a conceptual framework. The next three sections look in turn at prevention in social policy, climate change policy and economic policy. The final section offers some very brief concluding thoughts. As a consequence the paper is extremely broad and synoptic; I hope that the gains from such an overview outweigh the many gaps and lacks in the paper.

## A conceptual framework

### *Some definitions*

The dictionary defines prevention as stopping something (usually unpleasant) from happening. This definition is rather crude – it is all or nothing; either threat or risk X is stopped or it is not. For this reason, ‘prevention’ is not used in connection to climate change because a considerable degree of global warming *cannot* be prevented: it is an inbuilt consequence of past emissions and destruction of carbon sinks. Here the favoured term is *mitigation*, referring to all measures to reduce the intensity of radiative forcing and thus global warming. A more useful alternative definition of prevention is ‘to reduce the probability of downside risks’ (Holzmann and Jorgensen 2001), in which case it could be applied to measures to reduce climate change. We must be careful when using these different terminologies.

It is common in social policy to go on and identify different forms of prevention, usually distinguishing three, and usually labelling these primary, secondary and tertiary. Table 1 shows various definitions of these three levels (see also Coote 2012, Table 1). There are similarities but they are not identical, so care must be exercised when using the terms. Secondary prevention in particular can mean either identifying at-risk groups and targeting interventions at them; or mitigating the impact of ‘downside’ risks when they occur.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a fourth sphere: national security interventions. It is possible to identify certain preventive strategies here, such as international treaties, foreign aid and ‘soft power’ as alternatives to military power. I say no more about this here.

**Table 1: Varying definitions of primary, secondary and tertiary forms of prevention**

	Primary	Secondary:	Tertiary
General (Coote 2012)	'Upstream': Prevent harm before it occurs, usually focusing on whole populations and systems	'Midstream': Mitigate the effects of harm that has already happened; focus on groups at risk	'Downstream': Cope with the consequences of harm, stop things from getting worse
World Bank: Social risk management (Holzmann and Jorgensen 2001:541-2)	Prevention: reduce the probability of a downside risk	Mitigation: reduce the potential impact of a future down-side risk	Coping: Relieve the impact of the risk once it has occurred
Health (OECD 2009; NPHP 2006)	Prevent the onset of undesirable states	Early stage disease detection and interventions	Minimise impact of disease
Crime (Brantingham and Faust 1976)	Reduce crime events by modify the physical and/or social environment	Identify at risk populations and potential criminals and address the causal risk factors	Stop criminals committing more crime, eg via imprisonment
Social work (Hardiker et al 1991)	Prevent the emergence of a problem	Early identification of problem; amelioration and containment of serious problems	Avoid further harm to client

### Theories of prevention

These are notable for their absence. In two papers Richard Freeman (1992 and 1999) undertakes 'a self-conscious attempt to theorise a domain of activity which is often left undertheorised' (1999: 233). He argues that prevention is a product of modernity, being bound up with the welfare state and the authority of professional and scientific expertise. Prevention policy is built on two basic foundations, both of which are contested concepts. First, *scientific understandings of cause and effect and the possibility of prediction*. Notwithstanding relativist and post-modern critiques, and historical shifts in paradigms in both the natural and social sciences, it is indisputable in my view that there has indeed been a broad historical improvement in our understanding of the determinants of welfare and need satisfaction in numerous domains of life (Doyal and Gough 1991). Second, prevention policy presumes some *capacity for controlled intervention by government in social life*.

Again I would argue that the broad historical expansion of public administration in modern societies cannot be denied, as Mann (1993) has established in his account of the rise of political- administrative power since the eighteenth century, including the size, scope and bureaucratisation of the modern state.

If we have established the basic parameters of prevention and recognised the variety of preventive policies, what factors explain which dominant strategies are adopted by particular governments in particular policy areas at particular times? This is a big question! I will approach it by building on historical and comparative welfare state scholarship over the past four decades. This literature has identified five factors or drivers of social policy development in the West over the last century. I call these the 'five I's' of Industrial capitalism, Interests, Institutions, Ideas/Ideologies, and International Influences (Gough 2008, Gough and Therborn 2011). Though

developed to explain social policies I believe it can be applied to the contemporary emergence of environmental policies (Gough forthcoming). In this paper I will focus on Ideas, Interests and Institutions in seeking to understand the development and pattern of modern *preventive* public policies.

### *Ideas and ideologies.*

Freeman notes that his definition of prevention presupposes some value consensus on the nature of cause and effect in social science and on the intervention capacities of modern government. But he observes right away that in understanding the social world there are contending theories with different notions of causality and with different implications for policy. In numerous areas of social policy there is contention: between structural and individual approaches, between contextual and rational actor models, between medical and social explanations, etc. Alongside these sometimes epistemological differences, there are the sheer empirical challenges of identifying causality in complex models. Further contention arises around intervention strategies. For example, social statistics in epidemiology and criminology relate to populations and probabilities, which make for controversy over the legitimacy of preventive interventions with respect to actual individuals (1992: 36).

Thus the role of ideas and ideologies – clusters of views on the nature of the world and normative beliefs about what governments can and should do – is central. We shall see that ideological predispositions and conflicting paradigms shape the goals, scope and nature of preventive strategies. Prevention is by no means intrinsically ‘progressive’. For example, youth crime can be prevented by fortifying public buildings and introducing metal detectors in schools; or by neighbourhood development programmes and more holistic programmes to promote child wellbeing (Hayward 2007, France et al 2010). Obesity can be reduced by stomach stapling operations or by regulating sectors of the food industry or numerous interventions between these two. Harm from prospective climate change can be reduced by reducing emissions or by adapting infrastructures or behaviours. Preventive strategies are highly contested, and will be shaped by dominant paradigms in society.

### *Institutions*

Next, the nature of public policies, including preventive public policies, are shaped by institutions. These include the nature of political systems, their form of political representation, the administrative bureaucracies of modern states, and the form of integration of interest groups in the policy making process. Three examples. First, representative democracy will favour short-term policy-making following electoral cycles, militating against longer term preventive strategies. Second, the extensive welfare states of the Western world have built up powerful ministries which seek to protect their policy areas and dislike overarching preventive initiatives. Third, these in turn bequeath policy legacies, commitments and path dependencies: welfare states constrain and pre-empt resources being applied to prevention due to the ‘double fiscal burden’ such investment strategies impose. This constraint is much less evident in the making of environmental policy.

### *Interests*

Behind ideas often lurk different organised interests. These include the professions created by and dominant in welfare states, including medical, economics, pedagogical etc. They also include the dominant economic actors of business and trades unions. The power of the latter has diminished within Western countries, but the power of corporate and financial interests has clearly grown, reflecting both their structural power and their 'voice' in modern polities. In social policy two lobbies are important: those sectors supplying inputs to state services, which cover a growing range from producing drugs to running care homes and prisons; and those whose products cause harms to health or wellbeing which social policies try to ameliorate. Both wield considerable power alongside professions to shape prevention policy. In climate change policy, industrial and commercial interests play a big role in opposing or supporting mitigation programmes.

Behind all these are the restless, relatively unplanned processes of socio-economic change, including economic growth and transformation, new inequalities, regional and local spatial changes, demographic shifts, new forms of family life, etc. These provide the seed ground of new issues and 'puzzles' which continually confront governments as new 'social problems'. These background structural changes stretch to embrace global shifts in capitalism, trade and financial flows and migration. But I will not stretch this paper that far and will take these as given.

Thus the above framework provides a checklist to which I will refer when seeking to explain preventive policies in different areas

## Social policy and prevention

Social policy is a major site of contemporary debates and policy innovations concerning prevention, and has fostered a wide range of studies and research. I shall here briefly survey health, crime and early years intervention.

### Health

'Socio-environmental change is costly, radical and unpredictable, whereas health education is cheap, uncontroversial and safe' (Freeman 1992: 44)

This paper cannot go into the history of preventive health initiatives in the UK. The founding idea of the NHS was preventive but the reality was utterly dominated by treatment. Preventive initiatives emerged under Labour in the 1970s (eg. DHSS 1976) but were side-lined by the Thatcher and Major governments, which became preoccupied with continually reorganising the NHS to introduce market principles. However, pressure by the Health Education Council, Chief Medical Officer and various reviews such as the Wanless Reports (2002, 2004) continually raised new initiatives *alongside* the NHS, so to speak: restraining smoking and alcohol being two consistent themes (Allsop and Freeman 1993). Also as the cost of the treatment-oriented NHS has mounted there has been growing interest in the cost-containment potential of effective health prevention. The Wanless Reports and NICE reports document the 'significant short, medium and long-term savings to the service and to the taxpayer' that promoting good health and preventing ill-health could achieve (Knapp et al 2011 provides a recent example). The New Labour government developed a more coherent preventive health strategy beginning with the pathbreaking 1998 Green Paper *Our Healthier Nation* and put in place some initiatives to implement it. However, this approach was again side-lined soon after when Tony Blair announced his 2000 Health Plan to greatly increase expenditure on the treatment-oriented NHS. And many of the New Labour preventive initiatives have not survived the change of government.

Two interesting theoretical debates have dominated the whole period: between different ideologies and between interventions targeted at individuals or social structures.

First, the very idea of preventing ill-health could be seen as a Fabian one, entailing proactive government and a degree of 'social engineering'. The New Right or neo-liberal arguments concerning individual liberty and consumer sovereignty gained prominence in the later 1970s and have not relinquished that position. The 'nanny state' slogan has wormed its way into the national psyche (Kings Fund 2004). Yet this counter-ideology has not removed prevention from the political agenda, rather redefined it in terms of altering individual behaviour and life style choice.

Following on from this, the second debate has been between interventions targeted at individuals or at social structures. There is much work on conceptualising these alternatives; for example the famous 'onion' diagram of layers of influence on population health of Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991), moving outwards from individual factors, through family, community, broader living and working conditions to general socioeconomic

and cultural conditions. This relates to the tripartite forms of prevention depicted in Table 1.

Those arguing for more structural, primary level interventions have kept up a continual presence, from the 1978 WHO Alma Ata declaration, the 1980 Black Report, the 2010 Marmot Review on health inequalities in England and the 2010 Sustainable Development Commission Report on sustainable development and health. Sociological arguments are deployed and alternative methodologies proposed to identify the 'pathogenic nature of modern social structures' (Davis 1979). The Marmot Report proposes a radical preventive strategy extending to fair employment and good work, a healthy standard of living for all, and healthy and sustainable places and communities. The SDC advocates addressing the current 'obesogenic environment' of energy-dense food, motorised transport and sedentary life-styles. It notes areas of synergy between health and environmental sustainability, in food, transport, green spaces and built environment. The current obsession with economic growth also features as a block to radical prevention of ill-health, and alternative measures of well-being are promulgated. All this amounts to a more or less coherent structural preventive health strategy; but so far it has had little traction. A set of concrete proposals to tackle the numerous obstacles listed above has been advanced by the Kings Fund (2004).

The dominant strand of primary preventive intervention has been biomedical (eg statins), early years interventions (eg immunisation, nutrition during pregnancy) and health education and life style change (eg smoking cessation) (Allsop and Freeman 1992). In addition there has been a much greater focus on secondary prevention by identifying and targeting at-risk groups.

Can the framework presented earlier explain the subaltern role of prevention in health policy and the dominance of individualist interventions? I briefly consider some of the arguments.

#### *Ideological and epistemological*

It is difficult to gather clear evidence of the effectiveness of primary preventive health measures, particularly those that accrue in the medium term or long term. Both biomedical science and economics (the dominant epistemic community in social science) favour targeting individual bodies and individual behaviours. The search is for individual pathogens rather than the social context of disease. Both have advocated the methodology of randomised control trials (RCT) in order to identify groups at risk and effective therapies (Davis 1979). The role of medical sociology has been side-lined, and with it alternative, contextual methods to evaluate different policies (Asthana and Halliday 2006; Mays, Pope and Popay 2005).

#### *Institutions*

The institutional structures of health and the governance structures of modern capitalist societies weaken the scope for structurally-oriented preventive health. The powerfully organised medical professions around the NHS continually reproduce a political constituency advocating and favouring curative therapies. Managerial reforms coupled with progressive privatisation of some functions have if anything weakened the capacity to deliver preventive health measures (Kings Fund 2004). A wide range of departments have indirect impacts on health, including employment, tax,

business, agriculture and transport. But because prevention could be everybody's business it is likely to be nobody's (House of Commons Expenditure Committee 1977).

### *Interests*

Outside government are two powerful business lobbies. One, representing drugs and medical suppliers, campaign for preventive measures that represent profitable niches to supply goods and services (see Foote and Blewett 2003 on the USA). This also includes private insurers and health providers, such as BUPA, which advocate regular screening (sometimes coupled with patient selection). A second, representing businesses producing potentially health-harming products, lobby assiduously to prevent effective prevention, as with the current arrangements for 'self-regulation' in the food and drinks industry (Allsop and Freeman 1992). A final sector with a powerful impact on prevention is the media. For a variety of reasons the media publicise dramatic curative events and health 'crises' of various sorts, and give very low prominence to public and preventive health: no illness or crisis, no story! (Kings Fund 2004).

Thus, notwithstanding the ethical and economic arguments for upstream prevention, the dominant discourses, backed by powerful interests and institutions, has blocked any significant switch in priorities. New Labour did increase the share of preventive health spending during its term in power, but it was dwarfed by the overall NHS budget and retains a low share of 3.6% of total health expenditure (OECD 2009). Past and current trends to privatisation, contracting-out, quasi-markets and plural providers have generated a new strategy of payment-by-results, which again favours outputs that are easily measurable and attributable in the short term.

### **Crime**

Crime is another policy area where preventive discourses figure greatly. It is also one with quite well established links between ideologies, theories and policy recommendations. As in health three forms of crime prevention are distinguished as indicated in table 1.

Much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by sociological theories of crime as threats to social cohesion meriting just deserts punishment. From the 1960s onwards this was coupled with dispositional theories asking why certain groups committed crimes and research on identifying at risk groups and developing secondary forms of prevention. In the 1960s and 1970s a critical criminology perspective emerged which situated crime in the context of capitalist inequality and a state justice system located within the contradictory interests which this threw up. Later a left realist current re-engaged with older sociological perspectives.

The 1980s saw a rather clear paradigm shift towards a neo-classical criminology and rational choice theory (Hayward 2007; Kautt and Pease 2012). This focused on the 'rationality' of certain forms of crime, notably theft and burglary, for certain groups building on newer research by Becker and Kahnemann among others. The preventive policy derived from this was 'situational crime prevention'. This could be defined in a range of ways but most attention was focused on fortifying buildings and properties and more surveillance using CCTV, internal locking and metal detectors in schools

etc. Thus primary prevention was envisaged as modifying the built environment, with little attention to the social environment; at the same time 'tertiary prevention' was boosted via a continually rising rate of imprisonment. The Coalition government has taken tertiary prevention further, instituting a payment-by-results policy - here focused on outcomes not outputs - to incentivise 'offender management'. This harnesses private incentives across a range of providers, enabling them to innovate and invest money in activities to rehabilitate offenders. It requires a large administrative apparatus, measurable and attributable indicators of outcomes, systems to track individuals through programmes, and monitoring of unforeseen consequences (Nesta 2012), all of which can encourage 'gaming' by private contractors.

It is possible to link this shift to the model outlined earlier. The model of 'technical prevention' endorses focussed, short-term, cost-effective programmes, consistent with individualist rational choice theory. Criminal justice and policing institutions play a greater role compared with social work and probation: the new 'Secured by Design' policy is administered by the Association of Chief Police Officers. Furthermore the model provides large new profitable opportunities to a burgeoning security industry and multinationals like G4S. Indeed Minton and Aked's paper demonstrates an interconnected and self-perpetuating dynamic involving ACPO, private security companies and a public standards culture.

This neo-liberal policy continues to be criticised theoretically and methodologically arguing that such individualist theories are 'socially deracinated' (Cohen ): they ignore social contexts which range from social exclusion and marginalised neighbourhoods to values of immediate gratification encouraged by late modern consumerism. They also ignore value conflicts and 'expressive crimes' such as those manifested in the 2011 riots.

### **Early years**

In one sense much of the British welfare state was founded on improving life chances in early life, via policies to tackle Beveridge's 'five giants': such as housing, employment, income security, health care and education. This was echoed in the 1968 Seebohm Report's notion of 'general prevention': community wide policies aimed at creating environments conducive to social well-being'. But alongside that Seebohm identified 'specific prevention', aimed at individuals and families in high risk. It is this idea that has become so dominant in early years prevention since the 1990s (Smith 1999).

In particular early years prevention was taken up by New Labour after 1997: the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper and the Children's Act 2004, Sure Start, the Children's Fund, On Track etc. This linked to the preventive strategies in health noted above. The motivation was to prevent or at least stem the worsening of a series of social problems including truancy, youth crime, poor school achievement and employment prospects, and welfare dependency. It was also partly value based – seeking to move away from the predominantly punitive strategies of the 1980s and early 1990s – and economic, to forestall rising costs to welfare and penal services.

Risk Factor Analysis became an important tool, imported from the US where most initial research was undertaken, in predicting the targets for such secondary intervention. This has been criticised on the grounds that statistical analysis of correlations and causation cannot take into account the influence of social contexts. It led to the relative neglect of the sociological life course approach, of the dangers of stigmatisation, of the role of structural factors, and of transactions between individuals and contexts (France et al 2010). This 'empiricist psychometric' approach (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn 2005) applies *a fortiori* to the recent reliance on neurological findings on brain growth championed in the recent *Early Intervention* Report authored by Graham Allen (2011; labelled 'neurotrash' by Bristow 2011). The Coalition government has intensified and adapted this secondary prevention approach for the 'Big Society' and an era of cuts. Critics are also concerned that too much emphasis is now being placed on policing families and 'parenting' – a neologism reflecting a new and explicit arena of policy intervention.

The new economics foundation report *Backing the Future* (2009) advocates an alternative 'universal and holistic' preventive system for the early years. It advocates, like the Marmot report, a universal plus targeted approach. It draws on cross-national research suggesting the effectiveness of Scandinavian social and family services in reducing a wide range of social problems, from NEETs to teenage births, from crime to mental health. While this is not a cheap option it shows that the costs of not preventing are higher. Indeed it advocates social bonds to finance social and family services without tax costs, redeemable over a ten year period (see also Mulgan et al 2011).

However, the dominant strategy remains secondary prevention. Some of the implications of this strategy, such as devolving and pooling resources across sectors at the local level are now being discussed. On the other hand, several of the necessary neighbourhood programmes instigated by New Labour have been abolished by the Coalition government which will make this more difficult.

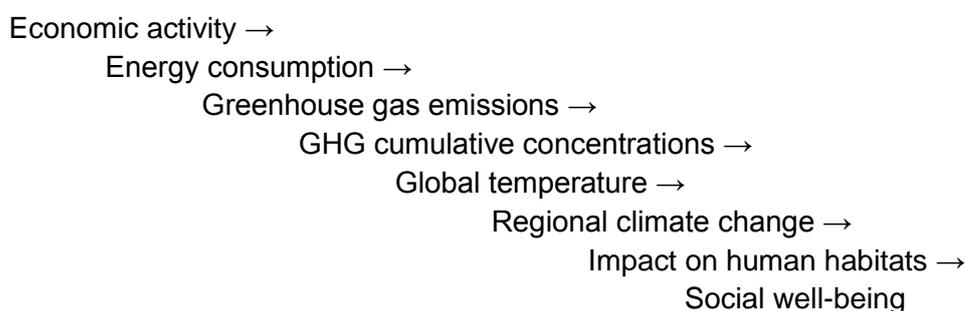
### *Conclusion*

At the most general level, we can conclude that discourses of prevention have proliferated within health, crime and early years intervention over the last three decades. This period coincided with the maturation of the welfare state and continual attempts to manage its long-term cost pressures. This situation of 'growth to limits' is now overlaid by unprecedented short-term cuts to manage fiscal crises brought about by the financial crash. These trends make more salient the theoretical case for prevention. But in practice this has been derailed by powerful ideological, interest-based and institutional forces. In all three fields, secondary prevention has been favoured over primary prevention, for ideological and cost-measurement reasons, and again because it has been in the interest of dominant players and institutions. Where, as in crime, primary prevention strategies have been developed they have adopted a technical rather than social form of interventionism. Finally, extreme austerity policies are fostering new incentive-based practices of payment-by-results which may use, but subvert, the idea of prevention.

## Environmental policy: preventing climate change

The domain of environmental policy is quite different. It is potentially enormous, covering pollution of air, water and land, species extinction, threats to global resources, including oil, water and food supplies, and much more. I will concentrate only on the threat of climate change. In the words of the Stern Review (2007: 25) climate change is a new risk that is 'big, global, long-term, persistent and uncertain'; it poses 'a truly complex and diabolical policy problem' (Steffen 2011; cf. Garnaut 2008).

Let us return to Freeman's two foundations for preventive public policy. The first, scientific understanding of cause and effects and the possibility of prediction, is very difficult given, *inter alia*, the complexity of the global climate system, the inherent problems in predicting the effects of a unique, rapid, one-off shift in the parameters, and the complexity of the causal chain linking global warming to human welfare, illustrated in a much simplified form in the diagram below:



Yet despite all this there is a global scientific consensus growing stronger over time, martialled by the formidable reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007). This is challenged by powerful 'climate denial' interests and in parts of the media, yet, contrary to expectations, this sceptical current has made little headway in terms of public opinion in the West with the exception of three outlier countries: the US, Canada and Australia. The great majority of Britons believe that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity; but it has low salience compared with other issues.

Freeman's second foundation is governmental capacity for controlled intervention. On the face of it, this too is remarkably problematic. Climate change is a *global* phenomenon, yet no authoritative global agency has such a capacity, nor can any other supra-national agencies approach the task. Climate change is an *intergenerational* issue posing threats into the very long term, far longer than the scope of any existing public policies (except possibly some forms of military and key resource planning). Yet all political systems, and notably western representative democracies, are challenged when addressing such inter-generational issues. Climate change is *cumulative*, so that short-term, high-cost measures are necessary to forestall vaguer, but potentially enormous, future costs. And there is much uncertainty about all the variables. Thus one would expect little *motivation* or *capacity* by national governments to implement serious preventive strategies.

The record is mixed and the only binding global agreement, Kyoto, is quite inadequate. Yet national primary prevention policies do exist. The EU has put in place the world's most ambitious cap-and-trade programme, the

Emissions Trading System (ETS). And the UK Climate Change Act 2009 is remarkably radical: a commitment to cut GHG emissions by 80% by 2050, with tough intermediate five-year targets, set in legally binding form, and with a statutory body, the Climate Change Committee, charged to monitor progress. This amounts to unprecedented preventive strategy. The UK strategy is complex; its three main goals are to price emissions via the ETS and a range of caps and mandated energy policies, to promote clean energy, and to improve energy efficiency notably in homes via a range of targets and incentives (Gough 2012). Our climate mitigation commitments even led to the development of the first national plan since the 1960s – the *UK Low Carbon Transition Plan* (DECC 2008). Rather than planning for growth in outputs it plans for cuts in carbon and GHGs, but it contains all the features of state planning: goals, targets, costing of alternative scenarios, sectoral breakdowns, timelines, policy proposals and incentive systems.

I leave aside for the moment the issue of whether all this will be implemented – see Michael Jacobs' contribution to the debate. But let me begin by using my framework to try to understand why such a radical – and so far cross-party – commitment has been put in place.

#### *Ideas and ideology*

As noted above, scientific consensus is quite solid and increasing over time. This is not the situation as portrayed in the media, but it does reflect a consensus among opinion formers and the public in the UK and across Europe, with some critical voices, such as Nigel Lawson's Global Warming Policy Foundation. Most surveys show public opinion in Western countries to be ambivalent – wishing to protect the earth's environment but unwilling to pay a significant price to achieve this. There has been some increase in climate change scepticism in the UK since 2005 and overall levels of concern about the issue have also fallen, as have risk perceptions (Gough 2011). However, outside of the US, scepticism about man-made climate change and disinterest in mitigation policies does not approach a majority position. In a few other Western countries, notably the US and Australia, the 'issue framing' of climate change has generated strongly polarised positions – it has become a crucial 'ideological marker' (Christoff and Eckersley 2011). These discourses interact with a particular configuration of actors, interest and institutions in each jurisdiction.

#### *Interests.*

Commercial interests in coal, oil and high energy-using industries, especially in the US, are funding vigorous public 'information' and lobbying campaigns to denigrate climate change science, some of which spill over into the UK. Against this a green agenda is advanced, from above and below. On the one hand, there has been an 'efflorescence of non-state activism': protest groups, counter-cultural movements, the green party, environmental social movements, transition towns and suchlike (Lipschutz and Mckendry 2011). On the other hand, the interests of elites in reform can shift. Sectors of business understand the opportunities in green products and processes. Political elites understand the social costs of unplanned growth. These reformist elites will conflict with representatives of 'carboniferous capitalism' and libertarian politicians, yet to date the paradigm of 'green growth' holds the centre ground in the UK and Europe.

### *Institutions.*

A range of ministries have responsibilities within the climate change field, including Business and Transport, but two new ones have been established: DEFRA in 2001 and a separate Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in 2008. There are several possible explanations for these new institutional developments in 'environmental state activity'. Unlike social policy there was no prior fiscal burden to be financed: the core programmes of climate change mitigation have required little public expenditure so far (Marden and Gough 2011). The commitment rather is to capital spending, and inter-departmental coordination and planning. Moreover, within programmes to reduce emissions there is a substantial prospective role for the private sector, and within public policy for market-based mechanisms, which undermines some political opposition (Gough 2011).

There is cross-national evidence that institutional patterns of interest representation affect the adoption of climate mitigation policies. Corporatist rather than pluralist political systems and proportional representation rather than first-past-the post electoral systems enable leading EU countries, notably Germany, and the EU itself to advance an alternative strategy of accumulation, based on aggressive carbon constraints, green technology and green growth (Christoff and Eckersley 2011). These comparative findings make the carbon mitigation commitments of UK governments difficult to understand. I would explain them in terms of: the UK's advanced de-industrialisation, which means there are few powerful business or trade union interests strongly opposed to carbon mitigation; the cumulated huge trade deficits which offshores a growing part of UK emissions; and the opportunities opened to the City of London in carbon trading and other climate-related financial activities.

Finally, however, there is evidence that the economic depression has lowered concern for climate change and strengthened pressures for short-term remedies.

To summarise this brief survey. The threat of climate change calls for a preventive GHG reduction strategy in Western countries; but estimating causal effects and developing the capacity to intervene are daunting. Yet we find ambitious mitigation targets and programmes in place including in the UK. Some ideological, interest-based and institutional explanations are offered for this anomaly. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that *implementation* and *delivery* will be very problematic, especially in the UK, where dominant ideas and institutions oppose the level of state intervention that will be necessary (Gough 2011). This returns us to the economy, current economic models and styles of economic management.

## Economic policy and management

Preventive economic policy is not much discussed as such. An online search of 'prevention' and 'economic policy' revealed a large number of studies of the influence of economic policy and economic performance on the effectiveness of prevention numerous other domains: obesity and health, famine, inequality, group conflicts, peace-building, disaster prevention etc. But there were relatively few on prevention as a goal within economic policy and management – the major exception being proposals to prevent a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent economic depression.

This may be a result of different terminologies. But it also reflects the domination of economics by ideologies – in the sense of combined normative and explanatory views of the world. Thus I begin by exploring the paradigm clash and ideological transition around 1980 in some detail, before briefly noting the underlying role played by interests and institutions in this shift.

### *Ideologies.*

Economic policy and management is riven by the clash between the competing paradigms of neo-classicism and Keynesianism, or some forms of 'Keynes-plus'. Neo-classicism or neo-liberalism displaced Keynesianism in the late 1970s and remains the dominant economic paradigm across the OECD if not the globe. The extraordinary financial crisis has done little to dent its hegemony. A brief history of these paradigm shifts will need to be rehearsed (drawing notably on Peter Hall 1993, Robert Skidelsky 2009, and Adair Turner 2012).

Keynesianism dominated until the mid-1970s, and it founded what could be regarded as a precautionary, preventive style of economic management. Fiscal and monetary policy was to be used to maintain aggregate demand and near-full employment, with resulting social and economic benefits. The automatic stabilisers of tax and welfare spending could be regarded as *primary preventive* economic mechanisms.

However, as Hall (1993) demonstrates, anomalies within this system began to accumulate, notably the combination of stagnation and inflation, which posed great challenges to the Keynesian paradigm, first its instruments and techniques, and ultimately its goals. After a period of what Hall calls both 'puzzling' and 'powering' it was displaced, initially in the English-speaking world, with what I will call for short neo-liberalism.

It is useful to distinguish two 'counter-revolutions' here: Hayekism and neo-classical economics, both with profound implications for Freeman's twin bases of preventive economic management. Hayek's (1976) philosophical foundations of markets as catallaxy and society as a spontaneous order rules out the possibility that society or its representatives could understand the causal connections essential for preventive public policies. Social explanation is impossible. Furthermore, should the state try to intervene in markets to prevent harm, this would be coercive, since the constraints on market actors' opportunities would be intentional, as compared to the results of market forces themselves (Plant et al 1980).

The second, neo-classical counter-revolution moved further away from Keynes's economics than ever before. These new theories abolish the distinction between uncertainty and risk, abandon the idea of a distinct macro-economic method, and advance the belief that markets are powerfully self-stabilizing. 'Rarely in history can such powerful minds have devoted themselves to such strange ideas' (Skidelsky 2009: 109-110). With their triumph, government intervention in numerous areas of the economy was rolled back, contracting-out and quasi-markets spread in social policy, cap-and-trade and market incentives spread in climate mitigation, privatisation and deregulation ruled in economic policy. Skidelsky and many others have demonstrated the role of this model in bringing about the 2008 crisis.

Where did this leave preventive economic policy, and notably primary prevention? In a series of influential writings, Majone (1994) argues that a new form of policy-making, the 'regulatory state', emerged to complement the shift towards a privatised economy. Its goal was to rectify market failures, notably the abuse of monopoly power and excessive externalities. This might be thought to offer the prospect of a new form of preventive economic management. However, Majone himself argued that the sole normative justification for such intervention is, and should be, *efficiency*: to improve positive-sum outputs for the economy as a whole. This required regulation by expert agencies – the Ofgems, Ofwats and Ofcoms of today's world – themselves increasingly removed from democratic oversight as autonomous agencies. This regulatory structure is not conducive to joined-up thinking in economic management. Nor can efficiency objectives be separated in practice from equity or sustainability goals and dealt with in a separate box. For example, providing incentives to energy companies to increase renewables by raising energy charges hurts lower income households the most.

Following the 2008 crisis the case for a reinvented Keynesianism, or rather of a new paradigm which embraces but moves beyond Keynes, is re-emerging. Recognising the radical uncertainty of the future provides the starting point for an alternative paradigm. According to Keynes, capitalism, as the engine of accumulation, itself exacerbates this uncertainty. From this it follows that government should exercise the capacity to pursue *precautionary* policies. Such preventive economic policies would include: taming finance, via substantial re-structuring of financial markets; an active macro-economic management; and the socialisation of considerable sectors of investment. Turner (2012) argues that governments should seek to maximise stability not growth, and he goes further in making explicit distinctions between good and harmful, or 'socially useless', economic activity.

I would argue that there is a pressing case to develop a preventive economic strategy along these lines but extending beyond them to embrace wellbeing and sustainability as central goals. The investment aspect of social policy would be emphasised, and new ways of 'valuing what matters' established (Nef 2009).

However, the discussion so far has remained in the domain of ideas and ideologies and has not recognised the role of interests, institutions and power. There is not the space here to treat this properly, but a few words are needed.

### *Interests.*

Neo-liberalism serves the interests of powerful capitalist agents, and in turn strengthens their power. Crouch (2011) argues that it serves the interests of giant corporations, which are 'more potent than states or markets'. This power is based on both structure (their ability to engage in 'regime shopping' within a globalising world economy) and agency (their capacity and willingness to put vast funds into lobbying, political funding etc.) The end result is no less than the 'capture' of governments by corporations, a process beginning in the US. For others, including Glyn (2006) and Dumenil and Levy (2011), it is the financial sector which drives neo-liberal policies and benefits most from them. As industry declines and is outsourced from the West, most notably in the UK, capitalism becomes financialised with numerous consequences. As a result, instability increases culminating in the 2008 crisis. But this only strengthens financial capital as it becomes more critical to national economic survival.

### *Institutions.*

Thus governments, starting with the American and British, become more beholden to these private and sectional interests and ideas. Indeed, governments and capital become more entwined and the ability of democracy to temper this is eroded as 'winner-takes-all politics' takes over (Hacker and Pierson 2010). The state in democratic capitalism is always torn between two conflicting principles of resource allocation: 'merit' and marginal productivity, or social need. But in this scenario the claims of social need are side-lined (Streeck 2010), beginning and most notably in liberal market economies dominated by financial interests, such as the UK.

### *Conclusion*

If this general argument is true, the obstacles to equitable and sustainable social and environmental policies, including longer-term preventive policies, are profound. They are located in the economy, sustained by neo-liberal ideology, and reinforced by the private interests and institutions that benefit from them.

In different areas of *social* policy, prevention discourse flourishes, mainly fostered by cost concerns of large welfare states, now facing enormous cuts. However, most policy is directed to secondary prevention and the alteration of individual and family behaviours, rather than to larger social structures. This is the result of dominant ideas which undermine the rational case for coherent longer-term social interventions, ideas that are in turn maintained by powerful interests and institutional biases.

In *environmental* policy, specifically climate change mitigation, we find a contrasting and paradoxical picture. Despite the manifold knowledge and capacity problems in mitigating future global warming, a reasonably coherent primary prevention strategy is emerging in the EU including the UK. However, the cross-national evidence suggests this is likely to be more effectively implemented, if at all, in economies with stronger traditions of state intervention.

In *economic* policy and management, the global dominance of neo-liberal ideas, economic models and values blocks the emergence of an alternative strategy for an equitable and sustainable social economy. Preventive initiatives in the economy, society and environment are having to be built in an atmosphere hostile to bold public initiatives. This hegemonic climate is supported by, and reinforces the power of, dominant corporate and financial interests.

Thus the current economic model hinders the necessary regulatory, fiscal and mobilising initiatives within the public sphere which are essential, I would contend, for a coordinated social-environmental-economic preventive strategy of the sort that **nef** and others advocate. Within social policy, for example, contracting-out spawns and subsidises a growing network of private providers, and a new synthesis of private-interest government. Within climate change mitigation it has seen off effective carbon taxes and new public investment in eco-system maintenance (Helm 2009, Gough 2011).

There is growing cross-national evidence that supports this conclusion but qualifies it in important ways. Goodin and his colleagues (1999) have demonstrated in great detail that the social democratic forms of capitalism, typified in their study by the Netherlands, has outperformed the form of capitalism of the USA. This has occurred across all major socio-economic outcomes – poverty, inequality and social integration – with the German regime achieving a respectable second place. Their more recent work shows that the same pattern holds when looking at a healthy work-life balance, a balance which serves both social and environmental prevention goals (Goodin et al 2008). Comparative research of climate mitigation effort and outcomes by Christoff and Eckersley (2011) shows that the leaders in the developed world are the Nordic countries and Germany, and the clear ‘laggards’ are the US, Canada and Australia.

The conclusion is that there are potential synergies between radical preventive social and environmental policy, but these are only realisable in more coordinated forms of capitalism. This is a more hopeful conclusion. I develop some of these ideas further in the appendix.

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# Appendix: notes on an alternative social economy and effective prevention

An alternative, preventive social-economic model needs to address, *inter alia*, three issues: the shibboleth of ‘consumer choice’, how to reach consensus on just and sustainable forms of preventive intervention, and the preconditions for integrated policy-making.

## 1. Wants and needs.

Hayek and neo-classical economics together helped cement the prime position of consumer sovereignty in economics and as a central, taken-for-granted, normative stance in policy-making. We have seen how this has inhibited various strands of preventive public policy (with some hard-fought exceptions, such as smoking cessation). Yet all serious studies, by scholars in political science, law and behavioural sciences, demonstrate that consumer preferences are *endogenous* to socio-economic systems. Our wants are shaped by structures, interest groups and private and public institutions. Thus to proclaim respect for consumer choice as the taken-for-granted foundation of preventive policy is to respect the current factors and forces shaping preferences as either optimal or unchangeable. This is rejected by scholars from a wide range of positions. ‘(In the face of current levels of obesity) it is quite fantastic to suggest that everyone is choosing the optimum diet, or the diet that is preferable to what might be produced with third-party guidance’ (Sunstein and Thaler 2006:237). ‘Any welfare approach based on the presumption that individuals are always the best judges of their own interest falls at the first hurdle: many people neither understand nor accept the conclusions of the science of climate change’ (Hodgson 2012).

Thus it is essential to qualify the pursuit of want-regarding principles by ideal-regarding principles, to use Brian Barry’s terms. I have argued that human *need* provides just such an alternative measure of value (Doyal and Gough 1991). Sen and Nussbaum proclaim capabilities and functionings. There are differences between these concepts, but they are less important than the challenge all offer to Barry’s ‘want-regarding principles’. In developing these alternative value measures, disciplines other than economics will play a powerful role, one which has been displaced in recent decades. Economics is by far the most dominant ‘epistemic community’ in the modern world, and economists such as Stiglitz, Turner and Skidelsky

recognise the harm this is doing. To develop more structural, primary forms of preventive policy, the full range of social (and historical) sciences need to play a greater public role.

## **2. Codified and local knowledge.**

In determining the evidence for making preventive interventions, two sorts of knowledge must be tapped. First, there is the best available codified knowledge, including scientific/ technical knowledge of causal relationships between human need satisfaction and other factors, and comparative anthropological knowledge about practices across cultures and sub-cultures, states and political systems in the contemporary world. Second, is the experientially grounded knowledge of people. If upstream interventions are to be negotiated, all groups must have the ability to participate in research into need satisfiers and to contribute to policy-making. 'Preventing harm is arguably most effective when it involves change from the bottom up: people and organisations becoming more resilient: building up their own immune systems, both literally and metaphorically, so that they become less susceptible to harm; changing attitudes and capabilities so that they are better able to withstand harm by taking positive actions themselves' (Nef 2012:18).

Thus any rational and effective attempt to resolve disputes over ways of improving the satisfaction of human needs, including preventive action, must bring to bear both the codified knowledge of experts and the experiential knowledge of those whose basic needs and daily life world are under consideration. It 'requires a dual strategy of policy formation which values compromise, provided that it does not extend to the general character of basic human needs and rights' (Doyal and Gough 1991:141). This 'dual strategy' calls for new forms of participatory processes and deliberative dialogue, already much explored and piloted in numerous areas of life.

It is not inconsistent to extol the virtues of participation while being extremely critical of actually existing representative democracy, as the Nef report recognises: 'While the *processes* of preventing harm may well be more effective if they are participative ... the *politics* of prevention offers a formidable challenge to democracy, perhaps especially where the environment is concerned'. Quite apart from the domination by powerful lobbies, the decline of value-based political parties results in a representative democracy built on aggregating preferences, as expressed in 'median voter' theories. The alternative advanced here promotes deliberative democracy in the determination of needs and need-satisfying policies, which may, as argued above, contradict current consumer and voter preferences.

## **3. Preconditions for a preventive policy-making.**

A sustainable social economy can be defined as one whose overriding goals are to provide an optimum pattern of need satisfiers for the current population without threatening the need satisfiers available for future generations. This requires certain procedural and material preconditions (Doyal and Gough 1991, ch 11; Gough 2000 ch2). To discuss just the *procedural* preconditions here: these refer to the ability of a nation (which I shall take as the relevant economic unit at this stage) to define basic needs and appropriate need satisfiers in a rational way and to prioritise the need

satisfactions of different groups, including future generations. These preconditions entail that the *composition of output* in an economy becomes as much an object of policy as its size and distribution. Following Baumol (1990) and Turner we should foster a principled debate on the distinctions between productive, unproductive (including distributive) and destructive outputs in the economy. This returns us to much earlier discussions of productive and unproductive labour, of luxuries and necessities, of inputs essential for reproducing people, communities and ecologies.

Using this framework I have tried to evaluate the ability of three forms of capitalism to achieve these preconditions: neo-liberal capitalism, statist capitalism, and corporatist capitalism (Gough 2000, chapter 2). My conclusion is that neo-liberal capitalism fails to achieve the first precondition – to identify sustainable needs - indeed true neo-liberals glory in the fact that there is no central debate on or prioritisation of the goals of the economy. By frequently denying the existence or knowability of individual and social needs it cannot or will not challenge consumer demand except in isolated cases. Thus needs not backed up by relevant knowledge and/or purchasing power will go unmet. By deregulating markets to the maximum extent, the ability of consumer-citizens to define need satisfiers is also diminished. Democratic distortions are numerous and increasing, as financial and corporate power is unleashed and freed from democratic restraint.

By contrast the ability of capitalism to meet material preconditions for human well-being is not to be dismissed. Markets can utilise the dispersed knowledge of millions of separate actors to achieve historic improvements in material standards of living. Against that, there is a need to counteract the well-established litany of market failures; to regulate and redistribute incomes to prevent soaring inequality; to protect consumers against the power of commercial lobbies and advertisers; and to prevent degradation of future natural resource stocks via regulation of property rights, preservation of stocks of natural capital and fostering of longer-term time horizons. Even in the most deregulated forms of capitalism governments will pursue some of these forms of regulation; but the continual pressure under neo-liberalism is to undermine them or roll them back altogether, as the disciples of Ayn Rand now demand in America.

Thus my conclusion is that neo-liberal capitalism may be an effective system for satisfying the *wants* of *some* people in the *present* by means of *commodities*. It cannot provide a framework for a sustainable social economy. One reason for this is that it cannot foster longer-term, preventive social planning. We need to study and evaluate alternative forms of coordinated capitalism, as they exist in Europe, and as they emerge across the developing world.