

## Models of Policy Discourse: Insights versus Prediction

DeLeon, P. 1998. Models of policy discourse: insights vs prediction, *Policy Studies Journal* 25:147-161.

Peter deLeon

"All right, have it your own way—you heard a seal bark!"

James Thurber (1945, p. 326)

Policy researchers traditionally have adhered to the quantitative (or positivist) approach. Recently, some policy analysts have emphasized a more qualitative (or postpositivist) approach. Little, if any, of the latter has been considered by proponents of the former as serious policy (i.e., "objective") analysis. This tension has produced some conflicts as to which camp is more attuned to a policy version of "truth."

This essay attempts to demonstrate the strong and weak points of both paradigms, and argues that either by itself has serious debilitating. For instance, positivists deny the subjective nature of values that denigrate the putatively "objective" orientations of their analyses, perhaps even rendering it "undemocratic." On the other hand, postpositivists have a difficult time operationalizing their preferred research methodologies with the necessary rigor.

The essay concludes that the research problem—rather than a favorite methodology—should determine the research approach, and that both the quantitative and qualitative aspects can be used in a consonant manner.

The disciplinary wool and warp that has so long been part and parcel of political science—most pointedly between behavioralism and case research (see Ricci, 1984)—typically has not been the case with policy studies. Almost from its inception, most public policy research has been permeated with a strong empirical orientation—almost an identity—more than likely due to its heavy debt to systems analysis and microeconomics (e.g., Jenkins-Smith, 1990; Quade, 1975; Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1978). Policy research's "weak sister" often has been depicted as a qualitative manifestation of traditional (maybe, to some, anachronistic) political science or public administration, generally proposed as a model of the policy process, replete with (usually) carefully sculpted case studies, trends, and other similarly subjective research endeavors. Little, if any, of the latter was considered by positivist-oriented analysts as the basis for "scientific" research or "objective" analysis, let alone actual prediction (even posed as a hypothetical proposition), however carefully executed (Sabatier, 1991).

"Everybody" (i.e., the large majority of political scientists, economists, and policy scientists) seemed to agree that "objective" policy research—that is to say, research based on the rational actor or the economic man and substantiated by sufficient empirical evidence statistically manipulated and displayed—was the only "real" basis by which the policy sciences eventually could aspire to a model of predictive status, and thereby gain credibility within policymaking circles. Benjamin Barber (1984, p. 47) despairingly has characterized this search for objectivity as a "relentless quest for certainty." Even those scholars who were less grandiose—those willing to back off the predictive litmus test or to accept building midlevel theory—were careful to couch their "findings" in all sorts of

caveats, as any good, self-respecting "scientist" is trained to do. The Holy Grail might not be attainable, but at least its presence was not missing.

However, in the past few years, policy research has developed a stance somewhat reminiscent of the other social sciences, one in which two methodological poles—here we shall call them simply the quantitative (or positivist) versus the qualitative (or postpositivist) pole—have made their presence and antipathies well known. While scholars might question the precision of the distinction, it is clear that the two mainstream orientations do differ. Indeed, this division and its underlying assumptions are one of the major epistemological disputes within contemporary policy research. Whereas once they could reside in splendid isolation of each other at opposite ends of the epistemological continuum, recently both have been promoted by their proponents as superior research methodologies. Naturally, this tension has produced some conflicts (academic courtesies aside) between their principal supporters as to which is more attuned to "truth" and more likely to attain better outcomes, which positivists often have defined in terms of predictive capabilities.

This article proposes to irritate both parties by suggesting that there is, not surprisingly, a viable middle ground that actually is preferred to either end of the methodological spectrum. The argument used here draws upon a similar disciplinary squabble from political science. The analogy employed is approaching 35 years old now, as we are reminded of the unfortunate debris that emanated from the acrimonious methodological turf wars experienced by political science over many of the same issues. Robert Dahl's 1962 American Political Science Association presidential address, "The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph to a Monument to a Successful Protest" (Dahl, 1961) was just one memorial to that spat.

### **In This Corner...**

Most of the traditional policy researchers have availed themselves of the quantitative methodologies. The basis of these arguments often has been credited to a positivist philosophy of science, one drawn most directly from the natural sciences, but effectively a part of the social scientists' arsenal since at least the Age of the Enlightenment. Basically, positivism attempts to apply the lessons and procedures of the natural sciences to the social sciences' settings, trying to extract and codify universal laws and their responding behaviors. The essence of positivism as manifested in political science has been well captured by Douglas Torgerson (1986, p. 34):

The positive spirit would rigorously distance itself from the speculations of theology and metaphysics, confronting the world objectively in order to observe the facts and determine the lawful order of nature and society. The domain of mystery and ambiguity would be abandoned in order to know what could be known clearly and certainly.... Knowledge would replace politics.

In the positivist's arena, prediction is the primary test of value.<sup>1</sup> This perspective is seen most commonly as part of the social sciences in psychology, but economics, and, by extension, policy research, were quite taken in its thrall.<sup>2</sup> And for legitimate reasons: Is there, advocates would say, a more clear-cut reason for academic endeavors than to be able to predict with some justification what

might (or might not, if one is a Popperian) happen? Prediction was seen as the *raison d'être* for a bona fide academic endeavor. Otherwise, what would be its merit? The rationale is magnified greatly for policy research. Why should an issue be studied in a policy sense, in which one hardly ever engages in a research activity without a policy-oriented finding or recommendation?

The empiricist's criticism of the policy sciences often has turned on their advocacy and application of the policy process, which initially was proposed by Harold D. Lasswell (1956) and since been adopted by multiple authors (e.g., J. Anderson, 1979; Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Jones, 1977), possibly becoming the signature (or at least the modal) framework for the approach. With its Lasswellian emphasis on policy *in* and policy *of*, the policy process model was seen by many as iconic of the policy sciences' approach within the political science tent. Not surprisingly, it has lent itself to a large body of policy research of indisputably high quality (e.g., Bardach, 1977; Kingdon, 1995; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

The positivist's argument against the policy process framework has been advanced most insistently by Paul Sabatier (often writing with Hank Jenkins-Smith). In the late 1980s, Sabatier (1988, 1991) proposed that the policy process "heuristic" (their term) had "serious limitations as a basis for research and teaching" (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, p. 3), and, more trenchantly for an approach designed consciously (in Lasswell's words) to "bring greater intelligence to governance," that the policy process framework completely neglects "the role of ideas—particularly ideas involving the relatively technical aspects of policy debates—in policy evolution" (Sabatier, 1993, p. 15).

As a precursor to his proposed model of an Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1993, pp. 3–4) offered six very concrete complaints about the policy process as a unifying concept within the policy sciences (emphases in original):

1. "The stages model is not really a *causal model at all*." That is, it did not lend itself to prediction, or even to indicate how one stage led to another.
2. "The stages model *does not provide a clear basis for empirical hypothesis testing*." Hence it is not amenable to confirmation, amendment, or fabrication.
3. "The stages heuristic suffers from *descriptive inaccuracy* in posing a series of stages...."
4. "The stages metaphor suffers from a built-in *legalistic, top-down focus*."
5. "The stages metaphor inappropriately *emphasizes the policy cycle as the temporal unit of analysis*." In other words, it neglects the concept of a system of intergovernmental relations.
6. "The stages metaphor fails to provide a good vehicle for integrating the roles of policy analysis and *policy-oriented learning throughout the public policy process*."

Sabatier's preferred alternative, based on the ACF model, principally is structured around a posited institutional rationality (Sabatier, 1988).<sup>3</sup>

Sabatier's perspective is hardly an isolated voice.<sup>4</sup> In point of fact, even the proponents of the policy process approach have scarcely asserted it was a "success" in terms of predicted events or even a particular policy process. For most, the "expected" results have not been forthcoming (although what exactly these results were to be, or what the expectations were, and by whom they were



generated is uncertain). Others (e.g., Roe, 1994; Yanow, 1996) have brought different methodologies to the policy sciences as a means of reviving a faltering movement. Moreover, the shortcomings of the policy process have disparaged the entire policy sciences' approach; as sympathizers Donald Schön and Martin Rein (1994, p. xvi), among others, recently have written, "the policy analytic movement begun by Harold Lasswell in the early 1950s has largely failed."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, one might ask if the positivists are playing completely fair with the policy approach and its use of the policy process framework. Political scientists as a discipline have spent (almost literally) countless articles and books proposing something resembling "laws" or theories that, taken collectively or individually, have produced infinitely more confusion than clarity. David Ricci makes the persuasive case by quoting some of the discipline's leading scholars to the effect that in James Rosenau's words, "the prime aim" of political science is "to move up the ladder of generalization and construct theories that encompass and explain more and more of the phenomena that make up the universe of politics." Likewise, in David Easton's understanding, there are sufficient regularities in personal or collective political behaviors that can be "expressing generalizations or theories with explanatory or predictive values" (both quoted by Ricci, 1984, p. 250; also see Barber, 1984, chap. 3).

Yet few contemporary political scientists would be so bold as to validate those claims; Charles Lindblom (1990, p. 136) is very much to the point when he proposes that: "For all that effort and for all its presumed usefulness, I cannot identify a single social science finding or idea that is undeniably indispensable in any social task or effort. Not even one, I suggest."<sup>6</sup> Even taking into account Lindblom's well-documented faith in "muddling through," this is scarcely a ringing endorsement for theory building and validation in political science.

Ricci argues strongly that the problem with prediction in political science hinges on a positivist orientation that consciously excludes normative considerations or at best treats them as hidden assumptions. Lasswell and co-author Abraham Kaplan (1950, p. xi, emphasis in original) write in *Power and Society* that theirs "is an attempt to formulate the basic concepts and hypotheses of political science [and] contains no elaboration of ... what the state and society ought to be." Or Easton, in the full blush of doctrinaire behavioralism, holds that "inquiry into how men ought to act is not a concern of research in political behavior" (quoted by Ricci, 1984, p. 137). Ricci (1984, p. 296) concludes that the positivist vision of political science is nothing short of a

tragedy [that] lies in the fact that, even while mainstream practitioners strive without success to produce the reliable knowledge that might enable us somehow to change political behavior for the better, their work succeeds in carrying the discipline away from considering a great many intangible factors that can make democracy attractive and worth supporting.

In short, even within the political science community, there is genuine question as to whether many of its theories are universally (or even widely) accepted, which casts some question as to its ascription of "science." In a Kuhnian sense, its findings are more critical of each other rather than they are cumulative in nature, a legitimate hallmark of the scientific enterprise. Given the widespread dissent among political scientists (cf. political scientists on the nature

of democracy or the concept of power), is it justified to hold a largely accepted policy process *framework* to such fundamental desiderata of models as Sabatier has posed in place of what its proponents intended (deLeon, 1994)? Should not positivists who live in glass disciplines be careful in casting stones?

### ... While in the Opposite Corner

The more qualitative side of the dispute stands in opposition to the positivist orientation outlined above; not unexpectedly, it is usually referred to as the "postpositivist" orientation, with a number of approaches, varying by particulars but still under an umbrella of consonant schools (e.g., hermeneutics and critical theory).<sup>7</sup> It grew out of a general understanding among its proponents that the positivists were not able to subscribe to their promise of a predictive nature, but more fundamentally it sprang from an understanding that political science itself was problematic methodologically, that "political studies suffer from overemphasizing science while paying insufficient attention to the realm of morals where men may be impelled to behave well and inspired to resist wrongdoing" (Ricci, 1984, p. 305). For instance, Barber (1984) claims that behavioral political science lacked such quintessential components as a theory of citizenship. Moreover, political science, they claim, was manifestly boundary-oriented, one generally reluctant to utilize considerations that fall beyond its established disciplinary ken.<sup>8</sup> The result, postpositivists argued, was a political science—and, by extension, a policy sciences—framework shaky in both its approach and, especially, its recommendations.

Frank Fischer (1995, p. 243) has offered a suitable starting definition of postpositivism:

A contemporary school of social science that attempts to combine the disclosures of social and political theory with the rigor of modern science. It calls for a marriage of scientific knowledge with interpretive and philosophical knowledge about norms and values.

While this definition is noted for its temperance, in practice, postpositivists have been particularly scathing in their denunciations of the rational man paradigm, especially in its appointments in rational choice theory, public choice, and, of course, neoclassical microeconomics, and most research that utilizes such approaches. A few (deLeon, 1997; Dryzek, 1990) have argued that positivism is fundamentally antithetical to democratic principles and processes. Another claim is that, in its search for objectivity, it conveniently overlooks the pivotal hurly-burly of political life, and especially the contending value structures. More centrally, Marie Danziger (1995, pp. 435, 436–437) writes that "objective" analysts or agencies are anything but unbiased or objective,

that standards of judgment, canons of evidence, or normative measures are proscribed by his or her professional community. Consequently, the potential for professional scientific objectivity, political neutrality, or substantive change are, by definition, curtailed significantly.... The philosophical point of departure ... is that the givens of any field of activity—including the facts it commands, the procedures it trusts, and the values it espouses—are constructed socially and politically, man-made rather than dictated by God or Nature.

John Dryzek (1990, pp. 4–7) hands down a brutal list of methodological and philosophical indictments regarding “instrumental rationality” (which he defines as “the capacity to devise, select, and effect good means to clarified ends”), one every bit as indicting as Sabatier’s positivist’s criticisms of the policy process framework:

1. Instrumental rationality destroys the more congenial, spontaneous, and intrinsically meaningful aspects of human association.
2. Instrumental rationality is antidemocratic, [thus violating the only seemingly common denominator in American political science].
3. Instrumental rationality represses individuals.
4. Instrumental rationality—and the political institutions in which it is manifested—is ineffective when confronted with complex social problems.
5. Instrumental rationality makes effective and appropriate policy analysis impossible.
6. Instrumental rationality informs inappropriate and unfruitful social science instruments and methods.

While Dryzek might be especially critical as a way of rhetorically highlighting what he views as the shortcomings of an empirical political science and, concomitantly, the policy sciences, it is not difficult to imagine how far removed a postpositivist orientation would be from a rational (i.e., positivist) political science—even one buffered with a Popperian overlay of falsifiability (see Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987). Thus, one might be led to wonder what common methodological grounds could be shared.

One feature of a postpositivist orientation is congruent with one of the policy sciences’ basic tenets—a multidisciplinary approach—for it basically holds that any particular perspective (say, sociological) is necessary but none is sufficient for policy research. For this reason, postpositivism takes epistemological umbrage at a policy approach that is single dimensional (e.g., welfare economics or benefit/cost analysis) for it leaves out much of what postpositivists claim is equally important, especially the more intangible components (for instance, the explicit value of democracy or other normative aspects) of policy choice. Postpositivism is, almost by definition, a holistic approach, in which expansion rather than limitation is crucial.

Such a wide-ranging methodology flies directly in the face of the more traditional policy analysis (from the Greek, *analysis*, to loosen or to split apart), in which problems are treated in a disaggregated manner. As Easton (1969, p. 1054) explains, “Only by analysis, by chopping the world up into manageable units of inquiry by precision achieved through measurement wherever possible can political science ... [acquire] more reliable knowledge.” After their disaggregated parts are remedied they are reassembled in their now-altered configurations. Again, then, the opposing approaches seem unable to work together cooperatively.

Most particularly from a critical theory orientation springing from the writings of the Frankfurt School, a postpositivist approach calls for a “critical” rationality developed by working deliberately to maximize citizen participation while minimizing “systematically distorted communications,” resulting in what Dryzek and others (e.g., Fishkin, 1991) have called a “discursive [or a deliberative] democracy.” Postpositivism plainly calls for viewing a society or polity *in its totality*; that is, a thorough integration of a people’s normative and ethical postures and positions into public policymaking. Michael Sandel (1996, p. 335)



relates the perceptive anecdote that normatively distinguishes the rational actor from the involved citizen, when he tells of an activist tilting for his community against an impending incursion by a Wal-Mart: "I'd rather have a viable community than a cheap pair of underwear."

While few would argue against a greater degree of deliberation within a democratic system,<sup>9</sup> a postpositivist methodology could argue cogently against a system of democratic liberalism, one that places the analysts and policymakers in an unassailable position for decisionmaking; that is, one with little accountability (C. W. Anderson, 1993; Barber, 1984; deLeon, 1997). Yet that is the situation inevitably being constructed by policy analysts and the growing reliance of their unelected expertise. In a postpositivist protocol, an indirect or representative democracy would be infeasible as a legitimate means of governance; people are directly responsible for their own governance and must act accordingly; to cede that basic citizens' responsibility to others is to invite a potentially repressive regime.

However, it does not take (even) a rocket scientist to point out the problems inherent with a postpositivist approach, as Dahl (1990/1970) sympathetically has pointed out.<sup>10</sup> There are times and places in which authority (perhaps even an authoritarian procedure) is the preferred condition for most concerned; a Cuban Missile Crisis, a nuclear plant accident, or open heart surgery would be illustrations. The potential of a tyranny of the majority is indeed a greater possibility under a postpositivist regime than under a Madisonian, checks-and-balances type democracy. Operational problems are similarly acute. Deciding on just whose voice is relevant in a particular policy debate or how the debate would be structured would be formidable tasks. One would need to understand if postpositivist procedures would be accepted by the citizen or left to wither aimlessly or be "captured" by existing interest groups; even with a landslide of legitimate (and other less legitimate) excuses (see Greider, 1992), the American voter ranks remarkably low in terms of citizen participation, as Robert Putnam (1994, 1995; but see Lemann, 1996) and others repeatedly have pointed out. Finally, an education component would be essential; what with the complexity of current affairs (e.g., trade policies or foreign aid), political involvement would be harder than ever to secure. But the very act of education itself is far from a neutral or value-free commodity, as the study of propaganda makes clear (Ellul, 1973).

Moreover, there are methodological problems that are hardly straightforward. Even setting aside issues of rigor,<sup>11</sup> nagging questions of relativism are not handled comfortably by "hermeneutic circles." Nor has the issue of generalizability of the results been put to rest, although a confirmed postpositivist would argue that to generalize is to place matters well beyond the unique conditions established by the particular research context; postpositivists might claim that to be held to propositions of reliability and verification would be to fall into a "scientific" snare. This raises another problem regarding the Lasswellian policy sciences' approach, which always emphasized context, but one wonders just how far contextuality is being stretched in this case and to what ends—apparently, a long way. In the Introduction to their collection of essays in *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, Fischer and Forester (1993, p. 7) posit that: "In sociological terms, these essays teach us about the context-specific rhetoric character of analytic practices.... In political terms, these essays teach us about the ways policy and planning arguments are intimately involved with relations of power and the exercise of power." The attendant essays often must make judgmental (i.e., arguable) decisions as to what emphases to pursue.

Lastly, of course, there is the policy sciences' jackpot question of predictability, essential of course in most any policy research activity. Many would conclude that, lacking the pivotal and admittedly "scientific" criterion, postpositivism is little more than informed and always-changing speculation, hardly the basis for a "science" of anything. And failing the science test....

In the end, postpositivism may claim justifiably that positivism is feeble in the face of intractable or "wicked" problems (Fischer, 1995), or is unable to deal with moral dilemma. But it is simply not clear that postpositivism accords can offer much in terms of their own set of resolutions, or even specify a common goal of its own, especially in the operational aspects of policy research. As one of the strongest supporters of a postpositivist orientation, Frank Fischer (1995, p. 224), indicates, "It is not clear that everybody must—or even can—participate in all matters."

Ricci relates the scene from Tom Stoppard's play "Jumpers," in which the local constable informs the audience that he has a "nose" for criminal activity, to which the Vice Chancellor of the university responds: "With all the best will in the world, I can't give the Chair of Logic to a man who relies on nasal intuition" (quoted in Ricci, 1984, p. 85). While certainly an overstatement, the Vice Chancellor's assessment does not differ greatly from Charles Lindblom's 1981 American Political Science Association presidential address, in which he asserted that radical approaches to political science might well be wrong. But Lindblom ultimately observed that there are few reasons for "holding confidently" to the discipline's "mainstream views" and that "we have ... found no solid ground for choosing the first approach [with a positivist orientation] over the second [with elements of post-positivism]" (Lindblom, 1982, p. 14).

### And the Winner is ...

It is easier in this comparison to declare a loser than a winner, for, as political science has learned in its tussles with the behavioral *poltergeist* (see Dahl, 1961; Easton, 1969), the two opposing sides contain justifiable complaints about the other, with neither camp willing to make public concessions. The "loser," of course, is both political science, and, to the effect it influences the policy sciences, policy research. The "winner," if we are forced to choose, is, naturally, a nicely symbiotic (but rarely attained) crossing of the respective bars. While representatives of the two camps publicly appear reluctant to make that journey (at least in journal articles as opposed to their conference rhetoric), it is hardly unexpected to find that some members of the political science and public policy community already have made the transition, and, one might add, with some critical acclaim. Two examples are Robert Putnam's (1993) splendid analysis of Italian politics, *Making Democracy Work*, which was selected for the 1993 Louis Brownlow Award by the National Academy of Public Administration, and Jeffrey Berry and his colleagues' (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993) fine work on *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, which won the American Political Science Association's 1994 Gladys M. Kammerer Award for the best publication treating U. S. national policy.

To be sure, both volumes enjoy the unique advantage of taking a long-term, meticulously chronicled view of politics; in Putnam's case, in Italy, in Berry et al.'s case, American urban politics. Both assembled and utilized carefully structured data bases; in Putnam's case, almost a decade's worth of sectional data



were gathered and analyzed. In short, they benefited from resources and latitudes beyond most researchers' means. Pointedly, however, neither book stuck stubbornly to its empirical foundations, but moved beyond these to propose important, revelatory normative conditions, outcomes, and policy recommendations.

Putnam placed his thoughtfully analyzed statistics in the historical (read: qualitative) context of Italian politics, tracing Italian traditions from the Renaissance through the *Risorgimento* (of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) up to the present day. While he considers using contemporary political science methodologies—such as game theory and prisoner's dilemma—to explain his findings, he concludes that their "solution is too neat" (Putnam, 1993, p. 168). Rather, he borrows the much-less empirical and much-more normative concept of "social capital" and a practiced, i.e., "lived" commitment to a "civil community." His conclusion drew upon his longitudinal surveys combined with his normative analysis, ultimately observing that "Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civil engagement, and collective well-being" (Putnam, 1993, p. 177). This, he proposed, was the critical precondition for democratic governance.

Even though Putnam availed himself of the path-breaking efforts in comparative analysis by Almond and Verba (1965), it is easy to see how he has moved beyond their survey benchmarks. Furthermore, without necessarily meaning to infer any "radical" political methodologies to Putnam's work, one might propose that he was (at least implicitly) utilizing some of the postpositivist epistemologies in formulating his conclusions, and, one might add, rendering it a superior piece of scholarship.

Berry and his colleagues (Kent Portney and Ken Thompson) carried out a series of interviews in 15 carefully selected medium-sized American cities, based on a calculated Index of Community Participation (ICP); the ICP served to identify those cities with large amounts of citizen involvement in governance. The authors' stated purpose was to ask if a participatory democracy (that is, one with a higher ICP) resulted in an improved citizenship and, concomitantly, a "stronger" democracy, with the assumption that these would form a circular (feedback) loop. The theory of a participatory democracy—running from deTocqueville to Pateman (1970), to Mansbridge (1980), to Barber (1984)—is rich, if empirically untested to any degree; in Berry's words, "In an era of hard data, participatory democracy was a soft argument" (Berry et al., 1993, p. 197). Yet with careful manipulation of their data and a recognition of the "side" benefits (i.e., those beyond easy quantification) of citizen participation, they concluded with well-couched circumspection (Berry et al., 1993, p. 98):

Do neighborhood participation structures produce strong democracy? The answer is maybe yes and maybe no. To the extent that strong democracy requires an expansion of participation to the chronically disenfranchised and politically inactive, the answer is no.... To the extent that strong democracy requires that people engage in fundamentally different kinds of participatory activities, the answer is yes.

It is instructive to outline some of the "side" benefits Berry and his colleagues identify, such as "People who participate in the life of the community share a *strong appreciation* of its riches," or "The final outcome of efforts to build

community confidence is ... clearly supported by participation activities," or "Community participation makes people *feel better* about their own political effectiveness" (Berry et al., 1993, pp. 239, 255, 279 respectively; emphases added). All of these explanations deal in subjective, relativistic assessments, surely more impressionistic than objective in nature. Yet, equally, they are all central to Berry's findings.

Lastly, one should note that Berry and his coauthors are not panting after a romantic, Rousseauian vision of a participatory urban democracy; they make it clear that in the "real" world (in other words, their 15 cities), "institutions for strong democracy must be integrated into a system that also includes institutions of representative democracy" (Berry et al., 1993, p. 293). This finding rejects the posits of participatory democrats (e.g., Pateman, 1970), who hold that the two are distinct and should not be conjoined. Rather, they support Mansbridge (1980) and Barber (1984), who admit (albeit not enthusiastically) that there are conditions under which representative democracy is more practical than the participatory mode.<sup>1</sup> In short, Berry and his coauthors propose a more accessible path to a participatory democracy, one in which both organizations count and individuals matter.

Berry and his colleagues paint an extremely thoughtful vision of a democratic ethos in a number of midsized American cities. Most of the time, their research and explanations are quite empirical, but to explain the cogency of their empirical results, they tiptoe gingerly into a postpositivist world—finding Robert Bellah (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) as useful as Sidney Verba (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995)—as they observe how citizens value and "feel better" about their government (even if they are not always satisfied with its actions on specific issues) under a participatory arrangement.

To use Putnam and Berry et al. as exemplars of a dual-epistemological research strategy—a methodological pairing many policy researchers would find implausible, if not impossible—is not to indicate that these are singular, unique accomplishments. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith—who appear to many to sit well in the very heartland of positivism—propose the concept of "core" and "policy" values as central parts of their ACF model (mostly measurable after the event), and offer various policy forums in which to uncover and temper changing value structures. Their openness (especially in their accompanying case studies) within the positivist paradigm might have been difficult to imagine from hard-line behavioralists of the political science stripe a few decades ago. Yet, it would seem that much of the policy research world, if not divided up into absolute methodological fiefdoms (one readily hears positivists admitting to—even insisting upon—an interpretative bent to their research; see David Weimer's essay in this symposium), suffers from a sharp dichotomy of emphasis, a split one would hope that the earlier division in political science over behavioralism and the recent examples of excellent policy research would do much to dissipate.

## Conclusion

This paper began with James Thurber's epigram from his famous *New Yorker* cartoon of a woman telling her husband<sup>12</sup>—as a seal looms large above their headboard—"All right, have it your way—you heard a seal bark!" In an inexact but still salient sense, the two participants here (if one discounts said seal, who shall reenter momentarily) resemble the positivist and postpositivist sides of

the policy research community. Neither really believes the other that a seal (now reappearing, as befits a Thurber creature) either is present or is not (i.e., is imaginary). Rather than taking a middle and cooperative road, they seemingly retire for the night in a fruitless snit.

The policy research community, if we believe many of its strong proponents (to say nothing of its critics), might well be confronting a crisis in confidence. One suspects that David Kirp (1992) was being only somewhat less than serious when he facetiously (one hopes) prophesized the "end of policy analysis." The difference might well be "sealed" in the desired end-products of positivism (resulting hopefully in prediction) and postpositivism (leading hopefully to an understanding). While the two *at their limits* stand in contradiction, this is not bound to be the case in workaday practice or theory. James Gilsinan and Carl Velpe (1984) imply such a distinction in their essay on program evaluation.

There are, to be sure, policy problems in which the appropriate resolution might well lie within the boundaries of positivism; financing of a municipal bond issue for a new football stadium would be one illustration, as decisionmakers can analyze with some precision the difference in bond rates, time frames, risk factors, and ultimately projected costs (see Noll & Zimbalist, 1997). Other problems lie more comfortably in the postpositivist frame: To use the same example, one needs to ask whether the municipality *should* retain its football heroes by building them a new stadium (and parking lots and luxury sky boxes and lucrative concessions ...), whether the municipality "gains" something in terms of civic pride (Putnam calls it civic virtue) from having a team of "its" behemoths thump a team of other behemoths (or, on the downside, seeing their beloved team suffer ignominious defeat), or—most to the postpositivist point—if there are not alternative *better* uses for the proposed stadium funding?<sup>13</sup> However, as different as these questions might be, there seems to be no obvious reason to assume that they must run at cross-purposes or to the exclusion of one another.

The question thus becomes one bifurcated along predetermined, value goals of one's own epistemological volition: the positivist's preference for *prediction* countered by the postpositivist's predilection for *understanding*. As Milton Friedman (1953) suggested, the linking of the two often could be treated as unimportant; what really counts, he claimed, was whether a theory worked in terms of prediction, and if it did, then understanding was an unexpected but largely vestigial side payment. But in a complex world in which neither idol can be satisfied—perfect predictions are not possible nor are they likely to be believed by policymakers (who have alternative values to weigh or scenarios to consider), and perfect understanding is ephemeral, as any good deconstructionist can affirm—then it would seem foolish to set the two concepts at odds, in a zero-sum game, as opposed to use them to inform and support one another.

As is by now obvious, it is not the present intention to come down firmly in either party's camp. Rather, the end purpose is twofold. First, good policy research must be a function of the problem and resources at hand; otherwise, the policy sciences come perilously close to manifesting Abraham Kaplan's famous suggestion that when all one has is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail (Kaplan, 1964). Succinctly, the research problem must dictate the research design, taking it to whatever procedures and philosophies are pertinent without concession to one's "school." The suggestion falls directly into Lasswell's admonishment of contextuality, which few policy scientists would wish to ignore, even though it indicates a much wider range of methodological



expertise. Second, policy research must perforce arrive at some sort of a conclusion, but many, such as Edward Quade (1975), argue that it is inappropriate to come up with the "wrong" answer, no matter how "precise" or exactly documented. This aphorism, of course, cuts both ways, into positivism with its empirical underpinning but value deficiencies and into postpositivism with its holistic approach hindered by inherent (i.e., arguable or irresolvable) indeterminacies.

In this case, neither camp should remain isolated nor indifferent. It is difficult to imagine that a policymaker, for any important policy problem, would not be better off with at least an understanding of the conflicting forces than a problematic prediction.

Finally, one might inquire as to specific guidelines: When should an analyst use an empirical as opposed to an interpretive approach? While this essay is not meant to be a methodological cookbook, there are indicators as to the preferable mix of approaches. For instance, how important are the issues of research validity and reliability? We know that a postpositivist protocol is less likely to result in a wide-ranging generalizability; to excuse it as too embedded in a scientific paradigm is to dodge the question, for that is the preview of the ultimate user. Timeliness might be another criterion, for a participatory approach is scarcely the most expeditious. Still, the overriding theme of this essay (also see Ann Chih Lin's article in this symposium) is the reduction of the barriers between the two, so as to make them more integrated and symbiotic, thereby enhancing policy research and results.

Let us return to the beginning, where two apparently fair-minded persons are bickering over the existence of a (probably equally fair-minded but visually obscured) seal. Public policy is often a dispute over how one identifies a seal's "bark," then demonstrates it to others, and finally comes up with (and implements and evaluates) a course of action. To be sure, positivists would claim that a "bark" can be measured scientifically and quantified (decibels would seem a likely metric), but the postpositivist would counter that the noise might be confused for a dog's "bark," or whether dreams allow for noisy mammals, or one might ask if a "sea lion" qualifies as a seal. The more receptive resolution would be to engage in a mutual search to find if the seal is indeed a seal, what it is doing in the bedroom, why it barked, and what were its intentions.<sup>14</sup> To do otherwise would be to engage in self-inflicted incriminations over a dispute that by its very fundamental nature never can be resolved completely but, with mutual good faith (abetted by a more informed policy sciences drawing freely on both camps), can be co-opted.

\*\*\*

Peter deLeon is professor of public policy at the University of Colorado at Denver, in the Graduate School of Public Affairs.

## Notes

This paper originally was prepared for delivery at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, August 29–September 1, 1996. I am grateful to members of the panel, the audience, and this journal's reviewers for their comments and assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dvora Yanow (1995, 1996) has observed that prediction is not invariably a characteristic of theory; she points to evolutionary biology and its emphasis on typologies as an example. Granting Professor Yanow her point; still one suspects that in this case we have an exception that proves (or at least demonstrates) the rule.

<sup>2</sup> One should comment in fairness that while political science ideally would claim similar powers, the field has tempered its predictive assertions sufficiently with numerous qualifications, as we shall see below.

<sup>3</sup> This is not the place to comment specifically on Professor Sabatier's criticisms of the policy process approach; see deLeon (1994, 1997, in press) for a closer critique of Sabatier's charges.

<sup>4</sup> For other particularly noted examples, see Richard Hofferbert (1990) and Elinor Ostrom (1990).

<sup>5</sup> Peter deLeon (1988) and John Dryzek (1990), *inter alia*, make much the same argument.

<sup>6</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, John Platt, and Dieter Senghaas (1971) proposed an alternative listing of "indispensable" social science findings.

<sup>7</sup> There is a semantic disagreement in the "post-" camp, with some utilizing the phrase "postpositivist," others using the expression "postmodern," and others preferring "interpretive." This essay will use "postpositivism" as a generic term, with the understanding that this essay's purpose is not to resolve this particular dispute.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that some economists such as Donald McCloskey (1990) are beginning to make similar charges and recommendations against over-empiricism within economics. Also see sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Huntington (1981) would be a counter example, but there are many who worry about the democracy's dysfunctions; see Lasch (1995) Sandel (1996).

<sup>10</sup> A recent listing of shortcomings was compiled by Edward Lawlor (1996).

<sup>11</sup> As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) have demonstrated, good research is rigorous research, regardless of its quantitative or qualitative basis.

<sup>12</sup> One would assume, at least in Thurber's day, that this is their connubial relationship, since they are pictured together (if not necessarily blissfully) in bed.

<sup>13</sup> As most followers of big-time sports realize, these are on-going and, to many civic-minded citizens, very crucial and discriminatory issues in which they as citizens have precious little say; witness the plight of the sport fans in Cleveland ("Hello Indians, adios Browns"), New York ("Good-bye Giants and Jets, please stay Yankees"), Denver ("Welcome Avalanche, possibly hit the road Broncos"), or Miami ("Break up the Marlins").

<sup>14</sup> Knowing Thurber, the possibilities might be limitless.

## References

- Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1965). *The civic culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Anderson, C. W. (1993). Recommending a scheme of reason: Political theory, policy science, and democracy. *Policy Sciences*, 26(3), 367-378.
- Anderson, J. (1979). *Public policy making* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bardach, E. (1977). *The implementation game*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Berry, J. M., Portney, K. E., & Thomson, K. (1993). *The rebirth of urban democracy*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Bobrow, D. B., & Dryzek, J. S. (1987). *Policy analysis by design*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Brewer, G. D., & deLeon, P. (1983). *The foundations of policy analysis*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Dahl, R. A. (1961). The behavioral approach in political science: Epitaph to a monument to a successful protest. *American Political Science Review*, 55(4), 763-772.
- Dahl, R. A. (1990; originally published in 1970). *After the revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Danziger, M. (1995). Policy analysis postmodernized. *Policy Studies Journal*, 23(3), 435-450.
- deLeon, P. (1988). *Advice and consent: The development of the policy sciences*. New York, NY: The Russell Sage Foundation.
- deLeon, P. (1994). The policy sciences redux: New roads to post-positivism. *Policy Studies Journal*, 22(2), 200-212.
- deLeon, P. (1997). *Democracy and the policy sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- deLeon, P. (in press). Has the stages heuristic outlived its usefulness? In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Deutsch, K. W., Platt, J., & Senghaas, D. (1971, February 5). Conditions favoring major advances in social science. *Science*, 450-459.
- Dryzek, J. S. (1990). *Discursive democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Easton, D. (1969). The new revolution of political science. *American Political Science Review*, 52(4), 1051-1061.
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. (K. Kellen & J. Lemcr, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage.
- Etzioni, A. (1988). *The moral dimension*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Fischer, F. (1995). *Evaluating public policy*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- Fisher, F., & Forester, J. (Eds.). (1993). *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Friedman, M. (1953). *Essays on positive economics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilsinan, J. F., & Volpe, L. C. (1984). Do not cry wolf until you are sure: The manufactured crisis in evaluation research. *Policy Sciences*, 17(2), 179-192.
- Greider, W. (1992). *Who will tell the people? The betrayal of American democracy*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster (Touchstone).
- Hofferbert, R. I. (1990). *The reach and grasp of policy analysis*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Huntington, S. (1981). *American politics: The promise of disharmony*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jenkins-Smith, H. C. (1990). *Democratic politics and policy analysis*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Jenkins-Smith, H. C., & Sabatier, P. A. (1993). The study of the public policy process. In P. A. Sabatier & H. C. Jenkins-Smith (Eds.), *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach* (pp. 13-39). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Jones, C. (1977). *An introduction to the study of public policy* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Kaplan, A. (1964). *The conduct of inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Chandler.
- King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kingdon, J. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policy* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Kirp, D. L. (1992). The end of policy analysis: With apologies to Daniel (*End of Ideology*) Bell and Francis ("The End of History") Fukuyama. *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management*, 11(4), 693-696.
- Lasch, C. (1995). *The revolt of the elites and the betrayal of democracy*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1956). *The decision process*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland Press.
- Lasswell, H. D., & Kaplan, A. (1950). *Power and society: A framework for political inquiry*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lawlor, E. F. (1996). Book reviews. *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management*, 15(1), 110-121.
- Lemann, N. (1996, April). Kicking in groups. *The Atlantic*, 227(4), 22-26.
- Lindblom, C. E. (1982, March). Another state of mind. *American Political Science Review*, 76(1), 9-21.
- Lindblom, C. E. (1990). *Inquiry and change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mansbridge, J. J. (1980). *Beyond adversary democracy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- McCloskey, D. M. (1990). *If you're so smart: The narrative of economic expertise*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Noll, R., & Zimbalist, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Sports, jobs, and taxes*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pressman, J. L., & Wildavsky, A. B. (1984). *Implementation* (3rd ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (1994, August). *Bowling alone: Democracy in America at the end of the twentieth century*. Presented at the Nobel Symposium, Uppsala, Sweden.
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in the United States. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 28(4), 664-683.
- Quade, E. S. (1975). *The analysis of public decisions*. New York, NY: American Elsevier.



*Symposium on Policy Analysis: deLeon*

- Ricci, D. M. (1984). *The tragedy of political science: Politics, scholarship, and democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Roe, E. (1994). *Narrative policy analysis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sabatier, P. A. (1988). An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein. *Policy Sciences*, 21(2-3), 129-168.
- Sabatier, P. A. (1991). Towards better theories of the policy process. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 24(2), 147-156.
- Sabatier, P. A. (1993). Policy change over a decade or more. In P. A. Sabatier & H. C. Jenkins-Smith (Eds.), *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach* (pp. 13-39). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Sandel, M. J. (1996). *Democracy's discontents: America in search of a public philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Division of Harvard University Press.
- Schön, D. A., & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame reflection*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Stokey, E., & Zeckhauser, R. (1978). *A primer for policy analysis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Thurber, J. (1945). *The Thurber carnival*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Torgerson, D. (1986). Between knowledge and politics: Three faces of policy analysis. *Policy Sciences*, 19(1), 33-60.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Yanow, D. (1995). Built space as a story: The policy stories that buildings tell. *Policy Studies Journal*, 23(3), 407-427.
- Yanow, D. (1996). *How does a policy mean?* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.