EDITED BY

MICHAEL
MORAN

MARTIN
REIN

ROBERT E.
GOODIN

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American expectations and achievements have hardly produced universal progress compared to other industrialized nations, with crime, the environment, health care, and public education being only four examples. What motivated the spread of the public policy orientation was the expectation that well-trained, professional analysts, appropriately focused, would produce an unbroken succession of policy successes. As Richard Nelson (1977) wondered, if America could put a man on the moon, why was it unable to solve the problems of the urban ghetto? Nelson suggested, and the narratives above second, that the promise of the policy sciences has not been fulfilled. All of which leads one to ask a series of questions, assuming, naturally, that this promise is still worthwhile, i.e. not impossible: Why are some examples of policy research more successful than others? Or, is there a public policy "learning curve?" What does it resemble and to whom? What is its trajectory? And where is it going?

Finally, it is important to observe that political activities and results are not synonymous with the practice of the public policy or the policy sciences. But they certainly reside in the same policy space. For the policy sciences to meet the goals of improving government policy through a rigorous application of its central themes, then the failures of the body politic naturally must be at least partially attributed to failure of, or at least a serious shortfall in, the policy sciences' approach. To ask the same question from an oppositional perspective: Why should the nominal recipients of policy research subscribe to it if the research does not reflect the values and intuitions of the client policy maker, that is, in their eyes, does not represent any discernible value added? To this question, one needs to add the issue of democratic governance, a concept virtually everybody would agree upon until the important issues of detail emerge (see deLeon 1997; Barber 1984; Dahl 1990/1970), e.g. does direct democracy have a realistic place in a representative, basically pluralist democracy?

3. "... Miles to Go Before I Sleep"

Robert Frost, in his "Stopping in the Woods on a Snowy Evening" (published in 1923), was certainly not concerned with the relevance of the public policy in general and, in particular, the institutional viability of the policy sciences. Still, in writing

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
> But I have many promises to keep
> And miles to go before I sleep,

he does provide an allusion to what ails the contemporaneous relationship between policy makers and their would-be advisers, a relationship tempered by the history of the policy sciences and their applications, one rife with institutional complexity, with much to promise, and "miles" to go before those promises are realized. What

necessary services or goods are policy makers asking from their policy advisers and how can the policy scientist best (as a function of quality and integrity) respond? Inherent in this question is a principal assumption: policy advisers, in the words of Aaron Wildavsky (1979*b*), must "speak truth to power." That is, without access to and the ear of policy makers, the policy sciences lose their sine qua non; they have been, from their earliest iteration, an applied (inter)discipline: if they need to re-ask Robert Lynn's question, *Knowledge for What?* (1939); if the study of public policy becomes irrelevant through lack of application or, to borrow deLeon's metaphor, if (policy) advice does not match (political) consent, then—let us be candid—the policy sciences have failed to meet the challenges spelled out by Lasswell, Dror, and the other pioneers in their efforts.

There are two possible explanations that might address this worrisome condition. The first, and more optimistic reading is that the policy research community is still maturing in terms of a necessary set of skills and applications. Brewer and Lövgren (1999, 315) allude to this possibility during a Swedish symposium on environmental research:

> While the demand for interdisciplinary work is large and apparently growing, our capacity to engage in it productively is not keeping pace. This is not to say that genuine knowledge about complex problems and the requisite theories, methods, and practices to confront them is unfamiliar. Instead, we seem to be facing numerous challenges intellectual, practical, and organization that impede our efforts to engage problems effectively.

This explanation suggests that with a bit more theory and practice, typically through a greater application of interdisciplinary activity, more receptive client organizations, and a few more tractable problems, there is little wrong with the policy sciences approach that a normal cognitive maturation process might not remedy. However, in fairness, this promise was laid out by the policy sciences' originating fathers (and others; see Merton 1936) more than a half-century ago and is still awaiting consummation. Moreover, the extant public policy theories are at best only "under construction" rather than in the testing stage (see Sabatier 1999). Few public policy scholars today deride the value of an interdisciplinary approach (e.g. see Karlqvist 1999 and Fischer 2003); in the hands of a careful student of democratic practices, like Robert Putnam in *Making Democracy Work* (1993), it clearly is of great worth and value. However, even if this interdisciplinary possibility is widely seen as both valid and persuasive, then it is still imperative to measure out other ameliorative elements of the policy sciences besides an interdisciplinary approach, a compliant client, or a few more methodological tools.

An alternative (and admittedly more pessimistic) reading is that the policy sciences approach is losing whatever currency it once held among policy makers, policy scholars, and the cognizant publics. If so, one needs to explore possible reasons. To borrow a phrase used by Martin Rein and Donald Schön (1993), in a political system characterized by pluralism, there is an inherent-bordering-upon-intractable problem in reaching a consensus on "framing" the analysis (also see Schön and Rein 1994). In Rein and Schön's (1993, 146) description, "framing is a way of selecting, organizing,

interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting." John Dryzek (1993, 222) agrees with Rein and Schön in terms of framing's centrality but also comments on the difficulty in framing policy discourse: "each frame treats some topics as more salient than others, defines social problems in a unique fashion, commits itself to particular value judgments, and generally interprets the world in its own particular and partial way. . . . . [Not surprisingly] frames are not easily adjudicated." (A thought problem for the enthusiast: How have "framing" problems affected the US commitment to the recurrent Middle East crises, to say nothing of the shortcomings of the American public education system or US environmental/energy policy?) In an American political and social system often defined by polar politics and overwhelming complexity that result in a general lack of consensus, reaching agreements on how best to frame policy issues could be tantamount to impossible or, more likely, something to be "put aside" until the next political crisis forces a temporary consensus, which, of course, dissipates when the crisis passes. To pose the question frankly: again, in an applied context, what "value added" does the study of public policy and the policy sciences bring to a political policy-making process that is often and decidedly unanalytic?

Once we have asked these questions, of course, we should not necessarily subscribe to a counsel of despair or unnecessarily rend our collective sackcloth. But it is important to recognize that the policy sciences as a fruitful exercise for future policy makers is not a foregone conclusion, as we have enumerated above, and not necessarily as it has been traditionally presented. If for no other reason, time and conditions have changed. In all likelihood, Lasswell and his colleagues never considered their framework to be forever sacrosanct or beyond amendment. Douglas Torgerson (1986, 52–3; emphasis in original) speaks to this issue:

The dynamic nature of the [policy sciences] phenomenon is rooted in an internal tension, a *dialectic opposition between knowledge and politics*. Through the interplay of knowledge and politics, different aspects of the phenomenon become salient at different moments . . . the presence of dialectical tension means that the phenomenon has the potential to develop, to change its form. However, no particular pattern of development is inevitable.

What then might be some signposts for the continued development and application of the policy sciences, or what Dan Durning (1999) has described as "The transition from traditional to postpositive policy analysis?" A more precise criterion as well as introducing a new approach is offered by Maarten Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar (2003*a*: 4; emphasis in original): "*What kind of policy analysis might be relevant to understanding governance in an emerging social network society?*" Furthermore, Hajer and Wagenaar (2003*a*: 15) speak directly to the normative compass of the policy sciences: "Whatever we have to say about the nature and foundation of the policy sciences, its litmus test will be that it must 'work' for the everyday reality of modern democracy." Who and what, in Laurence Lynn's (1999) expression, warrants "a place at the [public policy] table" and why? One can posit that the traditional public policy analytic mode, primarily based on a social welfare model (for example,

see Weimer and Vining 2005) has not proven particularly successful when applied to the political arena (as, indeed, the post-positivists argue; see below), an arena marked more by backroom compromise than theoretic-elegant solutions. Thus, we are enjoined to consider a broader set of approaches and methodologies beyond those adopted whole cloth from microeconomics and operations research. As such, we need to examine thoughtfully various aspects of the post-positivist research orientations.

Hajer and Wagenaar (2003a) have presented an innovative central concept to the policy sciences methodological tool kit; that is, the idea of *social networks* under a democratic, participative regime.[9] This orientation is reflected in three conditions. First, increasingly, observers of public policy issues no longer look at specified governmental units (say, the Department of Commerce for globalization issues or the Department of Education's mission to "leave no child behind") per se. Rather, they tend to examine *issue* networks, including governmental units on the federal *and* state *and* municipal levels; these are constantly seen to be interacting with important non-profit organizations (NPOs) on both the national and the local levels, and various representations from the private sector as well (Heclo 1977; Carlsson 2000). Research in health care, education, social welfare, the environment, indeed, even national security (in terms of protecting the citizen against terrorist threats; see Kettl 2004) suggests the rise of the social network phenomenon. All of these actors are engaging in what Hajer (1993) called "policy discourses," hopefully, but not always, of a cooperative nature. Second, of equal importance to the policy sciences, they must continue to expound a democratic orientation, or what Mark Warren (1992) has termed an "expansive democracy," one featuring an enlarged component of public participation, often in the direct democratic vein and, more commonly now, without the traditional political party serving as an intermediary; the alternative is what Dryzek once balefully referred to as "the policy sciences of tyranny" (Dryzek 1989, 98), when bureaucratic and technological elites assume governance roles (see Fischer 2003). Third, and in conjunction with the first two, the policy sciences need to assimilate the decentralization tendencies of political systems that are so vital to contemporary public management processes, often under the heading of the "new" public management (e.g. Osborne and Gaebler 1992), but also an integral part of the participatory policy analysis themes (deLeon 1997; Mayer 1997; Fischer 2000).

In many ways, the inclusion of a post-positivist orientation in public policy theory and practice could mark a fractious transition within the community of policy researchers, for a number of reasons. There is the potential for an internecine brouhaha between the positivist and post-positivist advocates. Historically, the public policy "track record" has characteristically been based on a social welfare economics, i.e. a largely empirical, analytic approach; there are significant intellectual investments (to say nothing of a large education infrastructure) supporting this endeavor. However, there are numerous scholars who suggest that the prevailing quantitative orientation is precisely the problem and the positivist approach should

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[9] Scott (1991) and Wasserman and Faust (1994) offer thorough introductions to social network analysis.

be held intellectually accountable for the shortcomings observed. Many scholars of the post-positivist bent—Frank Fischer (2003), John Dryzek (1990, 2000), Ronald Brunner (1991), Maarten Hajer (1993; with Wagenaar 2003a)—have identified what they claim to be serious epistemological failures of the positivist approach, assumptions, and results, offering historical examples (above) that seem to be supportive. Dryzek (1990, 4–6) has been particularly scathing in his assessments of positivism, especially what he (and others) call "instrumental rationality," which, he claims:

destroys the more congenial, spontaneous, egalitarian, and intrinsically meaningful aspects of human association...represses individuals...is ineffective when confronted with complex social problems...makes effective and appropriate policy analysis impossible...[and, most critically] is antidemocratic.

But, as Laurence Lynn (1999) has convincingly argued, many lucid and powerful (and in some cases, unexpected) insights have been gleaned from the collective analytic (read: positivist) corpus conducted over the past fifty years (such as in the field of criminal justice, public transportation, and social welfare policy) and there is little reason to suspect that future analysts would want to exorcize these modes. Alice Rivlin (1970) suggested years ago that we might not have arrived at many definitive answers to vexing public problems, but policy research has at least permitted us to ask more appropriate questions. This capability should not be treated lightly, for asking the right questions is surely the first step in deriving the right answers.

Neither side of this divide, then, is without valid debating points as they set forth the future directions for the study of public policy. More important, however, is that the scholars of the positivist and post-positivist persuasions should not intellectually isolate themselves from one another. Few social welfare or health policy economists would deny that there are important variables outside the economic orbit in most social transfer equations; why else would they concern themselves about issues of equity? Similarly, few proponents of an "interpretative analysis" would simply eliminate the calculation of expenses deriving from differing bond rates underlying urban renewal opportunities from their analysis. The policy problem—as any analyst of most any stripe will agree—must be defined in terms of what methodologies are relevant by the context (see deLeon 1998), not by an analyst's preferred methodologies, as Lynn (1999) implies in his criticism of the post-positivist approach. The alternative diagnosis comes dangerously close to Abraham Kaplan's (1964) famous "law of the instrument:" when all you have is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail.

In this case, social network theory might not only describe a new conceptual approach to viewing the policy world, but it also provides an intellectual bridge that both sides of the positivist–post-positivist divide can accept. And, to be sure, there are already some "bridging" methodologies, such as Q-sort (Durning 1999) and social network analysis, that both camps can possibly share.[10] But the key to the continued development of the policy sciences and public policy research community in general is the ability to countenance and assimilate new concepts as *a function of the problem*

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[10] Steven Brown (1980) is arguably the best reference for those wishing to engage in Q sort analysis.

statement, i.e. the problem context, as their analytic lodestone. This suggests a willingness to utilize whichever approach is best suited for the analysis at hand. A favorable harbinger in this regard is the recognition of a more ecumenical set of methodological approaches and the importance of process *and* substance, as evidenced in the more recent policy analysis textbooks (e.g. Weimer and Vining 2005; MacRae and Whittington 1997).

The democratic theme, a central part of the policy sciences' Lasswellian heritage, has been emphasized of late in terms of "participatory policy analysis" (PPA), or the active involvements (or "discourse" or "deliberation" or "deliberative democracy") of citizens in the formulation of policy agenda.[11] James Fishkin (1991, 1995) has engaged in a series of carefully structured public deliberations as a means to bring public awareness and discursive involvement to political policy making. But the deliberative role in public policy making has also been derided as being simply "too cumbersome" or "too time intensive;" in the problematic search for consensus, its products are too ambiguous; some characterize it as little more than a publicity exercise in which the opposing group that has the more robust vocal chords or tenacity or resources is the invariable winner; deLeon (1997) has suggested that there are contingencies in which technical expertise and/or expediency are crucial for decision making; and, as Lyons and his colleagues (1992) have written, participatory policy analysis does not necessarily result in greater citizen participation, knowledge of the problem, or even satisfaction; indeed, James Madison's *Federalist Papers* (number 10) carefully warned about the dangers of popular participation in government.

There are, in short, many obstacles to participatory policy analysis that would caution its universal dissemination. However, it does need to be recognized that there have been some instances in which PPA has performed admirably, mostly, of course, on local levels (for examples, see Kathlene and Martin 1991; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; deLeon 1997) and in many cases of environmental mediations (Beierle and Cayford 2002; Fischer 2000). In short, the democratic ethos is such a fundamental bedrock of the American polity that it is difficult to countenance an ideology or orientation that could supplant it (Dahl 1998). In that regard, there appear to be ample grounds for a more systematic examination and application of PPA.

Lastly, in both the public and private sectors, the American polity is undergoing the decentralization of the nation's political processes. The current literature on public management talks extensively about the "devolution" of power from the federal government down to state and municipal governments, a phenomenon manifested by the Welfare Reform Act and the Telecommunication Act (both 1996). To some, for instance, centralized government regulation has become little more than an antiquated (perhaps dysfunctional) concept, as easily abandoned as the bustle. If these trends continue, various aspects of the policy sciences—such as PPA and social network theories—are certain to become more pivotal in addressing the potential effects of decentralized authority; e.g. what measures would be necessary to ensure public accountability? One obvious concern is that policy researchers will

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[11] See Dryzek 1990, 2000; Renn et al. 1993; Elster 1998; Forester 1999; Fischer 2003; deLeon 1997.

need to assimilate a new set of analytic skills dealing with education and negotiation and mediation, that is, helping to forge policy design and implementation rather than advise policy makers, which raises another recurring dilemma, impartiality.

4. Conclusion

The policy sciences were developed in part as the "policy sciences of democracy . . . directed towards knowledge to improve the practice of democracy" (Lasswell 1951*a*, 14) and in recognition of providing "intelligence pertinent to the integration of values realized by and embodied by interpersonal relations [such as] human dignity and the realization of human capacities" (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950, 15). These represent their conceptual bedrock. But, having said this, the world has surely changed since the early 1950s. With these changes, it would be quixotic to suggest that the policy sciences as an intellectual orientation have remained somehow constant. To this end, we have offered some new approaches that could be readily incorporated into the body of the policy sciences' approach.

As we have pointed out, then, some changes are necessary to "improve" the policy sciences' processes and the results; stasis is hardly an option. However, to surrender the hallmarks of the policy sciences' approach would be tantamount to giving up the (relevance) candle to satisfy the (Lasswellian) flame. For these reasons, a continuing dialogue is necessary to assure that both the candle and the flame will endure and shed light on their appointed subjects.

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