

Rezension

Putting Civil Society In Its Place

Governance, Metagovernance and Subjectivity

Jessop's very recent publication is a masterpiece. Two thirds of the book are a fascinating academic exercise of dissecting the governance of complexity and the complexity of governance, in theory and in praxis. The first four chapters trace the failure of markets, state, and of the modes of governance of civil society, i.e. networks and solidarity. Metagovernance in seeking to correct for these failures is doomed to fail as well: Failure is a central feature of all social relations.

In part III Jessop analyses selected topics of governance and presents case studies, from global social policy to cities as a case of good governance, two regional case studies in English regions, corporatism and competition. Each of these topics offer tremendous insights also into current discussions about civil society in liberal bourgeois democracy. Has civil society become a really existing unified, extra-discursive phenomenon? Are there major shifts in the residual space that has been conventionally described as civil society? Jessop's view is clear: There is still no unified civil society.

Of course, the book is about civil society as a mode of governance. In that sense, title and subtitle of the book are a true account of what the reader can expect. Still, one might wonder why Jessop chose to refer to "putting" civil society in its place. He rather identifies its location (Part II) based on his interpretation of civil society as a shifting horizon of action that encompasses contestation over political, intellectual and moral leadership. A pluralistic ensemble of governance or governmental arrangements with diverse agents, civil society could elaborate the balance between markets, state, networks and solidarity. Given the ultimate failure, Jessop considers *romantic public irony* as the best means to optimize the governance of complexity: *ironic* because of the commitment to act cooperatively as if one can succeed and choose where to fail; *publicly* to work with partners in networks and communities to choose objectives, methods, and forms of governance and deciding how to respond to emerging signs of failure; *romantically* as in relying on the wisdom of crowds since failing together may minimize the risks of failures.

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The book will leave many readers waiting impatiently for Jessop's next tome. In the meantime, they may choose from the long list of his past publications some 20 of which are included in the *References*. Not that many, compared to the 24 pages of *References* which make for about 400 titles in total.

Rolf ALTER, December 2020

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