

Territoires, réseaux et solidarités : Les politiques publiques de l'éducation et de la santé à l'épreuve d'une recomposition de l'Etat-providence.

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New Welfare Subjects, New Ethics?

One of the key changes brought about by contemporary modes of welfare regulation is the increased emphasis placed upon the idea of the welfare subject as 'involved'. To be involved in this context means in one way or another to be an active participant in welfare processes and relationships and no longer merely a passive recipient of welfare goods and services. There are a range of kinds and degrees of involvement that are currently being encouraged, including public participation in the design of services, the introduction of new markets and quasi-markets that enable users to choose providers, forms of partnership-working with established professional groups, which themselves include a spectrum between consultation and co-production, the devolution of service provision to user groups and the complete delegation of choice of welfare goods to individual users through personal budgets.

In this paper we want to use examples from education and health to explore the ethical implications of the idea of the involved welfare subject, but before doing so it is worth briefly setting these changes in the context of some broader sociological readings - both in order to help make sense of where these changes have come from and to begin to get a feel for the normative shifts they can be seen to represent. Specifically, we will say a few words about theories of reflexive modernity, neo-Marxist critiques of contemporary economic change, and poststructuralist theories of governmentality.

These three sociological approaches help to illuminate different dimensions of the welfare subject that are brought into existence by new discourses of involvement. In a nutshell, these can be summarised as continuously reinvented selves, flexible economic subjects, and governed souls. Although these approaches can be seen as competing they can equally well be treated as complementary, highlighting different elements of contemporary political

ideologies. For example, Giddens' account of self-making projects characteristic of reflexive modernity is closely associated with third way/neo-liberal interpretations of social democracy. The key idea here is that welfare requires attention to both autonomy and particularity, i.e. that autonomy is a fundamental condition of, and intrinsic to, welfare and partly for this reason what counts as welfare enhancing varies from person to person. By contrast, neo-marxist and Foucauldian readings offer critiques of this liberal construction of autonomy. The former points to the relations of oppression and inequality that are obscured by the neo-liberal focus on individual choice making and the latter to the potential for moralism and authoritarianism being exercised in and through processes of autonomisation (i.e. making people autonomous) which are simultaneously directed at responsabilisation (i.e. making people responsible).

The tensions between these different ideological perspectives form the background against which we will review 'the ethics of new welfare'. We will look at some of the key ethical issues or dilemmas associated with the involvement agenda confronting policymakers, professionals and welfare subjects in turn. For example, how do policymakers and professionals hold together the elements of 'libertarian paternalism'? How can users negotiate the tensions between their identities as consumers and as citizens? Finally, how do these value disputes relate to some of the more traditional welfarist concerns of equality and solidarity?