A Relational Realist Vision for Education Policy and Practice

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1. The Functionalist Symbolic Reference of UK Governance Models

In coming chapters, I will argue for a relational approach to governance — with its accompanying mode of knowing — capable of articulating policy initiatives and social practices in ways that acknowledge the human element as a distinct reality. The need for this alternative will be first justified in response to existing approaches to governance in the UK that are conceptually insular. The policies and practices developed in hegemonic governance approaches negate rather than acknowledge relational distinctions; they aim to regulate relations in specific directions to generate outcomes that sustain a pre-given *symbolic reference* with complementary organisational ties. These ties create shared commitments that direct individual subjectivity.

Each social relation has a *symbolic code* that defines its identity (*symbolic reference*) and how its components are integrated. In insular modes of governance, relations are organised to manage differences through pre-existing objectified social formations. Actors are instrumentally encouraged to self-invest, but how they do so depends on the interactions' socio-cultural context. Any distinction in relations (identified in the human element's plurality) is negated through this system-based perspective. Social integration takes a collective dimension that shapes the parameters of exchange between actors and regulates those involved to produce outcomes ensuring an economically productive social order.

In the regulation of individual subjectivity, there is an attempt to balance individuals' liberty as self-maximisers — taking up opportunities to better themselves in guided ways — with a collective

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sense of belonging to a state-defined national project. Consequently, policy initiatives aim to reach a compromise between self-interested individualism (*homo economicus*) and the need to integrate and regulate this individualism (*homo sociologicus*). The different pathways seeking to achieve this compromise characterise the *lib/lab* mode of governance and its functionalist *symbolic reference*. On the individualist path, the goal is to valorise self-governance as the model of navigating the world. Whereas, on the collectivist path, the state seeks to collectively regulate the environment of interaction to enable individuals to reproduce system needs.

The state-regulated environment means that the state's opportunities (public goods[1]) become a pathway to scarce goods attached to prescribed roles and defined by a competitive situational logic.[2] In this competitive situational logic, the design and application of opportunities guide the acquisition of private goods by providing individuals with tools to make sovereign choices. The end goal in this arrangement is not the development of individuals but the acquisition of system-based accredited goods on a meritocratic playing field.

To demonstrate the centrality of *lib/lab* compromises that shape policy and practice, four UK approaches to governance (derived from New Labour and three Conservative governments) will be discussed:

1. The New Labour approach (1997–2010) sought to regulate social networks through the idea of an enabling state. The state provides

1 Public goods are part of the political system in its setting of collective goals and the allocation of resources (Donati 2011). As a good of the political system, public goods are state-defined (lab) that extrinsically define collective goals. Citizens or collective actors are not sovereign participants in making the relation's 'We-ness' that shapes its direction and value commitments. What differentiates public goods from *relational goods* is that the latter is produced in reconstitutive morphogenetic cycles through the sovereign actions of *Relational Subjects*. *Relational goods*, according to this difference, are part of the referential dimension of the AGIL scheme.

2 State-provided public goods are strongly tied to providing the means and tools to access opportunities. However, as these opportunities are a bridge to taking up pre-defined roles within relations, they describe the acquisition of private goods that enable individuals to activate their talent. As a result, there is a situational logic in which public goods become the means to sort and credential individuals (credentials being private goods). In the coming chapters, the implications of this situational logic will be seen in assessment planning in which the objective is not the development of all learners but a determination of which individuals are legitimated to succeed.

the tools through which actors responsibly integrate into the collective.

2. The 'Big Society' agenda (2010–2015) sought to remake social networks in pre-given ways.

3. The 'Great Meritocracy' (2016–2019) idea is that the state provides opportunities for individuals to integrate into modes of belonging.

4. 'Unleashing the potential of post-Brexit Britain' (2019–ongoing) combines a renewed civic infrastructure that unleashes opportunities through job-based skills training and broader economic infrastructure investment. Levelling up and providing opportunities leads to greater enterprise and productivity growth.

With differences in focus and approach, each of these four examples points to the same *lib/lab* direction that negates the plurality of the human element by starting from a social integration model that reproduces and sustains system integration in reference to activity within impersonal market mechanisms.

New Labour, Social Networks, and the Enabling State

The New Labour project sought to justify itself by articulating a narrative of change that required specific interventions. These interventions involved the state's re-invention in meeting the needs of a changing world. The imperative of a competitive logic is extended to a global economic order that needs a consensual national society to adapt and work in partnership. As a result, as Morrison observes, a new policy direction was proposed that moved beyond the failures of the Old Left and New Right:

> These are the presupposition, firstly, of a neo-liberal narrative of a changing world that demands adaptation; secondly, of a consensual society that can agree shared values and work in partnership; and, finally, of the failure of both Old Left and the New Right, characterised respectively as the first and second ways, hence the required Third Way (Morrison 2004: 176).

The notion of a consensual society is presented as an alternative mediation to the Old Left's failures and the holism of top-down state provision. To generate an environment that is not centrally regulated,

a third way is required that adopts what can be described as 'culture governance' (Donati 2011:206). In this approach, the goal is to empower citizens to be part of the state's provision. Individual conduct becomes part of state-steered partnerships in which self- and co-governance generate the optimal conditions for an economically productive society that is part of a changing world. Culture governance results in a discourse of self-empowerment that is, in reality, self-disciplining:

> Culture governance is about how political authority must increasingly operate through capacities for self- and co-governance and therefore needs to act upon, reform and utilise individual and collective conduct so that it may become amenable to its rule. Culture governance represents a new kind of top-down steering; it is neither hierarchical nor bureaucratic but empowering and self-disciplining (Donati 2011: 206).

New Labour sought to bring about this level of self- and co-governance between state and individual by proposing that norms and values should connect social action — the culture of provision — with a consensual society's institutions. Behavioural changes generate common expectations between provider and recipient. In turn, responsible individuals take up roles that achieve the desired outcomes of sustaining social integration and working partnerships. Worker-citizens claim their stake in a consensual society as part of a mutual duty to improve themselves through the opportunities provided. In the words of Tony Blair, such a society is

> based on a notion of mutual rights and responsibilities, on what is actually a modern notion of social justice — 'something for something'. We accept our duty as a society to give each person a stake in its future. And in return each person accepts responsibility to respond, to work to improve themselves (quoted in Morrison 2004: 114).

The emphasis on co-governance through self-governance — directed via top-down steering — led to subjective and objective formations being part of one process (a theme that recurs in the 'Big Society' agenda). The lab dimension of policy enables this process by producing joined-up networks and investment in supply-side weaknesses at the point of provision (that is, the state connects citizens to networks that provide access to vital public goods). Therefore, this pluralistic and synergistic understanding of provision means co-governance generates a virtuous

cycle in which state-steered social networks operate to maintain social integration in times of change and upheaval. According to Tony Blair, it is a method for making a new relationship between citizens and community that is suitable for the 'modern world' (quoted in Morrison 2004: 171).

New Labour's focus on claiming responsibility represented a turn to strategic self-governance that invests in employability. In this model, the self-governing citizen is committed to life-long learning and the development of skills that further the collective project promoted by state-regulated partnerships. Life-long learning is promoted as providing benefits to the individual, to businesses, and to the competitiveness of the national economy:

> All adults need the opportunity to continue to learn throughout their working life, to bring their qualifications up to date and, where necessary, to train for a different job. Now and in the future employability is and will be the best guarantee of employment. Learning also brings broader benefits. It encourages and supports active citizenship, helps communities help themselves, and opens up new opportunities such as the chance to explore art, music and literature. It helps strengthen families and encourages independence. That means that everyone must have access to high quality, relevant learning at a time and pace, and in places that suit them. Not only do individuals, families and communities benefit, learning throughout life also delivers tangible results for business — improved productivity and competitiveness (DfEE 1999: 56).

Thus, New Labour's education policy emphasised learning throughout working life and continuing learning to sustain employability. It linked the enhancement of employability with behavioural outcomes believed to affect collective conduct by strengthening communities and families and improving economic productivity and competitiveness. In these shared mediations of state-steered partnerships, individuals are connected to strategic networks that offer pathways (public goods) to enhance life chances in the long term. Consequently, disadvantage is understood by New Labour as being cut off from a consensual society's norms and values.

In this model of governance, the state's role was to provide opportunities to citizens in the context of the UK's position in a global emerging knowledge economy. The idea of a knowledge economy is the defining feature of a globalised economic order that implicates the

necessity of supply-side interventions to remedy skills-gap problems in the workforce. This workforce investment is part of adapting to competitive external conditions between national economies. Skills investment attempts generate advantage through institutional arrangements capable of mediating social pressures represented as natural facts. Thus, for example, New Labour's 'The Future of Higher Education' White Paper (2003) viewed higher education as a global business responsive to the skills demand required for a knowledge-based economy and competitive markets:

> Our competitors see — as we should — that the developing knowledge economy means the need for more, better trained people in the workforce. And higher education is becoming a global business. Our competitors are looking to sell higher education overseas, into the markets we have traditionally seen as ours (DfES 2003: 13).

In the words of Gordon Brown, it is the skills and ability of the workforce that 'define the ability of a national economy to compete' (quoted in Bevir 2005: 113).

The lab's role is to produce institutional arrangements that integrate citizens into broader governance goals. Therefore, objectified institutional arrangements (Bevir 2005: 31) played an essential mediatory role in managing contingencies to ensure the right outcomes were produced. These arrangements become transmission belts between social pressures and envisaged policy outcomes. As a result, in the narrative of social pressures in 'today's world', the right institutional arrangements and policy outcomes are given as natural facts in which initiatives are validated in relation to these same facts (Bevir 2002: 52). What is handed down becomes the collective project of 'one nation'. In a speech to the Confederation of British Industry, Tony Blair stated that all stakeholders contribute to making 'Britain more competitive':

> The choice is: to let change overwhelm us, to resist it or equip ourselves to survive and prosper in it. The first leads to a fragmented society. The second is pointless and futile, trying to keep the clock from turning. The only way is surely to analyse the challenge of change and to meet it. When I talk of a third way — between the old-style intervention of the old left and the *laissez-faire* of the new right —I do not mean a soggy compromise in the middle. I mean avowing there is a role for government, for teamwork and partnership. But it must be a role for today's world.

> Not about picking winners, state subsidies, heavy regulation; but about education, infrastructure, promoting investment, helping small business and entrepreneurs and fairness. To make Britain more competitive, better at generating wealth, but do it on a basis that serves the needs of the whole nation — one nation. This is a policy that is unashamedly long-termist. Competing on quality can't be done by government alone. The whole nation must put its shoulder to the wheel (quoted in Fairclough 2000: 26).

Social Capital Investment and Communitarian Themes: Long-Term Investment to Manage Social Pressures and Produce Pre-Set Outcomes

The long-term lab agenda of networked partnerships led to a focus on communitarian and social capital themes. New Labour's turn to co-governance (pluralistic modes of provision) was part of a discourse of empowering local and mid-level collective actors. Innovative modes of state provision were part of an integrative approach needed to manage social pressures in a changing world. Investing in the social is an investment in alternative organisational ecologies and subjective identities. These dimensions — alternative organisational ecologies and subjective identities — are aspects of social investment guided by the state and part of the devolvement of power and responsibility to empower individuals and communities. As such, they are examples of culture governance. Enriching social capital was central to a third way of thinking as an antidote to neoliberalism and the dependency culture of welfarist collectivism: 'Within third way discourses, social capital is presented as an antidote to both socially destructive nature of rampant neoliberalism and the 'dependency culture' produced by excessive collectivism' (Gewirtz et al. 2005: 653).

New Labour's investment in the social as a corrective measure, observed in the adoption of social capital theory and communitarian themes, aimed to tackle possible moral anomie and social fragmentation that arises with unfettered markets (Driver & Martell 1997). Devolution of provision to regional and local social networks sought to transform corporate actors' behaviour and social practices through government

recalibration of social networks (Franklin 2007).[3] In the context of a centrally regulated co-governance model, social capital theory is utilised to redefine idealised sources that impact social network outcomes. An affinity is identifiable in Putnam's view of social capital as a self-sustaining virtuous cycle, i.e., networks of families and communities whose relations are enhanced by sources of social capital (features of social organisation). Sources of social capital include 'networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, quoted in Portes 1998: 18). Societies rich in the right sources of social capital are better equipped to cultivate desired forms of behaviour that, cyclically, enrich the stock of social capital.

In turn, societies rich in social capital are better equipped to overcome possible structural strains (the social pressures of a changing world) to generate outcomes that advance economic performance and system-wide integration. Reliance on the right sources of social capital — a resource for the dual purposes of ordered social space and economic resource (Franklin 2007) — was part of New Labour's view of the social world as a consensual and ordered space. In this consensual space, policy initiatives work from an unproblematic understanding of what makes for positive system integration. Investment in social capital guides individuals to identify with the normative sources and expectations of social networks. Individuals' integration, achieved through responsible investment in social capital sources, produces a knock-on effect in behavioural changes. The result of managing social pressures and

3 To regulate individual behaviour, New Labour adopted practices to produce pre-set outcomes. One example was a reliance on technologies of governance — an ethos of managerialism that measures outputs. In the context of apparent devolution, technologies of governance through numbers became a means to mediate social pressures. Reforms were introduced to cultivate idealised subjectivities (organisational identities) motivated to embrace changes in the way they work. As a result, this meant the need to quantify workplace performance to meet policy outcomes defined by centralised governance goals (Ball 2009). In this context, reforms became a meta-policy status that 'subsumes almost every aspect of public services under its rubric' (Ball 2007: 93). Disciplinary techniques adopted to regulate institutional arrangements included utilising a discourse of contractual obligation for both providers and recipients of services (Fairclough 2000). In the case of providers, for example, in exchange for a pay increase, teachers and nurses, in the words of Tony Blair, were expected in return to 'be prepared to embrace fundamental reform in the way they work' (quoted in Fairclough 2000: 39).

structural strains is individual changes that lead to effective access to strategic networks and opportunities (bridging social capital).

According to New Labour, the community represented a contingent achievement of people acting ethically in fulfilling their duties to others (Bevir 2005: 77). Driver & Martell (1997) consider New Labour's communitarian thinking to place the individual, as a moral and responsible citizen, within a virtuous cycle that generates social cohesion and contributes to the creation of a more viable market economy:

> In Labour's communitarian thinking three themes — economic efficiency, social cohesion and morality — are interwoven. Economic success — particularly more jobs — will bring greater social cohesion, which is further strengthened by a more dutiful and responsible citizenry, and more social cohesion will in turn help create a more viable market economy (Driver & Martell 1997: 34).

As social exclusion is multi-dimensional, re-distributive measures were promoted to tackle the different facets of deprivation, including unemployment, high crime, substandard education performance, and limited aspiration (Levitas 2005). A networked approach to behavioural changes improves employability chances and makes Britain more economically competitive in a changing world (Levitas 2005: 206–209; Fairclough 2000: 57).

Accordingly, New Labour's commitment to communitarian themes was a vital component of a networked society, a bedrock of ties and relationships of trust, values, beliefs, and norms that are all core components of social capital. Communities, as the bonding and bridging social capital, contribute to making ethical and cooperative citizens. Such citizens who fulfil their responsibilities make the most of the opportunities provided by the state and broader social structures. In claiming their stake, they thus realise and demonstrate values within their community and wider society: there is a renewal of civic life in fulfilling responsibilities to others.

Furthermore, New Labour's communitarian thinking, in emphasising the fulfilment of responsibilities, acknowledges a moral underclass. Family and community are structures wherein individuals learn to negotiate the boundaries of acceptable conduct. The implication is that the breakdown of family and community bonds leads to a breakdown of law and order. Inherent in the provision of opportunity is a contractual

arrangement whereby individuals claim their stake in society. In the words of Tony Blair:

> The breakdown of family and community bonds is intimately linked to the breakdown of law and order. Both family and community rely on notions of mutual respect and duty. It is in the family that we first learn to negotiate the boundaries of acceptable conduct and to recognise that we owe responsibilities to others as well as ourselves. We then build out from that family base to the community and beyond that to society as a whole [...] we do not show our children respect or act responsibly to them if we fail to provide them with the opportunities they need, with a stake in the society in which they live. Equally, we demand that respect and responsibility from them in return (quoted in Fairclough 2000: 42–43).

In New Labour's approach to *lib/lab* governance and its seeking of a third way, multiple discourses can be identified, including the Labour Party's social democratic tradition. Newman recognizes this multiplicity of discourses to emerge when 'old and emergent regimes interact, with different elements of the new and old being packaged and repackaged, producing tensions and dis-junctures as different sets of norms and assumptions are overlaid on each other' (Newman 2001: 26). In a non-linear understanding of policy production, different assumptions and expectations may co-exist in a governance approach (Newman 2001: 30). Therefore, it is possible to identify different and sometimes contradictory themes within New Labour's policy initiatives as they seek to reach a working *lib/lab* compromise. These themes may co-exist in tension, such as self-governance and open-systems models or policies devolving power to citizens and communities and those preserving centralised governance that sets policy directives from above as an output-based model of managerialism.

The 'Big Society' Agenda: Focusing on Behavioural Adjustments

Integrating individual behaviour through centrally regulated social relations continues in David Cameron's 'Big Society' agenda, first outlined in 2010. However, rather than focusing on regulating top-down social inclusion measures, it focused on managing behaviour by rolling forward local co-governance that stresses social responsibility

and initiative. While there are differences in how the *lib/lab* compromise is articulated, there are similarities to New Labour's third way in the vital role ascribed to the social as the site of policy interventions (interventions that are an antidote to transcend past policy failures). In the Big Society agenda, the focus was on localism to enable a more responsive state that empowers individuals and works to generate the conditions of self-dependency. Nevertheless, like New Labour's third way, the citizen's role is viewed in the context of pre-defined system imperatives and the need to make the social work for individuals as members of a national community. From a normative representation, policy initiatives are developed that establish a distinct diagnosis of what went wrong and what may be done to remedy those mistakes.

'Big Society', 'Broken Britain', & Breaking Cycles of Dependency

David Cameron's 'Broken Britain' thesis underlines the normative regulation of social relations through re-worked practices that mediate inter-generational structures. The focus of his 'Big Society' policy response was not merely on making the economy work better for those socially excluded, as was the case with New Labour, but on reversing a moral crisis and bringing coherence to a fragmented normative landscape. Deploying a polemical tone, Cameron presented the welfare state as a harbinger of dependency culture, eroding responsibility and encouraging dispositions that entrap individuals in antithetical life choices and cycles of poverty. He suggested that dependence on local measures, in the form of community and, more importantly, the family, had been compromised by an overbearing big government's nationalisation of social problems. The institutionalization of a welfare system had not rewarded responsibility or granted a voice to citizens, rather, the provision of public services had eroded any notion of responsibility and reciprocity.

'Broken Britain' was a return to New Right discourses on poverty, but Cameron's Conservatives articulated 'the non-financial aspects of poverty' to use them for specific ideological ends. A shift in rhetoric rendered unemployment, for example, a 'structural' problem that created 'perpetual jobseekers', a 'benefits trap', a 'way of life', and the need to replace the conditions that rewarded the work-shy to one

in which 'the payment of unemployment benefit by the state is an entitlement which is earned, not owed' (Conservative Party 2009: 12). To counter this 'culture of worklessness and structural unemployment', the party posited a holistic policy that sought to tackle the interconnected paths to poverty, that is, 'family breakdown, serious personal debt, drug and alcohol addiction, failed education, worklessness and dependency' (Social Justice Policy Group 2007: 5). However, 'Broken Britain' was not just a policy of blame with an imperative for individual self-improvement. Instead, it was a stance that, while acknowledging the necessity of 'Thatcherite modernisation', conceded that problems had been generated by its reforms of hyper-individualism to an over-reliance on the centralised power of the state to push ahead with economic reforms (McAnulla 2010: 290).

In the spirit of *lib/lab* policy triangulation, the state — specifically the welfare state — erodes responsibility and entraps individuals into cycles of disadvantage and poverty. Thus, as with New Labour's third way, David Cameron offered the idea of the 'Big Society' as a policy that transcended what is represented as the traditional Left/Right dichotomy:

> The left in politics talk too much about the state. And the Right sometimes talks too much about the individual. But what really matters is what is in between — society (Cameron 2009a).

Connected to the Conservative Party, the think-tank 'The Centre for Social Justice' emphasised this political triangulation in their publication 'From Breakdown Britain to Breakthrough Britain' (2007):

> The traditional 'laissez-faire' approach understands poverty simply as a product of wrong personal choices about family, drugs, crime and schooling. That view says that poverty is always the fault of the person who makes the wrong choices. On the other side of the political divide, the elimination of poverty is seen principally as the job of government — thus if a person is in poverty it must be the government's fault and it must be the government that develops a top-down solution to the problem (Social Justice Policy Group 2007: 7).

In place of the maligned welfare state, the policy called for public services to be provided beyond the state. 'Big Society', in the form of the locale and community, between both state and individual, was viewed as

the appropriate site of welfare provision and simultaneously given the role of creating 'avenues through which responsibility and opportunity can develop' (Cameron 2009b). Through a 'radical decentralisation' of power, service recipients would be empowered and inter-generational structural disadvantage would be countered (Cameron 2009c). Rolling back the state would serve to roll forward society and break cycles of dependency and selfish individualism.

By creating the 'Big Society', the government resituated itself as a guide, partner, and instrument in engineering changes to remedy behavioural pathologies. In the words of David Cameron: 'But I see a powerful role for government in helping to engineer that shift. Let me put it more plainly: we must use the state to remake society' (Cameron 2009b).

The 'Big Society' agenda sought to strengthen and encourage social entrepreneurship within local institutions embedded in communities, generating solidarity, and making welfare provision more personal. It advanced the idea that strong local institutions would enable people to come together and work on a responsive provision (Cameron 2009b). As envisioned, individuals would be encouraged to make the right choices by the cultivation of a more responsive service through the devolution of provision. The intended effect of this devolution was a shared responsibility for social welfare, so that provision would become a shared burden and not solely the government's job.

Nudging citizens towards positive choices, whether through devolving powers to communities or introducing tax credits and benefits for families, empowers both communities and families with purpose. New conditions were envisaged to break a cycle of poverty, especially early on in a child's development (Social Justice Policy Group 2007: 8–9), by encouraging aspiration, the take-up of newfound opportunity, and behavioural changes. Ascribing significant importance to a new environment of a public provision meant breaking inherited subjective experiences that come with pre-existing social positionalities, for example, intergenerational worklessness with its subsequent 'state of mind'. To achieve this objective, what was required, according to the Social Justice Policy Group, was the breaking of a 'cycle of disadvantage in the early years of a child's life' by rolling 'forward the frontiers of society by extending the parameters of social responsibility' (2007: 7).

A consistent theme emerges in 'From Breakdown Britain to Breakthrough Britain'— individuals make wrong choices, but policy initiatives cannot regulate individual choices. Thus, the creation of the right structures and environment for individuals and communities would enable self-dependency: 'On the contrary, what we should be doing as politicians is, wherever possible, creating the right structures and environment for individuals and communities to help themselves' (Cameron & Herbert 2008: 123).

With this focus on the right structure and environment, 'From Breakdown Britain to Breakthrough Britain' further describes New Labour's state interventions as piecemeal, to be superseded by a Conservative holistic and structural approach. The mutualism of 'Big Society' offers avenues of opportunity — corrective behavioural measures — through a network of empowered local institutions meeting citizens' needs. Membership in these organisations fosters responsibility and a more accountable and responsive welfare provision.

Like New Labour's co-governance themes, the citizen in the 'Big Society' is a stakeholder in public provision; he or she takes responsibility for its delivery and balances citizens' rights as consumers of these same services. Through taking responsibility, citizens acknowledge their shared responsibility, hold public services accountable, and are incentivised by the government to take up opportunities. The difference between New Labour and the Conservative 'Big Society' approach to triangulation is New Labour's greater focus on initiatives that produce social inclusion. Thus, as noted above, New Labour aimed to connect citizens to the right self-improvement resources through networked interventions that generate behavioural changes. While a moral underclass discourse is implied in this approach, there is no pre-existing assumption of a systemic normative breakdown. Conservative policy under David Cameron, on the other hand, focused on the erosion of responsibility, inculcated by a paternalistic state, which requires an alternative ethos that encourages citizens to adopt a 'collective culture of responsibility' and an 'ethos of self-betterment' (Cameron 2011).

The remaking of society was deemed necessary for a more responsive devolved public service (better provision) and a holistic delivery of these same services. This holistic approach included early-life interventions and paternalistic nudges to guide choice-strategies that sustain and

complement the state's enabling role. This assumption of a holistic approach to welfare provision led David Cameron's Conservatives to accuse New Labour's policies of being both piecemeal and insufficient in tackling social exclusion problems. Nonetheless, both approaches maintain a functionalist understanding of social integration but differ in strategies adopted to connect individuals to the general system of social action and its pre-defined goals.

Welfare Co-Production & Redefining State Provision

As social disadvantage is viewed as a structured outcome and the site to develop an ethos of self-responsibility, policy initiatives focus on community development as the means to achieve this goal. The 'Big Society' agenda, as set out by the Community Development Foundation, defined the role of community development as 'empowering communities, opening up public services and promoting social action', and all three mentioned components 'will require greater cooperation and unity among local people, and between local people and the authorities that serve them' (Community Development Foundation 2010: 2).[4] The three components are intertwined; empowering communities will open up public services and promote social action (active citizenship). The third role of community/social action is to offer 'social value and complements or fills gaps in public services' (Community Development Foundation 2010b: 3). These three components thus fulfil two overarching and related objectives: 'localism and redefining the role of the state' (Community Development Foundation 2010b: 3). The state's redefined role is understood as an enabler of welfare co-production, in partnership with local people, and in being responsive to citizens, altering its provision to meet local people's needs.

Two themes may be identified with the above vision of welfare co-production:

1. A process view of service provision indicates a change in the nature of public service delivery. The resulting change leads to a responsive and open state engaged in the service-delivery environment and

4 The Community Development Foundation was chosen by the Coalition Government to deliver a £80m programme to help strengthen communities from 2010 to 2015 (Cabinet Office 2011).

the transformation it may generate through this same delivery. Consequently, there is a shift from the delivery of service as targets or outputs defined as 'top-down regulations and targets' to 'bottom-up accountability — individual choice, competition, direct elections and transparency' (Cameron & Clegg 2010).

2. Changing citizen behaviour and outlook by giving communities full responsibility for their lives. A responsive state encourages community action and devolves power to the locale. As a knock-on effect, it implicates a change in the citizen's habitus and the state's efficacy in meeting citizens' needs.

The first theme — a process view of public service provision — aims to respond to consumers' lived expectations in both delivery and outcome. As a result, there is a view of service provision in which 'there is no separation between production and consumption of a service; they happen simultaneously' (Klein 2010: 3). Objective outputs and subjective changes become inseparable, with citizens being transformed as they take responsibility for services in their communities. Subjective transformation necessitates creating 'the right structures and environment for individuals and communities to help themselves' (Cameron & Herbert 2008: 123). Whitaker describes this co-production view as follows:

> In 'delivering' services the agent helps the person being served to make the desired sorts of changes. Whether it is learning new ideas or new skills, acquiring healthier habits, or changing one's outlook on family or society, only the individual served can accomplish the change. He or she is a vital 'co-producer' of any personal transformation that occur. The agent can supply encouragements, suggest options, illustrate techniques, and provide guidance and advice, but the agency alone cannot bring about the change. Rather than an agent presenting a 'finished product' to the citizen, agent and citizen together produce the desired transformation (Whitaker 1980: 240).

Policy initiatives become necessary to establish a process approach to service provision by generating the right structures and environment for individuals and communities to help themselves. For this objective, instruments were set out, including the training of community organisers, to assist in self-help groups' operation and organisation. Both the institutional framework and situational factors (choice context) were viewed as key interventions in generating the right conditions through

which 'government can harness the power and potential of self-help to meet the converging ambitions of localism and the Big Society' (Archer & Vanderhoven 2010: 5).

Institutionally, policy initiatives were utilised to devolve powers to the micro-level. In terms of actual policy initiatives, the Conservative Party sought to redefine responsive public service through the following measures:

1. The reduction of bureaucratic and red-tape burden on local community organisations and businesses.

2. The establishment of neighbourhood grants and start-up funds for community groups to generate social capital in the poorest areas.

3. The support of self-help groups, for example, co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises (Conservative Party 2010a & 2010b), as front-line providers of a double devolution of public services (Community Development Foundation 2011).

4. Setting up a national citizen service as 'a two-month summer programme for 16-year-olds' that facilitates community engagement. According to the Conservative Party, this was a longer-term strand of the policy: 'This is about sowing the seeds of the Big Society — and seeing them thrive in the years to come' (Conservative Party 2010b: 2).

5. The designation of a 'Big Society Day' aimed 'to celebrate the work of neighbourhood groups and encourage more people to take part in social action projects' (Conservative Party 2010a: 2).

6. A proposal to set up national centres to train community organisers with the necessary skills and expertise to assist self-help groups in providing localised public services. While not paid, community organisers will 'help communities to establish and operate neighbourhood groups, and help neighbourhood groups to tackle difficult social challenges' (Conservative Party 2010a: 6). Also, intermediary bodies were viewed as a bridge between self-help groups and the successful provision of services that require expertise, skills, and successful mediation between the state and the locale. For this purpose, the Conservative Party envisaged a role for civil servants and trained community organisers, fulfilling the key functions of intermediary groups (Archer & Vanderhoven 2010). Regarding civil servants, the Conservative Party sought to 'transform the civil service into a national "civic service"'. This

> change of ethos was to be enacted 'by making regular community service, particularly in the most deprived areas, a key element in staff appraisals' (Conservative Party 2010a: 7).

The proposal of a more responsive state (as demonstrated in the initiatives noted above) was part of a process to generate citizens' transformation. It works to create an altered terrain conducive to a different and responsible outlook. As a result, welfare co-production is understood as more than an individualised workfare model — a model in which individual rights are preceded by a responsibility to seek out and take up opportunities. While an individualised dimension existed within the 'Big Society' agenda, there was a greater emphasis on the collective in welfare co-production that is preceded, as noted, by a conducive structure and environment. As a processual approach does not focus on the top-down production of set service outputs, the locale's collective assets are sought to generate outcomes that feed into a virtuous cycle of welfare co-production.

Citizen co-production is part of the virtuous cycle in which behavioural changes — maintaining a self-reliant culture — break intergenerational cultures of dependence and sustain self-reliant community groups. Whitaker (1980) categorises three types of citizen co-production; these types recognise a relational inseparability between the citizen and a responsive institutional environment:

> (1) Citizens requesting assistance from public agents; (2) citizens assisting public agents; and (3) citizens and agents interacting to adjust each other's service expectations and actions (Whitaker 1980: 242).

All three categories rhetorically existed in Conservative policy (cf. Cabinet Office: Behavioural Insights Team 2010 & 2011), ranging from open communication on local needs between service providers and citizens, cooperation in the delivery of services (e.g., recycling waste), and finally in the existence of self-help groups as service providers, with the government as an enabler in this process.

Nudging Community Action & Changing the Decision Context

Libertarian Paternalism complements the 'Big Society' policy vision. The Conservatives adopted 'nudge theory' — part of the lab component

of governance — to restructure the choice context to generate different social practices and conditions and to cultivate specific subjectivities. With its focus on developing a choice-architecture for self-help groups and individuals, the 'Big Society' approach 'nudged' citizens with a combination of Libertarian Paternalism (Thaler and Sunstein 2003) and Libertarian Welfarism (Korobkin 2009). In these, the consequences of individual choices, as covered above in the case of a virtuous cycle of welfare co-production, are more than a matter of maximising personal utility; they include collective welfare. Because the 'Big Society' vision places sustainable communities at its core, supporting policies seek to go beyond personal behavioural change. Self-help was thus viewed primarily as a collective initiative that provides direction to changes in individual behaviour.

Nudge theory (Libertarian Paternalism) assumes a negative view of human decision-making. Individuals, it is argued, often make decisions that are detrimental to both themselves and the greater public good. In the *homo economicus* view, human nature is characterized by 'unbounded rationality, unbounded willpower, and unbounded selfishness' (Mullainathan & Thaler 2000). Thaler and Sunstein propose the contrasting term '*homer economicus*' to denote that 'people have self-control problems' (Thaler and Sunstein 2003: 176). Self-control problems — bounded willpower and rationality — can include a judgemental bias, status-quo bias, context-dependent preferences (the situational factors of decision-making (Korobkin 2009)), and susceptibility to social influences such as herding (Thaler and Sunstein 2009; Thaler and Sunstein 2003).

To alter the decision-making process, Thaler and Sunstein recommend an array of possible avenues or a toolbox that can nudge the citizen in directions that counter potential problems arising from bounded rationality and willpower. For the provision of such a toolbox to qualify as Libertarian Paternalism, however, coercion must be carefully circumvented, and citizen welfare promoted to render it unobjectionable:

> But since no one is forced to do anything, we think this steering should be considered unobjectionable to libertarians (Thaler & Sunstein 2003: 177).

For example, overcoming a status-quo bias or inertia can be achieved by introducing automatic enrolment for pension schemes that do not coerce the citizen, as it offers a possible opt-out. The setting of such defaults is considered an unavoidable nudge, but other nudges exist that can be deployed to prevent or remedy common errors in decision-making. These include providing feedback and advice. Examples include (Thaler, Sunstein, & Balz 2010):

- Providing a map of welfare provision and explaining public-service choices and what they entail.
- Structuring complex choices to avoid possible confusion and accompanying services with well-thought-out information that enables the user to learn about possible decisions to reach an informed choice.
- Providing incentives for certain choices by making salient the outcomes they produce.

Nudges exist in policies that target individual choices. For example, organ donation, smoking, diet and health problems require the dissemination of information to allow the making of more informed choices. However, in terms of the 'Big Society' agenda, nudge theory was viewed as more than a useful means of cultivating citizen behavioural adjustment. It also extended to what can be described as Libertarian Welfarism, in which interventions or nudges encourage collective well-being through behavioural changes that extend beyond personal benefit. Overall, nudges were envisaged in terms of 'the power of the crowd'; this power is both collective and collaborative, where consumers work 'together for a better deal', which includes 'introducing a range of new initiatives that will support the development of collective purchasing and collaborative consumption' (Cabinet Office: Behavioural Insight Team 2011: 6-7). The collective dimension of the 'power of the crowd' was part of a joint government initiative that advocated government-business-community partnerships based on allocating budgets to the locale at the point of delivery.

The 'Big Society' agenda thus extended Thaler and Sunstein's notion of a nudge-choice architecture to collective enterprises and collaborative efforts. In the previously noted example of community organisers who work with intermediaries to nudge self-help groups to take

responsibility for public service provision, nudges could take the form of the dissemination of information via intermediaries and the social structuring of choice mechanisms. Also, incentivising nudges are sought to generate an intrinsic motivation to participate when devolving power, that is, a sense of self-determination and belonging for local services (an envisaged 'Big Society Day' is one such nudge in this direction) (Klein 2010). Other incentives included monetary funding of local self-help groups via a proposed 'Big Society Bank' (Archer & Vanderhoven 2010).

Because the transformation of citizen behaviour is tied to a broader welfare co-production in public service, Conservative policy sought to achieve a more holistic approach by 'facilitating the design and delivery of other services with diverse sector partners' (Cabinet Office: Behavioural Insight Team 2011: 4). In delivering services, this partnership was sought within a three-level ecosystem conception of 'Big Society'. Each level has its designated role — from the government (both central and local) to government partnerships with both private and social sectors and finally to the locale as a point of delivery delivered by both citizens and self-help groups (Cabinet Office: Behavioural Insight Team 2011). Thus, the overall policy objective trickles down, and nudges occur at all levels of the 'Big Society' vision. While David Cameron viewed the state as reconfiguring the social landscape, with paternalistic nudges as a means, the Conservative Party understood this process as a collective and collaborative effort and not a matter for the state alone.

The coordination of social activity became the role of the lab pole of governance. In turn, the lib side would fuse with the lab's social initiatives, in which a pre-diagnosed normative breakdown would be remedied. The individual's subjectivity is contextualised in and through the corrective role of 'Civic Conservatism' (Williams 2019). This approach involves individual behaviour being nudged and guided towards self-responsibility by way of a coordinated shared terrain engineered through state-led partnerships. The stronger focus on a moral underclass discourse, compared to New Labour, resulted in collectivism that hinged on a culture of mutuality in which it was posited that power would be devolved to the locale. Centralised regulation and bureaucracy that, according to David Cameron, exists in the overbearing lab side of governance takes control and responsibility away from citizens to make their social world:

> The paradox at the heart of big government is that by taking power and responsibility away from the individual, it has only served to individuate them. What is seen in principle as an act of social solidarity has in practice led to the greatest atomisation of our society. The once natural bonds that existed between people — of duty and responsibility — have been replaced with the synthetic bonds of the state — regulation and bureaucracy (quoted in Gibson 2015: 41).

The state under 'Big Society' policy did not aim merely to enable access to strategic networks; instead, it sought to engineer new conditions in which co-producing communities could thrive and, as a knock-on effect, access self-betterment resources. By producing the normative foundations of reciprocity, the government would become the bedrock that sustains free markets and grows a competitive national economy.

The 'Great Meritocracy': A Strong and Inclusive Economy

Under the leadership of Theresa May (beginning 2016), Conservative policy continued the trend of policy triangulation. Generally, the 'Big Society' idea persisted in acknowledging a 'shared society' (Williams 2017). However, emerging ideological polarities took a practical turn in what the government might achieve:

> We must reject the ideological templates provided by the socialist left and the libertarian right and instead embrace the mainstream view that recognises the good that government can do (Conservative Party 2017: 7).

The shift to a 'mainstream view' meant that importance was ascribed to taking 'decisions on the basis of what works' and 'what matters to the ordinary, working families of this nation'. Essential to the government's ability to do good, it declared, is a strong economy: For, 'without a strong economy, we cannot guarantee our security, our personal prosperity, our public services, or contented and sustainable communities' (Conservative Party 2017: 6).

The lab side of governance is seen in interventions designed to deliver a more robust economy that works for everyone. Like New Labour, there is no focus on a normative breakdown. Instead, the government acts to remedy the supply-side skills gap and provide access to better-paid

jobs. A modern industrial strategy was proposed to deliver a strong and inclusive economy that distributes opportunities fairly and on merit:

> Our modern industrial strategy is designed to deliver a stronger economy that works for everyone — where wealth and opportunity are spread across every community in the United Kingdom, not just the most prosperous places in London and the south-east. It will help young people to develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future. And it will back Britain for the long term: creating the conditions where successful businesses can emerge and grow, and helping them to invest in the future of our nation (Conservative Party 2017: 18).

The modern industrial strategy was positioned as central to reducing inequalities between communities. Government investment aimed to generate sustainable and inclusive growth based on a shared distribution of wealth between communities. In this sense, the 'shared society' under Theresa May directed focus onto practical initiatives that would deliver sustainable growth:

> We will use the structural fund money that comes back to the UK following Brexit to create a United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund, specifically designed to reduce inequalities between communities across our four nations. The money that is spent will help deliver sustainable, inclusive growth based on our modern industrial strategy (Conservative Party 2017: 35).

Under this plan, work-based welfare was the best means to ensure prosperity, and getting people into work was believed to provide the best route out of poverty. Participation in the workplace was advanced as the practical means for assisting individuals and growing the economy:

> Employment is at a record high and we will continue to strive for full employment. We will continue to run the welfare system in accordance with our belief that work is the best route out of poverty, that work should always pay, and that the system should be fair both to the people in need of support and those who pay for it. We have no plans for further radical welfare reform in this parliament and will continue the roll-out of Universal Credit, to ensure that it always pays to be in work (Conservative Party 2017: 54).

Education was a key facet of the plan. Employers were placed at the centre of proposed reforms to offer 'world-class technical education'

developed in partnership with the British industry that addresses skills shortages. Again, continuing the trend of New Labour, lifelong learning and technical education were to be made accessible:

> We will establish funding streams to ensure investment for the long term, and make a modern technical education available to everyone, throughout their lives, to provide the skills they need. We will remove the barriers that hold back small firms with big potential — and let them compete when government itself is the buyer (Conservative Party 2017: 19).

The lib side of policy triangulation emphasises personal effort to make the most of individual talents. Reliance on personal initiative is possible when the government ensures everyone has a chance to advance. When social injustices are tackled — framed primarily in terms of obtaining work-based skills — opportunities emerge that enable individuals to succeed in the defined context of a national industrial strategy. The result was the making of a 'Great Meritocracy' in which hard work would be rewarded and where advantage would be based on merit, not privilege:

> The greatest injustice in Britain today is that your life is still largely determined not by your efforts and talents but by where you come from, who your parents are and what schools you attend. This is wrong. We want to make Britain the world's Great Meritocracy: a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, where advantage is based on merit not privilege. To succeed, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, can have a world-class education (Conservative Party 2017: 49).

The 'Great Meritocracy' idea is closer to New Labour than Cameron's 'Big Society'. It understood the lab role of governance as providing opportunity and the expectation that individuals will contribute to a pre-defined national strategy. Compared to Cameron's 'Big Society', what distinguishes the 'Great Meritocracy' is its emphasis on initiatives based on 'what works' rather than claiming a societal breakdown and inherited states of thinking and living. Social cooperation between the government and employers is the means to provide responsive work-based skills that enable social mobility and self-responsibility.

The Post-Brexit Challenge: Levelling-up Unleashes Opportunities

The move towards reaching a compromise between the *lib*/*lab* sides of governance continued with Boris Johnson's post-Brexit Conservative government (2019). Because previously Labour-voting constituencies in the north of England turned to the Conservative party, a tactical strategy was devised to maintain this support. A levelling-up approach became the defining policy feature, describing government aims to invest in infrastructure to connect urban centres to achieve and improve mobility between places (Tomancy & Pike 2020).[5] Investment in infrastructure also included investment in education to tackle supply-side weaknesses. In the words of Boris Johnson, the problem was one of supply in which Further Education (FE) colleges were failing to endow their students with relevant skills:

> We are short of skilled construction workers, and skilled mechanics, and skilled engineers, and we are short of hundreds of thousands of IT experts. And it is not as though the market does not require these skills. The market will pay richly. The problem is one of supply — and somehow our post-18 educational system is not working in such a way as to endow people with those skills (Johnson 2020a).

The lab's governance role is to provide opportunities to access necessary training to take up well-paid jobs. This entails focused investment in technical training that produces transferable skills. To enable the lib side to work, the government promised a skills guarantee for individuals to train and retrain at any time in their lives (Johnson 2021a). The proposition responded to changes in the UK economy accelerated by the Covid pandemic by ensuring that individuals would be better positioned to find new and better jobs. Boris Johnson's government, recognising the rapid process of change, put forward investment in infrastructure in the form of science and technology to enhance productivity and growth:

5 The objective in transport infrastructure investment is to connect marginalised places to centres of urban growth. The knock-on effect of this investment is furthering social mobility by providing access to skilled and well-paid work (Tomancy & Pike 2020).

> We're making unprecedented investments in infrastructure — and doubling the investment in science and technology from £11 billion to £22 billion a year by 2024 (Johnson 2020a).

Technical education is part of the investment in infrastructure that has the dual purpose of providing opportunities to individuals and adapting the nation to 'build back better' (Johnson 2021a). Similar to New Labour, the idea is to encourage individuals to take up opportunities and, in turn, acquire the necessary skills that generate further productivity and growth. Therefore, investment in the right infrastructure results in a trained workforce that can 'build back better'. Aligned with the levelling-up initiative, the policy direction was to invest across all regions to unleash opportunities and generate the skills the economy needs (Department for Education 2021). Boris Johnson described the increased investment in work-based skills as a 'Fair Deal' that delivers an 'Opportunity Guarantee' (Johnson 2020b).

The dual approach of investment in technical training to generate individual and national opportunities — continuing the policy blueprint of previous Labour and Conservative governments — can be seen in the government's education Whitepaper 'Skills for jobs: Lifelong Learning for opportunity & Growth' (2021). In the report, the government set out its aims to strengthen the link between FE education and employers through active partnerships. Thus, the reform of FE was tied to putting employers at the centre, where education and training lead to jobs that improve productivity and further close the skills gap. In turn, educational institutions are given the autonomy to adapt and develop courses in cooperation with the government and local employers. To enable this process, Boris Johnson's Conservative government proposed a strategic development fund that planned to improve partnerships in which providers would be 'empowered to shape their provision to respond to skills needs' (Department for Education 2021: 18). The state, in this scheme, would regulate post-16 technical and higher education and training to meet employer-led standards. New powers for the secretary of state for education were proposed to allow for direct intervention when providers did not deliver the skills needed by employers:

> Strengthen the governance of colleges, by taking a clearer position on what good governance and leadership looks like and placing specific

> requirements on colleges and other provider types…This includes setting out clearer expectations, requirements, and support to empower weaker colleges to address problems earlier, as well as ensuring that college corporations can govern effectively and autonomously (Department for Education 2021: 12–54).

Although Boris Johnson claimed that the boost to vocational education represented a 'radical change', it is, in fact, the same path taken by previous governments. For example, work-based learning under Theresa May's leadership was extended to all aspects of higher education. Accordingly, degrees were expected to include 'significant periods of work experience' so that 'practical experience of the workplace [would] become the norm in degrees and an integral part of making students "work ready"' (Department for Education 2019: 11). Furthermore, under Theresa May, social justice measures to widen participation were similarly set in the context of economic productivity in which opportunities provided required greater institutional accountability on graduate employability outcomes.

Under Boris Johnson's leadership, the Conservative Party did not explicitly argue that society had broken down; yet, it adopted a moralising tone with regard to the preservation of national identity. The use of nationalist rhetoric and signifiers, though influenced by the post-Brexit landscape (Sobolewska & Ford 2020), also supported a broader electoral strategy to gain and keep traditional Labour voting constituencies.[6] In contrast to larger cities, smaller towns and rural areas in the North and Midlands predominantly voted to leave the European Union and led to the intensification of inter-regional polarisation. As Mackinnon (2020) observes, the Brexit referendum's result manifested pre-existing regional inequalities that included New Labour's weakened relationship with its post-industrial working-class regions.

Brexit, therefore, accelerated the momentum of change. In continuity with Theresa May, Boris Johnson specifically targeted leave-voting seats — part of the broader 'levelling-up' agenda — by promising sustainable economic regeneration to communities 'left behind' with the aim to

6 This electoral strategy is seen in the 'Town Deals' scheme that disproportionally selected towns for funding — to improve local infrastructure — based on them being marginal Conservative-held parliamentary seats (Hanretty 2021).

deliver long-term economic and productivity growth (Johnson 2019). A fairer distribution of opportunity, thus, was tied to solidifying strategic electoral wins. Through greater and more equitable infrastructure investment, the creation of high-skilled jobs and highly skilled employees would drive the prosperity of previously neglected regions.

While Boris Johnson's Conservative government did not have a broader vision like New Labour or the 'Big Society' agenda, it still maintained the same blueprint of *lib/lab* triangulation. In this blueprint, the government tries to compromise between collective interventions and individual subjectivities that self-invest and sustain a greater state-defined mission. Despite the rhetorical acknowledgement of partnerships, cooperation, and stakeholders, it is a return to a work-based welfare model. Individuals self-invest — provided with tools and opportunities — to become 'work ready' self-responsible citizens. Measures are adopted, for example, through career guidance, to direct personal choices in ways that maximise earning outcomes and provide relevant skills wanted by employers. 'Levelling up' and 'building back better' are part of one virtuous cycle — distributive fairness provides opportunities that generate skills-based outcomes and connect citizens with better jobs, resulting in greater national productivity.

When Devolution is not Devolution

As noted in the introduction, while there are differences, the models of policy triangulation point to attempts to reach a compromise between the *lib/lab* poles of governance. In various ways, the state (the lab pole) is viewed as a partner that ensures opportunities are accessible through investment in non-centralised public service infrastructure. In turn, the lib pole relates to self-responsible individuals who maximise the opportunities provided within a greater state-defined project. The discursive move to devolution, partnerships, and stakeholders is part of an attempt to reform what is presented as the failures of traditional political templates in maintaining system-based integration. Consequently, despite devolution discourse, the relational reciprocity between individuals is appropriated by state-led mutual socialisation to meet the economic needs of a globalised world.

Although claiming to transcend past policies' failings, relational ties remain directed through modernity's *symbolic code* that directs

the content of mediation in the form of values, symbols, rules, and instrumental resources (Donati 2011: 72).[7] Unless modernity's *symbolic code* is transcended, we are left with an epistemic observation system whose knowledge infrastructure is conceptually insular. Knowable reality takes the observer's starting point in the form of a pre-existing symbolic content that does not distinguish between the human element and outcomes sought from relations. Therefore, policy initiatives are inherently closed, incapable of authentically devolving authority in a way that acknowledges and responds to relational distinctions as a possible referential moment of transformation. Whether gravitating towards one pole or seeking to triangulate between these poles, the functionalist mode of governance limits what is possible.

Lib/lab compromises reproduce the system-based approach to policy without altering its general framework but differ from it by seeking adaptable responses to what is represented as a fast-changing world. In the coming chapters, I aim to investigate a new relational mode of knowing that does not pre-define the direction of social relations. As stated in this chapter, the *lib/lab* approach is conceptually incapable of acknowledging the human element's autonomy as a referential object of knowledge. Thus, a re-think is necessary to understand knowledge to be generated from the reciprocity of epistemic relations — the *a priori* origins from which knowledge develops. Starting from the relation's internal features opens new horizons of sociability — with transformative social bonds — that *morphogenetically* transcends the received.

7 An example of this regulation and formalising of relations was previously noted in New Labour's reliance on governance technologies and an ethos of managerialism to measure outputs. Similarly, the Conservative Party's English devolution plans, a theme that gained prominence under David Cameron's leadership and subsequently continued, demonstrate a regulated mediation of relations. The contract-based approach to English devolution — as the state steers contractual obligations with local authorities — meant local decision-making is tied to central government funding that sets the direction of partnerships and the organisational setting to produce desired outcomes (Sandford 2019). The noted case of increased infrastructure investment in local vocational education is an example of funding tied to a broader context of business skills needs and economic productivity.

Concluding Remarks

The documentation of different *lib/lab* approaches in this chapter demonstrates the hegemony of system-based forms of governance that seek to compromise between valorising self-governance and the collective regulation of this self-governance to ensure individuals are adequately integrated into the system needs. While differing in focus, the common denominator between these approaches is the proposal to transcend inherited ideological templates to meet the needs of a changing global economic order. Each attempted to enable individuals to adapt their behaviour through work-based forms of welfare that reward initiative and responsibility in different ways.

New Labour represented an approach that sought to reach a compromise through an enabling role for the state to integrate individuals into a broader state-defined national project. Accordingly, there was a narrative of a changing world that brings novel economic needs. In response, new policy formulations were needed to remedy an existing skills gap to meet these needs. The environmental contingencies needed an enabling state — the lab side of governance — to produce relevant opportunities for individuals to claim their stake. As a result, investment in the social aimed to tackle moral anomie and connect individuals to strategic networks (bridging social capital). The intended outcome of this process was the enablement of self-governance — the lib side — through responsible citizens contributing to creating a more viable market economy. Consequently, the New Labour compromise between lib and lab poles of governance was intended to enable a virtuous cycle in which the state directs networks to produce institutional arrangements that integrate citizens into broader governance goals.

The 'Big Society' agenda represented continuity rather than rupture with New Labour's *lib/lab* approach. Rhetorically, welfare co-production themes took greater prominence due to a proposed normative breakdown. Again, new policy initiatives advanced beyond pre-existing templates, that is, reliance on collective formations between the individual and state. These formations are vital as they are a bulwark against inherited inter-generational dependency — with responsibility eroded by the welfare state — by enabling individuals to take self-responsibility. The rolling forward of the 'Big Society' was directly tied to a state-engineered

environment of self-governance. In this process, the state would remake the social by opening public services to partnerships that enable welfare co-production. Policy nudges were envisaged to direct individual choices and extended to collective initiatives to transform the decision-making context. Here, as with New Labour, we saw the same objective of re-thinking the social to be more responsive to skills needed in the economy. Though agreed on goals, the 'Big Society' differed in focus from New Labour by emphasising a broader normative breakdown and the need for collective changes to create the right structures and environment for individuals and communities to help themselves.

Both the 'Great Meritocracy and 'levelling-up' agendas represent a return to New Labour's focus on skills-based solutions to supply-side weaknesses, and the role government can take to make the economy work for everyone. They promoted the provision of opportunities in work-based training to ensure prosperity and get people into work. In turn, in the spirit of meritocratic fairness, increased opportunity meant that personal initiative would be rewarded, and everyone could advance based on merit. The envisioned outcome is that individuals make the most of their initiative and gain skills to grow the economy. Relatedly, Boris Johnson's 'levelling-up' rhetoric emphasised the importance of a 'fair deal' that delivers an 'opportunity guarantee'. The lab's role, here, was to ensure that individuals can access the right training to connect citizens to better jobs in the context of a productive nation. Infrastructure investment — the goal to 'build back better' — is an attempt to train individuals and connect them to high-skilled jobs. Thus, as with other *lib/lab* approaches, the state has a role in which it is part of a virtuous cycle that endows individuals with the requirements of roles that are well integrated into greater system needs.

These different approaches to *lib/lab* governance demonstrate a shared vision in which the state provides the tools for provision beyond what is represented as the ideological template of top-down governance. Yet, in attempting to transcend previous ideological templates, a state-led mutual socialisation of relations remains. The state provides the direction of organisational relations — including leadership structures — and the outcomes that are expected from these relations. As a result, notwithstanding the claims of transcending previous ideological templates, we have the reproductive continuity of modernity's

symbolic code that negates distinctions within relations rather than acknowledging these distinctions as referential objects of knowledge. Specifically, the human element's reality and transformative potential are first understood from pre-existing symbolic content that shapes the identity and future of relations.

Therefore, as will be articulated in the coming chapters, it becomes necessary to propose an alternative epistemic approach that acknowledges the human element in social relations. The human element is the referential starting point that directs the identity of relations and their organisational ties. Subjective and objective dimensions are, thus, emergent from generative mechanisms that are characterised by the reciprocal orientations between agent-subjects (Donati 2011). Acknowledging reciprocity as a *sui generis* reality entails starting from the internal features of sociability rather than seeking to regulate its outcomes. Hence, the received templates are open to transformation through new ways of knowing that shape new sociability parameters. These, in turn, better meet the needs of those in relationships.