Do models of behaviour change allow for conditionality?

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International expert panel on ‘Understanding behaviour change and the role of conditionality’, 12 May 2014
Overview

- Contexts for rise of conditionality and behaviour change
- Nudge and Think as behaviour change ideal types. Consider:
  - Model of the agent
  - Role of the state
  - Compatibility with conditionality?
- Initial conclusions/discussion start point
Broad (contested) assumptions behind conditionality

- Agential rationality and capacity for responsibility
- Contractual state-citizen relation
- Ethic of ‘rights and responsibilities’
- Retrenchment from universalism
Context of behaviour change agenda

- Social complexity and ‘wicked’ problems
- Societal individualisation
- Hollowing out of state capacity
- Developments in behavioural sciences
Nudge and human agency

- Modern policymaking has relied on unrealistic ‘Econ’ (homo economicus): rational, calculating, strategic

- Policy should instead ‘go with the grain’ of the all too human ‘Human’:
  - impulsive, short term, emotion driven
  - inertia in face of complexity
  - individualised but subject to social norms
  - subject to choice architecture: nudging...
The Nudging state

- Ethic of libertarian-paternalism
- Intervene in choice environment: nudge subjects into choices that serve their best interests *as if judged by themselves*
- Does transparency affect efficacy?
- Attracts libertarian *and* paternalist critics
Nudge and conditionality?

Nudge undermines the contractual basis of conditionality:

☐ The ‘Human’ not capable of taking sustained responsibility in a contractual relationship

☐ Conditionality needs longer term commitments, the Human (and nudges) are short term

☐ Conditionality requires a transparency that can render nudges ineffective

☐ Some practical insights from behavioural science might be compatible with conditionality (re efficacy, not philosophy)
Think and human agency

- Think draws on deliberative, participative democratic theory
- Retains idea of rational, purposeful agent (but not necessarily utility maximiser)
- Focuses on capacity for collective deliberation to determine preferences, objectives, behaviours
- Theory tends to assume outcomes will have collectivist character
The Thinking state

- Does not presume to know citizen’s ‘best interests’ in advance
- State as facilitator, enabler of citizen deliberation
- Can learn with/from citizen deliberation?
- Focuses on optimising institutional settings/procedures for deliberation
Think and conditionality

- Agents are capable of entering contractual relations, taking responsibility, civic minded
- Conceivable that conditional policy could be outcome of citizen deliberation
- Could be used to engage those subject to conditionality in different fields. Policy learning
- BUT what if deliberation leads to a rejection of conditionality per se, and/or radical alternatives governors don’t like?
Preliminary conclusions

- ‘Conditionality’ and ‘Behaviour change’ have different philosophical, political and evidential lineages (although critics will also point to resonances)

- Nudge’s vision of the agent and state action seems incompatible with conditionality – and even undercuts it

- Think’s deliberative model potentially more amenable to conditionality: but in ‘thicker’ and potentially subversive forms

- Normatively, deliberative theorists imagine ‘free’ deliberation. But could participation in deliberative processes be made a condition: a controversial ‘deliberative paternalism’??
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