Drawing the Line: On the Public/Private Distinction in Debates on New Modes of Governance

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Privatization, output steering, and other measures that are often collectively referred to as New Public Management have been broadly commented on in recent years. Critiques of New Public Management lament a diminishing publicness and an erosion of the public/private distinction. On closer inspection, however, the meaning of these concepts in the critiques is often not clear, which leads to confusion and paradox. Most notably, it remains unclear what is at stake in the public/private distinction. In this article, it is argued that these issues can be clarified when it is acknowledged that there are, in fact, two underlying ideals: a liberal ideal and a republican one. An elaboration of these ideals, and of the relation between them, helps in gaining a better understanding of the problems the new modes of government entail and in formulating more promising alternatives.

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In recent years, many have criticized the new modes of governance. Within the study of public administration and also in societal debate, privatization, business models for public management, public/private partnerships, and the like, have become objects of public derogation. Many have come to the conclusion that these measures—mostly referred to as New Public Management (NPM) tools—have not brought about what they promised. Indeed, studies show that introducing markets and incentives often has not led to lower costs and better services. Such measures, in fact, have triggered all types of mechanisms that result in adverse consequences. Among these “perverse effects” are curbing, cherry picking, increasing output or quantity over quality, and focusing on short-term results (Dibben, Wood, & Roper, 2004; Hood & Dixon, 2015; Klijn, 2011; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000).

Critics, disappointed by the results of NPM measures, have called for new initiatives, including renationalization and the introduction of nonprofit service delivery; more regulation and civic responsibility; more protection of civic freedoms and transparency; and more governmental steering and citizen involvement. Such remedies are often presented as reclaiming the publicness of public territory after the implementation of unfortunate privatization or marketization policies. Within public administration studies, the effects of NPM measures are also presented as threats to
public values or as leading to a diminishing publicness and an erosion of the public/private
distinction (Bozeman, 2002; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Haque, 2001). Moreover, these
evaluations have generated an abundance of studies of public values, public value management,
public service motivation, and public virtues (Alford & Hughes, 2008; Beck-Jørgensen &
Bozeman, 2006; Moore, 1995; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Pesch, 2005; Stoker, 2006). The issues
of publicness and the public/private distinction are surely back in the spotlight.

The prominent position that publicness currently has prompts the question of what exactly is
meant by the concept of publicness. The different types of remedies associated with publicness
make it a very broad concept. It might even be an umbrella concept and thus useful in political
debate. However, the differing remedies also make one wonder how they can possibly be
logically combined. How, for instance, can regulation and civic responsibility be branches of
the same tree? Is “more publicness” a probable banner for a coherent alternative to NPM, or
is it a term so fuzzy that it cannot reasonably live up to that promise?

Contemporary studies on the subject of publicness, considered as a whole, offer a perplexing
view. Most studies use their own definitions and understandings of what the public is. Even
within these studies, the use of the term “the public” sometimes generates confusion. An
illustration can be offered by Haque’s often-cited article “The Diminishing Publicness of Public
Service” (2001). The title of this article already implies that at least two different understand-
ings of “public” must be involved. However, no definition or theoretical elaboration of “public”
is given in the article. Haque simply provides the reader with a list of five dimensions or char-
acteristics of publicness.1 Haque thus makes one wonder what, exactly, he means by publicness
—and by “private,” for that matter. Furthermore, he gives no clue as to why this publicness and
the public/private distinction are of importance; it is taken to be self-evident—but is it? What is
at stake in maintaining the public/private distinction? What is it that warrants concern?

This article takes a closer look at the idea of publicness and the accompanying public/private
distinction. What is at stake in the distinction is twofold: What are the underlying values? What
is it that is diminishing and needs protection? It is argued that the confusion arises partly
because there are, in fact, two traditions of publicness and of the value of a public/private
distinction involved in this field of study.

In the next section, an overview and critical analyses are given of the current approaches to
the study of publicness and public value in the public administration literature. To overcome the
complexities in this field of study, this article will then look into the history of the ideas to dis-
tinguish two traditions of understanding the public/private distinction. A closer look at these
traditions—and the relation between them—helps clarify the contemporary debate so as to
see more clearly what might be at stake.2

**APPROACHES IN CURRENT PUBLIC VALUE STUDIES**

Over the last decades, the attention to public values, in contrast to private ones, in public admin-
istration has been booming. Some studies are straightforwardly prescriptive: they provide a
more or less defined notion of publicness and argue for protective measures for such publicness
(e.g., Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Haque, 2001). Others are more reluctant to take sides and try
to pinpoint typical public (as distinguished from private) values, virtues, or concerns (e.g.,
Beck-Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2006; Bozeman, 2007; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008).
In this section, a brief overview is offered of the approaches to publicness within the field of public administration. The intention is not, and could hardly be, exhaustive. However, this overview provides a good idea of the diversity of approaches and the types of questions that they entail.

**Crucial Characteristic Approach**

The first, and simplest, type of approach that addresses the issue of publicness notes specific characteristics or aspects as the true marks of “public” or “private.” It is an approach that is very commonly found in primers and textbooks. This approach offers characterizations and definitions, such as the following:

- The public is what concerns the whole citizenry (Rosenbloom & Goldman, 1989, p. 8).
- The public is concerned with societal and democratic values; the private with managerial values (Raadschelders, 2003, p. 202).
- Public is what is (inevitably) shared, as in public goods or public opinion (John, 1998, pp. 4, 206).
- Public concerns the government and what it chooses to do (Dye, 1992, p. 2).

All of these characterizations have their own intuitive appeal. However, the mere presentation of them immediately prompts the question of which of them is the true or central characteristic? Furthermore, it is unclear whether and/or how these characterizations can be combined or integrated.

**Listing Approach**

A second type of approach is common in public administration studies. It does not single out one characteristic typical of the public (or the private) but, rather, provides a list of crucial aspects. An example of this approach can be found in the previously mentioned article by Haque. Throughout the article, an array of principles and values can be found that are taken as indicative of publicness: impartiality, openness, equality, representation, monopolistic, and having a long and broad societal impact (Haque, 2001, p. 66). Later another definition is provided that contains equality, justice, citizenship, and accountability (p. 67). Haque constructed his list by building on many other publications in the field that he thought relevant. Others, however, opt for a more empirical approach. They build their lists on, for instance, questionnaires asking employees from the public or private sector to select the rules, virtues, and values that they find most appropriate for their field of work (e.g., Beck-Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2006).

These studies provide valuable insights, but they also have their downsides. For instance, the inductive approach can hardly offer an understanding of the intrinsic link between the items on the list; it gives no clue as to what unites these different aspects or values. Do these items really all belong to one dimension? Do they all have a place on the same scale? Furthermore, this approach cannot explain why some values pop up on both the private and public sides whereas others do not.

A further disadvantage of this approach is that the lists of characteristics cannot explain what is at stake in the changes under the new modes of governance. Why should it be a
problem if the values on one list become dominant—in particular instances—over those on the other list?

Two-Syndromes Approach

A third approach also presents two lists of values or virtues, but this approach tries to note the internal logic behind each list. A fine example is in Jane Jacobs’s *Two Systems of Survival*. Jacobs, (1992) distinguishes between two syndromes of virtues, each belonging to a particular societal sphere: the guardian (politics) sphere and the commercial sphere. According to Jacobs, problems arise when these syndromes come together within one organization or one person, as both syndromes can make quite different demands. The guardian syndrome, for instance, contains virtues such as “Shun trading” or “Deceive for the sake of the task”—attitudes that are clearly vices in the sphere of commerce. In fact, Jacobs maintains that such complications can hardly be avoided, as every society and every person is involved in both spheres. Only in a fixed-class system or when ways are provided for individuals to shift back and forth between the two syndromes can the occurrence of problems be prevented.

An approach such as that of Jacobs can answer some of the shortcomings of the previous two approaches. However, it still has drawbacks. It is questionable, to say the least, that the distinction between the guardian syndrome and the commercial syndrome is congruent with that between the public and the private as the latter is intuitively (or commonly) understood. Is the private (strictly) concerned with commercial activities? Do “Deceive for the sake of the task,” “Take vengeance,” and “Be fatalistic instead of optimistic” refer to the virtues of the public? To take the issue one step further, does Jacobs ever really get to the point of articulating what is at stake in “the public” and “the private” (i.e., the issue of what goods are realized by exercising these virtues)?

The latter point can also be made in another way. Jacobs convincingly argues that the mixing of different sets of moral guidelines can be demanding and even problematic. However, why should the spheres (or “systems of survival”) themselves survive? Why is it a problem if the commercial sphere becomes dominant over the whole of social life? Why should diminishing publicness be a problem?

Continuum Approach

A completely different approach is found, for instance, in Crouch (2011). He observes that “public” (and “private,” for that matter) has multiple meanings, as does the public/private distinction. He maintains that this confusion results from using a flawed dichotomy. The conceptual confusion can be overcome when a scale instead of a strict dichotomy is used. The scale that Crouch presents ranges from the political realm on one side to the market realm and its particular values on the other (see Table 1). Following this idea, it becomes clear that there are many organizations and institutions that have to be placed somewhere halfway along the continuum, as they contain elements of both the public and the private.

Crouch’s approach is a clear example of the many theories that try to present the public and the private as opposing poles of the same dimension (for a similar approach, see, for example,
Brandsen and Van der Donk (2010) or Warren (1999)). This perspective is quite useful in characterizing organizations (including “hybrids”). Furthermore, it offers a strategy for overcoming the problems of the listing approach. Unfortunately, it is not clear and convincing enough. First, an approach similar to that of Crouch’s does not really go beyond the listing approach; in fact, it does worse than Jacob’s approach on this point. One does not gain a deeper understanding of the link (“syndrome” or “system of survival” in Jacob’s vocabulary) between those elements in a particular place on the scale.

The second problem is one that Crouch shares with Jacobs: Is what he calls public really all of or typical for what is commonly meant by public? Is the public really without normative appeals or values and thus merely a matter of coercion?

The third issue becomes apparent when one asks what, exactly, is meant by the middle ground on the continuum. In what sense is a church a mixture of state and market? One might even conjecture that a church must lie in a different sphere altogether. Some scholars, following this latter suggestion, have dismissed the two-pole continuum in favor of a triangle model. They provide a model of a state/market/civil society or a state/market/family “trichotomy” with a more complicated set of hybrids between the three corners of the triangle. This, again, might be a useful picture for particular and specific purposes. For the present inquiry, however, the question remains the same: What is meant by “the public,” and what is at stake in its preservation against “the private”?

**Multilevel Approach**

A possible remedy to the problems of the continuum approach can be found in the multidimensional approach, which distinguishes and relates different dimensions instead of reducing all phenomena to one. An example can be found in Bozeman’s “multidimensional theory of publicness” (Bozeman, 2007). In this theory, two types of public (and private) are distinguished. One is found in the “instrumental dimension” and concerns types of constraints over institutions. These can range from public (government) authority constraints to market authority constraints. The second dimension is “normative” in Bozeman’s terms. It is concerned not with instruments but with aims: public interest ideals and public values. In this two-dimensional world, it is possible, for instance, to use private instruments to realize public goods. The central question, according to Bozeman, must be: By the use of which (mix of) instruments can the public good best be realized?

Bozeman’s approach has the clear advantage of avoiding Procrustean measures to herd all public (or private) phenomena into one category. Moreover, from his perspective, it becomes

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**TABLE 1**

| Type of action | Coercion | Normative appeal | Exchange |
|---------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| Institution   | Polity   | Values           | Market   |
| Characteristic organization | State | Church           | Firm     |

*Source: (Crouch, 2011, p. 55).*
clear how a diminishing publicness (on the instrumental level) can exist together with an increasing publicness (realizing certain common ideals on the normative level). However, like the other approaches previously reviewed, Bozeman’s approach raises questions.

The first set of questions concerns his conceptualization of the public and the private in the normative dimension. The public here refers to the public interest (“the outcomes best serving the long-run survival and wellbeing of a social collective construed as a ‘public’” [p. 12]) and public values (“normative consensus about rights and obligations of citizens and state” [p. 13]). These are, however, quite different understandings of the public. The first seems to refer to a particular understanding of the good (as derived from a normative theory), while the second seems to be an empirical category (“consensus of individual ideas of public values”). In other words, one relies on some idea of the common good that transcends the individual, while the other is the overlapping consensus of actually existing preferences. Thus, the question arises: What exactly does Bozeman mean by public (and thus also private) in the normative dimension?

The second set of questions concerns the instrumental dimension. Bozeman introduces this dimension by referring to a “philosophy of economic individualism.” By this, he means the philosophical tradition in which individual development, through the use of private property and the like, is a basic value—the tradition of which John Locke is a characteristic proponent. Bozeman does not go into the public aspect of this instrumental dimension. However, what is even more remarkable is that, without further argument, he degrades this philosophical tradition to the instrumental level. Why, one wonders, should this philosophy give rise to values that have a merely instrumental standing? From which normative perspective might the philosophy of economic liberalism be marked as secondary?

**Summing Up**

Several observations follow from this review of the recent approaches to publicness in public administration. First, the public is always, in one way or another, defined in contrast to the private, particularly in terms of one having certain characteristics that the other lacks. Second, those who try to go beyond a mere juxtaposition of lists seem to run into trouble when they try to reduce all aspects to a single dimension; that is, to a singular opposition between the public and the private. A third conclusion is that those who try to answer the question of what is meant by “the public” (and why there is a problem when it is diminished) end up chasing their tails when choosing empirical approaches. The answer is, in one way or another, already inscribed in the strategy chosen. These observations imply that the inquiry should shift its focus to a more normative or philosophical approach. Furthermore, they imply that one should look for a pluralistic or multidimensional understanding of the relation between the public and the private.

**TWO TRADITIONS**

Bozeman’s approach has its weaknesses; however, his two-dimensional scheme certainly contains inspiring elements. His reference, for example, to the philosophy of economic liberalism
offers a clear starting point for elaborating one dimension. The philosophy underlying the second dimension, then, should similarly at least elaborate in a consistent and convincing way the common values or goods of the dimension. Taking these suggestions as a lead, two traditions in philosophy thus present themselves as relevant: liberalism and republicanism.5

Liberal Tradition

The liberal tradition centers on the freedom for individuals to realize their ambitions. In his Second Treatise on Government, Locke argued that a state is needed to provide security and stability (Locke, 1690/1982). Everyone would probably either explicitly or tacitly consent to common institutions that provide law and order. These institutions are public in the sense that they provide goods and services that are in everybody’s interest. Although people may gravely differ in their preferences and ambitions, these institutions make it so that everyone can use their talents and property in the way that they prefer, without harming others. In contrast, real life, that which really matters, takes place in the private sphere. It encompasses, for instance, family life and economic activities. The activities of public institutions should be limited to that which is necessary, as collectively realized.

The public depends on or is secondary to the private. The public only exists—and, for that matter, the state is only legitimate—as far as it is necessary for the realization of the preconditions for one’s aims in one’s private life.

The underlying value in this philosophy is not simply the maximization of efficiency or the utilitarian “greatest welfare for the greatest number” (as Bozeman’s label of “economic individualism” suggests). Rather, the fundamental idea is that individuals are essentially free; Locke refers to individual natural rights to drive home this point. Currently, the language of natural law seems to have become out of date, although the human rights and basic freedoms in treaties and declarations such as the Bill of Rights express a similar idea. This basic idea goes back even further than 17th-century natural law theory. Basic elements can be found in, for instance, Roman law, regulations of Germanic tribes and even Christianity (for the Augustinian moment of turning inward in Christianity, see Taylor, 1989, p. 127).

The public (and hence the state), according to liberals, is inevitable; it is a necessary evil. However, there should be a clear distinction between the public and the private. In the apt phrase of Walzer, liberalism is about the art of separation. “Liberalism is a world of walls, and each creates a new liberty” (Walzer, 1984, p. 315). The wall between church and state creates religious liberty and freedom of conscience; between state and university creates academic freedom; between state and civil society creates economic competition and free enterprise; and between family and state creates political liberties (instead of ruling dynasties and the like). Liberalism is the ultimate critique of the Louis XIV credo: “l’état c’est moi.” Under liberal rule, individuals in ruling positions, just like their (civil) servants, have “jobs” and are individual (private) persons when separated from their functions (Weber, 1991).

The possible threats to the private sphere that liberals are concerned about take many different forms. They might involve loss of property (through, e.g., taxation, limitations of use, forced selling, obligatory insurance), control over body and lifestyle (via, e.g., vaccination, body search), personal data (e.g., fingerprints, Internet use), freedom of movement, and so forth. Writers in the liberal traditions have noted different types of causes for the ever- looming
infringements on individual liberty. Some have been concerned about special interests taking over public institutions (the Federalists, for instance), whereas others note the tendency of public institutions to develop interests of their own (e.g., Hayek, 2004). Routines developed by public offices might entail limiting the freedoms of citizens (Weber, 1991). According to some, the modern ambition toward effective government has led to the creation of broad-scale disciplining techniques (Farmer, 1995; Foucault, 1963, 1975, 1976/1984).

Liberal remedies vary as widely as these diagnoses of looming threats, from specific to structural. They swing from proposals for better legal safeguards of privacy, say, to advocacy for small government or for dismantling hierarchical institutions.

The liberal tradition, to be sure, is much more complex than this brief overview might suggest. Among its philosophical supporters are such otherwise different writers as Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Rawls, Nozick, and Dworkin. Politicians as different as Lincoln, Gladstone, Thatcher, or Kohl may be counted in its circle. This tradition also contains its typical internal disputes: about the meaning of social justice and the role of states in realizing it; on what exactly the value of equality entails; or on the best configuration of representative government. For an overview of the historical development and key authors, see Fawcett (2014) and Ryan (2012).

In recent years, neo-liberalism has received much attention. Although the term “neo-liberalism” often seems to be more a catchphrase in public debate than a well-developed philosophical position, it might be understood as a variant within the liberal tradition as it is understood here, be it a limited one. Its central characteristic is its focus on an economic policy of laissez-faire. Private enterprise and the market are taken as panacée for all issues; state and collective are identified as the source of all problems. For that reason, commentators often identify neo-liberalism as the philosophy behind NPM measures. The broader liberal tradition that this article focuses on, however, encompasses more values and is not limited to economic concerns. These broader-ranging key values in the liberal tradition are sometimes at odds with NPM (see below).

Republican Tradition

The republican tradition is at least as old as the liberal one. One can find central elements in Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, and others in the Italian Renaissance (for the latter, see Pocock, 1975). More recent contributors to the republican tradition include Kant, Arendt, and Habermas. The central difference between the republican and the liberal traditions can be illustrated by the way Kant defined freedom in his newspaper article on the question “What is Enlightenment?” (1784/2009). One can only really be free, Kant maintains, in the public. In the private sphere, that of labor and professions, a person is not and cannot be free to speak his mind. To get the job done, one has to obey orders, follow the company line, and so forth. Liberty—in Kant’s example, the freedom of speech—has its proper place in the public, not the private. Thus, republicanism finds the locus of freedom exactly where it is not and cannot be, according to the liberal point of view. Hannah Arendt, especially in The Human Condition, offers a clear presentation of this view.

Arendt (1958) recalls a distinction between the public and the private that was predominant among the ancient Athenians and that got its philosophical expression in the work of Aristotle. The private, here, is the realm of the household (oikos). The household is the realm of survival and encompasses food, shelter, and procreation. It includes family life,
manufacture, and trade. This is the sphere of necessary things, a sphere that is not distinctively human. Man, as a zoön politikon, also belongs to another sphere: the polis, the “political” life.

The private realm is the sphere of management (and even coercion) aimed at satisfying basic wants and needs. It is the sphere of biological needs and economy. It is, in a sense, pre-political, in terms of its being a necessary precondition for public life but not actually a part of it. The political, in contrast, is the realm of freedom and not of necessity. Coercion and inequality have no place in this realm. It is constituted by the typical human competencies of action (praxis) and speech (lexis); that is, not talking and acting to satisfy one’s wants or needs but rather for the common good. It involves contributing to public deliberation on political affairs, and it involves acting for the common good both in the office and on the battlefield. Courage (on the battlefield, for instance) is the typical political virtue. The good life, as Aristotle puts it, is the life of the typical citizen (Arendt, 1958, pp. 22–37).

To be a citizen and to perform public functions means that one has developed certain qualities or virtues, such as courage. However, in a more general sense, enacting republican freedom means that one has “disciplined” and developed oneself (i.e., that one has undergone training and has tried to learn from others). The qualities that one has to develop are those that contribute to communicating and cooperating with others to realize the common good (Arendt, 2006, p. 152; MacIntyre, 1985; Taylor, 1985, p. 165).

The common good in the republican tradition is not the sum of collective goods or the collection of (similar) individual interests—those concerns belong to the private sphere (oikos) and thus cannot be the core of the public sphere. What, then, is meant by the common good (res publica) in this tradition? In the republican tradition, freedom is understood in terms of one’s not being hindered from effectively realizing one’s individual aims and preferences. “Freedom resides at least in part in collective control over the common life” (Taylor, 1985, p. 211) Taking part in the activity of men ruling themselves is considered an activity that is valuable in itself. Of central concern in the republican tradition are not merely convergent goods but shared goods, too. In other words, it is not only having dams, bridges, and other works that are beneficial for each person, but the common involvement in realizing these works, and the further appreciation of this that constitutes the public or common good in the republican tradition (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 200; Taylor, 1985, p. 96).

Distinguishing between the public and the private, and guarding this dividing line, is also important in the republican tradition. The private sphere is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of the public sphere. However, the concern here is about keeping private interests out of common practices. An exclusive or dominating effort to acquire money, power, recognition, and/or other individual advantages undermines the realization of public goods (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 190).

Republicans fear the intrusion of private (or collective) interests into practices concerning a common good, as well as the weakening of the collective spirit in general. Private intrusions can have an incidental character (e.g., fraud by or corruption of officials) or a more structural character. Some researchers have noted such structural tendencies in modern Western societies. In an industrial society, local ties have become ever more loosened. At the same time, technical innovations have promised individuals ever-larger control over nature and their surroundings. People tend to forget their links with others and instead see society as an instrument for the satisfaction of their own wants. They forget about common practices and discover consumption...
goods (Taylor, 1985, p. 304; Walzer, 1990), or, as Hannah Arendt puts it, they become *Homo faber* at the expense of their active and public lives (Arendt, 1958; Sennett, 1977).

Like the liberal tradition, the republican tradition presents different diagnoses of the mechanisms underlying the threats to its ideal, and here again, an array of remedies can be found. Remedies range from introducing ethical codes, providing civic education, fostering a civic religion, creating government programs supporting community, and cooperation to nationalization or the formation of communes (see overview in Table 2).

The history of the republican tradition, like that of the liberal tradition, is much more complex than can be shown in this brief overview, and among its contemporary adherents many disputes and different varieties might be distinguished. For fine overviews of the historical development and contemporary key authors in the republican tradition, see Laborde and Maynor (2008) or Pettit (1997).

### THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TRADITIONS

#### Two Complementary Approaches?

The liberal and republican traditions are remarkably similar in terms of their basic points. They both give clear accounts of the meaning of public and private, they both give reasons for maintaining a clear distinction between the two, and, in both cases, their underlying values are freedom and individual development. Yet it is clear, after the overview given above, that the concepts of public, private, freedom, and individual development have different meanings in each tradition. The motivations for drawing a clear line between the public and the private are, in fact, direct opposites.

According to the liberal tradition, it is the private sphere, encompassing one’s freedom to take care of one’s own business and develop one’s own individual talents in whatever ways one sees fit, that must be protected. The public sphere, which is necessary for realizing the goods
that are of interest for all individuals, has a tendency to grow and threaten the private sphere. A reason for this might be that a particular group has gained control over a public institution and is using it to facilitate its particular life plans at the expense of others. Another reason might be that public institutions start to act in their own interests. Regardless of the cause, public infringement on the private sphere is a serious issue of concern. On the other hand, according to the republican tradition, one should be worried about the public sphere. All types of tendencies make the common good and common practices lose ground. Individuals tend to shift their attention to private affairs and make them of foremost importance. Even those who do become engaged in collaborative efforts tend to focus on their particular interests. Therefore, real freedom, that which can be realized only by truly getting involved in common practices, are blocked.\(^8\)

The conceptions of freedom that are involved in these two traditions can be understood by a certain reading of the notions of negative and positive freedom introduced by Berlin (1969). For liberals, the concept of freedom is intertwined with the value of having a sphere of one’s own. For republicans, freedom is only possible when one is involved in certain activities that require stepping outside the strictly individual sphere.

What exactly is the relation between these two traditions? An initial answer might be that they are complementary in the sense that they both, in effect, support the same measure, albeit for quite different reasons. They are like two adjoining countries, both fiercely guarding their borders; each, due to its own ideology, fears the immigration of subversive effects from the other side. Furthermore, both can agree on particular measures, even if for quite different reasons. Liberals and republicans will both, for instance, support participatory rights for all. The first will advocate them to provide everyone with instruments to protect their interests, while the latter will do so for individual development and for deliberation on the common good. For similar reasons, both will consent to measures of openness and transparency.

A second answer might be that the complementarity of both traditions goes beyond this more or less accidental agreement on certain aims. It is not simply a matter of a similar measure that is defended by two different “ideologies”; in fact, the two perspectives presuppose one another. In a liberal society, it will often be necessary for (particular) individuals to make sacrifices to realize a good in the collective interest. Take, for example, risking one’s life in war or in a struggle against the forces of nature. In these cases, though also in less extreme ones, individual behavior cannot be explained or justified in strictly liberal, individual terms. (The argument that such cases concern individuals who accidentally happen to have heroic or altruistic preferences misses the point. It further underlines the need for something that liberalism itself cannot offer but certainly needs.) Some sense of the common good, that which transcends individual freedoms and the satisfaction of individual needs, is called for. Liberals, on the other hand, can note a deficiency in the republican position. In the republican tradition, material preconditions for common activities are simply taken for granted. In the Greek polis, it might indeed have been the case that citizens could freely devote their time and energies to the common practice of politics, as material issues were covered by slaves and the working class of denizens.

A Harmonious Ensemble?

Thus far, two traditions have been presented that fit together remarkably well in terms of supporting measures from different sides and even in presupposing one another for their mutual
survival. This, however, does not mean that they can be combined harmoniously, because contradictions arise at three levels.

On the level of policy measures and political instruments, both traditions seem to support similar instruments, such as participation rights and transparency. When push comes to shove, however, each demands a particular design for these instruments that is in line with its particular aim. From a liberal point of view, participation rights, for instance, must be equal for everyone, because everyone must have an equal opportunity to defend his or her interests. From a republican perspective, which is concerned with finding the best elaboration of the common interest, the best form of participation might very well imply that some will have to be given greater roles than others. (One can witness J. S. Mill struggling to combine these opposing demands into one electoral system [Mill, 1861/1991].) Furthermore, in the case of openness and transparency, such conflicts can also arise. While republican deliberation demands openness, liberals have good reasons to opt for a right to secrecy and privacy; openness might harm business (Possner, 1984) or deprive individuals of the “backstage” whence they can develop their talents without public intrusion (Rössler, 2005).

The second level on which the two traditions prove to be an uneasy ensemble concerns the threats envisioned by each. To a considerable extent, each tradition supports the subversive tendencies in the other. The celebration of individual freedom in liberalism is one of the grounds for a diminishing concern for the common good and common practices. The strong focus on common practices that transcend mere individual interest, on the other hand, is exactly the tendency that liberals fear, as it can easily lead to curtailing individual liberties for the sake of the common good.

The third level at which the incongruent relation between the two traditions shows itself is the theoretical level. Some philosophers have tried to bring together the ideas and values that are presented here as part of either the liberal or the republican tradition. Hegel (and others inspired by his effort, such as Habermas) is a clear example. Hegel and similar others are certainly convincing in their (historical) portraits of the two traditions as developing side-by-side and supporting one another: Hegel in his story of the unfolding of the Weltgeist (Hegel, 1967), and Habermas in his account of the development of the modern state (Habermas, 1996). However, their theoretical efforts to substantiate that there must and will be a harmonious connection, an “Aufhebung of contradictions,” is less convincing. Such arguments rely on a highly questionable system of logic (as in the case of Hegel; see Taylor, 1979) or on highly abstract ideas (such as Habermas’s “gleichursprünglichkeit” [co-originality] of the two sets of values; see Larmore, 1995). Unfortunately, assessing harmonizing theories such as these goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is clear that these theories—even if they are conceptually sound—cannot answer the particular question that arises from the first and second levels just mentioned.

CONCLUSION

In this elaboration of understandings of the public/private distinction, it becomes clear that the notions of publicness (and the private, for that matter) refer to broader understandings of the good. This relation has already been observed by others (see Mathews, 1984; Newman & Clarke, 2009; Ventriss, 1987). This article, however, tries to elaborate two comprehensive
understandings of the good: the liberal tradition and the republican tradition. This elaboration of
two different ways of understanding the value of the public/private distinction, and of their
mutual relation, entails a number of lessons for public administration studies and for practi
tioners who want to deal with the diminishment of publicness after NPM.

First of all, it can disentangle the sometimes confusing conceptualizations of publicness in
public administration studies. Bozeman, for instance, takes “the philosophy of economic liber-
alism” as instrumental for “realizing public value” and “public interest.” It has now become
clear that the latter two aspects of publicness reflect different values; republican ones reflect
public values, and liberal ones reflect what Bozeman calls public interests. Furthermore, this
elaboration clearly shows that Bozeman’s conceptualization contains a problem. He sees “eco-


nomic individualism” as instrumental for realizing publicness, which makes sense from a liberal
point of view (public interest ultimately relies on individual interests) but not from a republican
point of view. The common good (or public value, to use Bozeman’s term), in republican lines,
cannot be built on individual interests. Individual interests in this tradition are exactly what
threaten the value of publicness.

A similar confusion can now be pointed out in the work of Haque. His list of characteristics
of publicness contains, on the one hand, liberal elements like a concern for control and account-
ability and efficiency in the provision of services. On the other hand, it includes, although to a
smaller extent, republican elements like an encompassing public sphere and a community com-
mitment of citizens and civil servants. His remedies, remarkably, completely follow the liberal
diagnoses (investigate what type of service delivery is most efficient, install proper forms of
control and accountability, etc). Yet he hopes that these measures will also contribute to the
trust and motivation of citizens and civil servants (Haque, 2001, p. 74). This leads to a second
point. This elaboration of two traditions can help us to get a more clear view of the different
problems of publicness and the particular remedies that might be adopted to deal with them.
The central lesson is that NPM measures have led to two types of problems of publicness. In
NPM measures, both liberal and republican values are at stake. Liberals are concerned with
the possibilities that individuals have for defending their private interests when the realization
of general services is left to private agents, while republicans fear problems of public control
over such relatively autonomous organizations. Liberals question participatory instruments
because their design is prone to excluding certain groups, while republicans are concerned about
the quality of decision-making. Liberals doubt that public goods will be efficiently realized,
whereas republicans see the common good undermined by a growing mutual indifference
and the realization of the common good as threatened.

These concerns might be taken together, as Haque does, by referring to values such as
accountability, democracy, participation, or justice. However, by doing so, the real differences
remain hidden. The differing traditions have their own answers to NPM’s shortcomings.
Solutions for the problems of accountability, participation, justice, and the like, often point
in opposing directions. For example, both liberals and republicans might see a threat to public-
ness in the privatization of neighborhood surveillance, in handing over competencies to client
groups, or in introducing individual incentives for performance. However, they will differ in the
alternatives they advocate. For one tradition, enhancing control, allowing more competition,
shifting incentives, or increasing the size of organizations might be probable solutions to the
problems. For the other tradition, such measures would, at best, do nothing and, more likely,
would augment the problem. Or, to give another example, both traditions value participation
and might recommend it in reaction to a diminishing publicness. Each, however, values it for different reasons and is therefore prone to identify a different type of problem and expect different results from particular arrangements. In the republican line, a problem of participation involves diminishing commitment to common practice. Liberal thought, on the other hand, focuses on deficiencies in control. The latter will, therefore, favor participatory arrangements that strengthen the accountability of power holders and representative bodies. The former, however, may want to expand participatory bodies in which citizens themselves have planning and decision-making powers.9

Of course, the typical remedies that are proposed in both traditions are the material for empirical study by researchers of public policy: Under what conditions can such remedies actually be effective for dealing with these particular problems? But this articulation is also, in another way, of relevance for empirical researchers in this field. It can make them more aware of the value choices that are involved in studying the consequences of NPM and in evaluating the remedial measures. The elaboration made clear that publicness is an ambiguous term that is related to different traditional valuations. Seemingly instrumental advice might express a particular understanding of the value of publicness without properly introducing it as such (as Haque, in most of the article cited, follows the liberal ideal). Compare on this point Ventriss (1987).

The elaboration, finally, also entails a more general conclusion—it illustrates the relevance of conceptual and philosophical analysis in public administration.

NOTES

1. One of these characteristics is “the degree to which the public-private distinction is maintained” (Haque, 2001, p. 67). This criterion, logically, turns Haque’s characterization into a tautology. His complete set is that the publicness of public service depends on the following: (a) the extent of its distinction from the private sector, (b) the scope and composition of the service recipients, (c) the magnitude and intensity of its socioeconomic role, (d) the degree of its public accountability, and (e) the level of its public trust.

2. This article is not, to be sure, the first that distinguishes between the different meanings of “public” to clarify contemporary debates. For other approaches, see, for instance, Frederickson, 1991; Geuss, 2001; Mathews, 1984; Newman & Clarke, 2009; Schubert, 1960; Ventriss, 1987; Weintraub, 1997. This article differs from them in its focus on the traditions that provide justification for upholding a public/private distinction and that are (therefore) relevant for debates on administrative measures. This study differs from studies like that of Newman and Clarke (2009) in that it does not provide an historical analysis of changing understandings or of changing modes of public participation. It does not follow an historical but a systematic approach that identifies two traditions (see below). Within each of these traditions, particular types of participation and particular publics might be called for, as will become clear. It is, of course, possible to use the two orientations discussed here for an historical study: Are there shifts from a more republican to a more liberal orientation in a particular era?

3. Many others have taken a similar approach. See, for instance, classics like Allison (1982) and Hood (1991).

4. In one relatively detached chapter of the book, Bozeman heralds Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy (Bozeman, 2007, chap. 6). It remains unclear whether or exactly how Dewey’s pragmatism is supposed to answer the questions raised here.

5. These terms refer not to political stands or political parties but to traditions in philosophical thinking.

6. “Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the world is at stake” (Arendt, 2006, p. 155).

7. Steiner (2000) offers an example of a critique that comments on the liberal conception of public good yet remains within the lines of this philosophical tradition. He maintains that the common good goes beyond that which is of advantage for all individuals here-and-now; an encompassing common good conception also has to take into account future generations. This might indeed go beyond the mainstream liberal understanding of public goods, although it still is far from the republican turf.
8. Both traditions tend to identify “the public” and “the state.” Yet for both, these two need not be identical. For liberals, the public threat may go beyond the state. Mill, for instance, notes that the freedom of the individual might be threatened by the collective in the form of public opinion (Mill, 1851/1991). Republicans, on the other hand, note phenomena that are elements of a state (or any other collaborative effort), but are not part of the common good.

9. Ambiguities, like the one in “publicness,” might, of course, be employed intentionally in political debate. Yet this intentional neglect of difference might easily lead to disappointment with the public later. Also in this area, therefore, this elaboration is of value.

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