
Handbook of
POLITICAL THEORY
and
POLICY SCIENCE

Edited by
EDWARD BRYAN PORTIS
and
MICHAEL B. LEVY

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FOREWORD

Martin Landau

There is not a dull essay in this book. Each is a serious and scholarly work; intelligent, constructive, and often enlightening. One glance at the Contents is enough to indicate that the problems under consideration are timely and bear directly on the tensions now existent between political science and policy studies. The issues that are dealt with are quite fundamental: ethical, philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and epistemological. There are no dilettantes here: these are carefully crafted papers which, when taken as a whole, provide a singular illustration of the value of disciplinary self-criticism.

It is now almost twenty years since David Easton announced “The New Revolution in Political Science.” Its battle cries, as he put it, were relevance and action (Easton, 1969). And in these decades we have been swamped with policy studies; to such an extent that the public policy orientation in the discipline is patently dominant. So many of us thirst for action, and so many of us seek relevance. Whether the action we take is, in fact, relevant is, however, another story. But it is quite clear that the discipline can now be disaggregated into an infinite number of policy specialists—all organized and constrained by the practical problems of the moment. So, apart from defense policy, and security policy, and foreign policy, and arms control policy, we have our specialists in housing, welfare, transportation, education, technology, and energy. The list is endless. By their nature, and by their thrust, they constitute a centrifugal force—literally fleeing from the center of the discipline. That is, such fields as policy analysis, policy evaluation, and policy implementation are seen increasingly as separate fields, quite distinct from political science (Dye, 1981; Nagel, 1980; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). If, however, they presume to draw little from political science, they frequently, and quite thoughtlessly, attach to economics. It is rather striking that while the distance between political theory (classical and empirical) and policy studies grows, the distance between economic theory and policy studies shrinks.

This presents us with quite an irony. If we restrict ourselves to classical political theory, that which is ethical, prescriptive, and normative; that which frankly legislates values and norms; its influence is at a minimum as our policy specialists race toward the shelter of economics. The irony is to be found in the fact that economics is a normative discipline. It legislates doctrines of efficiency, of optimality, of rational decision-making. It prescribes, in short, proper rules of conduct, no less so than normative political theory. Its body of knowledge is not based upon empirical findings but on axiological deductions drawn from postulates that are by now axioms of right for too many of our brethren. Economists, however, were not standing with Moses on Sinai. When, therefore, they legislate efficient decisions, the value of such a value is open to criticism. The situation would be quite different if economists treated their axioms as premises that must be questioned: we would then have a store of knowledge that would include empirically warranted praxiological rules. But when we are told that if the world is wrong when it does not operate as economic models prescribe, we can be certain that we are in the world of moral discourse.

The relationship between political theory and policy studies is a central element of this volume. Indeed, the relationship between all of social science, including economics, and policy studies is taken as a matter of primary concern. On this question and others, the various authors reveal disagreement; but there is very little dogma in any of the essays. They are frank searches that deal with important questions and do so in a manner that has much scholarly and pedagogical value. They exhibit such value because there are no restrictions on the freedom to analyze save those that are self-imposed. What I mean by this is that the treatment of such problems as ethics and value, of democracy and science, of science and policy, of theoretical and applied science, of rationality, of policy science, are neither polemical nor dogmatic. There is very little of a "cock-sure" certainty, as Charles Peirce would say.

To be cock-sure that one is an infallible reasoner is to furnish conclusive evidence either that one does not reason at all or that one reasons badly. This is Peirce's statement; and he adds that such a deluded state of mind prevents the constant self-criticism that is the very light of reasoning (Peirce, 1931). Of all things required of public policies, none is more paramount than that they be subject to criticism. The cost of error runs high in this world, and it is manifestly more sensible to prevent error than to correct it.

There are other reasons why criticism is necessary. While many of the authors here struggle with the relation of theory and policy, of knowledge and policy, it should be obvious that all policies, even those in force a long time, lie in the future tense. It may be helpful to remind ourselves that future conduct is the only conduct subject to control. Policies seek to establish such control; i.e., to direct events that are yet to come. Whether a policy is negotiated or designed, the only statement that can be made with certainty is that it is a hypothesis. Policies contain high empirical content; they not only specify a desired future state, they presume to organize it. They are not, or should not, be "prophetic

predictions,” as Popper would say: whereby we predict events we can do nothing about. They are, to the contrary, praxiological predictions that anticipate a class of outcomes by ordering events so as to produce such outcomes. They belong, therefore, to the class of unverified propositions. And they cannot be accepted *a priori*. Indeed, the only subjective certainty that attaches to a policy, any policy, is that it carries some degree of objective uncertainty. There is noise in every system; no process works with zero tolerance; there is, in short, no immunity from error. Policies, like organizations, are error prone. And as the time span of a policy is extended, its anticipations (of what will happen when certain operations are executed) become ever more uncertain, and the probability of error increases. There is some time constraint beyond which any policy cannot be trusted.

That is why criticism is so important. Its object is to anticipate error; to detect it and, hopefully, to correct it—and to do so in advance of execution. The ground on which we stand becomes much firmer when our ideas, which invariably entail forecasts, are subjected to a critical audit. And we learn. In fact, such criticism, especially when institutionalized, reduces the necessity of constant relearning. Once Ernest Nagel remarked that the history of science exhibits a steady tendency to eliminate intellectual effort in the solution of individual problems. If this note appears jarring, the rest of the thought should ease discomfort—“by developing comprehensive formulas which can resolve by rote a whole class of them” (Nagel, 1954).

It may be said, of course, that this applies to science but not policy. But then we forget John Dewey’s injunction (1938) that “every measure of policy put into operation is, logically, and should be actually, of the nature of an experiment.” A policy asks a question: and the program it establishes answers the question. If we do not learn from this process, then we are doomed to respond to every social irritation as if it is a rare occurrence, or an atypical instance.

However much desired, one cannot be unduly optimistic as to the ease with which a system of institutionalized criticism can be established. The reasons derive from the study of politics which, in the first instance, corrects the fundamental assumption of classical policy analysis that there is something equivalent to a “point source” or a central decision-maker in government that is capable of discrete choices; and that such choices can be evaluated in terms of standards (a preference function, as they say) that allow for the rank-ordering of options. This is a curious picture of the policy process; it does not even hold in a highly technical bureaucracy—as, e.g., NASA. And it is at sharp variance with the pictures produced by political research. These reveal that if any rank-ordering occurs, it is on the basis of the distribution of political power.

Where such power is asymmetrical and transitively ordered, where there exists a monopoly of power, there may well be a point source. But in so many countries and circumstances, there exists an uneven distribution of power that necessitates negotiation and coalition, and this is the cardinal element of the policy process. The cost of alternatives can only be assessed, if then, when a bargain has been

struck as to benefits. Policies are rarely mounted as carefully considered hypotheses: they are far more likely to be the result of a negotiated settlement. They do not constitute "efficient" decisions: but they can be made quite "acceptable." And if they are acceptable, we can find a lessening of conflict and a reduction of sabotage.

Once a bargain is struck, however, there is no reason not to consider its policy outcome as a hypothesis, and its program an experiment. That is, there is no in-principle reason why we cannot apply both a priori and a posteriori criticism. Not to do so is to deny the cause-effect relations that are found in every policy. Whether honored or not, whether treated as an opportunity or a burden, the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) requires that every federal agency mount critical studies to determine the effects of its policies. Agencies are required to do so in advance of execution and afterward. For many, this is an arduous chore that is best dispensed with. But when we remember, with Oliver Wendell Holmes, that "Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy (read, forecast) based upon imperfect knowledge," dispensation invites disaster.

In mounting critical studies, however, we cannot be cavalier. There are real problems. We have had teachers who have instructed us that our passions will attach to our reason. So James Madison warned. And a century and more later, Graham Wallas told us that the relation between words and things constitutes a central difficulty in politics. Words are so easily personified, so associated with affect and prejudice, as to give rise to serious difficulties. These result from the conscious use of and reasoning about those symbols called words and their almost automatic and unconscious effect in stimulating emotion (Wallas, 1962). Modern logicians refer to such terms as "persuasive" and caution that subjective connotations easily override cognitive content, thereby predisposing toward error.

Our problems are compounded by the fact that politics, policymaking, and policy execution are not exhausted by empirical claims. Politics is preeminently a domain of persuasive discourse; and so are its products. Words matter and so do their connotations. Values, preferences, interests, contrary to Arthur Bentley, are not spook stuff. Ideologies count; as do symbols. It is often the case that the measure of a policy is not its substance; it is, rather, its symbolic significance. We understand this as we understand that important political questions—accountability, obligation, legitimacy, responsiveness, and justice—are imbedded in political structures and in public policies.

Politicians search for issues and for positions. They clothe them in persuasive language; they appeal to our most cherished symbols; and when they descend from charter-like pronouncements to the task of policy-formulation, they are tactful and diplomatic, resorting to an ambiguity that renders cost-benefit analysis pointless. Ambiguity is a time-honored protective political response, but it does permit the overlap of positions, and of zones of indifference, which enables compromise. One may, e.g., denounce logrolling but it serves to permit a majority resolution. Accordingly, politics, parties, and policy are frequently am-

biguous, allowing for further compromise as the processes of formulation and administration take effect—processes that frequently engage the judiciary. Far from holding to a clear, unequivocal hypothesis capable of a decisive test, policy frequently emerges as a collection of proposals, sometimes competing sometimes contradictory, tied to outcomes that are themselves objects of contention. Hence, it is that the measurement of outcome often is itself a conflictual matter and the acknowledged result a product of negotiated assessment.

For such reasons, political science and political theory are of fundamental importance to an understanding of policy problems, both substantive and procedural. No good comes from disembodied policy analyses that proceed in ignorance of vital symbolic issues, conflicts of interests, issue networks, dense interorganizational environments (Landau, 1988), jurisdictional battles, transformation of means and ends, and more. When set against the pictures of the policy process produced by political science, the implicit models of standard policy analysis collapse. What is of more than passing interest, however, is that these models are value judgment. They prescribe what is good and right for us: efficiency and rationality. So, in unabashed manner, one leader in the field of “policy analysis” can tell us that the architects of the constitution came “under the influence of other objectives than rationality of choice.” It is rather lucky for us that this indeed was the case.

To engage policy analysis sensibly, to be able to criticize it, requires knowledge of the political system. To engage judgment of value and of benefit, and to criticize them, requires a knowledge of the history and place of values in the system. And to understand the policy process is to understand the structure and function of the political system.

These tasks constitute the agenda of the discipline and the point of its theories. If policy analysis does not tie itself to the discipline’s theories of value, its decision theories, its theories of coalitions, and its theories of structure, it pays the price of “the necessity to constantly relearn” what it should already know. This is the cost that the chapters in this volume seek to reduce.

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PREFACE

Since most political scientists believe there to be a significant relationship between the theoretical sophistication of their knowledge and its potential contribution to the solution of public problems, it is not surprising that the primary concern of those who have written about theory in policy analysis is the need to develop usable political theory (e.g., Gregg, 1976). The more fundamental issue of the relationship between political theory and policy analysis in the first place tends to be answered largely by assumption. As the chapters making up this volume will amply demonstrate, however, the relationship is far from unproblematic. Whether effective policy analysis requires a theoretical orientation, and for that matter is even compatible with it, are questions for which there are many different answers. Moreover, the answers one finds plausible are of vital importance because they clarify what policy analysis can be and determine whether it is a legitimate endeavor.

In presenting an array of possible answers to these questions, we hope, on the one hand, to encourage political theorists to take these issues more seriously than they have in the past and, on the other hand, to increase the level of critical self-reflection among those committed to some form of policy analysis. Given the great concern displayed by social theorists and philosophers for the more general question of the relationship between social science and politics, we are relatively confident that the former purpose will be served to a meaningful degree. Consequently, greater effort has been devoted to making this volume useful to the political scientist concerned with policy analysis who does not consider him or herself a political theorist.

Of the need for greater clarity on these matters we have no doubt, primarily because many colleagues have expressed frustration over the lack of readable literature clarifying these issues for both themselves and their students. In order to meet this need we have encouraged the authors of the following chapters to avoid language that presumes extensive theoretical or philosophical training.

Furthermore, we attempted to achieve a balance between theorists and nontheorists when asking scholars to contribute to the volume. We were successful in this effort, but even more heartening is the fact that so many of our contributors could be placed in either category.

The idea for this book originated in a panel held at the Southwestern Political Science Association meetings in 1984. We thank Susan J. Hekman for the opportunity to arrange this initial exchange of ideas. David Rebovich and Jack Rabin provided an additional forum, and Mildred Vasan, of Greenwood Press, encouraged us to expand the scope of the project into the present book. We also are indebted to her for patiently awaiting the final product. Mary Ann Smith and Diane Adams must be given credit for the technical expertise required for shaping that product into a presentable manuscript. Finally, the editors acknowledge with affection the support and forbearance of their immediate families.

INTRODUCTION

At the most general or inclusive level of meaning, theory and policy refer to two distinct ends of knowledge. Science has always been animated by these two general aims. On the one hand, it has promised unified knowledge and the discovery of a theoretical order able to make sense of the apparent multiplicity of individual occurrences. On the other hand, it has promised increased control over the environment. The tension between these two ends is not particularly strong in modern natural science because theoretical achievement has become an important ingredient of engineering success. No such reconciliation has occurred in the social sciences, for the role and even the nature of theory in an empirical field of study that increasingly justifies itself in terms of its potential contribution to rational public policy are far from obvious. Consequently, a conclusive or consensual answer to the question of the optimal relationship between such a science and political theory is not likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. The purpose of this handbook, therefore, is to present, compare, and clarify the most likely alternatives and to explore their implications for the purpose and potential of political science.

In light of the lack of consensus on the nature of "theory," "policy analysis," or "science," this volume clearly cannot be a handbook in the sense of a manual or a compilation of basic facts and procedures. There is not and, perhaps, cannot be, a social scientific counterpart to the *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*. A handbook in social science typically consists of a collection of articles, each surveying the issues and notable literature in a recognized subfield of the general discipline (e.g., Greenstein and Polsby, 1975; Lindzey, 1954; Knutson, 1973). Although the lack of a common theoretical framework, apparently endemic to social science, precludes a definitive classification of subfields, such volumes conceivably can give a comprehensive and very useful overview of the discipline in question.

Yet our concern is a relatively specific theoretical problem rather than a field

of study. Instead of offering surveys of ongoing work or major intellectual trends influential among a discernible community of scholars, the authors of the chapters in this volume are attempting to establish the validity of their views of the proper or necessary relationship between political theory and policy analysis. Indeed, most of the authors of the following chapters are critical to some extent of what presently passes for policy analysis. Rather than describing current practice, they are primarily exploring theoretical options and possibilities. To purport to offer a catalog of all existing or possible resolutions of a fundamental theoretical problem would be presumptuous, and perhaps even preposterous. This volume is a "handbook" in the only sense applicable to work on such a problem. It purports not to survey all existing positions, but rather to present the range of issues with which one must come to grips in formulating a coherent and plausible position, as well as to present a number of high-quality examples of arguments that lead to divergent conclusions.

Divergent conclusions, in fact, provide the organizational basis of this book. For while the theoretical formulations of a fundamental issue are bound to vary, the types of conclusion possible are usually limited by the very posing of the issue. If one assumes that there is a relationship between the policy mission of social science and its theoretical development, then it must be positive or negative, symbiotic or parasitic, equal or hierarchical. Just what these categories mean will depend upon the particular manner in which "theory" and "policy analysis" are conceived. Irrespective of how the problem is approached, however, any conclusion could be classified as one of three types: the relationship between political theory and policy analysis is *complementary*, *integral*, or *mutually exclusive*.

A *complementary* relationship can mean either that political theory and policy analysis are distinct but mutually supporting activities or that they are no more than dimensions or phases of the same activity. In the latter case they are in reality indistinct in the sense that it is impossible to do one without doing the other and that only some sort of practical convenience leads us to refer to one or the other. If political theory and policy analysis are seen as distinct activities, on the other hand, we classify as complementary any analysis concluding that each makes an essential contribution to the achievement of rational policy, and, in this sense, they are thus equal.

To be *integral* to something could mean the same as being complementary, but we are using the term to refer to the incorporation of something into a higher endeavor. As such, incorporation necessarily involves a degree of subordination, of hierarchy. A relationship is integral, in the sense the term is used here, if both activities are essential for sound public policy formulation or policy evaluation, yet one must be subordinated to the other. Put more positively, the relationship is integral if political theory in some way guides policy analysis or vice versa.

Since we are assuming that there is some relationship between political theory and policy analysis, by a *mutually exclusive* relationship we mean that one sort

of activity threatens the viability of the other. This incompatibility may or may not entail implications for the formulation of sound public policy, depending upon the particular theoretical formulation of the problem.

An introduction precedes each of the three parts of the book. These introductions serve two functions. First, the rationale for placing the chapters composing that particular part together is explained in greater detail than above. In other words, we explain what these chapters have in common. Second, the thesis of each chapter is briefly described in order to clarify its distinctiveness. This juxtaposition is not only intended to indicate the array of alternative positions within each of the three general conclusions, but also to provide the reader with a relatively convenient index to discern which chapters are especially relevant to his or her interests. Although we believe that the book can best be read from beginning to end, each of the chapters is a self-contained exposition. Moreover, this book is meant to serve as a reference, despite the previously mentioned caveats.

As an alternative organizational structure, we could have divided the essays according to each author's view of the nature of "theory." However appealing and natural this might seem to theorists, we believe that such an organization would have diminished the usefulness of the handbook for those largely unfamiliar with the disputes over domain that occupy political theorists and philosophers of social science. Our intent is to produce a volume that will help policy analysts in their efforts to clarify the scope of their endeavor as well as to offer theorists an array of potential ways of approaching the general problem. In order to serve the latter purpose we have taken pains to insure that most broad theoretical positions are represented in the essays that follow, but to serve the former purpose we have sought to focus on the various considerations that might influence an assessment of the role of theory in a policy science.

The first chapter is intended to serve both functions by providing an historical and philosophical context for the following chapters. Although he does not attempt to present a detailed historical sketch, Michael B. Levy points out that alternative views of the potential contribution of political theory to policy analysis and evaluation have been shaped by the evolution of political science. The development of the "behavioral" movement in the discipline, combined with the growing influence of analytical philosophy, involved a shift away from political evaluation and policy considerations. This movement left traditional political theory isolated and hard pressed to justify either its normative prescriptions or its claim to constitute some sort of usable knowledge.

Part of the renewed emphasis upon policy relevance in the latter years of the 1960s, in turn, is attributable to widespread skepticism concerning the plausibility of the image of science that legitimized behavioralism in political science. Yet political theorists have not been able to define a role for themselves in this new policy science through a return to a culling of great books for insight and guidance. Instead, two mutually incompatible policy orientations now prevail. One of these, popular especially among professional philosophers, attempts to

maximize consistency in widely shared moral precepts that underlie public policy. The other, more often found among political theorists, seeks a basis from which to evaluate assumptions, widely shared or not, used to legitimate policies. The former approach pays for its clear relevance to policy analysis by accepting severe limitations on the questions it can address, while the latter pays for its relevance to the truly important questions by rendering its claims to knowledge tenuous.

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