THE NEW ORTHODOXY: THE DIFFERENTIATED POLITY MODEL

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Anthony King (1989, p. 97) argued some time ago that: ‘most of Britain’s best political scientists (…) are for some reason journalists’. This is a claim which could only be made by someone who thinks that understanding, or explaining, politics merely revolves around knowing what happens at the centre of power. It neglects the point that facts do not speak for themselves; rather, they have to be interpreted within a conceptual or theoretical framework. Such theoretical frameworks are, for the most part, conspicuous by their absence in work on British politics. This point is amply illustrated by the most recent survey of work on British politics, Flinders et al. (2009), The Oxford Handbook of British Politics, which almost totally neglects broader ways of conceptualizing British politics that would allow us to situate some of the individual chapters against a wider background. There are nine references to the, once ubiquitous, Westminster model, but these are all in two chapters, Dennis Kavanagh’s chapter ‘Antecedents’ and Oliver James’ chapter ‘Central State’. Only James discusses recent alternatives to the Westminster model and, although he deals with interpretivist critiques, there is no reference to the ‘differentiated polity model’ in the book’s index, let alone to the asymmetric power model, two of the positions considered here. Rod Rhodes’ work provides a very important exception to that omission, which has stimulated a great deal of interest and encouraged younger scholars to move away from description and fairly mindless empiricism.

This piece focuses upon one of Rhodes’ major contributions, the differentiated polity model. I use this term differentiated polity model, although, as we shall see, Rhodes no longer does so. However, it is inevitable also that I touch on some of Rhodes’ other contributions on policy networks, governance and, particularly, interpretivist approaches to political science. As such, this piece is divided into three substantive sections. The first section briefly situates Rhodes’ work on the differentiated polity model in the context of his broader contribution to the political science/public policy literature. The second section outlines the differentiated polity model and examines how it responds to the previously dominant Westminster model. The final section then compares the differentiated polity model with two alternatives, which Bevir and Rhodes barely consider, the asymmetric power model and the metagovernance approach. My aim in this last section is not to adjudicate between these models, but, rather, to make clear the distinctions between them as a way of moving the debate forward and establishing Rhodes’ contribution.

THE DIFFERENTIATED POLITY MODEL, NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND INTERPRETIVE POLITICAL SCIENCE

In examining the differentiated polity model, it is important to situate the discussion within the context of Rhodes’ intellectual development, because, as we shall see, Rhodes’ treatment of it, and even the nomenclature he uses, has changed over time.

Rhodes’ initial work was broadly institutionalist (see, for example, Lowndes 2010), with more than a hint of behaviouralism (see, for example, Sanders 2010), although before the growth of what is now termed new institutionalism (see, for example, Rhodes 1995; Lowndes 2010). However, his early work on local government and sub-national
government, and later on policy networks, led him to argue that governance was a much better term than government for analysing how contemporary polities operate. Rhodes and Bevir (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Ch. 5) would now view his approach in his early work as an example of a first wave governance approach (see further discussion below). Here, his focus was particularly upon the growing importance of network governance. Subsequently, his embrace, in his work with Mark Bevir, of an interpretivist approach meant he developed his approach to governance. In this section I look briefly at each of these developments, paying particular attention to how they relate to the differentiated polity model. The treatment here is brief because these issues are dealt with at length elsewhere in this volume. However, the key point I want to emphasize is that examining this intellectual development highlights a key question for Rhodes (and Bevir), which is never fully resolved: is the differentiated polity (model), or indeed network governance, seen as an empirical claim about the nature of the contemporary British polity or, rather, a particular, contested, narrative about that polity?

**EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VARIOUS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

Rhodes’ work on local government (see, especially, Rhodes 1981), and later sub-national governments (see, especially, Rhodes 1988), did much to inform his development of the differentiated polity model and his focus on governance, particularly network governance. The main thrust of Rhodes’ work on UK local government was to emphasize that the relationship between central and local government was an exchange relationship, in which both central and local government had control over resources which the other ‘partner’ needed. So, central government determined much of local government’s income and could legislate to change the powers of local government, while local government delivered many, if not most, of the services that citizens/voters access, and the efficiency and effectiveness of that delivery has direct effects on voter’s views of national, as well as local, government.

Rhodes drew a broader conclusion from this research on local government, together with the work on sub-national governments which followed on. In his view, UK politics could not be adequately characterized by the Westminster model, which saw the UK as a unitary system, with power lying at the centre. Rather, for Rhodes, power was dispersed and based on exchange relationships. This became a crucial element of the differentiated polity model. However, it was also a key element in his increasing focus on governance, and particularly network governance, as was, to an extent, his work with me on policy networks.

**Policy networks**

The UK policy networks approach, developed first by Richardson and Jordan (1979), but most associated with Marsh and Rhodes (1992a), saw policy networks as a crucial feature of British politics. Networks were more or less tight relationships between interest groups and Departments (in Marsh and Rhodes’ terminology, 1992a, policy communities were tight networks and issue networks loose networks). In essence, the argument was that societal interests, particularly professions and business, were heavily involved in policy-making; so power was dispersed away from government, although the extent to which that was true was seen as an empirical question and government actors played a key role in the networks. Again, we can see how this argument fits with the differentiated polity model, but Rhodes, subsequently, significantly changed his position on policy networks and this went hand in hand with what he would now term a shift from a first wave to a third wave governance perspective (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Ch. 5).
The change in his position on policy networks also reflected his view that the Thatcher Governments of the 1980s and 1990s fundamentally changed the nature of British politics. In more general terms, Bevir and Rhodes (2010, p. 81) argue: ‘Governance is associated with the changing nature of the state following the public sector reforms of the 1980s’. There is some irony in Rhodes’ view of the transformative effects of Thatcherism, given he and I co-edited a book (Marsh and Rhodes 1992b) which took strong issue with the view that Margaret Thatcher had transformed British politics and public policy (Rhodes 2007, p. 1245; see also Bevir and Rhodes 2003b):

The government of Margaret Thatcher sought to reduce (the power of policy networks) by using markets to deliver public services, bypassing existing networks and curtailing the ‘privileges’ of professions, commonly by subjecting them to rigorous financial and management controls.

He further argues (Rhodes 2007, p. 1245):

Fragmentation not only created new networks, but also increased the membership of existing networks, incorporating both the private and voluntary sectors. The government swapped direct for indirect controls and central governments are no longer either necessarily or invariably the fulcrum of a network.

BEYOND NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Newman (2003, p. 85) argues: ‘The idea of a shift from markets and hierarchies towards networks and partnership as modes of coordination is a dominant narrative’. More recently, Bevir and Rhodes (2010, Ch. 5) have developed a classification of three waves of the governance approach: the anglo-governance school; metagovernance; and the decentred approach.

The anglo-governance school

This first wave of governance literature could just as easily be called the network governance approach and Rhodes’ (1997) initial work on governance and, indeed, to an extent his first book with Bevir can be seen as an example of this approach. Here, governance is seen as replacing government in contemporary polities: ‘The term “governance” refers to a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing’ (Rhodes 1997, p. 15). More specifically, the view is that networks have replaced hierarchy and markets as the dominant mode of modern governance and, in this vein, Rhodes (1997, p. 15) defines governance as involving: ‘self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state’. Similarly, Bevir and he argue: ‘governance as networks is a common and important development in advanced industrial societies where the relationship between state and civil society has changed dramatically’ (2003a, p. 54). In effect, Rhodes initially argued that such change results, in large part, from the increased complexity, dynamism and diversity in contemporary society. This complexity, dynamism and diversity itself results from a variety of processes, including globalization, devolution and the growth of non-governmental organizations and leads in this view to a ‘hollowing out’ of the state.

The concept of ‘hollowing out’ is very important in Rhodes’ earlier work. So, Bevir and Rhodes argue: ‘The state has been hollowed out from above by international interdependence, and from below by for example marketization, and sideways by agencies’
In this view, such hollowing-out suggests that: ‘the growth of governance has further undermined the ability of the core executive to act effectively, making it increasingly reliant on diplomacy’ (2003a, p. 58). The detail of this need not concern us here, but the thrust of the argument is clear. In this view, the increased complexity of modern society, and hence of the modern polity, has led to a new form of governance. As such, the modern polity involves a continuing process of negotiation between the various levels of governance and between government, private and voluntary sector actors; or, to put it another way, contemporary governance involves negotiations within and between networks, rather than the assertion of authority by government.

**Metagovernance**

I return to the issue of metagovernance below. Here, I want to briefly introduce Bevir and Rhodes’ understanding of the issue, which I critique later. They argue (2010, p. 86): ‘Metagovernance refers to (the) role of the state in securing coordination in governance and its use of negotiation, diplomacy, and more informal modes of steering’. So, from this perspective, governments steer, they do not row, by: (1) setting the rules of the game; (2) shaping discourses/narratives/identities; and/or (3) distributing resources (Rhodes and Bevir 2010, p. 86). Bevir and Rhodes also assert that metagovernance and network governance approaches share an unacknowledged commitment to modern empiricism, network governance and a reified notion of structure; assertions Fawcett and I (2010b) take strong issue with elsewhere. More importantly here, I return to the issue of metagovernance below.

**The decentred approach**

Here, Bevir and Rhodes focus on what they term the stateless state, where the institutions of the state are (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, p. 90): ‘the contingent meanings that inform the actions of the individuals involved in all kinds of practices of rule.’ They continue (2010, p. 91) arguing that the: ‘the decentred narrative focuses on the social construction of patterns of rule through the ability of individuals to create meanings in action.’ As such, the concept of situated agency is crucial. From this perspective, structures, institutions or practices do not determine people’s behaviour; action is a matter of contingent individual choice. Consequently, actions are explained by reference to the beliefs (or meanings or desires) of individuals. However, any particular belief occurs within, is mediated by and interpreted within the context of the wider set of beliefs the individual holds. These beliefs are explained by reference to traditions, modified by dilemmas. So, agents operate within a web of traditions which shape the meanings they attach to the institutions and action involved in governance. Crucially, such meanings only change: ‘When people’s perceptions of the failings of governance conflict with their existing beliefs, the resulting dilemmas lead them to reconsider beliefs and traditions’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, p. 91).

**THE SHIFT TO INTERPRETIVISM**

Rhodes’ intellectual trajectory, then, can be characterized, in large part, as a shift from the network governance approach to the decentred approach, a change which reflects his embrace of interpretivism. Consequently, Rhodes has, for the most part, come to reject the idea of a differentiated polity ‘model’ and talk instead of a differentiated polity narrative. However, in my view, Bevir and Rhodes still treat that perspective/narrative as an alternative, indeed a better alternative, to the Westminster model.

In his original work, Rhodes (1997) does not, in fact, use the term ‘model’. Rather, the differentiated polity model is variously described as ‘an organizing perspective’ (Rhodes
1997, pp. 4, 15), an organizing framework (Rhodes 1997, pp. 19, 23, 113) or a thesis (Rhodes 1997, p. 195). However, although the term ‘narrative’ is not used in this book, it is clearly put forward as an alternative, an empirically superior alternative, to the Westminster model, which can be subject to empirical testing. So, Rhodes argues at various points:

- ‘this picture is consistent with Britain as a differentiated polity’ (1997, p. 19).
- ‘The map of the differentiated polity is complex’ (1997, p. 22).
- ‘There is little work on IGM in Britain’s differentiated polity’ (1997, p. 196).

All of these quotes strongly suggest that Rhodes thinks Britain is best viewed as a differentiated polity and, indeed, much of the subsequent literature refers to it as the differentiated polity model (for example, see Carmichael 2003; Kerr and Kettell 2006; Jose 2007; Bache 2008).

In their first book, Bevir and Rhodes argue (2003, p. 62; see also p. 9) that: ‘The phrase “the differentiated polity” provides an alternative, or at least an amendment, to the Westminster model’. Subsequently, in their second book they do focus on the ‘governance narrative’ which clearly overlaps, if it does not subsume, the differentiated polity perspective (see especially Bevir and Rhodes 2006, p. 60), before identifying the differentiated polity narrative (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, p. 76). Finally, they assert (Bevir and Rhodes 2008, p. 729): ‘We refer to our analysis as a narrative or story not a model’. This nomenclature is now well established (Bevir and Rhodes 2010).

The same can be argued about Bevir and Rhodes’ views on governance. So, in many places, although admittedly more consistently in their earlier work, they see networks as the key feature of contemporary governance, but they also see it as a narrative. The tension is, to an extent, obvious when Rhodes (2007, pp. 1246–7) argues:

The term ‘network governance’ has two faces. First, it describes public sector change whether it is the increased fragmentation caused by the reforms of the 1980s or the joined-up governance of the 1990s, which sought to improve coordination between government departments and the multifarious other organizations. Second, it interprets British government; it says that the hierarchical Westminster model of responsible government is no longer acceptable. We have to tell a different story of the shift from government with its narrative of the strong executive to governance through networks.

However, even here the second face, network governance as a narrative, is cast in terms of an imperative. It almost appears as if the ‘new’ narrative is both necessary and ‘true’; a difficult position for an interpretivist to take.

Elsewhere, Bevir and Rhodes (2003b) see governance as a narrative, and distinguish in the UK between four different contemporary (although, of course, with historical roots), and to an extent overlapping, narratives of governance, which parallel the four British political traditions: Tory; Liberal; Whig; and Socialist (Bevir and Rhodes 2003b, p. 48). As Smith (2008, pp. 145–7) emphasizes, the Bevir and Rhodes’ definition of tradition is loose – and it does an enormous amount of work in their analysis. First, the Tory narrative focuses upon strong, authoritative government, which bypasses intermediate institutions. Second, the Liberal narrative emphasizes the need to marketize public services, thus reducing state control and the power of intermediate institutions. Third, the Whig narrative is seen as strongly associated with the Westminster model, and argues for the reinvention of the organic constitution, with its focus upon gradual change. Finally, the Socialist narrative emphasizes the need for more participation, trust and negotiation.
Here, I’m not concerned with the utility of this classification. Rather, the point is that Bevir and Rhodes (2003b, p. 59) argue: ‘In an important sense, there is no such thing as governance, but only different constructions of the several traditions’. Their aim is to find: ‘new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking about British government’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2003b, p. 60). I have two problems here. First, reiterating a point I made earlier, it is never clear whether for Rhodes (and Bevir) network governance is a description of how UK government works and/or a narrative about how it works. The former appears to be the case when they claim ‘The governance narrative claims to capture recent changes in British government in the way the Westminster model cannot’ (2003, p. 54; see also 2003, p. 41). However, the latter seems the case when the talk of alternative, competing narratives. Second, there is a broader ontological and epistemological point. I am not sure how an interpretivist can talk about a ‘better’ way of speaking about British politics, as they do not accept the notion of a ‘reality’ independent of narrative or discourse (see, for example, Furlong and Marsh 2010). In my view, the problem is that Bevir and Rhodes want it both ways; they talk of narratives and invoke the interpretivist position, but see network governance and the differentiated polity as a more accurate description of how the contemporary British polity works than the Westminster model.

As such, my main claim in this piece is that the differentiated polity model/perspective/narrative, involves an empirical claim about the changing nature of modern governance; if it is a narrative, it is one which claims empirical resonance. It is also interesting to note that Rhodes has also co-authored a book on Westminster systems (Rhodes et al. 2009) which, however, doesn’t really engage with either the Westminster model or the differentiated polity narrative. As such, in the rest of this piece, I shall discuss the differentiated polity ‘model’ and its alternatives.

**THE DIFFERENTIATED POLITY MODEL AND THE WESTMINSTER MODEL**

It is clear then that Rhodes initially developed the differentiated polity model in direct response to the Westminster ‘model.’ Indeed, in my view, one of the problems with Bevir and Rhodes’ analysis of British politics is that they still treat the Westminster model as their main ‘other’, although, in their latest work, they do also consider anti-foundationalists/post-structuralists/post-Marxists (see, for example, Bevir and Rhodes 2010, pp. 46–61). More broadly, as Smith (2008, p. 144) emphasizes, they see everyone who is not an interpretivist as a ‘modern empiricist’. I return to this issue at more length below. Here, I briefly outline the Westminster model, before turning to the differentiated polity model.

The Westminster model was widely used as an organizing principle, both within British government and by observers analysing British politics. Gamble (1990) identifies a number of characteristics of the model, which would be agreed in broad terms: a unitary state; Parliamentary sovereignty; strong cabinet government; accountability through free and fair elections; majority party control of the executive; elaborate parliamentary conventions; and institutionalized opposition (for a similar list of characteristics, see Verney 1991, p. 637). It is also worth emphasizing that: many observers have a strong normative commitment to the Westminster model; it has an evolutionary view of change (see, for example, Bevir and Rhodes 2003, pp. 27–8); it is agency-centred (Bevir and Rhodes, p. 28); and operates with a broadly elite pluralist view of power in Britain.

Bevir and Rhodes also argue (2010) that the Westminster model sees power as an object, as something individuals have and use, and power relations as a zero-sum game. I do not
disagree, but it also needs to be recognized that most proponents of the Westminster model are pluralists, albeit elite pluralists. In such a view, while some have more power in the Westminster system, there are checks and balances provided by the executive’s ultimate accountability to both Parliament and the electorate. Box 1 outlines the characteristics of the differentiated polity model, comparing it with the Westminster model.

The first three characteristics of the differentiated polity model merely emphasize network governance and the hollowed-out state and I have already dealt with them. However, a number of other features strongly associated with such an approach also underpin the differentiated polity model: plurality and contestation; a stress on agency over structure; and an emphasis on ideas/narratives, rather than structures.

**BOX 1 The Differentiated Power Model**

- Governance, rather than Government
- Mixed Modes of Governance, but Networks Main Mode
- A Hollowed-Out State
- Power Dependence, Involving Evolving, and Open, Exchange Relations
- Intergovernmental Relations
- A Segmented Executive
- Contested Political Traditions
- Focus on the Plurality of Civil Society, Reflected in the Involvement of the Private and the Voluntary Sector in Network Governance
- Pluralism

Power dependence, exchange relations and intergovernmental relations are key aspects of network governance and, thus, also fit happily with an interpretive approach. Here, the view is that the government is not dominant, as it is the Westminster model, but, rather, it is involved in a series of exchange relations with both sub-national governments and the private and voluntary sectors. As Bevir and Rhodes (2003, p. 41) put it: ‘British government has shifted (…) from the government of a unitary state to governance in and by networks’. So, as we saw earlier, while the government has certain resources, notably authority and legitimacy, the private and voluntary sector also have resources, for example, information and the capacity to reduce government’s cost both by cooperating in the administration of policy and, perhaps increasingly, being involved in the delivery of services. Similarly, while central government may make the laws, sub-national governments also have legitimacy and are responsible for delivering a broad range of services. As such, central government and both sub-central government and the private and voluntary sectors are interdependent and this is the basis of the exchange relations.

The Westminster model emphasized that British government was characterized by a strong, united, core executive. In contrast, the differentiated polity model asserts that the executive is segmented; that there are differences within the core executive, between ministers, departments and coordinating mechanisms, which mean that, once again, the polity is characterized by contestation and exchange relations – and hence, incidentally, the emphasis upon joined-up government in New Labour’s rhetoric.

In some senses, the idea that there are contested traditions within British governance is at the core of Bevir and Rhodes’ interpretive and ‘decentred’ approach. As indicated, they suggest that there are four contesting traditions within the UK: Tory; Liberal; Whig; and Socialist. However, to Bevir and Rhodes, traditions are not static and should not be
reified, rather agents are bearers of one, or a mixture, of them and they may, or may not, invoke them to explain/understand and respond to dilemmas. They argue (Bevir and Rhodes 2006):

Dilemmas and traditions cannot fully explain actions both because actions are informed by desires as well as beliefs and because people are agents who respond creatively to any given dilemma. Although dilemmas sometimes arise from experiences of the world, we cannot equate them with the world as it is because experiences are always theory-laden. Like meanings in general, dilemmas are always subjective or inter-subjective.

A dilemma is:

any experience or idea that conflicts with someone’s beliefs and so forces them to alter the beliefs they inherit as a tradition. It combines with the tradition to explain (although not determine) the beliefs people go on to adopt and so the actions they go on to perform’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2006b, p. 399).

Hall and the present author (Marsh and Hall 2007) critique Bevir and Rhodes’ view on British political traditions elsewhere (see also Smith 2008). Here, it is merely important to emphasize that this view of traditions is linked to Bevir and Rhodes’ interpretive approach, leading to a focus upon diversity, contestation, agency and the role of ideas.

The last two features of the differentiated polity model I have identified are not included by Rhodes in his list of the model’s features, although the first, the emphasis upon plurality, seems important and fairly easy to establish. Bevir and Rhodes do not talk of plurality as such, but it is a key feature of both an interpretive approach and the differentiated polity model. Certainly, there is no acknowledgement at all in Bevir and Rhodes’ work of any key divisions in civil society, based, for example, on class, gender or ethnicity, that might shape individual behaviour or political outcomes. This reflects their interpretive position and the fact that, as I have argued at more length elsewhere (Marsh 2009), they deny the existence of structures that constrain or facilitate agents. As such, civil society for Bevir and Rhodes is made up of agents who operate within traditions that they reflexively monitor in response to dilemmas. As Fawcett (2009) argues, Bevir and Rhodes focus heavily on reflexivity and situated agency, yet, at the same time, in their view, this agency is clearly affected by the traditions, acting almost as a structural constraint/facilitator. Nevertheless, there is no discussion of the processes through which this influence occurs. Plurality, together with contingency and the ubiquity of change are the key features of their analysis.

The idea that the differentiated polity model is a pluralist one is much more contentious and one which Rhodes does contest. Rhodes argues (2007, p. 1250): ‘I always explicitly agreed I presented a broadly neo-pluralist argument’. However, he denies that he considers power as diffuse, claiming rather that ‘power is structured in a few competing elites, which includes the private government of public policy by closed policy networks’ (Rhodes 2007, p. 1250). Certainly, I acknowledge that the differentiated polity model does not assume that the inevitable outcome of politics is a balanced polity; one in which everyone gains. However, in categorizing himself as an elite pluralist, he contends that power is shared, perhaps it’s better to say negotiated, between different levels of government and between government and agents negotiating on behalf of/representing other sectors, within networks. Of course, it should be added here that this takes us back to a previous point, because this elite pluralist ‘model’ does not fit well with an interpretivist position. The outcome is not a balance in the sense that classical pluralists would suggest. However,
the strong implication is that such negotiation is likely to be based upon a continuing exchange relationship which will be undermined if one partner involved in the exchange feels it is consistently losing out. Consequently, in my view this is a pluralist model (on this point, see also Smith 2008), certainly when compared to the asymmetric power model which I consider in the section that follows.

THE DIFFERENTIATED POWER MODEL, THE ASYMMETRIC POWER MODEL AND THE CONCEPT OF METAGOVERNANCE

One of the key issues I have with Bevir and Rhodes’ work is that they imply that, if one’s analysis is not underpinned by an interpretivist position, and does not acknowledge the superiority of a ‘decentred’ view of governance (and, to a large extent, the view that the UK is a differentiated polity), then one is operating with a positivist, or modern empiricist, approach, tied to the Westminster model (see, for example, Rhodes and Bevir 2003, pp. 59–60; Bevir and Rhodes 2006a, p. 76). Here, I want to argue that we need to take alternatives like the asymmetric power model and the metagovernance approach more seriously.

As such, my intention is not to defend the asymmetric power model or the concept of metagovernance (for those interested in a defence of the asymmetric power model, see Marsh (2008); and for a defence of the metagovernance perspective, see Fawcett (2009)). Rather, I want to outline these positions and contrast them with the differentiated polity model, so that it is perfectly clear what is at stake; which is a better model is, very largely, an empirical question.

An alternative: critical realism and the asymmetric power model

Bevir and Rhodes do not take the asymmetric power model, developed by Marsh, Richards and Smith (2002, 2003; see also McAnulla 2005), seriously. So, Chapter 5 of Bevir and Rhodes’ second book (2006), entitled Decentring Governance, deals with the various elements of the differentiated polity model, with no mention of the asymmetric power model. In my view, Bevir and Rhodes need to look beyond positivism and the Westminster model as their ‘other’, because the asymmetric power model offers a viable alternative to the differentiated power model. This is particularly the case because Bevir and Rhodes defend a notion of objectivity, not common among interpretivists, arguing: ‘Political scientists can retain a concept of objectivity defined by shared facts – as opposed to given facts – and by shared normative rules and practices that set criteria for comparative accounts (2003, p. 38). In this conception of objectivity, intellectual honesty in relation to the shared normative rules and practices is crucial. More specifically, the rules of intellectual honesty are: take criticism seriously; give preference to established standards of evidence, but be responsive to criticisms of them; and give preference to speculative, interesting theories (2003, p. 39). In neglecting critical realism and the asymmetric power model they seems to me to breach their first rule of intellectual honesty. Here, I intend briefly to outline the asymmetric power model and show how it is informed by critical realism, rather than positivism, which informs the Westminster model, or interpretivism, which underpins the differentiated polity model.

The asymmetric power model is outlined in table 1. In essence, this model accepts that there have been important changes in the nature of British governance, but rejects the idea that is has been transformed. To put it another way, the model suggests that there has been much more path dependency (on path dependency, historical institutionalism and critical
realism, see Fawcett and Marsh, 2011) than Rhodes acknowledges. More specifically, it contends that: (1) hierarchy, rather than networks, remains the dominant mode of governance and government remains strong, although increasingly challenged; (2) the power dependencies and the associated exchange relationships are clearly asymmetric; (3) there is a dominant, if contested, political tradition; and (4) the structured inequalities in society are reflected in asymmetries of power.

While the model emphasizes path dependency, it does not see this as determining outcomes. Rather, it sees the relationships between structure and agency, the material and the ideational and institutions and ideas as dialectical (on this, see Marsh 2010). So, it is rooted in the idea that structures and institutions constrain and facilitate, but do not determine, agent’s actions. In this way, the unequal distribution of resources within British society is reflected in access to the policy-making process and, thus, privileges some groups and disadvantages others; in an oft-used phrase, politics does not occur on a level playing field. However, unequal access to resources and to the policy-making process does not determine the policy outcomes. So, you cannot ‘read off’ policy outcomes on the basis of a knowledge/understanding of the patterns of inequality within society, in particular because such patterns of inequality are interpreted by agents. This interpretation will be affected, but again not determined, by discourses/narratives about the patterns of equality/inequality within society. Such narratives will be contested, although there may be a dominant discourse that constrains and facilitates, but again does not determine, outcomes. At the same time of course, different agents use resources more or less effectively. Finally, agents, in acting, can change the structure, notably in this case as a result of policy change, and the changed structure becomes the context within which the agents subsequently act.

It almost inevitably follows that the relationship between the material and the ideational is dialectical. Smith’s (2008, p. 151) argument here is again similar: ‘Beliefs are important but only in the context of a material reality and in accounting for action we need reference to beliefs and the real world. We cannot understand power by privileging belief, although we may need to analyse beliefs to understand power’. So, from this perspective, the material inequalities do not have a direct affect on outcomes, but, rather, they are narrated

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**TABLE 1 The Asymmetric Power Model and the Metagovernance Approach**

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<th>Asymmetric Power Model</th>
<th>Metagovernance Approach</th>
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<td>Governance, rather than Government</td>
<td>Government + Governance</td>
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<td>Mixed Modes of Governance, with Hierarchy</td>
<td>Mixed Modes of Governance, Occurring within the</td>
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<td>Main Mode</td>
<td>Shadow of Hierarchy</td>
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<td>Strong Government, although increasingly challenged</td>
<td>Strong State acting as the Key Metagovernor</td>
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<td>Power Dependence, involving asymmetric</td>
<td>Power Dependence, asymmetric relations which reflect</td>
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<td>Exchange Relations</td>
<td>past strategic struggles</td>
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<td>Intergovernmental Relations</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Strong, if Segmented, Executive</td>
<td>A Strong Executive, which reflects and reinforces the</td>
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<td>Contestations</td>
<td>unequal resources/power in society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominant Political Tradition, with increasing</td>
<td>Dominant, although perhaps increasingly contested,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality in Society</td>
<td>Discourse about economic, social and political values/organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetries of Power</td>
<td>Asymmetries of Power which reflect past struggles</td>
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and it is this narration which has an affect. Hay and Rosamond (2002) develop this point when they argue that New Labour was influenced by the dominant discourse about globalization, which emphasized both that globalization was a positive force and that it couldn’t be resisted, rather than by the actual extent of globalization. In contrast, I would argue that any narration about globalization constrained by ‘real’ pattern economic processes. As such, the actual extent of globalization constrains the ‘resonance’ of the discourse of globalization (see, for example, Marsh 2010a).

The asymmetric power model also sees the relationship between institutions and ideas as dialectical. In this vein, it argues that there is a dominant political tradition in the UK, based on a limited liberal notion of representation and a conservative notion of responsibility, which underpins the institutions and processes of British politics. I have developed this position at length elsewhere, engaging with Bevir and Rhodes’ interpretivist reading of British political traditions (Marsh 2003; Marsh and Hall 2006). In response to my original argument, Bevir and Rhodes assert (2007, p. 730):

Our account of governance (and the differentiated polity) differs from others in that it combines decentralizing with the aggregate concepts of tradition and dilemma. Marsh recognises that we want to decentralize, but he does not allow that our aggregate concepts are pragmatic ones. He assumes we are offering a model of British government rather than a series of stories about it.

They continue (2007, p. 731):

Because Marsh privileges reified concepts and models, he appears to want a single uniform view of power in British government. In contrast, because we believe in pragmatic concepts and narratives, we offer diverse, overlapping accounts of power and resistance at multiple sites throughout British government.

These quotes get to the core of my engagement with Bevir and Rhodes and, indeed, reflect some of the crucial differences between the differentiated polity model and the asymmetric power model.

First, as I indicated earlier, Bevir and Rhodes do talk about contestations between narratives and in later work about a differentiated polity narrative and a decentred approach. However, they also see the UK as a differentiated polity; a narrative which is also an empirically superior alternative to the Westminster model.

Second, Bevir and Rhodes barely acknowledge, let alone consider in any depth, the critical realist position. They do debate critical realism with McAnulla (Bevir and Rhodes 2006b; McAnulla 2006a, b), but they show no understanding of a critical realist position, in large part claiming that critical realism should embrace interpretivism (on this, see Marsh 2009) and, in so far as they address the asymmetric power model, and the position adopted by Richards, Smith and myself (2002, 2003), among others (see, for example, McAnulla 2006a, b), they seem almost wilfully to misunderstand it. I do not reify the British political tradition. Neither do I reify institutions or structures. I fully acknowledge that ideas about democracy are, and always have been, contested in the UK (as elsewhere). I also recognize that institutions, as well as ideas, are probably more subject to change in a period currently marked by increased complexity and risk; characterized by many as late modernity. However, in my view, the material and the ideational, and institutions and ideas, are best viewed as dualities, with the relationship between them as dialectical, that is interactive an iterative (on this, see Marsh 2009). To put it another way, unlike Bevir...
and Rhodes, I would argue that there is an extra-discursive realm; a realm that has causal powers independent of the narration of it.

As such, both ideas and institutions can, and do, change. This does not mean that change is as ubiquitous as Bevir and Rhodes’ approach implies; rather, there is often path dependency (on Bevir and Rhodes’ position on stability and change, see Marsh 2010b). The import of this is clear in the debate on the British political tradition. To recognize that there are contestations over understandings about democracy, and the relationship between these understandings and the institutions of British politics, does not mean that one cannot argue that there is a dominant tradition, although one which evolves. Indeed, that is exactly what I would argue. In my view, this question cannot be resolved by the assertion of an ontological and epistemological position, but that seems to me to be Bevir and Rhodes’ strategy. The main point here is that, as Hay (2007) emphasizes, these are ontological and epistemological differences that can’t be resolved empirically; you cannot ‘prove’ your ontological positions. Rather, it is an issue that needs to be examined empirically (and a number of scholars have done this, attempting to show how the British political tradition underpins the institutions and processes of British government (see, for example, Tant 1993; Evans 1995; Batters 2003; Evans 2003; McAnulla 2005; Hall 2008).

It should be clear then that, in part, the differences between the differentiated polity model and the asymmetric power model reflect the different epistemological positions of their proponents. However, they also reflect different readings of contemporary British politics and we need more work that investigates their relative merits.

**Metagovernance**

Fawcett (2009) adopts a metagovernance approach and is critical of both the differentiated polity model and the asymmetric power model, although more so of the former. It is also worth emphasizing that Fawcett, like Jessop, whose work he makes use of, is a critical realist, so he has significant reservations about Bevir and Rhodes’ interpretivist position.

In taking issue with the two extant models, Fawcett argues that both models tend to see government and governance as a dualism, when in fact they are better viewed as a duality; they coexist in different ways in different policy areas and different polities, and at different times. As such, we need a model of the British polity, or indeed any other polity, which both recognizes and attempts to theorize the articulation between government and governance.

Consequently, Fawcett criticizes both models for failing to recognize the existence of metagovernance, which is a process by which the state shapes both the particular form that hierarchy, networks or markets, as modes of governance, take within a policy area/political process, and the way in which each form articulates with other forms of governance. Here, Fawcett also takes issue with Sorensen and Torfing (2007) who see metagovernance as focusing entirely on network governance. They divide this question into three sub-questions: (1) how is the formation and mobilization of governance networks regulated through metagovernance; (2) how are network negotiations metagoverned; and (3) how does metagovernance affect the outcomes of governance networks (Sorensen and Torfing 2007, p. 182). In Fawcett’s view, they underestimate the role of the state and overestimate the incentives for non-state actors to participate in, and thus play a crucial role in, metagovernance. A similar argument is made by Bell and Hindmoor (2008) who suggest that, because non-state actors have little incentive to metagovern, the task is left to the state.

It is important here to stress that Jessop, and Fawcett, are not arguing that metagovernance eliminates other modes of coordination, rather it operates: ‘in a context of negotiated
decision making’ (Jessop 2004, pp. 70–1). So, governments oversee the various modes of governance through a process of metagovernance:

Governments play a major and increasing role in all aspects of metagovernance: they get involved in redesigning markets, in constitutional change and the juridical re-regulation of organizational forms and objectives, in organizing the conditions for self-organization, and, most importantly, in collaboration (Jessop 2004, pp. 70–1).

Here, they are taking particular issue with the idea of the ‘hollowing out’, or the increasing marginalization, of the state. As such, the metagovernance perspective of Jessop and Fawcett differs starkly from the view of Bevir and Rhodes that there are different possible articulations between the three key modes of governance, hierarchy, markets and networks, although with a particular stress on the increasing importance of networks. In contrast, their argument, in the words of Flinders and Matthews (2007, p. 196), is that:

rather than its marginalization, meta-governance highlights a revitalized role for the state in providing the context for the design of self-organization, ensuring the relative coherency of diverse aims and objectives, and setting the parameters within which governance transactions take place.

As such, following Jessop, but again contra Sørensen and Torfing (2007), Fawcett argues that, while hierarchies, markets and networks are distinct modes of government, hierarchy and control remain (Fawcett 2009, p. 24):

an important, if not the most important, form of coordination and governance, whether it is actively imposed on others from above or used as a latent threat to ensure compliance. This is because the state is typically understood to have retained its capacity to intervene in the activities of self-regulating markets and networks.

So, to Fawcett, like Jessop, network governance (and indeed other modes of governance) often occurs within what they term the shadow of hierarchy; a concept Jessop takes from the work of Scharpf (see, for example, 1994). As Jessop (2004, p. 52) puts it:

The forms of intervention associated with the state and statecraft are not confined to imperative coordination, that is, centralized planning or top-down intervention. Paraphrasing Gramsci, who analysed the state apparatus in its inclusive sense as ‘political society + civil society’ and saw state power as involving ‘hegemony armoured by coercion’, we could also describe the state apparatus as based on ‘government + governance’ and as exercising ‘governance in the shadow of hierarchy’.

Fawcett also follows Jessop in identifying four different forms of metagovernance involving different sets of practices by which the state manages different modes of governance. The first three of these forms are associated with markets, networks and hierarchy, respectively. So, as Fawcett (2009, p. 77) puts it, for Jessop: ‘metagovernance occurs at the level of: meta-exchange, in the case of markets; meta-organization, in the case of hierarchy; and meta-heterarchy, in the case of networks’.

It is the fourth form of metagovernance, collibration, which is the most unfamiliar. Indeed, Jessop argues that it is ignored, and thus not theorized, because researchers focus upon particular modes of governance and how they operate within certain policy areas and/or certain political systems, rather than focusing upon: ‘questions (about) the relative compatibility or incompatibility of different governance regimes’ (Jessop 2004, p. 61). As such, Jessop contends that governance failure does occur. Indeed, each mode
of governance has strengths and weakness and is, thus, susceptible to particular failures. Consequently, metagovernance requires reflexivity and a sense of irony among the governors (Jessop 2003).

Fawcett emphasizes that, while the concept of collaboration originates in the work of Dunsire (1996): 'it has been adapted and applied by Jessop to refer to the ways in which political authorities in, and across, all political levels have become increasingly involved in providing the ground-rules for governance' (Fawcett 2009, p. 42). Consequently, it involves attempts: 'to modify the relative weight and targets of exchange, hierarchy, and networking in the overall coordination of relations of complex interdependence' (Jessop 2004, p. 62). Of course, this crucially involves the state and: ‘different forms of coordination (markets, hierarchies, networks, and solidarities) and the different forms of self-organization characteristic of governance take place in the shadow of hierarchy’ (Jessop 2004, p. 65).

Finally, and crucially, Fawcett argues that neither the differentiated power model, nor the asymmetric power model, is adequately grounded in a sophisticated state theory. He, like I, sees the differentiated polity model as essentially pluralist. As such, he contends that it fails to locate the role of the state in contemporary society in a broader political, economic and socio-cultural context which acknowledges that the modern pattern of governance, and metagovernance, reflect the outcome of past strategic struggles. In short, arrangements are not formed, nor do they operate, on a level playing field. Here, he turns to Jessop’s strategic relational approach and argues (Fawcett 2009, p. 37):

Jessop is specifically concerned with analysing how the state is involved in managing, blending and asymmetrically privileging the organization of the conditions of governance and the relative mix between hierarchy, markets and networks, which are understood as different forms of coordination. Metagovernance therefore not only indicates a continued role for the state in the regulation of self-regulating governance networks, but it also casts doubt on the view that the vertical hierarchies of the old social structures of the state have been replaced or subsumed by such networks. In this way, the Strategic Relational Approach argues that power is much more concentrated than the networked polity model or the differentiated polity model would suggest.

Fawcett acknowledges that the asymmetric power model also recognizes that the playing field is not level, and indeed is marked by structured inequality. However, this inequality is not theorized, but rather asserted. As such, this aspect of the model is, at best, underdeveloped.

Fawcett’s work, which builds on Jessop’s state theory and understanding of metagovernance, is important because it raises important issues, which neither the differentiated model, nor the asymmetric power model, address in sufficient depth. I have outlined the main elements of the metagovernance approach in table 1. The key contributions it makes to the debate are: the very direct recognition that governance and government coexist; the concept of metagovernance itself and the recognition that the form of the three modes of governance identified by Rhodes and others, hierarchy, networks and market, and the relationship between these forms, may themselves be metagoverned; the concept of the shadow of hierarchy; the recognition of the role that the state can play in metagovernance, with the accompanying recognition that the state may not be as ‘hollowed out’ as authors such as Rhodes claim; and the attempt to theorize the origins and operation of the asymmetric power in the system, but using and developing a more sophisticated theory of the state.
IN CONCLUSION

Rhodes’ differentiated polity model has made a major contribution to the study of British politics, and indeed has offered insights into the operation of modern polities more generally. In a sense it has become the new orthodoxy when trying to conceptualize British politics, replacing the Westminster model. As such, Rhodes has made more students of British politics move away from description to try to understand how the institutions and processes of British politics relate.

However, the model is not without its detractors and, as I have argued here, they need to be taken seriously. In particular, advocates of the differentiated polity model need to move away from treating the Westminster Model, and more fundamentally what Bevir and Rhodes term modern empiricism, as the only alternative. Here, I have considered two alternatives, each informed by critical realism, rather than a positivism, or modern empiricism: the asymmetric power model; and the metagovernance approaches. My aim has been to make it clear how these positions differ.

Bevir and Rhodes make much of their interpretivism and, certainly, this position has underpinned the differentiated polity model in its later manifestations. However, the terminology I have used here is revealing. In these later manifestations, Bevir and Rhodes no longer talk of a differentiated polity model; now it is a narrative. In my view, here their interpretivism gets in the way. It is important to recognize that the different models/approaches/narratives are underpinned by different ontological and epistemological positions, but if we treat them as models that allow us to understand (or explain) the operation of a given political system, then the key point, surely, is to use the models empirically and assess their utility.

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