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The new century is one of contradictions that are fundamentally challenging the operation of the public, private and nonprofit sectors as well as relations among and within each sector (Scott, 2002; Pallotta 2008). Too often, the relationship among the three sectors and especially between the state and the third sector is characterized as antagonistic or harmonious, complementary or competitive, conflictual or cooperative. While these attributes might feature in these relationships, they are not helpful in understanding what type of relationship between the state and sector is most beneficial, effective or efficient for policy development and delivery under what circumstances. As the earlier work of Gidron, Kramer and Salamon (1992), Coston (1998) and Young (2000) demonstrates, understanding the power relations, linkages and history between the state and third sector is critical for determining how to restructure and improve the relationship.

This paper poses a continuum of relations between the state and third sector that may be used to capture the complexity of arrangements and to understand when certain dimensions of the relationship should be emphasized to achieve policy goals. Relations between the two sectors range from positive state enabling of the sector to more coercive state actions enforcing regulations and standards. There is a range of actions in between to capture the complex and often contradictory set of relations that may exist between the state and sector or government departments and organizations at any given time. The continuum was developed under two Social Sciences and Humanities of Canada research grants using the Canadian government and Ontario provincial government as case studies. In the third phase of research, the continuum is applied to other countries to test the usefulness of the continuum in developing theories of government-third sector relations and to reflect on the quality and changing nature of the relationship in different jurisdictions.

Using this continuum, the paper charts the character of relations existing between the state and third sector in Canada, the United States and England to compare their nature and effectiveness in serving citizens better, a goal in all three jurisdictions. The Canadian and British comparison is important in the aftermath of the development of compacts guiding relations between the two sectors (Taylor 2003, 2010, Elson 2010, Kendall 2003). The American case adds depth by contrasting a country without a compact between the two sectors but which shares a concern for effective regulation of the third sector in a period of increased accountability and vigilance (Salamon, 2003, 2006; Boris, 2006). The specificity of the continuum makes a three country comparison possible using secondary literature and primary data gleaned from government and nonprofit sector websites.

In sum, the paper compares the nature of the relationship in the three countries to assess their effectiveness in achieving the desired policy outcomes. In which system is state support for the third sector most efficacious in enhancing the sector’s capacity? When are facilitative, enabling actions most effective in supporting the third sector? When are more coercive actions necessary? The paper concludes with speculations on the appropriate criteria for determining when facilitative or coercive state action is necessary to ensure sector and citizen needs are well-served.

The paper has four objectives: 1. to test the usefulness of the continuum in a comparative perspective; 2. to further understand the multifaceted relationship between governments and third sector organizations; 3. to analyze effective state-sector relations in a post-welfare, neo-
liberal, regulated policy environment; and, 4. to advance our understanding of the role of the state and third sector in building and sustaining a healthy democracy and vibrant civil society. These lessons resonate for the US, Britain and other countries as neo-liberal values and a new era of terrorism and vigilance have fundamentally altered the way the state and third sector serve citizens.

References


