

ARTICLES

THE AMBITIONS OF POLICY DESIGN

John S. Dryzek and Brian Ripley

Public policy is concerned with solving or ameliorating social problems. Public policy design involves conscious invention, development, and application of patterns of action in problem resolution. Contemporary perceptions of widespread (if not wholesale) failure in purposive public policy should warn us that would-be policy designers face no easy task. Certainly, there has been no shortage of cautions against excessive ambition in consciously-pursued public policy. Our contention is that these critics have missed the target. Based on a correction of their aim, we will suggest there is little reason to eschew ambition in policy design, provided only that one attends closely to the conditions of policy formation. This is not to say that ambition should be pursued for its own sake, or that it is always appropriate, merely that fear of ambition should not act as a constraint. We warn the reader in advance that our survey of the critics is brief, in order to provide space for fuller articulation of our own position.

WARNINGS AGAINST EXCESSIVE AMBITION

A first warning against excess would have policy designers bridle their ambitions due to the inadequacy of weak social science theory. Effective policy design requires a theoretical base. The more ambitious the design, the greater the demands on social science theory. The trouble is that social science knowledge is dispersed, incomplete, and frequently contradictory. Policy design based on such theories is clearly a risky business.

In this idiom, the more prominent critics of over-ambitious policy design include Popper (1966, 1972) and von Hayek (1944). Von Hayek (1978) argues that "scientistic" movement from theoretical abstraction to practical application loses sight of the weakness of the theory on which any design is based.

Both Popper and von Hayek warn against utopian planners informed by comprehensive, highly abstract theories. Such visionary blueprints call for radical "canvas cleaning," which translates into the destruction of existing tainted social institutions. Thus the way is paved to authoritarian rule, for any theory for reconstruction is going to be mistaken, tempting its guardians into coercion of an apparently recalcitrant reality. Both these authors and their followers direct their arguments against policy based on any social theory assumed to be true and beyond criticism, whether it pertains to the construction of urban highways or an ideal state (see James, 1980).

Skepticism about the ability of social science theory to inform policy is frequently (if not necessarily) coupled with a more general distrust of public bureaucracies and their component officials, which constitutes a second warning. There is no need to posit motivations of greed, malice (von Hayek,

1944), or low self-esteem (Lasswell, 1930) on the part of public officials in order to doubt the efficacy of public institutions. Ordinary self-interest will suffice. Economistic critics of public decision making such as Friedman and Friedman (1980) assume that bureaucrats are as rationally self-interested as anyone else in society. Thus a sizeable public choice literature predicts public organizations will try to expand their size and budget to the exclusion of all other concerns (see, for example, Niskanen, 1971).

A third barrier to ambitious policy design stems from the political divisions inherent in plural societies, which can rarely achieve a durable political coalition to support any particular social remodelling (at least outside extraordinary circumstances such as depression and war). The prospect here is that exasperated planners may be tempted by the maxim that desperate times call for desperate measures. Thus the rise of authoritarianism in Latin America has often been linked to ambitious economic stabilization policies (Collier, 1979). More generally, over-ambitious policy design can create a situation where programs are created on behalf of citizens, but not at their behest. Dissent can expect the whip of a cruel state apparatus.

ANTIDOTES TO EXCESSIVE AMBITION

The discussion of the previous section is ample warrant for modesty in policy design. However, there are several antidotes to the dangers of excessive ambition, each of which requires its own distinctive kind of conscious policy design.

Perhaps the most well-known such antidote, especially in the context of weak social science theory, is incrementalism. A thinking person's incrementalism is forcefully articulated in Popper's (1972) notion of "piecemeal social engineering," and developed into a methodology of systematic trial and test in public policy by Popperians such as Campbell (1969). In this light, any public policy design should simultaneously ameliorate a social problem and yield clear inferences about the veracity of the theory informing the policy. If the theory is corroborated, then policies based upon it should be adopted somewhat more extensively; if that theory is falsified, then alternative directions for policy should be sought. It is crucial, at least in Popper's own formulation, that maximal opportunity be provided for criticism of the policy, the theory on which it is based, and its effects. Criticism should be admissible from all quarters, both expert and lay, for policies based on weak theories inevitably produce unanticipated effects in surprising locations (see James, 1980).

A strategy of incrementalism or piecemeal social engineering does little to offset the second warning, pertaining to the self-interest of politicians and bureaucrats. Moreover, if large administrative systems are too cumbersome to pursue any conception of the public interest systematically and effectively, there is little reason to expect the sensitivity, critical spirit, and flexibility necessary for successful experimentation.

Two options present themselves here. The first, in vogue for a decade now, involves privatization and minimization of the scope of government (see, for example, Friedman & Friedman, 1962, 1984). If we cannot do away with government, a second option is available: make government as decentralized as possible. A perennial theme in the public choice literature

would have governmental jurisdictions as small and specialized as possible, on the grounds that public officials are visible and accountable to the extent they produce a limited range of services for a small number of people (see, for example, Bish, 1978; Ostrom, 1971).

The last obstacle to ambition we noted in the previous section, that of political conflict, can be approached in at least three ways. First, though classical liberals believe consensus on the features of an ideal society is impossible, at least one strand in contemporary liberalism believes consensus is attainable with respect to the content of the worst ills afflicting society. Like the lawmen of the Old West, public policy should try to "clean up the town." More formally, this stance is known as "negative utilitarianism" (see O'Hear, 1980, pp. 157-158), which restricts public policy to pursuit of the elements of utility functions presumed held in common by all (or at least most) members of society. Such common elements might include eradication of extreme poverty or bringing down the inflation rate.

A second, superficially similar, means for coping with descensus in public policy is provided by the "politics of prevention" associated with Harold Lasswell (1965). But Lasswell is less concerned with ameliorating existing social problems than with anticipating and preventing future ones. Lasswell argues for the articulation of "developmental constructs," projections of likely but unwanted future states of affairs (e.g., a militarized "garrison state"), about which consensus should be possible. Such constructs should function as self-denying prophecies by stimulating policies to prevent their actualization.

A third, perhaps more nebulous, approach to descensus would simply recognize its inevitability and, therefore, designers should seek the identification of any minimal policies around which a broad coalition could be mobilized or broad acquiescence obtained. On the other hand, the politically astute policy designer may be able to capitalize on problem complexity in order to at least partially overcome descensus. One way of apprehending complex problems is through their decomposition into a set of smaller, interconnected problems, each with a potential solution.¹ Along these lines, Hirschman (1973) advises "reformmongers" to entice disparate political groups into problem-solving efforts by framing the issues involved in parochial terms attractive to each of the respective audiences. Having co-opted these diverse groups, the skilled reformmonger can nudge them toward further contribution. Each political group feels it has obtained a victory, some progress is made in resolving a searing social problem, and the shrewd policy designer's agenda is furthered.

WHY THE ANTIDOTES FAIL

The critics of excessive ambition in policy design would seem, then, to have made a number of remedies available, all of which salvage the possibility of design, if in modified form. We will argue in this section that these measures generally fail to serve as the remedies envisioned by their proponents.

First of all, the purported virtues of incrementalism are undermined upon closer examination of its central concept. While Dempster and Wildavsky (1979) tell us "there is no magic size for an increment," the problem here is less the lack of any scale by which to measure size than it is the

demands on theory, dismissed by incrementalists as weak and unreliable, to help us distinguish incremental from non-incremental adjustments. An intervention may turn out to be too big, and prove the first step on a slippery slope from which there is no escape (see Goodin & Waldner, 1979, p. 4). For example, deciding to construct a short stretch of freeway may effectively commit a government to a larger network of freeways in order to eliminate the congestion on roads leading to the first stretch. On the other hand, an intervention may prove too small to either make any difference to its target or yield any inferences about the theory on which it is based. Schulman (1980) notes that projects like the NASA space program require large commitments of resources if they are to produce any results at all.

Aside from being unable to tell us much about the actual size of an increment, weak theory cannot tell us how to construct an experiment for testing itself, especially with respect to the influences that need to be controlled (see Goodin & Waldner, 1979, pp. 13-16). Nor can weak theory indicate how long we should wait before adjudging an experiment a success or a failure. Design strategies involving privatization and a concomitant expanded role for market allocation hardly constitute a panacea for the ills of policy. Galbraith (1967) and others have long warned that large private institutions are subject to the same behavior and the same problems as large public institutions. Moreover, it is abundantly clear that market systems are unable to supply the values economists call public goods, at least to the degree such systems are competitive and decentralized. To the extent they are oligopolistic and centralized then the ills of large-scale organization appear.

Both market and piecemeal social reform are planks in the classical liberal platform, articulated forcefully by Popper and von Hayek. There is a clear inconsistency here. While Popper and von Hayek both stress the limitations of any theory of society, a belief in the power of the market rests on just such a theory--and a fairly comprehensive, macrolevel one to boot.

Of course, not all market advocates share the caution of Popper and von Hayek. Some see market theory as strong enough to use as a base for radical reconstruction (see, for example, Friedman & Friedman, 1984). These bolder classical liberals suffer an inconsistency of their own, though, for it will require drastic, purposeful, but unmistakably *governmental* action to bring their utopia into being. But governments, they tell us, inevitably go astray in their actions. One of the few escapes here seems to be the one advocated by Friedman and Friedman (1984): a grassroots mass movement to shrink government, headed ideally by a charismatic leader. One suspects that the use of such totalitarian means to lead society toward a market system is as risky as asking a Leninist Communist party to preside over the withering away of the state.

Governmental decentralization proves no more compelling than privatization as a means for promoting efficiency. The counter argument to the public choice decentralizers is of course that economies of scale can make large organizations more efficient than smaller ones, which in turn suggests consolidation of governmental units. When two theories predicated upon different assumptions predict opposite results, then clearly an appeal to empirical evidence is necessary. The available evidence is equivocal (see Lovrich & Neiman, 1984, for a survey).

Turning now from "positive" utilitarian market and public choice advocates to "negative" utilitarian problem solvers, it is clear that their requisite unproblematic consensus on what constitutes the worst ills in society is rare. Even when such a coalition can be patched together it may prove short-lived. Consider, for example, the fate of New Deal liberalism (Reich, 1985). The twin perils of economic collapse and global war forged a consensus built on a spirit of solidarity through shared sacrifice. Postwar affluence allowed expansion of social welfare programs without any immediate or obvious costs to groups within the coalition. The economic ills of the 1970s exposed the underlying fissures, and the lack of a coherent unifying philosophy left the coalition open to collapse.

Moreover, even if the requisite coalition and consensus is conceivable, it is by no means obvious that policy designers should await their arrival before proceeding. Take the history of the civil rights movement in the United States. One would presume that a social evil such as massive racial discrimination would engender the rational consensus negative utilitarians predict. But when the issue of civil rights finally did reach prominence during the 1960s, there was no immediate consensus on the nature of the problem. Riots and heightened racial tension were symptomatic of a lack of agreement, but they certainly did not suggest inaction pending consensus.

In fact, most policy debate results from competing definitions of "searing social problems." There turns out to be little difference between negative and positive utilitarianism on this score.

One further distinction that loses its power upon closer examination is between avoiding dystopia and pursuing utopia. For example, von Hayek's (1944) *Road to Serfdom* explicitly warns against an authoritarian dystopia and implicitly describes a market utopia. Just as people disagree about utopia, so can they differ over dystopia. Any strenuous avoidance of dystopia can involve coercion and repression of individuals who demur. Consider, for example, some of the implications of the British government's efforts to avert "serfdom" since 1979. In that period Britain has gained a *de facto* nationally-organized police force constructed to confront organized trade unions. Trade union activities have been further restricted by governmental prohibitions against sympathy strikes and secondary picketing.

The remaining means for coping with descensus discussed in the previous section is the minimalist strategy. This approach has all the familiar defects of "muddling through" when it comes to circumstances of severe policy problems, rapid social change, and changing social values (see, for example, Dror, 1964). Martin Luther King's eloquent "Letter from Birmingham Jail" offers a stinging critique of white moderates who repeatedly urge blacks to be patient and cautious in their reform efforts. Willingness to accept slow, gradual reform may in fact prove to be a direct function of one's place in society rather than a commitment to risk-aversion in public policy. Hirschman's attempts to accelerate and direct "muddling" by manipulation on the part of the policy designer is perilous, inasmuch as it relies on trickery. One suspects that if this trickery were exposed then the designer would indeed achieve a social consensus, one solidly against his or her agenda. If such a fate is to be avoided then the policy designer needs synoptic vision and consummate political skills, which hardly constitute an antidote to excessive ambition.

RE-CASTING THE DISTINCTIONS

The more widely-prescribed antidotes to excessive ambition in policy design turn out to be placebos, effectively obscuring the spread of the diseases they purportedly cure. But we have still to determine the appropriate ambitions of policy design, or, more precisely, the conditions under which we can confidently engage in what kinds of policy design.

Our approach to this determination rests on a claim that the principal detractors of excess in policy design have erred in the distinctions they make, and hence have all hit the wrong target. After substantiating this claim and correcting their aim, we will develop some distinctions of our own, and thereby generate some guidelines as to when policy design may be embraced and when avoided.

Consider, first, the misplaced distinctions of piecemeal social engineers and incrementalists we outlined above. The irrelevance of the piecemeal/holistic distinction should draw attention to the other, more convincing, plank in the Popperian policy platform: the need for maximal criticism of policy proposals and effects.

Turning now to *laissez-faire* critics of large public organizations, let us suggest they redirect their ire at *hierarchy* rather than size or publicness. For private organizations are quite capable of malfunctioning, and small governmental units are not immune to subversion of their ends by self-interested officials. As we have already noted, the limited available empirical evidence suggests that small size is not necessarily correlated with effectiveness or accountability.² On the other hand, a substantial literature on organizational and administrative structure points to the informational problem-solving pathologies of hierarchical systems (see, for example, Lindblom, 1977; Thayer, 1981). In a nutshell, hierarchy can obstruct the free dissemination of information, conjecture, and criticism essential to effective problem-solving. The incentives are such that individuals use information as a resource in intraorganizational struggles rather than as an aid to joint problem solving (see Wilensky, 1967). Those at higher levels use their privileged command of information to solidify claims to authority. For their part, subordinates release and slant information in a manner designed to put a positive gloss on their performance. Hierarchical systems may be adequate for routine decision making and simple tasks, but not problem solving in a complex and variable environment (see Inbar, 1979). While hierarchy may be more likely in large organizations, size itself is no guarantee; nor will small scale necessarily dispense with hierarchy.

Finally, consider again pluralist warnings against excessive ambition in policy design. Surely, the key distinction here is not between boldness and modesty, for imposed *modest* reforms--be they designs or policies--can expect a similar fate in plural society. Rather, it is the fact of imposition that tempts failure, hence the relevant distinction becomes the degree of imposition.

The common pattern emerging from our correction of the detractors' aim concerns the variable conditions of policy formation, pertaining especially to critical oversight, hierarchy, and imposition. Too little criticism and too much hierarchy and imposition tempt failure. These three dimensions converge on a single quality, which may be termed "openness." Critical over-

sight involves openness to challenge and counterargument; hierarchy stands condemned to the extent of its distortion of information channels; and imposition means a refusal to countenance weaknesses of a policy. The integrating idea of openness in policy formation will now be developed in our continued quest for the elusive "difference that really makes a difference" in policy design.

THE CONDITIONS OF POLICY FORMATION

How does openness relate to policy design? Designed public policies require the backing of both empirical and normative theory. Empirical theory concerns the effects of policy, normative theory the worth of such effects and the processes through which they are produced (in terms of interests and values met, violated, promoted, obstructed, or ignored). Policy debates, and hence policy design, involve communication about both kinds of theory, which can vary in its degree of openness. Debate is "closed" to the extent of suppression of criticism, the extension of hierarchy, and imposition of a policy or design scheme on a reluctant community. We will argue that a focus on the openness of discourse in both empirical and normative dimensions is necessary, that closure on either dimension is perilous, and that closure on both simultaneously can prove disastrous.

Figure 1 represents diagrammatically our observation that policy communication has normative and empirical dimensions, both of which can vary from open to closed. Dichotomizing these two dimensions gives us four cells. Cell A may be termed "closed society," cell B "open society," cell C "good intentions," and cell D "practical reason." The reasons for these labels will become apparent in the discussion that follows.

Communication over Empirical Claims

| | | | |
|--|--------|--------|------|
| | | Closed | Open |
| Communication over Normative Claims | Closed | A | B |
| | Open | C | D |

Figure 1

CLOSED SOCIETY

Given the thrust of our argument so far, it should immediately be obvious that cell A risks policy disaster. Occasionally, temporarily-closed communication may be justifiable, perhaps in some cases of foreign policy crisis decision making. Even here, however, a case can be made for unconstrained communication *within* a closed policy-making group (George, 1972). More generally, the inevitably weak and uncorroborated empirical theory informing policy design will yield unanticipated and unwanted consequences. In the first instance any such errors are likely to be suppressed rather than exposed and corrected. Moreover, to the degree intended consequences are achieved they will upset the actors or interests excluded from policy debate, causing subversion of and opposition to the policy in question.

Paradoxically, cell A is where the control of any would-be elite of policy engineers seems to be strongest. Those regarding policy design as a tech-

nical rather than a political matter would be happy with this location. Clearly, much policy analysis methodology, especially what Dunn (1981) calls "analycentric" methods and techniques, are cast in this image.³ But if our characterization of cell A is correct, this situation is exactly what policy designers should avoid. Consider two examples.

First, this style of policy formation characterizes several Latin American cases in which authoritarian governments have faced little in the way of critical debate over their efforts to put economic theory into political practice. O'Donnell (1973) coined the term "bureaucratic-authoritarianism" to characterize regimes in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay that coupled narrowly technocratic policy style with military coercion. In recent years, the policymakers of such regimes have been steeped in neoclassical economic theory at U.S. universities, where they developed a dogmatic view of how an economy and policy system ought to be organized. Upon being let loose on their own economies they could engage in "experiments in radical conservative economics" (Foxley, 1983) to further their visions.

The case of Chile is instructive, but by no means unique. The Pinochet regime emerging from the 1973, coup which toppled Allende's government, embarked on an ambitious reorganization of the Chilean economy, ostensibly to fight inflation and roll back socialism. This economic overhaul has involved austere stabilization measures, such as substantial cuts in social welfare programs and rigid control of the money supply. The shared ideology of regime policymakers quelled debate over the empirical validity of monetarist economic theory. And a well-armed, active state police has stifled the citizenry's criticisms of the normative aims and consequences of economic policies. Turning to the Northern hemisphere, in recent years the United Kingdom has experienced a government uncritically committed to a particular economic theory, paying little heed to criticisms of the theory itself, evidence about its effects, the ends it is intended to serve, and the side-effects of pursuit of these ends (see Prior, 1986, for an insider's account). As unemployment mounted and economic growth moved into reverse, the guardians of the policy congratulated themselves on a shrinking public sector borrowing requirement in a style reminiscent of what Janis (1972) calls "groupthink."⁴ Although defenders of the British monetarist experiment can always plead that the long term will justify the strategy or that short-term difficulties were a result of factors outside government's control, such as global recession, Britain's economic performance since 1979 has been dismal even by its own post-1945 standards. It is not the economic theory's veracity, falsity, or even macrolevel ambitions at issue here, but rather the immunity to criticism of the process and policies it inspires, their intentions, and the theory itself. Of course, the theory has been attacked from outside governing circles, and gently criticized within Thatcher's cabinet. But this critical discussion has been divorced from policy formation.

Possibilities for salvaging cell A might be sought in the adoption of strong moral restraints by policymakers, perhaps along the lines of the stringent ethical code commended to would-be "policy scientists" by Harold Lasswell (see, for example, Lasswell, 1965a, p. 14). This strategy might work if empirical and normative knowledge about complex policy problems could be centralized in the hands of a few. We concur with the arguments of Popper and von Hayek discussed above in commending suspicion of any such

centralization, regardless of the credentials and intentions of the individuals involved.

Though we shall partially rehabilitate it below, cell A in our scheme promises some rather blatant shortcomings. Cells B and C have more insidious implications.

OPEN SOCIETY

Cell B constitutes the preferred location of Popperian enthusiasts of free criticism of policies and the theories informing them. To liberals and open society advocates alike, all value positions are of equal validity--except, of course, for the values of free expression intrinsic to the very idea of an open society. Differences among nonnative positions are seen as ultimately irreducible.⁵ The normative dimension of communication is closed.

Policy design under such conditions can only involve pursuit of essentially arbitrary ends (even if there is a "negative utilitarian" consensus on these ends). The effective pursuit of arbitrary ends raises Weber's specter of triumphant *zweckrationalitat*. This recognition of the dangers of instrumental rationalization of social and political life has been echoed over the years by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), Tribe (1973), and Habermas (1984). Tribe's statement of the point is perhaps most accessible. Our purportedly instrumental collective choices, Tribe claims, also shape our future preferences and ends, and hence our future selves. A drastic manifestation of this process may be found in policy choices about genetic engineering, which will affect who we become biologically. Less extreme examples are numerous. Decisions about resources to be devoted to different kinds of education shape the preferences and personalities of the individuals experiencing that education. Policy informed by market values is itself likely to promote both adoption of such values on the part of individuals who realize they have become increasingly functional for personal betterment (or necessary to avert poverty), and a reaction against market morality by those averse to competitive struggle.

Habermas states a similar point slightly differently. His principal fear is the "colonization" of all human social life by the imperatives of instrumental rationality, the net result of which is a world devoid of meaning, in which the only justification for social practices is their functional contribution to the maintenance of the social system. The most physically obvious example of such a process in action is perhaps urban redevelopment policy in recent decades, in which only the rebellion of their residents has prevented cities from becoming instrumentally rationalized systems set in concrete and glass. The net result of the victory of instrumental rationality is the same for Tribe and Habermas: society and polity lose control of their destiny, as they cast themselves adrift on a sequence of instrumental choices whose ultimate destination cannot be predicted or controlled. Consider, for example, the tide of events set in motion by series of limited instrumental choices about nuclear weaponry.

GOOD INTENTIONS

If cell B in our diagram represents the hazards of excessive concentration on the instrumental and empirical side of social problem solving and

policy design, cell C constitutes a different peril: exclusive focus on the normative aspect. In cell C, open normative communication enables free discussion about elements of the right and good life, both individual and collective. Such discussion might even produce a measure of social agreement, of the sort that forged the "collectivist consensus" in wartime Britain, which in turn laid the normative foundations for the subsequent development of the British welfare state.⁶ This kind of discursive collective life is presented in the works of Arendt (1958) and Habermas (1984). To Habermas, the "communicative action" of social life is properly oriented toward reciprocal trust and understanding among individuals, and certainly not toward instrumentally solving social problems; his (hypothetical) "ideal speech situation" should produce consensus on normative principals of justice. The idea that politics is properly a communicative domain, not a problem-solving one, is still more emphatic to Arendt.

To Habermas, then, political discourse should be primarily, if not exclusively, about the ends of action. Most of the time Habermas simply neglects any empirical dimension. Occasionally, though, he explicitly commends its repudiation, on the grounds that the use of instrumental action, even in pursuit of ends produced by free discussion, involves consorting with "diabolical powers" (see Keane, 1984, p. 184-186). Such powers include those that subverted the ends of Marxism through the (instrumental) means of Leninist centralism.

Popper and von Hayek would claim that cell C is indeed the road to hell, or to at least serfdom, paved as it is with good intentions. Both note that most over-ambitious social reformers are well-meaning. Occasionally, such reformers may even gain near-universal consensus on the desirability of their project. Such was the case over the 1940s vision of a British welfare state. But any neglect of the empirical dimension means that inevitable errors in a project or its execution will not be anticipated or uncovered. As their schemes go awry, the guardians of the project may be tempted to take actions that will further obstruct its fruition, such as coercion, or the identification and repression of scapegoats. The pursuit of the widely-held goal of racial desegregation through means of court-ordered busing in the United States is indicative of the possibilities here. Busing provoked opposition even from those who shared the goal of desegregation.

PRACTICAL REASON

Cells A, B, and C in our scheme are all hazardous locations for policy design. It should come as no surprise that we believe cell D is safer. In a sense, cell D's free empirical and normative dialogue is a rehabilitation of the notion of politics as prudential practical reason. Such reason is about "what should be done" in both the empirical sense of how to achieve goals, and the normative sense of the composition of these goals and the bounds on permissible means. The empirical aspect need not take the form of causal, law-like structures. Instead, this dimension is open to the possibility of social reality itself changing as a result of discursive deliberations engaged in by the citizens constituting that reality.

The situation we have described may sound like a resurrection of the Athenian *polis*; but what are its implications for policy design? The answer may be that effective policy design requires that the objects of design par-

ticipate in the design process (see Dryzek, 1982), such that the conjectures of professional designers require validation from a broader public. Policy design therefore differs from architectural and engineering design in being a discursive rather than a manipulative process. In this light, policy design is inevitably political, for concerned stakeholders as well as policy analysts can make and challenge claims. Thus politics and analysis are integrated, but not in the sense of analysis serving the political powers that be. The task of the policy analyst is to provide critical contributions to policy discourse, rather than engineer and effect policies at the behest of the powerful.

Where might such arrangements be located (or at least sought)? Intimations are more numerous than exemplars. One such intimation may be found in the area of international conflict resolution, which has seen a recent vogue for "problem solving" exercises (see, for example, Fisher, 1983). Participants (for example, British and Argentinean parliamentarians concerned with the Falklands conflict) scrutinize the nature and roots of their differences in a search for paths to reconciliation that satisfy the underlying interests of all sides.

Discursive procedures have also made some appearances in domestic policy making, especially in the United States, generally under titles such as mediation and regulatory negotiation (Amy, 1983; Harter, 1982). Typically, parties to a dispute reason through their differences under the auspices of a neutral third party in order to produce an action-oriented consensus. This consensus can then be expressed in public policy, though of course responsible institutions such as regulatory agencies, courts, and legislatures have the final say in the political system as it stands. Expression of consensus in policy is therefore facilitated if the forum is in some way tied to these institutions. Some well-publicized failures (e.g., the National Coal Policy Project of the late 1970s) have occurred in the absence of such a connection. Many of these exercises have appeared in the area of environmental policy, and have involved citizen groups, environmentalists, local governments, industry, and state and federal agencies. The issues negotiated have ranged from pollution control systems to flood control schemes to mining operations. Mediation and regulatory negotiation have some affinity with the "principled negotiation" exercises sponsored by the Harvard Negotiation Project whose canons are laid out in Fisher and Ury (1981).

These kinds of negotiations are transient and issue-specific, yet the principles involved can apply irrespective of the policy issue at hand. Taken to heart, their spirit would suggest restructuring policy processes. However, given that each exercise lasts only as long as the problem at which it is directed, there is no blueprint for *permanent* institutions implicit in them. Yet their successful functioning would undermine the credibility of existing institutional arrangements such as bureaucratic hierarchy or adversarial legal systems.

Two further caveats should be entered concerning these exercises. First, they have generally focused on dispute resolution, rather than design *per se*. But resolution often requires the creative design of patterns of action acceptable to the disputants. Second, these exercises in practice can involve deception and co-optation on the part of powerful interests such as developers. Thus the formal shell of a discursive exercise does not guaran-

tee free discourse among equals. The potential of mediation and similar procedures is thoroughly ambiguous. Indeed, many of their sponsors are unaware of the discursive aspect of their potential, and seek conflict resolution at any price.

This ambiguity points to two crucial roles for the policy analyst. The first is to address the conditions of discourse in a forum, in order to determine whether canons of openness are met. The second stems from the requirement that all participants possess roughly equal capability to present and question arguments, such that those unduly rich in finance and information do not dominate the proceedings. Equality here can be promoted by access to information (and perhaps funding); but political education of the resource-poor may also be necessary. The policy analyst might help, if only by disseminating information, questioning premises, and directing attention (cf. Forester, 1981).⁷

Our dramatization of the need for free and open communication about matters both empirical and normative should not blind us to the fact that criticism in policy debate can be an ambiguous good. In the context of small-group decision making, it has long been noted that creative solutions to problems can be devastated by premature criticism. Incubation of ideas may be necessary if they are to be given a fair competitive chance. Thus our endorsement of open-policy communication should be qualified by a recognition that infant ideas about the content of policies and designs may need protection from scrutiny (see Dryzek, 1983, p. 358). It is noteworthy that mediators often feel it necessary to hold meetings behind closed doors, so that the parties to a dispute can explore the implications of novel and creative solutions without fear of loss of face if the proposal eventually proves unacceptable. But just as successful mediation must quickly open itself up to the scrutiny of all interested parties, so must incubated public policy designs at some point be exposed to public scrutiny on both normative and empirical dimensions. Cell A in our scheme is a hazardous location, and should be vacated as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

Like any ideal, openness in policy communication functions as a standard for the evaluation and criticism of existing practices and the design of new ones. To the extent openness is violated, designed policy can expect to err. To the extent this standard is met, policy designers should not shrink from ambitious schemes for the resolution of social problems.

Although we have no cookbook recipe for attaining openness, we do have some modest suggestions for its pursuit in political institutions and policy analysis. Further experiments in extending mediation and like procedures in **open** directions would yield valuable evidence about the possibilities for this kind of policy design. For their part, policy analysts could in a "meta" role, attend to the openness of design processes, and more immediately, enhance and equalize the competence of participants in policy communication.

NOTES

¹But note that truly complex problems may resist such decomposition (see Alexander, 1965).

²Haefele (1973) argues that public choice theorists should expect their appropriate-size governments to produce better results (in utilitarian terms) only if they function by representation and vote rather than bureaucracy.

³The description "analycentric" means that a policy claim is justified through reference to the methodological competence of its production, normally through techniques such as cost benefit analysis, systems analysis, linear programming, and decision analysis.

⁴Prime Minister Thatcher's tendency to restrict her circle of advisors to a small group of like-minded individuals and to dispense with potentially critical ministers has been widely noted.

⁵This irreducibility does not mean that values are arbitrary. Popperians recognize that value systems have a history that can be understood as a succession of critical contributions. But this history is independent of any policy problem at hand, and hence it leaves us with an irreducible plurality in any given case.

⁶A clear statement of the normative principles involved may be found in Beveridge (1942).

⁷More extensive discussion of the institutionalization of principles of free discourse may be found in Dryzek (1987, part III).

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