Challenging Policy Analysis to Serve the Good Society

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This symposium is an outgrowth of the continuing struggle within the social sciences over what policy analysis is and what it should be, and thus how to teach it and how to practice it. We sought to bring the peculiar concerns of PEGS, with its focus on the search for practical new visions of the good society, to bear on this struggle. We asked contributors to consider what new and distinctive conceptions of policy analysis might be better suited to the achievement, maintenance, and enhancement of the good society. The essays reveal a remarkable set of intellectual alignments.

First, although few of the authors attempt an explicit characterization of the good society, a reasonably consistent conception is evident across the essays. In contrast to the diversity of good society conceptions that have appeared in the pages of this journal, the contributors to this symposium envision the good society as plainly and simply democratic, most likely with a system of representative government. The contributors do see this good society enjoying a much greater degree and breadth of citizen participation in governance and engagement in public affairs than is evident in the United States, which is their implicit, and sometimes explicit, reference point. Further, the contributors see this greater level of democracy closely intertwined with a much more bottom-up, community-based system of economic and social management than the centralized, bureaucratized, liberal-capitalist system evident among advanced industrial states today. Finally, the good society is not nirvana. It comes with many of the warts, weaknesses, and willfulness of the human spirit, and thus will require continued efforts at repair and improvement. In short, it is the *good* society, not the perfect society, and it will require something like policy analysis in its service.

Second, policy analysis is, and will remain, primarily a practical, problem-solving enterprise. To be so, however, it cannot be oriented only or even principally toward addressing discrete problems and finding programmatic solutions. It cannot, furthermore, only serve the currently powerful and the policy alter-

natives they prefer, and it cannot just pursue a superficially neutral evaluation of policy alternatives. Instead, while adhering to certain standards and methods, policy analysts must orient their efforts toward evaluating policy alternatives with the express purpose of maintaining and enhancing democratic governance. For several of the contributors, this means that policy analysis must commit to greater experimentation with types of policies and forms of delivery, that it must broaden its measures of assessment of policy alternatives and policy consequences, and that it must devote greater attention to developing the analytical capacities of citizens as well as elites. This broader conception of policy analysis, several contributors claim, is true to the vision of reforming democratic governance through better informed decision-making that Harold Lasswell and others articulated at the founding of the "policy sciences." It promises to make policies more legitimate while increasing social capital in ways that satisfy both the values of civic capacity-building and efficiency.

Third, policy analysis as currently taught and practiced is not merely inconsistent with its founding vision—it is incapable of helping us move closer to our aspirations for the good society. The deficiencies the contributors identify are legion, but several stand out as particularly severe:

- Policy analysis is insufficiently attentive to significant shifts in the way public affairs are conducted, including

Inside:

Conservative-Liberal-Socialism

Three Essays on Democratic Practice

(continued from cover)

    heavier reliance upon lower-level governmental and non-governmental agencies, contracting with private nonprofit and for-profit organizations, and greater expectations and demands for citizen and client participation, even as increasing proportions of citizens feel distant from their governments and overwhelmed by the scope and pace of economic and social change.

- Policy analysis as currently conceived and practiced has stoked a tendency to reach for all-or-nothing solutions based on an overly simplified view of the social order, and a tendency to distrust the capacity of citizens to create effective local governing arrangements.

- Policy analysis falls short in recognizing that the causes and effects of domestic policy problems and solutions cut across national jurisdictions and that relevant actors often stand outside national borders, and are indeed transnational in orientation.

Perhaps most devastating of all, every contributor criticizes the body of knowledge supporting the policy analysis enterprise, and the education and socialization of policy analysts. Several contributors emphasize that our social problems require multi-disciplinary approaches to understand the interactions among the market, government, and civil society, yet the academy values narrow specialization. The traditional approach to policy analysis also does little to help public affairs graduates become normatively engaged, to see their task as more fundamental than simply solving civic crises, as though normative issues are merely distractions that get in the way of the usual business of public administration or policy analysis. Further, public affairs students need a better grounding in the historical dimensions of controversies over the public good as well as the role of experts in expanding or closing down opportunities for civic engagement. They need to understand the ways in which public, private, and voluntary associations shape notions of civic accountability, communal obligation, and individual agency.

In response to these deficiencies, several contributors call for more attention to qualitative research methods and to the integration of organizational and political analysis along with traditional cost-benefit analysis. Such changes should help policy analysts, and the faculty teaching them, to better integrate empirical and normative studies and to work against the compartmentalization of knowledge and skills that too often characterizes public policy education today. With respect to socialization and practice, some contributors call for greater professional transparency through such actions as disclosure of the financial interests and affiliations of analysts, and publication of the track records of practicing analysts. They also suggest requiring that analysts work alongside citizens rather than only at arms length from or in opposition to them, via such approaches as "pro bono" analysis or the policy analysis equivalent of public interest law.

What this symposium offers, then, is a diverse yet consistent set of challenges to the prevailing orthodoxy that governs education, training, socialization, and practice in policy analysis. We believe that this combination of essays extends the debate about policy analysis that has engaged social scientists for a decade. We seek to open that debate more widely by inviting responses to the claims and arguments of our contributors, in the pages of this journal and elsewhere.

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