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## **Part I**

### **The Ideology of New Labour**

# 1

## The Ambiguities of the Third Way

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‘...the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender to them.’  
George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’

### 1. Introduction: a problem of self-definition

What does New Labour stand for? What is its ambition for British society? What is the public philosophy in terms of which it seeks to mobilize activists and citizens and how does this public philosophy differ from that of the right? These questions are posed by many political commentators, both in Britain and abroad. The puzzle to which they point, however, is one that is not confined to external commentators, but is to a great extent shared by many supporters and perhaps even members of the government. New Labour is clear about what it is not. It is not old-fashioned ‘statist social democracy’ and it is not free-market neo-liberalism. But how to state in more positive terms what it stands for?

This question, the question of New Labour’s public philosophy, has become a major theme of the first years of the Blair government. Intriguingly, the government has to some extent purposefully raised the profile of the issue. And it has itself tried to frame the terms of the discussion by introducing the concept of the ‘third way’. The questions with which we began have been translated and collapsed into one simple question: ‘What is the third way?’ Intellectuals close to Tony Blair have given their answer (Giddens 1998; Halpern and Mikosz eds 1998), and so too has Blair himself (Blair 1998).

Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the third way has thus far failed to capture the public’s imagination. One reason for this, I believe, is that despite recent efforts to clarify the concept, the nature of the third way remains fundamentally vague and elusive. It is not really a concept or an ideology, but, to use Steven Lukes’s phrase, a rhetorically defined space (Lukes 1999: 3–4).<sup>2</sup> This space is defined in terms both of values and of receptivity to certain kinds of policy instruments. But the space involved is

an expansive one, large enough to spread over a number of important intellectual divisions which correspond to potentially very different political projects. Some of these projects are clearly continuous with the Labour Party's tradition of egalitarian social democracy. Others are much less so.

Thus, what progressives ultimately have to decide is not simply whether they support 'the' third way, but what kind of third way project they favour; and whether, given its apparently inherent ambiguities, the dis-couragement of the third way is in fact one that they wish to employ at all. A distinction might be made between the substance of the third-way debate, which has raised some interesting questions and stimulated some interesting contributions as regards possible futures for progressive politics; and the form of this debate, the insistence on framing questions under the rubric of a search for a third way. Form has almost certainly damaged substance. Those interested in the future of progressive politics should, I believe, renounce the form, focus more clearly on the substantive issues at stake, and state more precisely in their own terms where they stand – accepting that when they do this, they may well find themselves standing in somewhat different positions.

## **2. The value framework: opportunity, responsibility and community**

One way in which people have attempted to answer the question 'What is the third way?' is by reference to values. It is often said that the third way is about finding ways to promote 'traditional values in a changed [or modern] world' (Blair 1998: 1). What values, then, supposedly animate the putative third-way approach to economic and social governance?

When one looks over recent attempts to articulate a left or 'centre-left' philosophy of government (e.g., Commission on Social Justice 1994, Brown 1994, Blair 1996), as well as more recent explicit efforts to define the third way (Giddens 1998, Blair 1998), three concepts occupy the centre-stage: opportunity, responsibility and community. Interestingly, all three concepts also feature in statements of 'New Democrat' belief in the USA, including many of President Clinton's speeches.<sup>3</sup> At least in the Anglo-American context, then, the putative third way may be defined at the normative level by commitment to these three values, regarded, moreover, as mutually implicated and reinforcing.

1) *Real opportunity*: The value of 'opportunity' can obviously be interpreted in various ways. Within the framework of recent left (or 'centre-left') thinking it refers primarily to substantive or real opportunity to enjoy and deploy strategic goods such as education, jobs, income and wealth. The ideal of a society in which all citizens enjoy adequate levels of real opportunity, in something like this sense, is often described in contemporary left (or 'centre-left') literature as a 'stakeholder society' (see Layard 1997: 5–6,

for an example of such usage). And the evil of 'social exclusion' can be understood in terms of patterns of distribution that deny people access to minimally decent shares of these goods, i.e., which deprive them of their rightful 'stake'. The commitment to real opportunity is typically linked to notions of 'equality' or 'equal worth' (Blair 1998: 3, Giddens 1998: 102). In essence, the commitment to real opportunity embodies a principle of equal concern and respect and may require certain kinds of substantive equality for its satisfaction.

2) *Civic responsibility*: Within the value framework of putative third-way thinking the commitment to real opportunity is conjoined with an emphasis on civic responsibility. Once again, the concept of 'civic responsibility' can obviously be elaborated in various ways. Concretely, individuals should not try to free-ride on the productive efforts of their fellow citizens; they should take primary responsibility for nurturing and providing for their children; they should bear a fair share of the taxes necessary to ensure adequate opportunities and public goods for all; and they should recognize and act on their responsibilities to the natural environment. Those who ignore these civic responsibilities offload certain costs of a civilized, common life onto others and thereby live at the latter's expense. As a matter of justice, the state should clearly define and, where necessary, enforce the obligations which derive from these basic responsibilities. As Giddens puts it (1998: 65): 'One might suggest as a prime motto for the new politics, *no rights without responsibilities*.'

3) *Community*: A third key value in putative third-way thinking is 'community' (Blair 1994, 1996, 1998; Brown 1994). Perhaps even more contestable than the preceding two values, this concept is employed in two distinct ways, in what one might call 'macro' and 'micro' senses. In the first, macro sense, it can be said to refer to the quality social relations have when the preceding two values are satisfied: a society exhibits the good of community when, and only when, it secures real opportunity for all on the basis of shared, equitably enforced, civic responsibilities. There is no genuine community without real 'opportunity for all', for without this some will suffer exclusion and second-class membership. But there is also no genuine community without a general acceptance of civic responsibilities, for without this some will live 'aristocratically', at the expense of others. In the second, micro sense community refers to local attachment and attendant solidarities, a localized public good that contributes in itself to real opportunity and which may also help to undergird a sense of civic responsibility (see Teles and Landy in this volume, Chapter 8, and the brief discussion of social capital in section 3 below).

Another putative third-way value, given particular emphasis by Giddens (1998: 70–8), is 'democracy'. For Giddens, the putative third way must be centrally about 'deepening democracy', about making sure that there is 'no authority without accountability'. This implies not merely the conven-

tional British reform agenda of devolution, and perhaps electoral reform, but a willingness to establish new democratic fora to connect citizen and state and to build legitimacy thereby for controversial public decisions in areas like science and technology. In some versions of the third way, therefore, the value of democracy rests alongside the 'core' values of opportunity, responsibility and community described above.

If this is the value framework of the putative third way, then it is by no means vacuous or empty of implication. It is clear, for example, that the commitment to real opportunity rules out libertarianism or a conservative form of meritocracy of the kind defended by Friedrich Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty*. The commitment to civic responsibility – and to its enforcement – also distinguishes the putative third way from certain other ideological positions. It arguably marks a difference, for example, with what David Piachaud has termed 'mid-century Fabianism', perhaps the dominant ideology of social-democratic reformists in Britain for much of the late twentieth century (Piachaud 1993). Mid-century Fabianism saw the state as having all sorts of enforceable responsibilities towards its individual citizens, but, as Piachaud argues, tended to downplay the idea that the individual citizen also has enforceable responsibilities towards the wider community. In this respect, the putative third way has more in common with earlier currents of progressive thinking, such as 'New Liberalism' (and perhaps turn-of-the-century Fabianism). As articulated in the work of Leonard Hobhouse, for example, New Liberalism affirmed the state's role in defining and enforcing responsible behaviour on the part of the individual citizen even as, at the very same time, the state seeks to secure real opportunity for all (see especially Hobhouse 1994: chs 7, 8).

The third-way conception of civic responsibility should probably also be distinguished, however, from the New Right's ethic of 'self-reliance'. If people discharge responsibilities of the kind described above – to work, to nurture and provide for their children, and so on – many of them will thereby attain a state of economic self-reliance. By the same token, a failure of self-reliance will sometimes be symptomatic of a failure to carry out these basic responsibilities. But it does not follow that this ethic of civic responsibility is coterminous with universal self-reliance. For people can obviously suffer great misfortunes – unemployment, ill-health, etc. – through no fault of their own, and they will then have a legitimate claim to assistance that in no way impugns their status as responsible citizens. To deny this and to insist that people always 'stand on their own two feet' would be to renege on the commitment to guarantee real opportunity for all.

However, while the value framework of the putative third way is by no means vacuous and without some substantive implications, it cannot be said that the framework amounts, in itself, to anything like a complete political philosophy. It is a *framework*, and a relatively general one at that,

which can be rendered more determinate and concrete in a number of ways. As I shall show in section 4, different elaborations of the core values of real opportunity and civic responsibility can issue in very different political philosophies and projects.

### **3. The broad policy framework: rethinking collective action**

An alternative way of trying to define the putative third way is by reference to distinctive policy stances and instruments – the ‘means’ of collective action rather than the ‘ends’ with which we were concerned in the previous section. In recent years there has been a wave of new thinking about how governments can and should act to promote progressive values, and the resulting ideas have acquired considerable saliency in the course of efforts to define the putative third way. Here I shall simply list and describe, in no particular order, what I take to be the most important ideas or sets of ideas:

- 1) The state should be seen as the guarantor, but not necessarily as the direct provider, of opportunity goods.
- 2) A receptivity to forms of ‘mutualism’ as a way of achieving progressive ends.
- 3) New thinking about public finance in connection with the state’s role as guarantor of opportunity goods.
- 4) Employment-centered social policy.
- 5) ‘Asset-based egalitarianism’.

1) *The state as guarantor, not necessarily provider.* According to one tradition in social-democratic thinking, the state is obliged to guarantee citizens access to certain opportunity goods (healthcare, education, etc.) and in general it ought itself to provide these goods. An alternative view insists that the state has the responsibility of guaranteeing access to such goods but denies that the state must directly provide these goods itself in order to discharge this responsibility.

First the state might continue to finance provision of certain opportunity goods while at the same time leaving actual production of the goods to other agencies. For example, the state might grant each citizen funds to acquire some high minimum of education and training (through such things as ‘Individual Learning Accounts’), but it does not necessarily have to provide that education and training itself. Another means of separating finance and production roles is through the use of ‘quasi-markets’ in organizing the provision of goods such as healthcare and personal social services (Le Grand 1989, 1997, Bartlett et al. 1998).

Secondly, the state need not necessarily even be the primary financer of provision, but may confine itself to erecting a regulatory framework within

which citizens are guaranteed access to opportunity goods. A pertinent example here would be recent proposals for a system of universal compulsory second pensions (Field 1996, Layard 1997). Citizens would be required to save some proportion of their income in funded pensions schemes, with subsidies for low earners, so as to ensure an adequate second pension for all. This is a potential example of what Julian Le Grand terms 'legal welfarism' in contrast with conventional 'fiscal welfarism' (Le Grand 1997). Under legal welfarism, the state requires the citizen, or more usually third parties, to undertake actions which ensure that he/she subsequently has access to important goods. Other examples of legal welfarism include: minimum wage legislation (requiring employers to pay their workers at least some prescribed amount); child support legislation (requiring absent parents to contribute to the upkeep of their children); and school-parent contracts (which might, for example, require parents to prevent their children playing truant). Legal welfarism clearly coheres with the emphasis on civic responsibility in the value framework of the putative third way.

2) *Receptivity to forms of mutualism.* Intersecting with this concern to rethink how the state might secure access to opportunity goods, on equitable terms, without necessarily providing them itself, is a renewal of interest in various forms of 'mutualism'.

One set of proposals, for example, is that the state should help and encourage Friendly Societies and other secondary associations to play a greater role in the organization and administration of welfare provision (Hirst 1994, 1997, Field 1996, Hargreaves 1998). Similarly, it has been argued that the state should help and encourage the formation of local Credit Unions to provide financial services to vulnerable, low income families (Toynbee 1998: 6).<sup>4</sup> There is related interest in 'time currencies' and Local Exchange and Trading Schemes as ways of reviving economic activity in disadvantaged communities (Boyle 1999). Tim Bentley and Geoff Mulgan have argued for a new form of association, the 'employee mutual', to provide protection for individuals in the labour market. Owned by their members, employee mutuals would organize training for their members and would negotiate the sale of their members' services to employers (Bentley and Mulgan 1996). They could also take on other welfare functions. Peter Kenway and Guy Palmer, along with Gerald Holtham, have argued that public utilities and other service industries should be reorganized as customer mutuals as an alternative both to conventional nationalization and privatized industry (Kenway and Palmer 1997, Holtham 1998).

An emphasis on the good of mutuality can also be discerned in recent thinking about business strategy and organization. Enterprises should not be seen as necessarily hierarchical entities which exist solely for the good of shareholders, but as sites of long-term, mutually advantageous cooperation between capital-holders and employees. Institutionally, such enterprises will be characterized by the use of various forms of revenue/profit-sharing

and employee involvement in decision-making. It is argued that such 'mutual gains' enterprises are likely to be more efficient, especially in pursuing quality-centered product market strategies (Ferne and Metcalf 1995, Levine 1995, Layard 1997). There are important disagreements, however, as to the appropriate extent and form of state intervention in developing such enterprises. For some, exhortation is sufficient. Others countenance tax incentives to encourage employee share ownership (Mulgan and Murray 1994). Others favour legally mandated works councils, and legislating to discourage hostile takeovers (Hutton 1995, 1997, Kay 1996).

The growing interest in mutualism is also related to a growing interest amongst social scientists in the effects and construction of so-called 'social capital' (see Putnam 1993) – roughly speaking, stable interactive relationships that help bind people to cooperative norms and which thereby help to promote desirable social outcomes (economic, social and political). Mutualist initiatives, such as the establishment of new Credit Unions in low-income communities, may provide a way of rebuilding social capital where it is currently lacking, with, it is argued, a wide range of positive knock-on effects for these communities and the wider society (Commission on Social Justice 1994, King 1997).

3) *New thinking about public finance*. While many have argued in recent years that the state should recast its role in securing citizen access to opportunity goods, few have denied that the state will continue to have a significant role in providing and financing the provision of these goods. Given the perceived tax aversion of electorates in advanced capitalist societies, progressive policy thinkers have been under pressure to come up with new ideas as to how the state can raise the necessary revenues. I list just a few of the more notable ideas here.

a) Environmental taxes and charges: These would seem to cohere with the commitment to civic responsibility described above (they seem to follow from the obligation to make responsible use of the environment, paying the community for the extra costs one inflicts upon it). But some also argue that increased use of such taxes will allow for a reduction in taxes on earnings so boosting employment (Robertson 1996, Holtham and Tindale 1996). Thus there may be a link between this policy proposal and the idea of an employment-centred social policy which I shall describe below.

b) Hypothecation at the margin: Some argue that voter resistance to new taxes can be reduced if the link between new taxes and benefits is made clearer. Hypothecation of new taxes to specific goods, e.g. education, healthcare, or long-term care in old age, is thought to offer one way of doing this (Mulgan and Murray 1994, Hills 1997).

c) New consultative procedures on tax: Governments should connect with citizens on tax issues more directly through new consultative procedures akin to 'deliberative opinion polls' (Halpern 1997).

d) Community Fund ('Topsy Turvy Nationalization'): Under this proposal (Holtham 1995, Meade 1991, 1994), the state gradually acquires a share of the nation's productive assets and places these assets in a special fund (private-sector institutions may be contracted to manage the fund). The returns on the assets can then be used to finance provision of goods like education and healthcare. Initial capital for the fund could come from a revitalized inheritance tax or a wealth tax. While this idea is not on the immediate policy agenda in Britain, similar ideas have been floated in the US, not least by President Clinton, as a way of securing the long-term viability of the public pensions system (Blackburn 1999).

4) *Employment-centred social policy*. A fourth theme of recent policy discussions on the left is employment-centred social policy (a term I borrow from Haveman 1997): the central aim of social policy must be to enable citizens to achieve a decent standard of living through employment, and, since employment is becoming increasingly knowledge-based, this must be based on encouraging the ongoing acquisition of skills (Rogers and Streeck 1994, Commission on Social Justice 1994, Brown 1994, Layard 1997). Consequent policy proposals focus on enhancing the capabilities of disadvantaged workers (through increased access to education and training and childcare); and increasing the work incentives of disadvantaged workers (through some combination of a minimum wage and new or reformed 'in-work benefits' (see Ellwood 1988)). Since it will take a long time for new educational initiatives to feed through, it is sometimes argued that other complementary measures are necessary in the meantime to increase the demand for unskilled workers and/or to prevent entry into long-term unemployment (Phelps 1997, Haveman 1997, Layard 1997).

5) *Asset-based egalitarianism*. Closely linked with the idea of employment-centred social policy is the idea of 'asset-based egalitarianism' (Freeman and Rogers 1997). The basic idea is that the left's traditional distributive objectives should not only be pursued through income redistribution, or solidaristic wage policy, but by more concerted action to change the initial distribution of assets and productive endowments, such as skills, which people bring to the market in the first place (Rogers and Streeck 1994, Commission on Social Justice 1994, Freeman and Rogers 1997, Bowles and Gintis 1998). Employment-centred social policy can be seen as one application of this general idea. Another area of application is *asset-building policies*, such as the aforementioned proposals for universal second pensions (Field 1996) or tax incentives to encourage saving amongst the asset poor. More radical still are policies of explicit *asset-based redistribution*, such as the proposal to provide every citizen on maturity with a basic capital grant that he/she would then be free to use for approved activities such as education and training or setting up a new business (Haveman 1988, Le Grand 1989, White 1991, Ackerman and Alstott 1999). In this vein, for example, Ackerman and Alstott advocate endowing each US citizen on maturity with

a grant of some \$80,000 to be paid for out of a tax on wealth and inheritances.

#### **4. Not one third way, but many**

We have now reviewed the value and broad policy frameworks of the putative third way. I want now to suggest, however, that there can be (and currently are) important differences of opinion concerning the interpretation of the core values and how the state should seek to advance them. And these differences ultimately suggest very different, to some extent opposing, political philosophies and projects.

There are at least two important lines of division within the rhetorical space of the putative third way. There is, firstly, an important and potentially fractious division between 'leftists' and 'centrists' over the commitment to real opportunity: a philosophical division over exactly what this is a commitment to and, derivatively, a division over exactly what policies are needed to satisfy it.

Secondly, there is a no less important and potentially fractious division between 'liberals' and 'communitarians' over the commitment to civic responsibility – more specifically, over the precise range of behaviours for which individuals are appropriately seen as responsible to the community and which the state may therefore legitimately seek to regulate.

1) *Leftists vs. centrists: the ambiguity of real opportunity.* The people whom I am here terming centrists understand the commitment to real opportunity primarily in meritocratic terms. The people I am terming leftists, on the other hand, interpret the commitment to real opportunity in more egalitarian terms. Perhaps influenced by contemporary egalitarian political philosophy (see especially Rawls 1972, Dworkin 1981, and Cohen 1989), the leftists argue that meritocracy allows for unjust inequalities in real opportunity grounded in morally arbitrary ('brute luck') differences in natural ability. They believe that, in principle, policy ought to seek to mitigate for these undeserved brute luck inequalities.

From this philosophical difference, certain policy differences can of course follow. In particular, while accepting the need for a general reorientation towards 'asset-based egalitarianism', leftists will accord a larger continuing role to income redistribution in promoting genuine equality of real opportunity than centrists. Centrists will downplay the importance of income redistribution. Indeed, as qualified meritocrats, they will think it *unjust* to tax away the returns to superior ability beyond a moderate point. Blair (1998: 3) is perhaps endorsing the centrist position when he writes of how the left has in the past 'stifled opportunity in the name of an abstract equality'. While not strictly inconsistent with the leftist position as here defined, this is probably intended as a rejection of the level of income redistribution that leftism calls for. On the other hand, as we saw above,

Blair does state that 'equal worth' is a defining value of the third way, and it is precisely this foundational value to which leftists appeal when they critique meritocratic arrangements for arbitrarily penalizing the less talented (Rawls 1972, Dworkin 1985) and/or for creating a society riven by inequalities of status and respect (Tawney 1964). It would, moreover, be quite wrong to suppose that all social-democratic modernizers, either in Britain or elsewhere in the advanced capitalist world, embrace the centrist position (see especially Vandembroucke in this volume, Chapter 12). There is no reason why those who are committed to a form of equal opportunity that goes beyond meritocracy cannot try to rethink their 'strategy of equality' by reference to the broad policy framework described in section 3. It is perfectly possible to be an egalitarian of a Rawlsian or near-Rawlsian variety at the philosophical level, and at the same time an open-minded modernizer at the level of policy.

2) *Liberals vs. communitarians: the ambiguity of civic responsibility.* Those sympathetic to the value framework of the putative third way claim that individuals have important civic responsibilities and that the state may and often should act to enforce the obligations which derive from these responsibilities. There is, moreover, a plausible range of consensus on what these responsibilities include: the responsibility to work (in return for a share of the social product) and to make an effort to acquire relevant skills for work; the responsibility to be a good parent (if one chooses to be a parent); the responsibility to pay a fair share of taxes; the responsibility to respect the environment. Nevertheless, there can be (and currently are) important disagreements about the precise range of behaviours for which people can reasonably be held responsible to the community and which the state may therefore legitimately regulate. The people I am here calling communitarians interpret this range of behaviours quite broadly, while those I am calling liberals interpret it more narrowly.

Take the case of family policy. The typical communitarian, as I am here using the term, will argue that the state has a legitimate interest in encouraging married two-parent families and that public policy ought to reflect this interest, for example by favourable tax treatment, tougher divorce laws, etc. Through such policies, the state encourages or requires individuals to act on their responsibilities as spouses and parents with positive repercussions for the community as a whole. The typical liberal, on the other hand, will see such policies as unfairly restricting or infringing personal freedom. Or take the case of drugs policy. The typical communitarian will see drug use as paradigmatically irresponsible behaviour which ought to be prohibited and punished. The typical liberal, on the other hand, will make the basic Millian distinction (Mill, 1985) between punishing someone for harmful behaviour which results from use of a given substance (which punishment is legitimate), and punishing someone for mere

use of the substance regardless of how the person then behaves (which punishment is illegitimate). Relatedly, the liberal will in general be more hesitant about recourse to 'legal welfarism' (Le Grand 1997).

In short, the liberal will want to identify a limited number of very specific civic obligations and will acknowledge the legitimate role of the state in enforcing these specific obligations (witness, for example, John Stuart Mill's trenchant defence of the state's right to force parents to support and educate their children). But what the liberal will reject is the idea that the state may and should enforce 'good behaviour' in any very general sense. The liberal will see this as dangerously moralistic, i.e., as providing an alarming opportunity for elites or majorities to attack non-conformity for its own sake. On the other side, the communitarian, following such thinkers as Etzioni (1993) and Galston (1991), might argue that the liberal has an impoverished view of the rich social capital which undergirds civilized life, and of what is necessary to protect such capital from erosion.

There are thus at least two lines of division – leftist vs. centrist, liberal vs. communitarian – that cut across the rhetorical space of the putative third way. This space contains significant differences of opinion on values and public policy and these differences in turn define distinct, potentially opposing, political projects. On the one hand, for example, it is possible to speak of a 'leftist liberal' conception of the third way. This would combine a relatively strong emphasis on the continuing importance of income redistribution in pursuing the goal of real opportunity with a relatively narrow conception of the types of behaviour which the state may seek to regulate in the name of civic responsibility. On the other hand, it is also possible to discern a possible 'centrist communitarian' third way which would reverse these directions of emphasis. The former political project, I would argue, is genuinely social democratic (as well as liberal), whereas the latter project could conceivably end up having as much or more in common with a leftish one-nation Toryism of the Macmillan variety or leftish variant of continental Christian Democracy. Nor do these two positions exhaust the possibilities. It is perfectly possible to conceive of a 'centrist liberal' conception of the third way or, indeed, a 'leftist communitarian' conception of the third way.

There may also be further dimensions of disagreement pertaining to other values that I have not considered in depth here. In particular, Steven Lukes (1999: 3) has suggested that the value of democracy is the focus of another fundamental division within the camp of the putative third way between 'those inclined to concentrate power in the hands of the specially qualified, whether politically or managerially or technically, and those who favour its wide dispersion into the hands of the governed, enabling them to participate maximally in public deliberation and decision-making.'

## 5. Conclusion: moving the 'third-way debate' beyond the 'third way'

Contrary to some critics, it is possible to identify distinctive value and policy frameworks that define a putative third-way approach to economic and social policy. But this does not mean that the third way amounts to a distinctive, coherent and progressive public philosophy. For its defining frameworks are broad enough to accommodate some quite basic disagreements on values and policy – disagreements that cut across opposing public philosophies in the true sense of the word.<sup>5</sup>

This capaciousness and ambiguity reflects the coalitional character and ambition of New Labour. It is also, relatedly, a reflection of the 'newness' of New Labour: of the fact that this political current contains many possible futures, not all of which can ultimately be squared with each other. But this capaciousness and structural ambiguity do mean that the putative third way cannot perform the function that its proponents claim for it. It cannot serve as a public philosophy, simply because it skirts over the hard choices across values and policy orientations that define genuine public philosophies.

George Orwell recognized that to engage in serious and truly free political thinking we have to get our ideas clear first and *in the process* choose the words that are most appropriate to express them: freedom of thought *is* autonomy in the use of language (Orwell 1983). But this is exactly the reverse of the way in which the third-way discussion has proceeded in Britain. Contrary to Orwell's advice, those who have tried to answer the question, 'What is the third way?', have 'surrendered' to a phrase and have then cast frantically about for its meaning. This does not mean that the 'third-way debate' has been useless. It has provoked people into a real discussion, not only within Britain, but across Europe and (probably to a lesser extent) in the USA, about the future of progressive governance – though some have also probably been discouraged from entering into this debate by what they perceive as the shallowness of the third-way concept. But in the spirit of Orwell, with his acute sense of how language can control and distort thought, progressives should now put the ambiguous language of the third way aside and focus directly on the questions at stake in this debate: What values ought progressives to affirm (in particular, what kinds of equality)? What institutional arrangements can significantly advance these values in contemporary circumstances?

### Notes

- 1 This chapter is taken, with some revisions, from an earlier article, 'The "Third Way": Not One Road, But Many', *Renewal*, 6, 1998: 17–30. I am particularly indebted to Steven Lukes for comment on the earlier paper, and am grateful to the editors of *Renewal* for permission to draw upon it.

- 2 Lukes sharpens and extends a line of argument towards which I was groping in 'Not One Road, But Many'.
- 3 See the website of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) at <www.dlcpai.org> which contains an archive of speeches and policy statements by New Democrat thinkers and politicians including Al Gore and Bill Clinton.
- 4 At time of writing, the Labour government has already announced plans to reform the laws governing Friendly Societies and Credit Unions so as to facilitate their growth.
- 5 For other analyses which reach similar conclusions, see Freeden (1998) and Klein and Rafferty (1999).

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