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THE SOCIAL SCIENCES,
AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Edited by
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sources, methodology, and techniques of analysis and projection will provide a basis at least for better elucidation of the issues for informed debate if not for better decisions. Political discourse in a democratic society ideally requires knowledge and an understanding of the nature and limitations of information. It also requires understanding of the social, political, and moral values underlying the positions of the policymaker. Policy analysts in their roles as brokers between the researcher and policymaker have a responsibility, through analysis of the issues and presentation of options, to increase the breadth and improve the quality of political discourse. In the final analysis, political consensus will develop from the combination of information with political, social, and moral values and from the charisma of the leadership.

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Some Fundamental Differences

MARK H. MOORE

It always seemed that social scientists could contribute a great deal to policymakers. Since policymakers needed information about the likely consequences of policy choices and social scientists were trained to reason and collect information about social processes in careful, rigorous ways, social scientists could reduce the uncertainty about the outcomes of policy choices. This simple syllogism stimulated the development of a large social science establishment and thickened the bonds between policymakers and social scientists. In fact, policy-making processes now routinely incorporate social scientists and social science findings as part of the apparatus that determines (and legitimates) policy choices.¹

¹For some general discussions of the role of social science in policymaking see: Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., ed., *Knowledge and Policy: The Uncertain Connection* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1978); Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978); Charles E. Lindblom and David K. Cohen, *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979); and Seymour J. Deitchman, *The Best Laid Schemes: A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1976).

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Despite the apparent compatibility, however, the marriage between policymaking and social science has not been happy. To some, the union seemed corrupt from the start: it threatened to shift social values and impoverish the political process by giving the "experts" and their arcane language too influential a role.² But even those in the process who consorted with one another most avidly have become somewhat disillusioned. The policymakers are increasingly frustrated by the inability of social scientists to produce compelling information in the form they need at the time they need it and are tired of being accused of acting in ignorance by any expert whose advice was ignored. For their part, the social scientists feel that their scientific virtue is under constant attack and that their important findings and cautions are cavalierly brushed aside by policymakers. So a certain prickliness has appeared in what promised to be a friendly relationship.

My contention is that this tension is created by fundamental differences between the tasks of providing information useful in making policy choices (the tasks of policy analysis) and the task of studying social processes in general (the tasks of social science). We have been confused about this difference because personnel and methods for the different enterprises overlap significantly. In fact, most policy analysis is still done by people who think of themselves as social scientists and bring the professional virtues of social scientists to the task of policy analysis. The prickliness we observe exists because the professional virtues of social scientists fail to mesh neatly with the task of policy analysis, and this leads to disappointment and mutual suspicion on both sides. The condition will persist until the professional virtues of policy analysis are distinguished from those of social science and accepted

²Edward Banfield, "Policy-Science as Metaphysical Madness" in *Bureaucrats, Policy Analysts, Statesmen: Who Leads*, ed. by Robert A. Goldwin (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980).

by those social scientists and others who find themselves doing policy analysis. The purpose of this essay is to explore the differences in the goals, professional standards, claims, and relationship of the government to social science on the one hand and policy analysis on the other.

DIFFERENT GOALS

The goal of social science is to enhance our knowledge of human behavior—to help us understand why people and social institutions behave the way they do.³ The agenda of inquiry is largely established by the internal logic of existing disciplines. The normal activities of social scientists are to test, extend, and elaborate the theories that constitute the core of the disciplines.⁴ One "succeeds" by developing original propositions which bear specifiable relationships to previously established propositions and concerns and showing—through rigorous logic, empirical evidence, or both—that the propositions are true or false. To a degree, of course, the agenda of social science is tempered by the "relevance" of an inquiry to current social issues and by the availability of data, instrumentation, and methods that make some questions easier to investigate than others. But still, achievement in the enterprise of social science is largely defined in terms of contributions to the core concepts and ideas of the discipline.

The goal of policy analysis is quite different: it is to inform policymakers about the likely consequences of alternative policy choices. Thus, the agenda of inquiry is set not by the internal logic of an academic discipline but by the set of issues and questions raised by some contemplated use of govern-

³Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1964).

⁴Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

mental authority or resources. Each imagined use of governmental authority carries with it some conceivable consequences—both intended and unintended. The basic goal of policy analysis is to make as precise predictions as possible about the important, likely results of policy interventions. A piece of policy analysis is completed when the choice has been given a structure, including alternative actions and relevant possible consequences, and when estimates of the consequences have been made by tracing the causal links between the alternative actions and the consequences.⁵ Thus, the goal is to inform a particular, complex choice—not to establish a truth or elaborate a discipline that is reaching for a general understanding of social processes.

Of course, substantial overlaps exist in both the subjects and methods of social science and policy analysis. With respect to *subjects*, for example, macroeconomic theory is quite closely related to macroeconomic policy, criminology quite closely linked to crime control policies, and Freudian theory intimately intertwined with the practice of psychoanalysis. Similarly, with respect to *methods*, both policy analysis and social science are concerned with developing true statements about empirical relationships in the world. Criminology seeks to know what factors affect the incidence of crime, and policy analysts concerned with crime control want to know how increased imprisonment might affect the level of crime. In seeking to develop such statements, both social scientists and policy analysts are bound by the same rules of evidence and inference. Finally, in presenting their conclusions, social scientists and policy analysts must both adhere to the principle of full specification of methods, assumptions, and data to ensure that others may replicate their observations and cal-

⁵Edith Stokey and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *A Primer for Policy Analyses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978).

culations. Otherwise, any claims are suspect. Since social science findings often seem to be very important parts of policy analysis and policy analysis seems to accept many of the same methodological disciplines as social science, the two enterprises often appear to be so closely related as to be indistinguishable.

In my view, these similarities create confusion by obscuring much more fundamental differences. The differences concern both the form and substance of propositions that emerge from social science and policy analysis. Social science seeks to produce general descriptive propositions of the form "If X occurs, then it is likely that Y will also occur." Moreover, in choosing the X's and Y's, social science is guided by theoretical issues current in the discipline. Policy analysis, on the other hand, is interested in producing conditionally prescriptive propositions of the form "If one's purposes are to produce X, Y, and Z and one imagines alternatives A, B, and C, then our current knowledge of the world suggests that one should choose action A because that is likely to produce more of what is desired than either B or C." Moreover, in defining the relevant variables (i.e., the sets of relevant consequences and imagined actions), the policy analyst is guided not by social science theory but by concerns and questions raised by some contemplated use of governmental authority and resources.

Note also that the variables selected for investigation in the two different enterprises are likely to be very different. Because social science is interested in *general* explanations, the social scientist is likely to focus on a few "structural" variables. This focus on structural variables is consistent with the desire to develop a parsimonious general theory. Moreover, this focus is convenient in terms of allowing the maximum use of available empirical information and statistical methods to produce significant conclusions. The policy ana-

lyst, on the other hand, will focus on variables that can plausibly be affected by discrete policy instruments. Typically, these variables will be smaller and more precisely defined than the variables relied on in social science investigation. An example may be helpful.

If one were interested in developing general propositions about the role that guns played in determining the level and character of criminal attacks, it would be natural to think of a general variable called a "gun availability" and to measure its relationships to observed levels of criminal attacks.⁶ On the other hand, if one were facing the policy issue of whether gun-control efforts should focus on depleting the general stock of handguns, on preventing new purchases, on keeping guns from proscribed persons, or on preventing the illegal carrying of handguns, one might well need a more refined notion of "gun availability" that distinguished among kinds of individuals and degrees of availability.⁷ Typically, then, the variables of interest to policy analysts will be more particular and idiosyncratic than the variables interesting to social scientists. This implies that the *actual* substantive overlap between social science and policy analysis need not be very great.

The difference in form is also significant. The conditionally prescriptive statements of the policy analyst contain empirical propositions (those that link possible actions to relevant consequences). But they contain more than this. They include an implicit normative judgment in the identification of the relevant consequences. They include an implicit political and

⁶For an excellent example of this sort of theory, see Philip J. Cook, "The Effect of Gun Availability on Robbery and Robbery Murder: A Cross-section Study of Fifty Cities," in *Policy Studies Review Annual*, ed. by Robert H. Hauman and B. Bruce Zellner, III (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1979).

⁷Mark H. Moore, "Managing the Effective Price of Handguns." (Mimeographed; available from author.)

bureaucratic judgment in defining a plausible set of alternative actions. And behind the conclusion that one option is preferred to another is a more or less crude optimizing logic that builds from the empirical statement. Thus, propositions of interest to policy analysts contain a great deal more than straight empirical propositions.

These differences may seem insignificant and easily transcended. In my view, however, the gulf is much wider than commonly discerned. Perhaps the gap between policy analysis and social science can be illustrated by two characteristic things that happen when social scientists try to be helpful to policymakers.

Consider, first, the question of how a social scientist might proceed when asked about a given empirical relationship of some significance to policy—say, for example, the relationship between drug abuse and crime. In all likelihood, he or she will begin by assessing what is now known or believed about the relationship, going back to "the literature" and discussing existing theories and evidence. Attention will be focused on what is known or disputed and what could conveniently be discovered. This will take most of the social scientist's time. A policy analyst, on the other hand, would be inclined to ask first what he or she needs to know about this relationship in order to answer some plausibly interesting policy question. In searching the literature, then, the analyst—rather than being guided by the history of theorizing in this area or the desire to say exactly what is now known—will focus on what is known about the issues he or she needs to know in order to answer the policy question.⁸ One reads

⁸These observations are based on personal experience with a major study to review what was known of the relationship of drug abuse and crime. For the early result, see *Report of the Panel on Drug Use and Criminal Behavior: Preliminary Draft* (Research Triangle, N.C.: Research Triangle Institute, June, 1976).

the literature much differently when the purpose is to establish what is known with confidence than when it is to find out what is known about an issue on which a policy decision turns.

Consider, next, the typical effort to develop "policy implications" from social science findings. In the typical social science publication, elaborate efforts are made to establish a causal relationship among some variables—say, again, drug abuse and crime. The discussion of the data and methods of investigation are careful and restrained. The current investigation is placed in the context of other theories and findings. All this is consistent with the desire to build firm structures of knowledge slowly and carefully. Once the author has painstakingly established the existence (or nonexistence) of a relationship, however, he or she turns to the "policy implications" of the finding. At this moment all the caution that characterized the analysis is often abandoned as the author rushes toward conditionally prescriptive propositions at a pace that would make a serious policy analyst blush. Suddenly, goals are being suggested and governmental action conditionally prescribed all on the basis of *one* more or less firmly established empirical finding.⁹ The policy analyst would ask why the goals suggested by the social scientist were the "right" ones for considering policy and whether the stated goals were presented as a relatively complete statement of society's stakes in the area. Other obvious questions would be what set of policy alternatives had been considered and how the empirical finding proudly displayed by the social scientist might shed light on the likely consequences of governmental action. Typically, the social scientist would be silent on this point and

⁹For an example of this, see M. Harvey Brenner, "Drug Abuse Trends in National Economy and Crime Policy Report: (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, 1977.)

explain that he or she was merely suggesting some possible implications—not insisting on conclusions. The policy analyst, left with the problem of developing conditionally prescriptive conclusions for governmental action, might properly feel that the social scientist had left a substantial piece of work to be done. The analyst had still to develop the conception of the goals, conceive of plausible policy actions, and trace the empirical connections between governmental actions and consequences. In this, the finding of the social scientist might be helpful but far from sufficient for conditionally prescriptive statements about the advisability of governmental action.

In sum, then, social scientists and policy analysts have different goals. While they both seek to develop reliable and useful information about social processes, they do so for different "masters" and with different aims. For social science, the agenda of inquiry is established by academic disciplines seeking ever more powerful and more extensive generalizations about human behavior. For policy analysis, the agenda is set by contemplated uses of governmental authority to accomplish given purposes. Moreover, in the end, they are interested in developing different kinds of propositions. Social science is interested in developing general descriptive statements about social process. Policy analysis is interested in developing particular prescriptive statements about the advisability of governmental actions assuming certain goals.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The different goals of social science and policy analysis have important implications for standards of completed, high-quality work. Arguably, the first virtue of a piece of social science research is its definitiveness. Of course, the importance of the conclusion, the elegance of the study, and its

originality may also affect professional assessment of a piece of social science research. But definitiveness is a very important virtue aggressively pursued by social scientists.

The first virtue of a piece of policy analysis, on the other hand, may be its relevance and usefulness in informing a choice. Definitiveness may also be a virtue. And if definitiveness can be pursued without paying a price in terms of relevance, a policy analyst may be duty bound to pursue it. But the interesting situation occurs when the pursuit of definitiveness costs the policy analyst something in terms of relevance. At this moment, a tension appears in his or her commitment to the virtues of social science on the one hand and to policy analysis on the other. In my experience, this tension appears not rarely but routinely. Moreover, the issue is confronted and resolved not in the late stages of an inquiry but right at the beginning, when "the problem" to be investigated is first defined.¹⁰

Recall that the aim of policy analysis is to produce conditionally prescriptive propositions with a high degree of confidence (e.g., if you want to achieve X and you are choosing from actions A, B, and C, choose A because it is most likely to produce what you want). Such statements are essentially optimizing statements that depend on a *combination of empirical statements* (describing links between actions and consequences) and an analytic logic that yields the optimal choice based on weights assigned to the different consequences of the actions. To meet the social science standard of definitiveness, the conditionally optimizing statements generated by policy analysis must be rigorously developed and defended. This means that the empirical statements must be verified (or plausibly assumed) and the analytic logic explicitly laid out.

¹⁰Mark H. Moore, "The Anatomy of the Heroin Problem: An Exercise in Problem Definition," *Policy Analysis*, 2 (Fall, 1976), 639-62.

This is what makes the calculation reproducible and verifiable by others. In addition to the requirement for internal consistency, however, the propositions developed by the policy analysis must meet a test of *external* validity as well. The terms of the calculation must correspond to the terms of the situation as the policymaker confronts it.

Now, tension always exists between the standards of convenient empirical investigation, internal consistency, and external validation. The messy particulars of the world yield easily neither to elegant theoretical formulation nor to convenient measurement. Some verisimilitude must be sacrificed to allow for parsimonious theories whose internal logic can be fully and easily specified and which can be tested across a wide variety of situations. Professionals in both social science and policy analysis seeking to do quality work need to know how to strike this balance between verisimilitude and abstraction. Where to strike this balance, however, is a key issue. For social scientists, the standard is fairly clear: prefer parsimony and generality over verisimilitude. This is consistent with the goal of developing powerful general theories.

It is far from clear, however, that this should be the standard for policy analysts. After all, policy analysts justify their activities by being helpful to policymakers facing particular choices. Arguably, in formulating *their* problems (i.e., in defining relevant consequences, in conceiving of plausible government actions, and in estimating the likely consequences of actions), they should strike a different balance between elegance and solvability on the one hand and a close correspondence to the details of the particular world on the other. Because much of immediate practical significance turns on the particular way a policy problem is defined, it seems plausible that policy analysts should expand their definition of the problem until it corresponds closely to what is immediately possible and at stake in the world, even if that expansion

implies sacrificing rigor and certainty in the internal parts of the calculation. Thus, the desirability of parsimony, generality, and elegance against the demands of verisimilitude may be less strong for policy analysis than for social science.

If it is accepted that, to accommodate important particulars, the definitions of policy problems must be complex, it follows that the standards for "completeness" must be relaxed. Implicit in most policy analyses are scores of empirical assertions, which may or may not be fully validated. There is also an optimizing logic that grows increasingly complex as terms are added to the analysis. If the calculation becomes too complex and many empirical propositions are buried in it, it becomes impossible to meet the test of internal completeness and validity: the conclusion about the appropriate action simply does not emerge from a reproducible calculation. The clear implication is that if policy analysis is to be useful, we cannot insist on the same standard of completeness. We must understand the analysis as something that informs but does not strictly force a decision. Great room is left for disagreement and judgment.

This applies to the empirical assertions contained in the policy analysis as well as the overall conclusions. In fact, this is the area of greatest tension between the standards of policy analysis and the standards of social science. As noted above, a policy analysis is often built on a series of empirical statements about causal relationships in the world (e.g., the presence of guns in assault situations increases the probability of death; therefore, if one could remove guns from assault situations and everything else remained unchanged, the homicide rate would fall). The empirical relationships (and the methods for confirming that they exist) are at the heart of social science. For this reason, social science treats them with great respect. Nothing should be reported or believed about empirical relationships (and certainly no action should be based

on beliefs about relationships) unless one is confident in this knowledge. Policy analysts, on the other hand, have a much more voracious appetite for information. They are quite happy if a piece of information makes one hypothesis only a little more likely than another; they do not insist on 95 percent confidence that one hypothesis is true. The only imperatives are to use as much information as is available, to be disciplined in letting this information shape one's beliefs about the relative likelihood of a variety of alternative hypotheses being true, and to be careful in designing policies to hedge against the likelihood that the current most likely hypothesis will be wrong.¹¹ This apparently cavalier attitude toward empirical relationships—the willingness to use imperfect information and act on the basis of uncertainty about the relationships—stimulates indignation among social scientists, who feel that something important and solemn is being sacrificed when their painstaking conservatism in accepting information is brushed aside in favor of a less restrictive approach. It is important to understand, however, that while the approach may be less *restrictive* in terms of what kinds of information can properly be used and how certain one must be to begin talking about empirical relations, policy analysis is no less rigorous nor less faithful to the idea that we should form our views about causal relationships by looking at facts. Instead, it says that we will let available facts shape our views of which empirical statements are likely to be true and that we will act happily in situations where we cannot be sure that one hypothesis is true by hedging our actions against the possibility that alternative hypotheses will turn out to be true.

If empirical standards and requirements for completeness in the internal logic are relaxed, it also follows that no sig-

¹¹Howard Raiffa, *Decision Analysis* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1968).

nificant threshold need be surmounted to do a useful bit of policy analysis. Since the purpose of policy analysis is to structure and inform choices, and since it is always possible to make some progress in performing this function and little prospect that one can fully complete it, one can work at the enterprise in good conscience no matter how much time is available. Back-of-the-envelope calculations, month-long inquiries that allow deeper searches for documented experience, the exploitation of natural experiments that may have occurred, and multiyear studies that allow explicit experimentation all have value within the enterprise of policy analysis. Since the professional goal is always to use whatever time one has available to inform a choice as effectively as possible, no great prejudice is attached to studies that are "quick and dirty." Indeed, if time is short, they may have great value. This tolerance of hasty work is fortunate, of course, since it is often difficult to predict in advance when information of certain kinds will be needed, and it is reassuring to know that we need not have to give several years to pieces of policy analysis before they have any use.

In sum, then, policy analysis and social science strike much different balances as they seek to understand the world. Policy analysis seeks a close embrace with the particular terms and conditions of the world as it is affected by a contemplated use of governmental authority. For this close embrace, it is willing to sacrifice something in terms of confidence in empirical statements and internal completeness of the logic that produces conditional, prescriptive propositions. Moreover, there appears to be no minimum amount of time or effort necessary to qualify a piece of policy analysis as useful. It all depends on how helpful observations, reflection, and lines or argument turn out to be in revealing what is plausibly at stake in policy choices. Social science operates with much different standards—particularly with respect to the tradeoffs

between parsimony and verisimilitude and thresholds for accepting pieces of empirical information as useful. The differences predictably create tensions between policy analysts and social scientists and within the same person switching from task to task without noticing that he or she is doing so.

PUBLIC CLAIMS

If the conclusions of a piece of policy analysis do not emerge unambiguously and definitively from a reproducible calculation, the claims it can make on public credibility are less than policy analysts sometimes suppose. As noted above, it can inform a policy choice but cannot dictate by force of logic. Substantial room is left for more or less idiosyncratic judgments. The relative importance of different objectives can be altered. New objectives and alternatives can be created. Pieces of information bearing on beliefs about causal relationships can be interpreted somewhat differently. And different attitudes towards uncertainty and time can affect the "calculation" of which course of action is most appealing. The power of a piece of policy analysis, then, depends on how helpful its structure and accumulated information is in illuminating a choice and how persuasive its line of argument is in defense of a given policy. To the extent that it reflects and stretches the concerns of those who must decide, putting before them information and reasoning that increases their capacity to discover the likely results of alternative choices, it can be helpful and even influential, but it can rarely command fealty.¹²

This loss of determinacy and the weakening of the claims of policy analysis is often seen as the price policy analysts

¹²Charles E. Lindblom, *The Policy Making Process* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968).

pay for sacrificing the rigorous standards of social science. If the analysts had hewn more closely to the requirements for internal logical consistency and verification of empirical assertions, if they were not so indiscriminating in their use of information, and if they were patient enough for truth to be established, they could claim much more for their work. As it is now, their pandering to the concerns of politicians and their casual use of the powerful tools of social science tend to give all science a bad name.

The problem with this perspective, of course, is its presupposition that a properly "scientific" approach to the design of policies could make greater claims than policy analysis now can. In principle this is true. One can imagine a full specification of the choice confronting a policymaker that met all tests for internal consistency and external validation where the only indeterminacy was in the values to be assigned to given objectives. In such a situation, the conditionally prescriptive propositions of policy analysis would be powerful indeed. But in the real world, this is *not* true, and it is unlikely to become true (except in a few areas) over the next decades. Thus, it seems to me misguided to hope that a greater commitment to scientific principles would produce more powerful policy analyses.

In fact, I think it is likely that the commitment to more science and more powerful claims for policy analysis will not only fail to produce better policy analysis but lead to distortions in what well-trained, conscientious people do when they try to inform policy choices. For one thing, to assume that no ultimate tension exists between social science and policy analysis will cause social scientists to misallocate their efforts as they confront policy problems. They will seek to advance the science of solving that particular problem. That, in turn, will lead them to forget that their first loyalty is to define the problem in appropriate terms; they will shrink the terms of

the problem to make it more amenable to solution. Having reduced the problem and solved it, they will then think that their solution has more status than it deserves. It will be science demanding allegiance from intuition and judgment. Any failure to honor the claims of science will be treated as ignorance or corruption. And the tensions and mutual suspicion that now mark the relationship between policymakers and social scientists who are doing policy analysis will be exacerbated.

This conclusion that policy analyses cannot claim the definitiveness of social science findings is treated as bad news in many circles—so bad, in fact, that it is stubbornly resisted. The resistance seems based on a reluctance to surrender an elevated and special status. If one has the special skills required to produce truth and if others need truth, then one is in a powerful position. It is disappointing to find that a social scientist's status in confronting policy problems is reduced first by accepting the influence of mere policymakers in setting one's agenda and, second, by the discovery that one's tools harnessed to this task will fail to produce an undeniable truth. Some of the privileged status of social scientists is stripped away. They can still be scientists, of course. But they are denied the *dual* status of scientist and policy influential. In the conception of policy analysis presented here, the role of the scientifically trained policy influential becomes a more modest one, measured more by a capacity to be helpful than by exclusive access to truth and enlightenment.

Many social scientists, disappointed to discover that they could spend several years working carefully and imaginatively on a policy problem only to produce "conclusions" that are at best helpful in guiding policy for a few years, will decide that the returns are hardly worth the effort—particularly when contrasted with the hope of immortality through a significant contribution to a scientific discipline. But for many who decide

this way, it is a wrong decision. Their talents could frequently have greater social value if they turned their attention to policy problems and away from the marginal contributions that can be made to the disciplines. There is plenty of scope for ambition, skill, intelligence, and imagination in seriously confronting particular policy problems as well as in elaborating a discipline. In fact, I would argue that the people trained in social science methods are now very badly allocated in society, with far too many working on basic research elaborating existing disciplines and far too few using their skills to illuminate the stakes of policy decisions. At any rate, I think it is undeniable that even the most gifted social scientists applying themselves to a policy problem will produce pieces of analysis that leave plenty of room for disagreement. Hence, the claims of both policy analysis and social science as they confront policy problems must be modest, and they must take guidance from the terms and conditions of the particular situations as they appear to policymakers.

RELATIONSHIPS TO POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Throughout this essay, I have suggested that a crucial difference between policy analysis and social science is their relationship to government. Like all sciences, the social sciences (as social science) should seek an arm's-length relationship to the government. The enterprise will need government subsidies, and current needs may reasonably influence research agendas on the margin. But social sciences should insist on their right to pursue lines of inquiry regardless of the political implications. Nothing else is consistent with our commitment to free inquiry.

Policy analysis, on the other hand, is inevitably closely intertwined with governmental actions and concerns. In fact,

contemplated uses of government activity and resources are what define the issues to be addressed and resolved by policy analysis. Thus, the closer the relationship, the better. This observation is sometimes taken to imply that the government should (or will) subordinate policy analysts. Two threats to intellectual integrity are of particular concern. One is that policy analysts working for the government will be influenced to abandon their critical and imaginative perspective. They will accept the terms in which the government defines the problems rather than altering the terms to incorporate different objectives or new alternatives. As a result, potentially attractive alternatives will be lost and important stakes overlooked. The second threat is that the analysts will be biased in the way they report or interpret information. The bias will run to supporting current government programs. Both threats together will cause policy analysis to become a bastion for the status quo rather than an engine for innovation and change.

That such pressures exist, I have no doubt. Moreover, I am sure they are maximized for policy analysts employed by agencies within the government. Still, it seems possible that policy analysts could develop a professional norm resistant to such pressures. I think the government is best served by policy analysts who are aggressive and take initiative in defining policy problems, always going slightly beyond the strict terms of their assignment to see what other alternatives might exist and what unanticipated consequences might occur. Moreover, I think policymakers are best served (and know that they are) when analysts report and interpret information as objectively as they can. This does not mean that advocacy should not or could not ever appear in policy analysis. But it does mean that policy analysts should retain a substantial degree of intellectual independence in defining the problem and in collecting, reporting, and interpreting information. The close relationship with government does not mean that policy

analysts should abandon their intellect or training. It means that they should put their skills to use in an effort to be helpful to the government.

CONCLUSIONS

The tools and methods of the social sciences are increasingly important to government as it faces a wide variety of complex, substantive choices. In addressing these choices, we must depend on careful definitions of the problems and careful observation and close reasoning to foresee the important results. People trained in social science often have the skills, patience, interests, and intelligence to perform this task well.

Unfortunately, social scientists bring with them some attitudes and expectations that are disabling as well as enabling. They often think that their most fundamental objective is to develop a discipline or establish a truth rather than to inform a policy choice. They resent the influence the government has in shaping the issues they are asked to address. They alter the terms of reference in the policy problems they confront to make them solvable, in the mistaken belief that solving a narrowed version of the problem is more important than defining the problem accurately. They dismiss imperfect information and are reluctant to propose action without certainty about key empirical relationships.

It would be valuable to develop a group of people well trained in social science methods who understood that their main professional responsibility was not to elaborate disciplines or establish truths but to structure and inform particular policy choices. In doing this, it would be important that they maintain some detachment from the political process—enough to allow them to go beyond the definitions of problems as they were presented and to prevent bias in their collection,

reporting, and interpretation of available information. But they should also understand that in an important sense they are part of the political process. Their agendas will be shaped by government action. And their advice, while influential, could not be expected to command governmental choices. They would have to be comfortable with problems that were too messy to be neatly solved and would have to become disciplined in using imperfect information appropriately. Such changes in orientation are extremely difficult. And the only reward is the possibility of being appropriately influential over a short period of time on a policy choice. But in our current world, this seems a high calling indeed.¹³

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