PART I

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The policy orientation: legacy and promise

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THE POLICY SCIENCES APPROACHING MIDDLE AGE

The social sciences came into being as part of the modernization of Western societies in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the start they were preoccupied with the far-reaching effects of the transformation of traditional societies into modern ones. Their focus was on key features of the transformation. The 'social question', the rationalization of the world (in German debate captured by the term 'die Moderne'), development of the national economy, and the rise of representative institutions were crucial concerns. But the social sciences were also part of the very process of social transformation. They were meant to contribute to the amelioration of social evils and provide a basis for the rational and enlightened ordering of societal affairs. Such were the ambitions of the founding fathers of social science, and so have their emergence and evolution been perceived by later generations:

The historical transformation of social inquiry from rational speculation to empirical research occurred, as part of the general conquest of philosophy by science, in nineteenth-century Europe. This decisive turn in intellectual history accompanied the institutional transformation which gave modern society its distinctive character. The great problems of the age issued from the newly uprooted and displaced class of industrial urban workers and their families. The roots of modern social science lie in its responsiveness to the needs of modern society for empirical, quantitative, policy-relevant information about itself. (Lerner, 1959, pp. 15, 19)

After World War II, the term 'policy sciences' came into currency to characterize those elements of the social sciences that continued the tradition of commitment to the improvement of public policy. One of the earliest programmatic statements was contained in a book entitled The Policy Sciences, edited by Lerner and Lasswell in 1951. Lasswell's
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introductory chapter in the volume laid out the problems and opportunities facing the social sciences in the postwar world and gave a series of prescriptions for those who would accept the challenges of policy relevance. If we date the policy sciences from that time, they are now approaching middle age. The first purpose of this volume is to take stock of the nature of their development in the forty years since Lasswell wrote. We want to see how well subsequent generations of policy scientists have followed the direction and accomplished the aims set out by Lasswell and other pioneers. As Merton wrote in the concluding chapter in The Policy Sciences:

Perhaps owing to the absence of any systematic appraisal of their role, social scientists are sometimes beset with exaggerated doubts and harassed by exaggerated claims concerning their contributions to solutions for the problems of our day. (p. 295)

The doubts and claims are still with us. From today’s vantage point, there is still a need to examine how well those who came after stayed true to the vision—the grand vision—of early promoters of the policy orientation, and an equally vital need to examine the insight and the realism of the blueprint that they designed. Subsequent years have disclosed not only the soundness of many of their premises but also shortcomings in argument and expectation that call for revision.

In 1951, the most successful version of empirical, quantitative, and policy-oriented social science was in the United States. It was about to effect changes in the social sciences in the United States and elsewhere and it was to have an influence on the organization of government, largely evidenced in the creation of offices and advisory bodies for linking social science to government policy processes. Thus there is a triumphant note in Lerner’s assessment of the coalescence of reason and virtue when he outlines ‘the steady diffusion of social science as a mode of self-observation under democratic government’:

To perceive the integral connection between social science and social democracy is to see the historic relationship of knowledge to power in a new and encouraging light . . . These examples indicate that the social sciences tend, not to restrict personal liberty, but rather to expand the domain of free choice by clarifying the rational alternatives. (Lerner, 1959, pp. 29, 31)

Compare these brave words with an editorial in the Times Higher Education Supplement in 1985. Entitled ‘Social Science in Disarray’, the article also deals with the policy orientation in the social sciences but is profoundly different in tone:
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The key social science disciplines were conceived as intellectual responses to the ‘social question’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; their particular forms, particularly in their more vocational aspects, were moulded by attempts to provide answers to that great question most notably through the creation of a welfare state. Today most of these answers are out of fashion and some with great power are even disposed to deny the relevance of the question.

What has happened in the ensuing years and what can we learn from the experience? Our effort to come to grips with these questions has two overlapping origins. One is a research study, with collateral discussions and seminars, at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, in which Björn Wittrock, Peter Wagner, and Hellmut Wollmann have been engaged. The second is the sessions on ‘Governmental Institutional Change and the Impact of Social Scientists’ at the 1985 World Congress of the International Political Science Association, held in Paris. The sessions were convened and chaired by Hellmut Wollmann, Carol Hirschon Weiss, and Witold Morawski. Both the historical study and the World Congress sessions focused on comparative analysis of the relationships between social science and the state.

SOCIAL SCIENCE, ECONOMICS, AND THE POLICY SCIENCES

Two notes on the title of the book and the delimitation of its subject: at one point, we planned to use the words ‘policy sciences’ rather than ‘social sciences’ in the title. However, in some parts of the world the term ‘policy sciences’ has not yet come into currency. We therefore retained the older location, with the understanding that our referent is the tradition within the social sciences that seeks relevance to contemporary affairs.

In the historical and comparative perspective the book takes these social sciences can mainly be understood as the disciplines of economics, sociology, and political science in the way they emerged throughout, and specifically towards the end of, the nineteenth century in their particular national shapes, and in which they achieved academic institutionalization in the twentieth century (see for differentiated views on disciplinary formation in the social sciences Wagner, Wittrock, and Whitley, 1991).

Some of the chapters, like those by Schwartzman (chapter 11), Watanuki (chapter 10), Wittrock et al. (chapter 2), try a full analysis of this tripartite set of social sciences; some, like those of deLeon (chapter 3), Jann (chapter 4), and Blume et al. (chapter 7), look specifically at policy-oriented social sciences and, thus, do not stress the disciplinary boundaries and focus on the interdisciplinary nature of this type of knowledge.
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instead. Many other contributions, however, put an explicit or implicit emphasis on political and social knowledge as generated in the traditions of political science and sociology broadly understood.

One can argue, we think, that these two disciplines have a history, especially with regard to their relation to politics, which is clearly distinct from that of economics. When attempts, towards the end of the nineteenth century, were made to propose sociology as a science of society and the political sciences as the professional knowledge of the administrator, the discourse of the economic sciences was already well established. Economics in that period underwent a major transformation from classical political economy to neoclassical economics, with the latter becoming a firmly established scientific discipline. By the time of World War II, when political science and sociology were finally institutionalized in most industrial societies, economics in its Keynesian and econometric guises had become a master tool for analysis and intervention in a modern welfare state. Knowledge utilization, a field of study that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, formulated its main problem as ‘underutilization’. Thus, it did not specifically focus on the successful discipline of economics but on the seemingly more problematic knowledge provided by sociologists and political scientists. Given that the perspective of this book is shaped, though in a critical mode, by the experience of utilization research, the parameters of the latter subject are to some extent reproduced in its chapters. Thus, individual chapters may often focus on sociology and political science and as a consequence may not always apply to the same degree or in a similar manner to the case of economics.¹

The policy sciences in historical perspective

The idea of a policy-oriented social science was by no means a new idea in the postwar world. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a number of European countries undertook Polizeywissenschaften, literally ‘policy sciences’, to understand and improve the administrative rules and regulatory policies of the state. Although the term, and the activity, lapsed into disuse in the late nineteenth century, this effort was a precursor of later efforts. Later in the century reform-minded scholarly societies in England, France, and Germany sought to win a place for sociology in the university systems, in France with Durkheim as the towering figure and in Germany with Weber and other members of the Association for Social Policy. Institutions such as the London School of Economics and Political Science (Soffer, 1978) were formed around the turn of the century.

To go much further back, advice to rulers has been preoccupation of much political and social thought through the centuries. As Shils (1961)
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has noted, Aristotle, Plato, and Machiavelli are just the most well known among those philosophers who have wrestled with practical affairs and provided guidance for policy makers.

But it was in the modernizing states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the contemporary social sciences were constituted. Faced with massive social problems of urbanization and industrialization and the restructuring of political and economic institutions, the modernizing states were the site of a quest for extensive empirical analysis. In Sweden, for example, a government commission was established early in the twentieth century to deal with the then-critical problem of emigration, and the social scientists engaged in that effort essentially ‘invented’ statistics as an academic discipline. (The contribution by Wittrock et al. (chapter 2) delves deeply into the historical origins of social science on the continent and the policy roles it came to play.)

If the first theme of this volume is taking stock of the progress and failings of the policy sciences, a second theme is the need to understand the historical context from which the policy sciences derive. All too often observers of the research scene go back no further than the 1960s, or at best the 1950s, in the United States. But even in the United States, the policy perspective goes back to the emergence of the social-sciences disciplines in the mid nineteenth century. The orientation to social problems was a major strand in the separation of social science from moral philosophy, and linkages between social science and government policy can be traced back to the earliest period (Lyons 1969; Furner 1975; Ross 1979). It can be convincingly argued that a policy orientation has been central to the emergence and evolution of the social sciences as a form of professional activity.

Cross-national comparisons

Study of the historical context discloses that the relationship of the social sciences to the state varies with the form of state development and with the nature of the problems on the public agenda. Most obviously, it was concern with expanding the welfare state in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s that led to massive calls upon the social sciences for analysis and direction. But the differing relation between the social sciences and the state is most apparent when we look at the situation cross-nationally.

Here is the third distinctive theme of the volume. Our inquiry goes beyond examination of the experience of the United States and a few advanced democracies in Western Europe. By turning to such rarely examined societies as Switzerland, Poland, Brazil, and Japan, we enlarge
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our understanding of what different states seek from social science, how the social sciences respond, and what the consequences are for the formation of public policy. As we shall see, much depends on the institutional structures that have authority to take action for the state, the nature of the human beings who are recruited and retained within these institutions, and the traditions and culture that animate them. Much also depends on the history of the nation-state and the policy ‘legacies’ that set the parameters for current action. Not to be overlooked is the configuration of contemporary problems that face the state and set its political agenda. The contributors to this volume describe the varying ways in which social science has developed in different nations and its influence on government policy. Our collective endeavour identifies the ways in which intellectual developments have been shaped by the societal contexts in which they have emerged and the ways in which they have taken part in shaping those societies.

The Lasswellian vision

As we have noted, the policy sciences are not strictly an American invention. But Lasswell and his colleagues gave them a sophisticated coherence at mid-century. That they brought them to attention at that time, shortly after World War II, was not an accident. They and such other pioneers as Yehezkel Dror and Alain Enthoven realized that the United States and the Allies had survived the most devastating war in history if not by the skin of their teeth, at least by a margin of safety that looked far slimmer at the time than it does in retrospect. The Western world subsequently faced the threats of a world-revolutionary communism and international economic disorganization. To social scientists with social and political commitments, the zeal to contribute their professional knowledge to the advancement of the common weal was overwhelming.

The Lasswellian vision for the policy sciences is one of grandeur. This is not an ‘applied social science’ updated, attending to small-bore issues. As Lasswell writes in the introductory chapter of his 1951 volume, ‘The basic emphasis of the policy approach, therefore, is upon the fundamental problems of man in society, rather than upon the topical issues of the moment’ (p. 8). The policy sciences were to address such questions as full employment, peace, and equality. Others might study the implementation of new remediation schemes or the design of organizational relationships. The policy sciences were to be directed towards issues of high moment for democracy. In a fundamental sense, the programmatic statement called for a basic social science that would be applied by world leaders.
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According to Lasswell, '[t]he perspective of a policy-oriented science is world-wide' (p. 11).

This theme is emphasized in the final chapter in *The Policy Sciences* by Merton and Lerner. They warn the aspiring policy scientist not to become a mere technician to the bureaucratic state. Recent history, they say, ‘has seen too many examples of the intellectual committing moral suicide by allowing himself to be routinized in the service of the directive-giving state’ (p. 306).

The policy approach has five other essential characteristics. It is interdisciplinary. Given the nature of the problems that policy scientists would address, it is clear that no discipline alone holds the key to understanding. Collaborative work would be essential. Second, values are centrally involved in the policy orientation. Lasswell advises policy scientists to choose only those projects that allow them to advance their own values, such as ‘the dignity of man’ and ‘keep[ing] coercion at a minimum’ (p. 11), and to ‘call forth a very considerable clarification of the value goals involved in policy’ (p. 9). His statements disclose a sensitivity to the values implicit in policy and therefore in policy science.

On the other hand, Lasswell believes that once a project begins, the policy scientist could and should maintain objectivity in its conduct. After a decision is made about which study to do and which ultimate goals to advance, ‘the scholar proceeds with maximum objectivity and uses all available methods’ (p. 11). Although probably the dominant belief at the time, and still endorsed in 1972 in a well-known statement by Coleman, this acceptance of the possibility of objectivity has since been subjected to searching scrutiny.

A third feature of the Lasswellian policy sciences is their recognition of context. Lasswell advocates sensitivity to the complexities of institutions, societies, and human beings themselves. While acknowledging the merit of quantification in the social sciences, he points to scholars such as Freud and Weber as examplars of those who dealt with complex relationships through the use of non-quantitative models. The discussion is very brief, but there is a sense of phenomena grounded in space and place. He recommends giving explicit attention to time as a variable and ‘cultivating the practice of thinking of the past and future as parts of one context’ (p. 4).

Fourth, in Lasswell’s definition, the policy orientation has two components, ‘the development of a science of policy forming and execution’ and ‘the improving of the concrete content of the information and the interpretations available to policy makers’ (p. 3). He writes of them as two separate enterprises, united by their concern with the substance of policy
but distinct in the types of activities undertaken and the kinds of questions addressed. In subsequent years, the two activities have in fact proceeded fairly independently, with studies of the policy process becoming part of the central core of political science, whereas the provision of concrete information to policy makers has been done by policy analysts and applied scientists in the several disciplines. From today’s vantage point, Lasswell would seem to have been prescient in including a concern with policy making in his charter. This was not then a generally accepted component of the policy sciences. Nevertheless, Lasswell’s work does not appear to recognize the crucial linkages between the two elements. What experience in the policy sciences has made increasingly clear is that policy scientists can rarely become effective analysts and advisers unless they understand the institutions and processes of policy making in their governmental system. Without insight into who makes decisions where and how, they often fail to pose the most important research questions; similarly, they fail to transmit the most critical information and interpretation to appropriate policy actors.

Nor is the loss one-sided. Students of policy-making systems lose the opportunity to become acquainted with the experience of policy scientists who try to bring about change. A system is often better understood when it is subjected to perturbation. When change efforts are studied, observers can see which types of intervention work in the expected direction, which introduce countervailing pressures, and which fail to have any impact at all. The dynamics of the system are disclosed. Thus, in both directions the link between understanding policy processes and providing concrete evidence and interpretation is closer than even the original statement intimated.

This brings us to the final distinguishing characteristic of the policy approach: the need to establish new institutions to bring policy scientists and policy makers into contact. Lasswell’s longest paragraph on this subject deals with useful additions to the curriculum of university schools of law, public administration, and business. The well-financed initiative by the Ford Foundation to establish graduate schools of public policy in major US universities in the 1950s and 1960s was a brilliant elaboration of this idea.

With all the insights of the Lasswell group, it is interesting to note that the major part of this volume deals with research methods. Current-day schools of public policy in the United States come by their emphasis on analytical methods honestly.
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SOCIAL SCIENCE, PUBLIC POLICY, AND THE STATE

The ideas articulated in *The Policy Sciences* did not spring full blown from the minds of a small group of scholars, however brilliant. They grew out of decades of experience of social science with government, largely in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century, an interaction that increased in intensity during World War II. In the forty years since the call for a policy orientation was published, many major changes have taken place. The aim of this volume is to review the experience of the policy sciences, to analyse the historical contexts that shaped them in different societies, and to see how their development varied under different state auspices. Part I is devoted to this analysis of changing relationships between the social sciences and national states.

Part II represents an effort to rethink the premises and practices of the policy sciences themselves. Although our forefathers pointed out the path with knowledge and astuteness, the intervening years have shown that some of their assumptions were faulty. Certain perils that they warned against have not been serious, and some things that they failed to foresee have plagued and bedevilled us. Perhaps more importantly, we can now put flesh on the bare bones of their arguments and shift emphasis in ways that make more sense in the last decade of the century.

Part I starts with an attempt to develop a full comparative perspective on the policy sciences in Western Europe and North America. Wittrock et al. (chapter 2) trace the policy orientation to its early roots on the continent. They explore alternative theoretical perspectives for comprehending the interaction of social science with the state. In their analysis, they find that a big change came about in the 1960s and early 1970s, when welfare state interventionism led to a heightened reliance on the social sciences. Policy makers and administrators in Western countries expected social scientists to help them in ‘engineering’ their plans for social and economic change. The War on Poverty and the Great Society Program in the United States in the mid-1960s provide the most conspicuous example. In the United States the large state demand for analytic resources was met by a well-developed, university-based social-science system that was already distinctly empirical and applied in orientation. In continental European countries a similar state demand evolved at a time when the social-science system was still embryonic. In the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, the universities could not respond to the call for policy-relevant social science until after the educational reform of the 1960s had led to their expansion. Only then did social-science departments