



Editorial: Democracy and the Policy Sciences: A Progress Report

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Editorial

Democracy and the policy sciences: A progress report

Democracy appears victorious and, with it, so do the policy sciences of democracy. Formulated during a period when anti-democratic forces were intellectually as well as politically vital, Harold D. Lasswell's post-war call for the policy sciences of democracy (1948: p. 118; 1951) emerges today without serious challenge in the sense that every policy scientist now seems to be a policy scientist of democracy. Although controversy still remains on vital methodological, professional, and ethical issues involving the relationship between knowledge and power, these issues are themselves now typically framed in a way that signals a democratic ascendancy.

Yet this ascendancy has less to do with the intellectual trajectory of the policy sciences than with broader political developments. For the first time in history, just about everyone who matters, anywhere, is a democrat – at least when it comes to the public justification of their programs, if not the reality of their actions. Of course, if we scratch the surface of the symbolism, the actual content of many of the commitments of justifications labeled 'democratic' soon appears problematic, in the policy sciences no less than elsewhere.

At mid-century, Lasswell could reasonably worry about blatant anti-democratic uses of the policy-sciences – indeed, of their devotion to tyranny – and he could similarly take for granted the framework of liberal democracy that had developed in the West and was finally gaining stability in the early post-war period. Lasswell's policy sciences of democracy would emerge within this framework and serve to protect it. At the time, it may well have seemed superfluous – perhaps inadvisable – to probe the theoretical and practical perplexities which now confront the policy sciences of democracy. Yet these questions, which form the focus of this special issue, are not new: they are central to the intellectual traditions from which the policy sciences of democracy have historically emerged.

Reason and democracy: An historical context

The Enlightenment project of rational guidance in the development of modern civilization was not originally or necessarily a democratic one. Rather it has often appealed to a notion of guardianship that predates the Enlightenment: the idea, first proposed by Plato, that some elite should govern because of its monopoly on expertise. The relevant expertise might be that of Enlightenment *philosophes*, *laissez faire* economists, the early positivist priesthood, scientific managers, Marxist-Leninists, psychologists, nuclear engineers, or contemporary ecologists. Reason has not always been at ease

with democracy. Successive versions of liberal democracy have featured uneasy compromises between reason and democracy.

The principle of popular control has often been restrained by the fear of too much democracy, of democracy at odds with the requisites of rational governance. Indeed, despite today's democratic victory, a basic question still confronts the policy sciences of democracy: is the tension between reason and democracy unavoidable? Or can it be reduced, even largely avoided, by the promotion of an educated, active public able to enter or create new relationships between citizens and experts? The question suggests that the policy sciences are not as relentlessly technocratic as their critics sometimes aver. Instead, they contain the potential to encourage a participatory shift in democratic theory and practice – a revamping of liberal democracy along more participative lines, if not a clear shift from liberal to participatory democracy. Questioning the relationship between reason and democracy requires attention to both terms of the relationship – reason as well as democracy – and this special issue is meant to promote such examination.

The modern attempt to link reason and democracy could gain particular momentum in the nineteenth century because reason, in revealing and examining the prejudices of tradition, could hardly avoid questioning the traditional privileges and institutions that served to maintain the old beliefs and practices. Thus the English philosophic radicals, inspired by Bentham's critique of traditional jurisprudence, made common cause with democratization (Hamburger, 1965). Even so, the spectre of the ill-informed mass, the passionate and irrational mob, gave pause to some of these political intellectuals. Certainly, their key figure, John Stuart Mill, would – in fearing Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority – find it necessary to qualify his embrace of democracy.

Mill's stress on the need for free discussion among an active, educated public – a citizenry informed about affairs and involved in local issues – has won for him a reputation as a theorist of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970: ch. 2). Yet he also proposed institutions which would insure 'the right idea of democracy,' that of a 'rational democracy' where the populace, while retaining ultimate electoral control, would remain satisfied by good government, which could be provided only by the 'few,' 'an enlightened minority' of officials and experts responsible for the direct handling of affairs (Mill, 1835: pp. 194–196). While Mill was surely aware of the risks of official tyranny and of irresponsible bureaucracy, his hope for the progress of humanity inspired a fear of the wrong, irrational kind of democracy. Despite his significant participatory gestures, Mill's vision of liberal democracy thus paradoxically sought refuge in the expanding administrative apparatus of the modern state.

The expansion of the administrative apparatus was, for Max Weber, part of the irresistible rationalization and disenchantment of the world. Where a hopeful Mill had anticipated progress, Weber perceived fate. The future belonged to the efficiency and expertise of bureaucratic organization: econo-

my and society in the modern world were necessarily bound up with rationalization and bureaucratization. This was not something to be celebrated, but a reality to be clearly recognized by scientific observers and to be treated with resignation by responsible actors in public affairs. Voicing despair over conventional proponents of bureaucracy, grimly anticipating a regimented reign of uninspired experts, Weber foresaw no rosy future, but the closing of a bleak 'iron cage' (1904–5: pp. 181–182; Mayer, 1956: p. 127).

Nonetheless, one must measure up 'to the world as it really is in its everyday routine' (Weber, 1919: p. 128). Bureaucracy, indeed, was not fully rational; its power derived partly from real expert knowledge, but also partly from secrecy and the control of official files. There was room for the responsible intervention of the intellectual in matters of public policy. Not only might one seek to preserve spaces of personal freedom, but one might also promote partial limits on the power of bureaucracy through constitutional provisions of liberal democracy and mechanisms such as the parliamentary review of bureaucratic operations (Weber, 1918; Beetham, 1985: chs. 3–4). Yet there was no possibility of democracy involving an active citizenry. Weber, indeed, held much the same idea of liberal democracy as was later to be advanced by Joseph Schumpeter: once they have elected a leader, Weber said, the people are not to 'interfere'; they are to 'shut up and obey'.¹

Mill's ideas remained intellectually vital and the work of Weber was still quite fresh when, in the 1920s, a young Harold D. Lasswell began to map the outlines of what he would much later call 'the policy sciences.' Lasswell witnessed directly the economic distress and political turbulence of a Europe torn by war – what Weber, in a German context, had feared as 'a polar night of icy hardness and darkness' (1919: p. 128). Yet, in developing his ideas about knowledge and power in modern civilization, Lasswell remained under the primary influence of American progressivism – particularly as that movement sought a happy marriage of science and democracy.²

The marriage, however, was proving a difficult one. The advent of propaganda in a mass society, particularly under wartime conditions, led many progressives to doubt the possibility of an active and enlightened citizenry. As the spectre of an irrational populace loomed larger in the progressive mind, it was left to John Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) to reassert the possibility of a democratic public life involving both experts and citizens.

Even though Lasswell, a pioneering student of propaganda, probed far more deeply than Dewey into the irrationalities of psychopathology and ideology, he did not abandon the vision of a democratic community that was central to Dewey's pragmatist political theory. Lasswell's life's work might be read as being inspired by Dewey and as turning on the perplexing problem of how one might redeem this vision despite countervailing historical trends. With direct reference to Dewey, indeed, Lasswell proposed the policy sciences of democracy explicitly and deliberately to counter the dual historical threats of 'oligarchy' and 'bureaucratism' (1971: pp. xiii–iv; 119). While Lasswell's policy sciences of democracy remain part of a liberal democratic

framework, his work repeatedly explores how power might be shaped and shared through widespread participation, even offering in one instance – as Henry Kariel has observed – a ‘dramatic illustration of how social science can creatively restructure a prevailing system of power’ to promote ‘a democratic forum for sharing power.’³

Today, the technocratic idea of sealing reason off from politics has lost its plausibility. In the rough and tumble of political reality, we find conflict and contention among experts, a technocratic politics of expertise which the policy sciences of democracy cannot reasonably seek to eliminate. By recognizing and developing participatory potentials, however, it may well be possible to promote a democratic politics of expertise.

Experts and citizens

Efforts to link reason and democracy remain dubious so long as guardianship can claim sole custody and protection of the shrine of reason. Yet claims to the rationality of guardianship have been effectively undermined by Karl Popper’s arguments for the open society (1966, 1972). To Popper, the complexity of human affairs means that no single wisdom accessible to any small group of people can ever encompass the range of pertinent considerations surrounding a public problem. Thus the appropriate orientation to public policy is one of tentative trial and error, in which policy proposals and their effects are open to criticism from a variety of viewpoints. Such an orientation is possible only with decentralized and democratic politics. For Popper, it is liberal democratic politics which neatly fits the bill here. Indeed, liberals deserve thanks for the best critiques of guardianship (recently, e.g., Dahl, 1989).

Yet we now find a renewed apology for guardianship coming from a liberal direction. Liberals from Locke to Hayek have, of course, always been attuned to the dangers of too much democracy, and especially its threats to liberal freedoms and the capitalist market. Market-oriented liberals who have turned their attention to societies escaping from authoritarian political economies – whether in Latin America or, now especially, Eastern Europe – argue that effective economic reform is endangered by democracy. For that reform necessitates short-term pain (inflation, unemployment, and inequality) as the old economic order is dismantled. Voters cannot be trusted to stay the course; in demanding that the pain be alleviated, they are likely to compromise the prospects of economic reform. Moreover, marketization involves imposition of a technical economic blueprint made in the United States which ordinary people (especially those with no experience of a market system) cannot be expected to understand. Democracy, the argument goes, is therefore something which must be postponed until marketization has produced growth, prosperity, and a dynamic, pluralistic society.

The essay by Andreas Pickel constitutes an effective demolition of this

kind of authoritarian liberalism. Pointing to an unhappy irony, Pickel notes that the very societies which long and greatly suffered from the attempted imposition of one utopian blueprint – Marxism-Leninism – are now being asked to suffer the imposition of another. But the Popperian argument devastates both kinds of utopian social engineering. To Pickel, it is wrong to speak of *transition* to a new kind of economic system, for this language implies that human beings are indeed capable of implementing blueprints for whole societies on a predetermined time schedule, and that at some definite time the implementation can be declared complete. It is more appropriate to speak of *transformation*, an open-ended process with no fixed destination. Such transformation is more consistent with the social conditions of human intelligence. The appropriate political form, for Pickel, is a liberal democracy with distinctly participative elements, a form promoting piecemeal change and allowing open criticism from a variety of interests and positions.

Authoritarian liberal arguments are now only turned against democracy in the East and South, and even then only for some supposed transitional period. But policy scientists in the West may still be tempted by more subtle rationalistic, anti-democratic arguments and forces. Following Max Weber, it has often been argued that the sheer complexity of many public policy issues means that ordinary people and democratic politicians cannot be entrusted with them. For Weber, bureaucracy was the inevitable solution. For many policy scientists, the solution has often involved analytical techniques such as systems analysis, program budgeting, game theory, cost-benefit analysis, computer modelling, decision analysis, risk assessment, multi-attribute utility analysis, and so forth, all of which have had their days in the sun. But experience now suggests that the cost in terms of democracy has rarely been worth the gain in policy rationality.

Following the ruined hopes of such technocratic endeavors over past decades, one possible response is to 'bring in the people.' This kind of response is well represented in the article by Ortwin Renn, Thomas Webler, Horst Rakel, Peter Diemel, and Branden Johnson, which details a three-step procedure for policy making on complex issues. The first two steps entail expert judgment. Step one is a value-free analysis of stakeholder values. Step two involves determination of how particular options will affect these values through a 'group delphi' process in which consensus among the relevant experts is sought. Democracy enters at step three, where a panel of citizens selected by lot is given the results of the first two steps and asked to deliberate on these findings in order to make policy recommendations.

The three-step process described by Renn et al. remains under the control of the analysts, who decide when and upon what terms the people should be allowed in. But the people involved may not accept this subordinate role – indeed, in the New Jersey experiment that Renn et al. sponsored, the citizens who were recruited responded by excluding the analysts from their deliberations. For some, this episode might validate the concern that participation promotes irrationality; yet, for others, it might well demonstrate how a demo-

cratic rationality can assert itself. Indeed, a more radical approach to citizen participation in policy analysis would dispense with hard and fast distinctions between citizens and experts, at least once the experts have played a facilitating role. This is the approach taken by Frank Fischer.

Fischer's joining of reason and democracy is located at the convergence of two important strands of thought – one from the policy literature, the other from democratic theory. The first strand consists of postpositivist policy analysis, whose development is reviewed by Fischer and which, we would argue, now occupies the intellectual high ground in the policy field (even if it does not pervade the sensibilities of most practitioners in the public policy trenches). The other strand is a deliberative model of democracy, which involves a free discourse among political equals in which interests and values are subject to scrutiny – in contradistinction to the simple registration and aggregation of preferences typically characterizing liberal conceptions of democracy. Fischer shows that the conjunction of postpositivist policy analysis and deliberative democracy can be found in public policy reality as well as political theory. His two cases demonstrate further that participatory policy analysis can occur both as a state endeavor (in making policy for hazardous waste treatment in Alberta) and as public mobilization against recalcitrant state authority (in community-based 'popular epidemiology' in Woburn, Massachusetts). Against the Weberian and technocratic positions, Fischer demonstrates that participatory policy analysis is especially appropriate when it comes to 'wicked' policy problems featuring high levels of both technical complexity and political conflict.

The conjunction of postpositivist policy analysis and participatory deliberative democracy endorsed by Fischer can be associated with a particular 'scheme of reason,' as Charles Anderson puts it in his contribution. Anderson believes that a key task of the policy sciences is to recommend such a scheme to a broader public. The scheme consistent with deliberative democracy (participatory or not) is that of practical reason, as exercised in public-spirited debate oriented to the generation of consensus as to what is in the public good. Practical reason has a history that goes back to Aristotle, and in this century it informs the democratic pragmatism of Dewey, a key source for Lasswell's conception of the policy sciences.

Anderson believes that practical reason is essentially consistent with the way ordinary people and political actors can and do think. Yet economists and lawyers try to point us in a different direction. Economists favor utilitarian reason, which, Anderson notes, is manifestly inconsistent with the way most people reason most of the time – and so must entail undemocratic imposition upon them. Lawyers favor liberal rationalism, whose emphasis is on detailing the rules of reasonable individual behavior, while remaining largely silent on the possibility of public ends and actions. Anderson favors a combination of liberal rationalism and practical reason.

Deliberative democracy does, then, gain approval in the essays by Renn et al., Fischer, and Anderson, if in different ways, and with different degrees of

centrality to the argument. It is left to Goodin to provide a skeptical note here, and to argue on behalf of the decidedly less fashionable model of democratic elitism. Unlike populists (of for that matter market liberals), Goodin does not trust people to be the best judges of their own interests. Sometimes their preferences are uninformed; sometimes they are unsettled; sometimes they are not firmly held; and sometimes they are inconsistent with meta-preferences. Goodin believes that in such cases paternalistic public policy is defensible. But democracy, like policy, should respect individuals' reflectively-held preferences, even as it need not and should not respect their unreflective preferences. And in competitive elitism Goodin finds a number of devices that promote this sifting of preferences: most notably, reflection on the part of intermediaries (elected officials), the bundling of policy proposals at election time, and the extension of time horizons associated with the periodic nature of elections. Thus in Goodin's world, the policy sciences would seem to rest content with the existing structures of representative democracy, and need not attend to democratization of themselves or the political system.

Skepticism of a very different sort is manifested in the article by Sanford Schram. To postmodernists such as Schram, any drive toward consensus of the sort embedded in the idea of practical reason is as suspect, and as anti-democratic, as the more overly authoritarian imposition of policies and analytical frameworks. Schram points to the way that the 'reality' upon which policy operates is symbolically and discursively constructed, arguing that particular constructions serve particular interests. His critique of welfare policy exposes social constructions of the identity of welfare recipients and associated myths concerning the feminization of poverty. Thus it is social policy which creates and constitutes social problems, rather than responding to problems that are simply given by social reality. In this context, what looks like democratic policy formation can mask decidedly undemocratic discursive hegemony. The task of postmodern policy analysis then becomes one of questioning and destabilizing established discourses in order to allow alternative identities to emerge. Postmodern policy analysis points to a pluralist democracy in which identities can be asserted, defended, and scrutinized, rather than taken as given. Democratic deliberation retains a place in this democracy, but it is oriented to the highlighting of ineliminable differences, rather than the generation of consensus.

A difficulty with postmodern policy analysis and postmodern democracy alike is that they suggest no clear criteria for reaching and implementing a legitimate policy decision. The postmodern inclination to deconstruct rather than construct – while often producing striking insights – may also involve inattention that opens a gap for the entry of authoritarianism. If so, then the ironic result might be an odd combination of endless democratic play and bureaucratic policy imposition. The condition of internal politics at contemporary North American universities perhaps illustrates this prospect.

Table 1. Models of Democracy and Models of Rationality

	Model of Democracy	Model of Rationality
Pickel	Liberal open society	Popperian critical rationalism
Renn et al.	Constrained participatory	Instrumental/analytic dominant; communicative subordinate
Fischer	Participatory	Communicative
Anderson	Liberal deliberative	Liberal rationalism and practical reason
Goodin	Democratic elitism	Moral-analytic
Schram	Pluralist politics of identity	Destabilization of rationality claims

Models of democracy and rationality

The six articles collected in this special issue thus represent six different models of democracy and six different notions of rationality. These are summarized in Table 1. To Pickel, democracy consists of a liberal open society whose rationality is to be found in Popperian critical rationalism. This kind of rationality is both instrumental (in emphasizing the capacity to devise, select, and effect good means to clarified and consistent ends) and analytical (in its disaggregation of complex problems into simpler components). But it is not technocratic – and, indeed, includes participatory features – for it requires that rational policy interventions be subjected to criticism from a variety of perspectives. A piecemeal approach to policy experimentation is well-established in policy analysis, particularly in policy evaluation textbooks; though experimental and quasi-experimental approaches to policy evaluation have often downplayed the need for openness to criticism.

Renn et al. and Fischer are less explicit than Pickel when it comes to a model of rationality. But the kind of unrestricted discourse encompassing questions of both fact and value which Fischer favors is clearly consistent with the idea of communicative rationality, especially as developed by Jurgen Habermas. To Habermas, communicative action is oriented to reciprocal understanding and coordination; communicative rationality represents the degree to which this action is free from coercion, strategy, hierarchy, deception, and self-deception. This model is distinguishable from Popperian critical rationalism by its emphasis on the public scrutiny of interests as well as empirical claims, and its insistent interrogation of factors distorting authentic communication. Communicative rationality fits well with a deliberative, participatory model of democracy. Fischer's commitment to this combination is unqualified. The same, however, cannot be said of Renn et al., who appear to expect communicative rationality and deliberative democracy to operate only in spaces with boundaries drawn by the policy analyst. Thus in Renn et al., the communicative component of rationality appears ultimately subordinate to an instrumental-analytic one.

We have already noted that Anderson's model of rationality combines

liberal rationalism and practical reason. His implicit model of democracy may be styled liberal deliberative. Practical reason is really not that different from communicative rationality. Both have Aristotelian roots and support a deliberative model of democracy. The difference may be found in their historical trajectories: practical reason (at least on Anderson's account) comes via liberalism, whereas communicative rationality comes via critical theory. Thus communicative rationality is more insistent on the need to locate, criticize, and remove factors that constrain and distort political debate – and one would have to include among such factors some of the formal rules of proper conduct to which liberal rationalists are devoted.

Goodin's model of democracy is democratic elitism. His model of rationality may be styled moral-analytic, consisting of the capacity to sort defensible preferences from indefensible ones. This model is applicable to individuals and policy making processes alike. A note of caution is warranted here inasmuch as Goodin at no point suggests this model exhausts what we should mean by rationality in public policy; as he notes, he is taking but one cut at some complex issues of democracy and policy.

By not simply accepting the given preferences of individuals, moreover, Goodin's approach in moral analysis exhibits an interesting similarity to critical theory (though only in this one respect), and helps alert us to difficulties inherent in any effort to link reason and democracy. Habermas' communicative rationality depends upon inquiry and reflection that allow groups and individuals to overcome both deception and self-deception. Existing preferences are not simply registered but also criticized. Such critique implies that a legitimate standard of rationality can either be found or devised. Postmodernists argue that seemingly neutral standards such as practical reason, communicative rationality, or Goodin's principles for moral analysis neglect the ineliminable variety in human experience while serving some interests and excluding others.

With its plural, deconstructive politics of identity, Schram's postmodern democracy is especially alert to the danger of establishing standards in public policy discourse. No model of rationality easily fits with postmodern politics. For postmodernists are concerned with the destabilization of rationality claims, rather than the elucidation of any model of rationality of their own. Any standard creates privilege while constructing a diminished 'other.' Postmodernism therefore injects a question mark into every standard that might be proposed. The approach promotes a sensibility as well as a 'responsibility to otherness,' thereby highlighting how identities are constructed and enforced by public policy. By itself, however, such insight is insufficient as a program for linking democracy and the policy sciences. No politics can live by questioning alone, for there is also in politics and policy a 'responsibility to act,' which in turn requires legitimate, institutionalized ways for individuals and groups to make decisions and carry them out (cf. White, 1991).

Democratic responsibilities: An agenda of inquiry

Policy formulation and implementation – which fulfill the responsibility to act – are readily associated with the administrative state, whereas a responsibility to otherness is more at ease in a democratic social sphere. Can these responsibilities be combined, or at least connected, instead of having the responsibility to otherness routinely subordinated to the apparent instrumental imperatives of the administrative state? Modern states generally respond to persistent pressures, especially the economic imperatives dictated by the capitalist market system (cf. Lindblom, 1982). By contrast, a separate democratic sphere devoted to the cultivation of responsibility to otherness – and so, by definition, diverse and fragmented – is at most a minor irritant to routine state operations.

To help connect these responsibilities, the policy sciences of democracy must address two problems now emerging on the agenda of inquiry: (1) How might a democratic public sphere generate consensus as well as difference? (2) How might this sphere be related to the administrative state? The first problem points to communicative rationality or practical reason as means of generating public interests through democratic discourse. But communicative rationality and practical reason must somehow take into account the post-modern emphasis on difference and variety, even while maintaining the idea of a public interest.

The second problem suggests that democratic discourse and democratization should not be confined to a public sphere separate from the state (as some democratic theorists have recently suggested). Any argument on behalf of the virtues of communicative rationality or practical reason is applicable to state actions no less than civil society. And the state does not fit the caricature of an instrumental-analytic monolith, effectively grinding out answers to complex problems. Indeed, ineffective policy responses to increasingly 'wicked' problems open the door to alternative practices and rationalities. In some cases, this might involve relatively minor reforms, such as conducting public hearings in order to seek legitimation for policy decisions. But even such limited initiatives carry with them a concession to a more discursive and participatory style of politics, along with the implicit admission that all is not well in the affairs of the administrative state. Participatory and radical democrats, though often rightly suspicious of such moves, should also consider them as opportunities to expand upon, rather than simply turning away for fear of being tainted by too close an association with established power.

These items on the agenda of inquiry direct attention to questions which, while newly formulated, have always accompanied efforts to link reason and democracy: how to recognize difference while generating public interests, how to promote democracy in the public sphere while cultivating connections with the nuts and bolts of policy decision. In grappling with these questions, the policy sciences of democracy promise a new shape dramatically at odds with prior technocratic expectations. But there is less an accomplishment now to be celebrated than a project to be pursued.

John S. Dryzek and Douglas Torgerson

Notes

1. Weber did add, however, that the people could later judge and penalize the leader for making mistakes – seriously or not, Weber suggested ‘the gallows.’ Quoted in Gerth and Mills (1946: p. 42). Cf. Beetham (1985: pp. 111–112); Pateman (1970: ch. 1).
2. On the historical context of Lasswell and other figures in the emergence of the policy orientation, see Torgerson (1995) and the sources cited there.
3. Kariel (1969: pp. 137–138) refers to a study by Rubenstein and Lasswell (1966) which presents a ‘prototype’ of power sharing in a psychiatric hospital. On the concept of ‘prototyping,’ see Lasswell (1971: pp. 69–72).

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