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Public Policy Research?

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## ABSTRACT

Question: Can we describe a sensible mechanism by which knowledge about social problems affects how we deal with them publicly?

Answer: (1) Ideas are related to changes in how we act because they affect the contexts in which the problematic becomes formulated. This process of contextuating is one of guided attention.

(2) Public policy problems are not like puzzles. Rather than being defined and solved, they come to attention and initiate a series of actions which ultimately redirect attention away from the problematic. These actions sometimes include problem solving behavior, but most of the time are a manipulation of the structuring of the problem description.

(3) In a social world where specialization is highly articulated, experts in their professionalized forms become the means by which problems are attended to.

So: The knowledge we develop about social policy problems, while influenced by the conventional structure of problems, may cause changes of attention and significance to the material that make up the situation under examination. This itself affects how the problem is said to be "solved." Professionals are most influential in these changes of attention since they manage the languages of description and contextuation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Russell Ellis and Stephen Blum read and commented on the earliest versions of this essay. Larry Hirschhorn, Bayard Catron, and William Alonso helped in later drafts. I received some helpful responses when I gave a talk based on it at the Centre for Environmental Studies in London in Summer 1971. Peter Marris at that time and others took me up on my argument.

The usual remarks about credit and blame, good parts and errors, seem awful to me and so they will only be referred to.

Question: Can we describe a sensible mechanism by which knowledge about social problems affects how we deal with them publicly?

It is not obvious that we would be better off knowing more about the world if we wanted to improve public action. Our situation may not be amenable to the effects of systematic knowledge, or at best, diminishing returns may set in very rapidly. Even then arbitrary power, directed by common sense, may overwhelm even the supposedly marginal effects of systematic research and understanding. Men may be rarely, if ever, convinced by arguments offered by others.<sup>1</sup> What does knowledge have to do with authorized power?<sup>2</sup> Some say, "very little."

Two somewhat different representations of this feeling can be discerned. They might be called the "hippie" and "formalized rationality" perspectives.<sup>3</sup> The first says that the formal methods and systematic knowledge we possess cannot lead to good action; they lack goodness. The second suggests that these methods are likely to

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<sup>1</sup>Toulmin, 1970, p. 42, points out that the choice may even be more subtle. We may choose to believe that reason may be efficacious, but has little to do with our sensible selves (as does Hume). Or, we may believe that reason cannot affect anything of the material world at all (as do Descartes and Kant).

<sup>2</sup>As for questions of Macht (might) or unauthorized power, knowledge can be instrumental whether repressive or revolutionary. My concern here is with social authority.

<sup>3</sup>A somewhat more pragmatic and instrumental third view ignores the question of authority completely. (See Ways, 1971 or Krieger, 1970a). It is said that our problems are very complex, we must act on the basis of incomplete knowledge and realize that our expectations will be frustrated. I see merit in this view but it is irrelevant to the problem at hand.

lead to good action, but their current political embodiment (irrational and ideological) precludes this. These representations differ on ends (the nature of good action) and means (formalized systematic methods). The complainants do not care for each other, but they are in the same boat.<sup>4</sup>

I find neither of these perspectives to be congenial or valid. Here, I want to argue that: (1) We are better off acting in awareness of systematic knowledge; and (2) The way in which this knowledge affects how we act has little to do with its systematic character. It seems worthwhile to sidestep "goodness" and current politics for the question at hand.

In everyday life neither perspective seems true. Commonly we develop knowledge that does lead to good action. We look outside and at a thermometer to find out something about the weather before we go out. Similarly, we may look at consumer magazines when we are ready to buy an appliance. In bureaucratic life it seems that vast numbers of reports and studies are commissioned in good faith as ways of learning, rather than as a means of justifying preordained actions.

Still, there is a sense that formalized rationality<sup>5</sup> operating in the realm of public policy has misled us in the past decade.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>4</sup>The popular, though not necessarily best, representation of the "hippie" is Roszak, 1969. As for "rationality," the disappointed liberals provide the best samples. The latter include Nathan Glazer, 1970, Patrick Moynihan, 1969, and Daniel Bell, 1971. See Krieger, 1970a.

<sup>5</sup>By formalized rationality we usually mean some formal way of relating what we do to what we want, a way of fulfilling our intentions and understanding their consequences. Again this is not trivial. We could be irrational or impulsive and not think about what we are doing or where we are going. An alternative, still not considered rational behavior in its strict form, is an emphasis on process and the benefits therefrom as contrasted to content and "results."

<sup>6</sup>Yet at the same time, universities which are teaching policy studies emphasize further the techniques traditionally associated with rational

notable cases are the organization of the defense establishment, the management of the Vietnam War and associated shenanigans, and methods of program planning and budgeting. Others include the large numbers of reports commissioned on social problems.<sup>7</sup> What has been the effect of all this paper?<sup>8</sup> The poor and the war are still with us. Many suggest that the effects of systematic formal methods have been substantial and negative.

Some of the confusion might be cleared away when we inquire what we mean by "effect." My suspicion is that efforts at being "scientific," at understanding in a systematic way the connections between what we do and what we want, have been successful. Their success lies in that issues have been transformed as a result of such analysis, although it is true that it does not seem that the precise results of most studies are directly related to future action from the policy perspective. Our task is to reconcile the failure of most reports to be directly implemented (or methods of reorganization to "work") with their success in causing the reformulation and the restructuring of many of the policy questions we talk about today.<sup>9</sup>

A significant part of the explanation that we need is that the political consequences of implementing the results of a research effort are greater (in changes in power and privilege) than of absorbing methods, especially certain quantitative approaches, despite these observations.

<sup>7</sup>See Platt, 1971, for a nice discussion of riot commissions and their associated political world.

<sup>8</sup>For some comments on successes of these methods see Enthoven, 1971.

<sup>9</sup>The "hippie" will not be satisfied by my argument, for I do not relate the structure of knowledge to ethical questions. That awaits a later study.

the perspective of research into current policy work. The latter option is likely to be chosen. This part of the explanation is a bit circular since we know that the development of systematic knowledge affects political and social systems that are being studied, and also that policy researchers often interact and affect political actors directly. Also, I will argue that the effect of most understanding is to change the manner in which we see our problematic situations.

Another part of the explanation is to find a reason why we sense the impotence of much of our efforts at knowing with the respect to policy. I shall argue that a major source of the feeling is that our model of choice is a decisional one.<sup>10</sup> Policy problems exist and our puzzle is to figure out the answer to the problem by choosing our way down a path of alternatives.<sup>11</sup> Whether the decision is long-run or short-run, comprehensive or incremental, does not matter. We all realize some of the difficulties of an approach to policy making that views the process as a linked series of decisions. There are no simple truths and there are no simple decision or social welfare functions available. Still we persist with such a model. So, of course, each time we see that a certain, very carefully studied fact is ignored in a decision, we cannot help but be disturbed about the ineffectiveness of research and knowledge. (See Allison, 1969)

In response to the difficulties associated with decisional models, an argumentative (or dialectical!) model of the utilization of knowledge in policy making has been developed. (Churchman, 1969)

<sup>10</sup>Watkins, 1970, offers an interesting argument for a theory of non-decisions and historical explanation. He argues for assuming reasonable behavior even when that seems unlikely. See also, Bachrach, 1963.

<sup>11</sup>See Kuhn, 1970, p. 34, on puzzles.

Socrates and Hegel are, of course, seminal. The crucial point they all make is that data can only have meaning within a larger world view. The best approach for using data in policy making is to set up an argument in which people dispute interpretations of specific pieces of data and specific organizations of them. This approach has much merit in that it realizes that data of themselves do not exist without interpretation and associated theories. Unfortunately, it is still likely that the argument may be ineffective in gaining mutual assent. People may agree that "you have your perspective on the data and I have mine, but we need not deal knowledge-orientedly with each other much more than that." Mutual understanding is not a replacement for agreement. Consensus often exists and we need to explore the social mechanisms that bring it about.<sup>12</sup>

The source of difficulty in either model is a concentration on the data themselves, rather than on the larger frameworks of description. The emphasis should be somewhat different. The primary effect of knowledge, research, and understanding for public social policy lies in the development of a context and a mode of description of the situation that integrates what might be observed about a situation and what might be acted on with respect to it.<sup>13</sup> I call this

<sup>12</sup>Ayer, 1956, may have been right in saying that in disagreements about what we ought to do, we can only end up understanding the nature of our opposition. This understanding may be logical (you believe A and I believe non-A) or psychological (we have different up-bringsings and there is little hope for us to agree in the evaluation of certain things). But we often do agree and do have shared languages. Each of us does not make his own world. So, what is going on?

<sup>13</sup>Etzioni, 1968, uses terms and arguments which haunt me. I seem to parallel him, but we don't end up in the same places at all. This may be a result of our different intentions. See also Churchman, 1970.

I believe that contextuation has much in common with what is done when history is written. According to Danto, 1965, history is (a special kind of) telling stories. Also, I believe that contextuation has much to do with the nature of art. Both of these points will be

process contextuation.

This idea of context is reminiscent of the "paradigm" of Kuhn, 1970, but not quite. It is meaningful to say that paradigms exist and are superceded only when one has some consensual concept of validity and truth. A paradigm succeeds another when much information is brought to bear on the paradigm to which it is not responsive. The paradigm (and its proponents) may disagree with or be incapable of explaining the data. However, policy questions do not lie in the realm of truth or the explanation of data, but rather in that of articulating intent -- which is what policy is about.<sup>14</sup>

That contextuation is a significant function of systematic understanding, plays a role in the discussion of the nature of theories of natural science. In that discussion the emphasis is on the importance of theory for providing useful descriptors and suggesting the relative significance of measured variables, as well as what is to be measured. Theory and practice coexist intimately. For example, an electron (or positron) is both a theoretical and a measured entity dealt with in a subsequent essay.

It has been suggested to me (L. Hirschhorn) that this idea of context could be an argument for patience and conservatism. Namely, if we take the context idea to mean that knowledge has meaning only in terms of what exists, we seem to have a prima facie case for this limited view. But what exists, exists in a creative mind among other places. Clearly invention is limited by concepts, but that does not seem to have been ultimately limiting, at least over a long period of time. Foucault, 1970, is very interesting on this point. His epistèmes are not unrelated to contexts. Much of this whole approach goes back to Whorf.

<sup>14</sup>Paradigms may be useful for discussing science, and perhaps even useful for the discussion of social situations, but they seem to be just the slightly wrong concept when we discuss policy. Also, the almost casual use of the term these days by anyone when referring to some contextuating description blurs some genuine distinctions. See Lakatos, 1970, for further discussion of the controversy around Kuhn.

In a future essay I want to consider some of the criteria for judging contexts. Steven Pepper, 1938, on contextualist theories will be of some value. The whole problem is partly related to the discipline

and its properties, originally, were as much theoretical as measured. At another time, it is conceivable that the phenomena we associate with a particle of certain mass and charge and other properties, commonly called the electron, might well be dissipated among a whole new set of objects or fields.<sup>15</sup>

The manifestly important moral and political aspects of public policy make it somewhat different than natural science (or even much of social science). Contextuation, we shall see, serves not only technical but also normative (on the level of politics) functions.

Pervading the discussion will be a concern with something I call the truth, and which might be better termed reality testing. For the problem that seems most crucial to me in understanding how understanding plays a role in public policy is to figure out the interplay of politics and research realities.

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of hermeneutics. Hirsch, 1967, uses the idea of genre for getting at the field of interpretation. The other useful work in English is Palmer, 1969. I hope to carefully compare ideas such as telling stories, paradigm, context, genre, dialectic and so on.

<sup>15</sup>Kordig, 1971, gives a summary of the argument about theory-laden terms.

## IDEAS

(1) Ideas are related to changes in how we act because they affect the contexts in which the problematic becomes formulated. This process of contextuating is one of guided attention.

Ideas About These Ideas

The self-reflexive character of this discussion inclines me to discuss some of its self-imposed limitations. It is likely that I will not be entirely self-consistent in this essay, but at least I can expose what is going on.

I do not treat the exercise of power as problematic. Rather than discuss the machinations involved in politics, I want to deal with the limitations we tend to place on ourselves, often in an unconscious way, when we act publicly and politically.

In policy making the space of actions that we think are possible, either scientifically, politically, socially, or culturally is remarkably limited. The way in which the space of actions gets constructed, the potentialities of everyday life, is almost totally ignored. Another remarkable aspect of policy making is that from the variety of alternatives existent in a space of potential actions only a few come to be seen as potentially realizable. Why is this so? What is the role of knowledge in this process?

Pepper has pointed out that there seems to be a simple relationship between epistemology and metaphysics. I seem to fit into one of his categories. (Holzner, 1968, p. 49; Pepper, 1942) These categories

are (1) a commitment to formism as epistemology and similarity and truth as a metaphysics, (2) mechanism and causation, (3) contextualism and action, and (4) organicism and coherence. My own concern is with contextualism and its associated action-metaphysics.

I am trying for a synthesis, beyond even considering positivism as one of the polar theses, between two philosophies usefully represented by Husserl and Habermas. Husserl encourages us to examine the events that exist in the world and realize our hidden assumptions, especially if we are positivists. Habermas suggests that we concentrate on intents rather than events. In this way we will not ignore the importance of politics, power and social role in our everyday life. Can we join events and interests (or intents)? Schütz seems most close to doing this. Action, for him, becomes the mediation of events and intents rather than being separated from either. And knowledge becomes a way of informing action, affecting context, and changing relevances.

### Ideas and Change

What kinds of intellectual work "cause" change in the ways we view a situation?

An historian of ideas, George Boas, suggests one possible list of the ways in which ideas change. (Boas, 1969) His orientation is individualist, non-political, and positivist. The sources of idea change include perceptions we have of the world, our affectual attitudes toward them or memories of past perceptions, our fantasies of the future, and our inner lives.

This orientation toward perception pays insufficient attention to intentionality. It assumes a mechanistic philosophy of history.

Our conception of how ideas influence other ideas and our actions is a function of the philosophy of history we hold. Since problems and policy are abstracted from and composed of events in time, the choice of the model of time and the evolution of events is crucial. One that seems most useful for my purposes is to treat the succession of ideas as being similar to the succession of styles in art. (Kubler, 1962)

Dilthey takes a usable perspective. He emphasizes understanding the motives of actors in history and the ways in which they relate their intents to actions if we want to understand public action. The work of the historian, or the work of the policy maker who is committed to a (partial) understanding of the world, is to derive a context for describing a situation in terms of motives. Weber's use of Verstehen is exactly this. This interpretative act, of making sense out of the "raw" data, is pervasively influenced by one's culture.<sup>16</sup> More than that, one's concerns for others, in active caring for one's social consociates, influences how one interprets the phenomenon. Historian becomes part of history, policy maker becomes part of policy, intentionality part of action.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I have some doubts about the existence of "raw" data, but for the moment the fiction or concept will be used.

<sup>17</sup> I have left Hegel and Marx out of this discussion. Part of this reflects its level of politics. I realize that the ideas I speak of are separated from their class attachments. It is the nature of this attachment that I will examine further on. As for the dialectic process itself, Kuhn or Pepper offer interesting versions of it (insufficiently materialistic?), but my concern here is much more with procedures of social validation within one school rather than conflicts between them. Of course, it is only conceptually possible to make this separation.

Social Intention and Action

Any discussion of knowledge in the social and political sphere should begin with a quote from Mannheim.

In such cases [of political knowledge] we must never sever interest, evaluation, and Weltanschauung from the product of thought, and must even, in case it has already been severed, establish the relationship anew (p. 170, Ideology and Utopia)

"Interest, evaluation and Weltanschauung" influence what we know for policy making purposes. Conversely, an orientation towards contextualization implies that the true, the interesting, and the relevant are functions of social facts, and of each other. Our problem is to understand how they relate. We approach this by examining some ideas of Husserl.<sup>18</sup>

Husserl was concerned about avoiding the positivist "fallacy" of treating the social world as being "out there." By "out there," I mean that if one was to examine it as if it existed in the same sense as a nail, or a brick, or a chemical, one would be able to come up with a set of laws for describing the true situation of life.<sup>19</sup> Even the Geisteswissenschaften tradition was positivist in this sense, since it only criticized the nature of the data that are peculiar to studies about men. The positivists assumed that the truth was meaningful or could be made so in a socially agreed way, granted the existence of the objects of which they spoke. For Husserl, the problem lay in the nature of the existence of the objects; the nature of that existence was fundamental to the science. He emphasized the

<sup>18</sup>I follow Habermas, 1966, in my discussion here. Further discussion of Husserl's "The Crisis of European Sciences..." is to be found in recent issues of Telos.

<sup>19</sup>In a sense this idea goes back to Laplace.

importance of studying the events of everyday life and the things that we take for granted. In this way positivist science would be saved from an internal difficulty for the events that it would be using for understanding the laws of life would now be examined themselves. The biases of the investigator, his assumptions about the nature of what he is studying, would become subject to study and therefore make his positivist science even more scientific and even more "objective." We would have transcended human interest.<sup>20</sup>

Habermas, taking off from Husserl, suggests that even though we may go out and study the events and how we look at them, and thereby seem to ourselves that we are becoming more objective, we still ignore the process by which we come to events and who we are. (Habermas, 1966, 1970, 1971; Flöistad, 1970; Schroyer, 1971) Our awareness, our choosing, and our modes of descriptions of events are functions of our own interests and concerns. The phenomenological reduction as advocated by Husserl is inerradicably a product of political and social goals and not a scientific method that is "objective." Habermas encourages us to discover the "real" truth by looking at the sources of our contextuations and our choosing. He is as much an idealist as Husserl, but his ideal truth lies in the world of motivation as contrasted to the world of events.

The basic constructs of which Habermas speaks are called interests. Interests are meant not only to be related to the question of what is interesting but also to what is in one's self-interest. (This is related to the meaning of the German Interesse.) The most

<sup>20</sup>At the same time, the internal (hermeneutic) circularity of men interpreting men's actions, which interpreting is an action itself, characteristic of the Geisteswissenschaften, would be faced.

common kind of interest is technical. The everyday activity of technical intellectual work leads to the production of information. The basic rule of explanation in technical interest is causality and the products of such an effort are laws, nomological principles, relating an intent to its consequence. A more elevated interest is practical interest. The everyday activity is human communication. Here the modality is language and means of expressing ideas; our intellectual activity is the interpretation of them. The procedure used is hermeneutics, and the rules of making sense out of our knowledge are contextual. (The present essay is an attempt at exploring some practical interests.) Finally, and most gloriously, is emancipatory interest. This leads to a concern with authority that exists in society, and intellectual activity that is the analysis of the social system thereby revealing the chinks in the authority structure. Procedures and rules are derived from social systems analysis which has, perhaps, a strong Marxist orientation. For emancipatory interest to have meaning, one has to believe in a concept of false consciousness.

Habermas' distinctions have a purpose. His own interest is emancipatory, and he feels that by revealing the usually technical or at best practical orientation of most research, and understanding, we will be encouraged to get on with emancipatory research and knowledge. Yet he offers no technique for making this transition.<sup>21</sup> Almost within his own bind, Habermas suggests that we be emancipated by seeing the contradictions and disutilities of technical and practical

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<sup>21</sup>One may assume that some form of dialectic as history is sitting in the background, but this is not explicit enough for my purposes.

interests, yet he does not know how such seeing leads to the third kind of interest.<sup>22</sup> His writing is "practical" at best. And that is the real problem. For our concern is to develop a way of using our interpretations and contexts, in conjunction with our knowledge of the world in terms of facts and research details, to develop analyses which lead to more intended actions. In being critical, in having the interest that Habermas suggests, there is no room for effective actions. His scheme is impractical.

The situation is tragic and ironic. Habermas' mode of interpretation is so powerful that he cannot transcend it. What is lacking is work for ordinary men, technique, role models, that will lead them to deliberate activity. Schütz tries to address himself to this problem.<sup>23</sup> (Schütz, 1962, 1964, 1966) He views action as an articulation of intentionality in which our motivations reflect both our interest ("in-order-to motives") and societal forces ("because motives"). An action always has a meaning. At the same time, that meaning can only be derived from some social conceptions of the individuals that are involved, for the meaning we ascribe to an action depends on the typifications of meaning we attribute to other actors. What is the role in which our actions become informed by our interests and our typifications?

Schütz sketches a number of alternative social roles. (Schütz, 1964) The "man-on-the-street" assumes that things are as they are and

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<sup>22</sup>This may be because his emphasis on communications as the problem may be too limiting. See Therborn, 1971, p. 83. His distaste for Habermas is for the same reason that "young Anglo-Saxon reformist academics" find Habermas appealing. So?

<sup>23</sup>Schroyer, 1971, p. 312, suggests that this is only a partial effort on the road to a true emancipatory science.

he does and judges as other men on the street do and judge. He claims no special competences and he is unlikely to be able to explicitly sketch out his own perspective of a situation. By always relying on typifications and standard behaviors, he need not worry very much about the facts or interests that are involved beyond his common sense.

At the other extreme lies the role of the "expert." The expert is extraordinarily knowledgeable about some narrow field and therefore need not worry very much about his interests for they, too, are prescribed by the field. They are controlled by means of certain professional systems. His major concern is with the events themselves and often will take a positivistic orientation. He need not worry about larger contexts for his relevant situations are all within a very narrow frame.

There exists a mediating role between the "man-on-the-street" and the "expert," which Schütz calls the "well-informed citizen." The well-informed citizen is not an expert, since he does not possess a specialized and esoteric knowledge, and at the same time he is not a man on the street in that he does not assume that the typifications of everyday life are acceptable all the time. He is always searching for contexts and approaches that make sense out of situations.<sup>24</sup> He assumes that not only are the data important, but the manner in which they are arranged is important. The "sense" that he searches for is related to the desires and intents of someone.

The well-informed citizen wants to make sense out of a situation rather than master it. A well-informed citizen may or may

<sup>24</sup>See footnote 13. More details on one psychological perspective (involving human information management processes) is to be found in the book reviewed by Pew, 1971.

not be correct in the sense that he makes. The judgment that is made concerning correctness is not in terms of truth, and not really even a question of having the correct interest. The criteria are the correctness of fit, the appropriateness of categories, and the completeness of descriptive images. The well-informed citizen, in describing a context which relates events to intents, paints an integrated picture.<sup>25</sup>

The process by which the well-informed citizen manages to make his understanding felt is by affecting the distribution of attention by others. Contexts are effective in a person's assessment of a situation when his attention is primarily directed to features of the situation (the distinguishing of which is a property of the success of a contextuating process) which are major components of the contextuating image. The contextuating image serves to organize these primary attentions. New knowledge changes the ordering of importance that we attach to features or structures in which they relate. The process is probably akin to connoisseurship. Gombrich puts it nicely:

For concepts, like pictures, cannot be true or false. They can only be more or less useful for the formation of descriptions. The words of a language, like pictorial formulas, pick out from the flux of events a few signposts which allow us to give direction to our fellow speakers in that game of "Twenty Questions" in which we are engaged. (Gombrich, 1960, p. 89)

Contextuating images are like evaluative or appreciative systems (to use Vickers' phrase). (Vickers, 1965) They mediate truth and intents. Searches for truth within narrow frames of reference must always be partial, and contextuating images relate these truths to larger problems

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<sup>25</sup>This is very much like Sherwood's approach to understanding the nature of explanation in psychoanalysis. For him, a good explanation is one which comprehensively deals with a situation and which provides a direction for therapeutic input. (Sherwood, 1969; Cioffi, 1970)

not so easily narrowed down. At the same time prescriptions for action responsive to intents percolate through by means of the relationship between attention and consequent need to manipulate that to which we attend. (Seeley, 1967)

The well-informed citizen must convince others that his perceptions are relevant to their own, and that they should view their actions, the relationship of events to intents, in a way that he suggests. In essence they are no different than the ways that experts tend to convince each other in their private intra-professional lives.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Detailed mechanisms for Schütz's well-informed citizen remain to be considered. They are explored in Schütz, 1970. The essay I hope to write on mechanism (footnote 13) will explore this. Even more macro-sociological is my consideration of mechanisms in Krieger, 1971b, p. 51 ff.

## PUBLIC POLICY PROBLEMS

(2) Public policy problems are not like puzzles. Rather than being defined and solved, they come to attention and initiate a series of actions which ultimately redirect attention away from the problematic. These actions sometimes include problem solving behavior, but most of the time are a manipulation of the structuring of the problem description.

How does a group of people come to advocate a set of actions? From a political perspective, we may look for an answer in terms of power and legitimacy, or how interest groups and issues become effective. From a sociological viewpoint, we ask how social movements develop (and arise from social life) and make their way into the political arena. Dahrendorf has explored this question (in his terms, from "quasi-groups" to "conflict groups") and presents his answer in terms of the degrees of a group's self-awareness of "objective" conditions. (Dahrendorf, 1959) Ideologies can perform this function. Smelser has given an alternative description in terms of external factors and how they affect a movement's history. (Smelser, 1963)

These explanations cover major aspects of the process, but are insufficiently attentive to the nature of the problems that are the "sources" of the movements. I believe that it is in the problems that we can find out how issues become meaningful to their advocates, and how they become socially acceptable as questions for group action as contrasted to individual concern. I suggest that it is at this

level that knowledge becomes powerful. We want to look at the process and potential for intentional action. How does a consensual description arise among a group that eventually permits of directed social action which is considered legitimate?

Action, in this discussion, is not equivalent to activity. Rather it refers to perceived potential activities, which may or may not eventually take place. The characteristics of problems, it will be argued, are intimately related to the nature of public action situations.

The analytical task is substantial. For example, we need to understand which modes of explanation are acceptable at one time and not at another. (Foucault, 1970) This will be a clue to understanding how knowledge of situations can mediate felt discrepancies (between what is and what should be) and responses to them in terms of future actions. We also want to understand how we make situations problematic and devolve them by means of our chosen actions.

### Some Definitions

A situation is public within a society when we know of it (knowledge), are not excluded from dealing with it (participation and authority, unalienated) and, perhaps, are capable of exercising some power with respect to it (authentic).<sup>27</sup> This is a very strong definition of "public," but is intimately tied up with the manner in which I describe the development of problems. Public problems are characterizations of those situations which are defined as being unacceptable in a public fashion. What is peculiar about a public

<sup>27</sup>"Alienation" and "authenticity" are used in the sense of Etzioni, 1968, ch. 21.

problem, as contrasted to a non-public problem, is that many if not most people agree that it exists, that it can be dealt with, and it can be affected. Usually, a process of "publicity," of information diffusion and management, has converted a problem for some into a problem for many.<sup>28</sup>

Policy consists of (usually regularized) prescriptions for action (or non-action) and is a means for articulating intent. It is different from conventional science, which could be said to prescribe what should occur. Whether or not there is a difference between "is" and "ought" on a technical level, that policy says something should be done seems different from a descriptive statement of what is. Clearly, evaluation of what is relates to what ought to be done, especially in a putatively causal system.

That we have policies in a society is not obvious. It is strange to say that there exist regularized rules in the society which people actually care about. They are willing to make these rules and to articulate them in conscious as well as unconscious ways. On the other hand, policy is remarkable in that it delimits what is manipulable and controllable (with respect to questions of authority and power) within a society and what is taken for granted and beyond intervention. Today, when we tend to think of ourselves as protean, it is surprising

<sup>28</sup>It is a fair and reasonable question to ask whether public problems are "real." They are "real" in that they affect political and social events. They may not be "real" if the "science" of the time is out of step with common life. Witches do not affect our fates, unless we believe them to do so. Then they affect our belief induced behavior, and not so much the motion of the stars (except our interpretation of such motions). We do not have a poverty problem if it is denied by the society. There may exist poor people, but the problematic character of the situation is something else again. Moral pleas concerning helping the poor (doing something about that problem) are also means of establishing a problematic state.

how much of our everyday lives is considered beyond power, beyond control, beyond policy. It is remarkable that we do have rules, and even more remarkable that the rules are so limited.<sup>29</sup>

The public and policy characteristics of public policy are important to our discussion. If many have to be involved in the formation of a policy, then the kind of policy that is formed will be very different than if only one person is involved. At the same time, if we are going to have policy we imply that our public action will be informed by regularity and predictability, if not forever then for at least a while.

### Public Problems

Certain qualities of social problems that are public are significant if we want to explore the role of understanding and knowledge in the creation of policy.<sup>30</sup>

In some situations, problems are the way in which we formulate our inability to figure out what to do. Situations come first, and problems, derived from our discomforts, are abstractions from them.<sup>31</sup> That problems are derived out of situations suggests that the problems are not just solved, as are puzzles, and go away. Rather, they "fade

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<sup>29</sup>This paragraph is not prima facie true. In fact, it is prima facie false. We are all told in elementary courses on society about the wonder of social order and the need for rules in society. It is what makes it up -- whether we are Locke or Rousseau. So my standing away here is partly conceptual, maybe even phenomenological reduction. I open my eyes in the sense that the ethnomethodologists suggest. (See Douglas, 1970)

<sup>30</sup>There is a literature on the sociology of the sociology of social problems. See Lemert, 1951, Fuller, 1941, and Lemert, 1968. Commonly accepted social problems in the United States include poverty and alcoholism, for example.

<sup>31</sup>Note that we can have a situation consisting of problems. This essay is a statement of, and working on, a problem about problems.

back" into the situation. The significance we attach to the aspects of the situation that we call problematic declines, or we have modified the situation (acted on it) so that we decrease the high degree of irritation associated with it.

The original characteristics of public social problems suggest that models of problem solving from psychology and the artificial sciences do not apply. (Simon, 1969) These models assume reasonably well described "problems" which are to be solved -- essentially they are puzzles. For purposes of experimental design, the language used is simple and the situation does not involve actors who will react back on the problem (as might happen in a psychotherapeutic situation).

But public social problems are not puzzles. (Rittel and Webber, n.d.) They exist in rich complex environments (at least, until they have been worked on a lot). The fuzziness of the boundaries and the problem statement precludes a manageable listing of the "facts" before the problem is almost ready to be disposed of. I like to think of this disposal as "de-problemizing" the problem. We need much richer descriptive categories than facts.<sup>32</sup>

### Descriptions and Representations

There are a variety of ways of organizing what we know about situations. One approach, which I shall call the problem-solving approach, assumes that a situation can be organized in terms of

<sup>32</sup>This is clear even in current artificial intelligence research. I am aware that "facts" are not what most 1965-70 artificial intelligence work used, but the tone implied will be useful for what I say next. See Dreyfus, 1967; Newell, 1969; Reitman, 1970; Minsky, 1968; Kleinmuntz, 1966; McCarthy, 1968. Later on I discuss some more recent models which are somewhat richer.

properties that are present and those that are not. Certain facts are relevant to a situation and certain statements can be made about desired actions or goals. The process of solving the problem is reduced to the development of a means of going from where you are now to where you wish to go, and may be organized in such a way that there are a series of goals and sub-goals in the process.

Although this description of how we work on problematic situations seems fairly common-sensical, it is not the only one that we might use. Rather than viewing the working on problematic situations as one of trying to go from one place to another, we may, instead, search for a way of looking at the situation so that it no longer seems problematic, that the irritations associated with the problem are salved. This is not to say that we obviate the irritating situations, but rather our description or representation of the situation naturally incorporates means of working on the irritation or a re-interpretation of the source that makes it seem less irritating.

The difference between these two ways of looking at situations is that the first emphasizes the various goals and facts, while the second emphasizes the context and the modes of description of the situation. The two approaches may well be isomorphic in the sense that we can define a way of going from one approach to the other while preserving all the information in the process. However, they are not likely to result in similar approaches to a practical problem or modes of working on it.

In fact, our descriptions of most social situations are not complete; we do not have a simplified abstraction available as there

is for much of physical science.<sup>33</sup> It is not likely that two representations or two modes of problem solving or any pair of either would result in identical descriptions in the sense of an isomorphism. Most of the time we try, whether we are solving problems or developing descriptions, for an approach that is compact. We try to ignore "irrelevant" aspects of the situation. The difference between representations or modes of solving problems lies in the difference in what is considered relevant.<sup>34</sup>

Representation approaches emphasize the importance of choosing, selection, and contextuation. Like models, a representation is an abstraction and the important characteristics need be chosen by problem-workers. (Black, 1962) The idea of metaphor should be very useful.

We have a very natural connection between research and public action if we view our knowledge of public problems in terms of contextuating representations. If working on a problem results in the reorganization of the picture of a situation which leads to a more useful structuring of it, then action and understanding are coordinate. Similarly, our experience, whether by experiment or from the evaluation of public acts, permits us to recognize the way situations might be reconstructed.

To recapitulate: Public policy involves the consensus of a group on certain normative points leading to actions supported by it. A public policy question arises when a problem for a few is transformed

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<sup>33</sup>The simplified abstractions available to physical science are a product of a long history of hard work and subtle delineation, internal to the discipline, of the "important" problems.

<sup>34</sup>Amarel's work on representations is most interesting. (Amarel, )

into one to which many are willing to give attention. The process of training attention on a situation alters the definition of what is problematic, and the policy response does likewise. The effects of publicity are not so much characterized by ideas of truth, or falsity, as those of valuation on a situation. Altering the perspective possessed by people of a situation (the interpretive cast they give to it) is a major effect of the publicity effort.

The questions we now must ask concern agency. Who develops the language that defines problems; how does that language become regulated and accepted; what are the interests involved in the process?

## PROFESSIONS AND IDEOLOGIES

(3) In a social world where specialization is highly articulated, experts in their professionalized forms become the means by which problems are attended to.

The professions, as occupational roles, have grown and become more powerful, both in numbers and in areas of control, in the last fifty or one hundred years. Many more types of work are vying for professional status and the (presumably needed) associated theoretical intellectual foundation for these kinds of work is being developed.<sup>35</sup> In the professions and their associated ideologies are the means for understanding how knowledge becomes formed and socially accepted and then becomes part of the action set available to policy makers.

Professions have associated ideologies and styles of autonomy.<sup>36</sup>

If they are acceded authority, even for a short while, they develop

<sup>35</sup>There is some controversy about whether these are "true" professions. See Wilensky, 1964 and for a recent review Moore, 1970. Marshall, 1963, p. 152, indicates how the shift from leisure to labor and freedom to service has made the professions so very different from the past. Dr. Lydgate, in Middlemarch by George Eliot, occurring circa 1830, just begins to confront the "scientific" basis for medicine. (By the way, poor Dr. Lydgate is unbelievably popular as an example.)

<sup>36</sup>I use "ideology" here in probably the bourgeois sense of a systematic justification for action, status, and role. As for false consciousness, this too may apply but I am not sure that anybody can escape the designations. The ideologies I speak of here not only support power positions, but also mediate the subtlest of interpersonal relationships. Erving Goffman indicates the vital need for these consciousnesses if we are not to fall apart. See, e.g., Goffman, 1967.

modes of problem definition and consequent and subsequent technologies such that alternatives are, or become, meaningless. The esoteric character of these modes guarantees that the professions retain control of them for some time after the process of definition. As a result of this effort, there is no way of expressing the (new) alternative -- either as ideas or action -- for implicit cooptation takes place in using the old descriptors (and not even necessarily the old description). The thought structure created by the professions to structure the problematic of a society, once institutionalized, pervade.<sup>37</sup>

The professional system is a means by which the context and structure of public social problems is managed in the United States today. It is not obvious that this need be so. Politicians, who are not professionals about any single issue, could be the people

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<sup>37</sup>This fairly grand statement is as much derived from an essay by Roland Warren, 1970, as from the insights of Mannheim, 1936. See also Rose, 1971?, especially pp. 18-26 for a similar argument. See also Freidson, 1970, Chapter 15, also p. 330, and Reiff, 1971, p. 39. This intelligentsia-determinist (or post-industrial) vision of the development of social issues and problems is, of course, not without its detractors. The emphasis here is on who creates a language, but we also need to ask who accepts a language (and therefore can eventually reject it). If we believe in "History," who are the so called "subject-objects" of history? The professions I refer to here may only be in the control of other interests, which other interests would, eventually, be removed from situations of power. Perhaps the professions could even transcend this -- being beyond mere industrial class and being a special post-industrial one.

This is only a parody of a much deeper argument between Mannheim and Lukács. An interesting summary is provided in Lichtheim, 1967, pp. 34-43.

Obviously, professions do not exist independently of the rest of society. The problems that they take up are influenced by their community which includes philanthropic foundations and the theoreticians of the professions (who in turn influence the foundations). (Bensman, 1971) Charity can subsidize a problem until it is ready to be taken up in a more public way.

My tone in this section is purposively total, because explicating the above variations can lose the argument.

who manage the structuring of the issues, rather than managing only the gross structuring of public attention toward them. Journalists, whether print or electronic (including the cosmopolitans and influentials), could also control the contextuation and structuring of these policies. (Katz, 1955) Theoretical knowledge and the professions who control and make it are much respected these days (even by journalists), and it is possible for the experts to prevail.<sup>38</sup>

We may discern certain aspects of the complex of professions, problems, ideologies, and technologies, that make it possible for the holders of theoretical knowledge and associated practice to control the potential policies that exist in a society.

Professions are both public and social in character. In this social role, a person as professional spends a substantial amount of his time concerned with certain issues, becoming expert on them as well as knowledgeable about their potentials for action. One may respect him socially, both for his knowledge and his action. Publicly, professionals have come to have monopoly over certain issues by means of legal and traditional rules. So not only do they concern themselves with an issue, but their self-interest becomes associated with a certain perspective on it.

Public problems usually arise out of the irritations of individuals. By means of a social movement, perhaps, these common complaints become directed to professional experts who manipulate the complaints in their own esoteric fashion. On this high level of discussion they can transform the complaints into a description of

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<sup>38</sup>"...expertise is not mere knowledge. It is the practice of knowledge, organized socially and serving as the focus for the practitioner's commitment. The worker develops around his work an ideology and, with the best of intentions, an 'imperialism' that stresses the technical superiority of his work and his capacity to perform it." (Freidson, 1971, p. 39)

the situation which is amenable to the actions that they can offer which will remediate or at least ameliorate the original irritations. They then can transform their knowledge or practice into common language, still perhaps highly technical but not in the sole possession of their profession, that prescribes actions related to a problem. In the process of transforming the common complaint to a common action the norms (ideologies in part) and procedures (technologies) intrinsic to the profession become part of the problem and its formation.<sup>39</sup>

Ideology, as I use it here, is meant to be a total view of a system which tries to relate chosen events to other chosen events and give meaning to these relationships and thereby the events themselves. An ideology provides the basic descriptors of a situation and the method for choosing the significant events from the raw events of life. Certain complexes of these entities or events are considered especially significant and the ideology reifies them much beyond their "reality." Associated with every profession is a justifying ideology.

Technologies are the modes of action associated with ideologies. They are the interventions, usually conscious and distinguishable, that make it possible for intent to be realized. The technologies both limit and create the associated ideology, for if the technology is not reliable the professions, who administer the technology, will not be known as competent. At the same time, that professionals can do something which they have convinced others is significant permits a technology to make them effective.

The web of power and knowledge is very strong. A certain structuring of situations and thought are forced onto the experience

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<sup>39</sup>Zetterberg, 1962, has a similar formulation.

of life. As I have described them here, it may seem that the professions and their ideologies are all powerful and inescapable. The overpowering oppressive character of this domination causes a great deal of consternation these days. But sometimes ideas and professions and technologies do change.

There is no easy answer which explains how this occurs. The answer we choose, I am sure, depends on our political preferences, on the powerful we wish to unseat, and our personal propensities. It seems to me that power battles among the professions for control, which may well be exercised much beyond narrow fields of technical competence, can cause some of these changes. Another possibility is that the aesthetic appreciation of one explanatory descriptive mode may be much greater than that of another.<sup>40</sup> Hard work by the proponents of one may enrich their explanatory mode to such a point that others start to prefer it over some existent and more powerful mode. Although it seems likely that technological changes and developments are deeply influenced by who is powerful and the consequent resources devoted to such developments, sometimes we are

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<sup>40</sup>As I have hinted in several of the other notes, I suspect that it is in art that some of the issues that are opened here can be most fruitfully explored. Kariel hints at it nicely, "Reifications serve to restrict politics to the few ... Anyone who strives to negate the manifest present and design a new reality is accordingly confined to private life, the cultural arena, the realm of art ... But genuine latitude is granted only to the clearly identified, narrowly defined artist. Only he would seem to have room to maneuver, to express his entrepreneurial [sic] and creative impulses...But to understand it as a form of action, it must be perceived as no more (and no less) than the manifestation of man's desire to appear in public and display his freedom ... By giving credence to past or distinct or unfashionable life styles -- to modes of conduct which are possible though regarded as failures -- the social sciences reverse conventional valuations of goals." Kariel, 1969, pp. 769-75 passim.

surprised by our capabilities at innovation. At these times, technological changes may radically alter the acceptability of certain professions and their associated ideologies.

An example might be of some value. Scott has done an extensive study of the manner in which blindness is handled in a number of countries. (Scott, 1970) The most obvious thing to note is that there are vast differences in the attitude toward the blind. The nature of their stigma, its severity and kind, vary substantially. He also says:

...These considerations suggest that the conception of stigma contained in professional ideologies are only partly determined by empirical knowledge derived from direct experiences with and scientific studies of stigmatized people. (p. 269) ... the meanings of stigma that experts construct are deeply influenced by values, attitudes, and beliefs that are central to the society. These values affect the expert in several ways: they are a part of the language he uses to express his meanings; they are an integral part of the assumptive world of the culture against which the meanings of his conceptions of stigma are judged; and they are critical elements in decisions concerning the willingness of laymen to give financial support for programs. (p. 274)

I now want to return to the man who might make a difference in the situation that I have just described, our well-informed citizen. How might we view his mode of operating as he mediates processes of information utilization and problem development?

The words "information utilization" hint at one possibility that has been developed. We may view the process in terms of the diffusion of ideas and innovations, gate-keeper roles, linkers -- namely one of communication in a behavioral sense.<sup>41</sup> This trivializes questions of the systematic character of the knowledge and research that is of interest. The filtering process, to use an appropriate phrase, that makes sure that what is communicated is valid and relevant

<sup>41</sup>There is a vast literature on this field. Farr, 1969 and 1970, is a good review. More generally available is Rogers, 1962.

is still embedded in the diffuser. What we need is some more explicit handling of problem development.

Because those who work on machine (or artificial) intelligence have to be explicit in their formulation of problems and procedures, it turns out that some very nice methods have been developed recently. Some of these methods, called heuristic, include powerful simulations of what scientists do (e.g. mass spectroscopy analysis, McCarthy, 1971, p. 32). But so far, it seems to me that this work still deals with too restricted ideas about relevance to be of much use to the well-informed citizen. On the other hand, a promising development lies in methods of increasing the connectivity of what is known in a very decentralized manner.<sup>42</sup> Rich sets of relata to a problem are invoked in surprisingly natural ways.

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<sup>42</sup>This model is inspired in part, by the work that is leading to the development of languages such as PLANNER (Winograd, 1971, explains the language developed by C. Hewitt) and QA4 (Rulifson, 1970). These languages represent a shift in artificial intelligence (AI) research in that they emphasize the incorporation of semantic material in a systematic way (rather than ad hoc), as previous efforts tried to incorporate syntax systematically. This shift from syntax to semantics is also evident in linguistics. Another aspect of these languages is that the context of a situation is naturally put in (this context turns out to be specific to the kind of problem -- semantic in nature). Information about context can be developed independently of a problem at hand and is called to mind ("called-up" as a programming routine) by "automatic" features in PLANNER and QA4.

The other inspiration is the critical analysis of AI by Hubert Dreyfus. (Dreyfus, 1965, 1972) When originally published it caused a good deal of interest in the world of AI and engendered an interesting commentary by Papert. (Papert, 1968) At that time, 1965, research in AI was somewhat more syntax oriented than now and certainly less systemic and systematic. Dreyfus first criticized the AI fraternity (is it one?) for its unfulfilled promises and overly ambitious claims. He then went on to discuss the potential ultimate limits of machine intelligence in terms of phenomenological philosophy. He especially emphasized the work of Merleau-Ponty, as well as that of Husserl and Heidegger. There, the claim was that the structure of contexts, the nature of the embodiment of human beings, and the intentional character of life precluded the possibility of AI claims being successful. Papert came back with a strong counter-attack. He, rightly to my mind, pointed out the fallacies in Dreyfus' understanding of AI, and hinted that the

The model works something like the following. The well-informed citizen hears a first version of the problem. Certain combinations of symbols (cues to relevances) in the first story suggest certain procedures that might be related to de-problemizing. At the same time other procedures are invoked by other symbol combinations. A very high degree of parallelism is permitted and in this sense the original problem statement is enriched. Various procedures that lead back from this expanded tree of possibilities are invoked to come to a more quiescent state. The context is altered, the problem is seen in new light.

The significant value of this kind of model is that the question of directing attention is not purely sociological, but is also epistemological.

field should not be penalized for some of the publicity it engendered. (My suspicion is that AI is so frightening and challenging to human beings' self-importance, that until it becomes more common knowledge, casual articles will always come out bizarre, independently of what people in the research field want. The interaction with reporters will always be strange. See the article in Life magazine of late. ("Meet", 1970).) He spends somewhat less time dealing with Dreyfus' insightful remarks from phenomenology. Dreyfus' criticizes AI for some of its less interesting errors, and Papert defends himself without coming to terms with Dreyfus' best ideas. Yet it is now clear that the ideas from phenomenology should be helpful, if only by means of suggestion, in current research. They point to the horizons, so to speak.

The problem is more interesting than even what I have said already. Dreyfus' book on What Computers Can't Do... is likely to tell AI researchers what to concentrate on, thus defeating its seeming purpose. In the terms of the current essay, by taking AI sufficiently seriously and giving it attention, he makes it more likely that the set of ideas involved will become realized. Criticism, even when logically fatal, is not phenomenologically fatal. It keeps things alive and helps them grow.

On the other hand, ridicule can be deadly. Another possibility is to ignore a set of ideas. Either strategy takes attention away from the original set of ideas and they may wither.

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We have returned to where we started.

The knowledge we develop about social policy problems, while influenced by the conventional structure of the problems, may cause changes of attention and significance to the materia that make up the situation under examination. This itself affects how the problem is said to be "solved." Professionals are most influential in these changes of attention since they manage the languages of description and contextuation.

## SOME EXAMPLES

Two points seem most salient in the argument. (1) Based on the nature of the descriptors and contexts we have available, public social policy problems come to exist and are worthy of action and intervention. (2) What we learn from studies and research deeply influences these descriptors and contexts rather than the decisions we make about them.

Eventually, we might want to examine a series of policies and look at their symbolic contents. (See, e.g., Allison, 1969) We want to see what are the worldviews and interests of actors, their implicit assumptions, not on the political but the descriptive level, and how brittle their descriptive modes are to informedness and questioning ("boundary elasticity").

For the moment a few brief examples will have to suffice. Let us look at environmental, health and housing policy.

In our descriptions of so-called environmental problems, several concepts seem dominant in how we describe situations. (Krieger, 1970, 1971) The existence of an environment -- a separation that man can make between himself and the outside world -- is crucial. Even if one invokes an ecological perspective, the ability to maintain a separation of our selves and the world, a seemingly trivial idea, is absolutely essential for all else. It is also assumed that we want to survive and that we do not normally wish to terminate our lives in a conscious fashion. Another needed concept is that of "nature," that there are

some things called natural phenomena out there uninfluenced by man, that have been going on forever. Finally, we must have some concept of the "future," for we value it and suspect that our actions at present influence future results in a dramatic way.

But none of these sets of assumptions or concepts and descriptors are necessary. We may take the perspective that environmental policy deals with not man and his environment, but the relationship of men with each other. We may treat survival not as an end of itself, but look at differential rates of survival dependent on other desirable acts. Nature may be a reification, and we might look at the world as a creation of man. And finally, that a future exists and is highly valued is a tenuous idea. There are no representatives of future generations on earth, and it is a strange altruism to want to protect them.

Policy for health is almost completely developed based on the idea of illness. We have no current conceptions of positive health that dominate medical practice. Consequently, for example, almost all medical policy in the United States deals with extreme illnesses or preventing them. We spend extraordinary resources in the society on those who are only marginally likely to live an extra year, rather than improving the physical well being of a large number of people for many years.

With respect to housing, an important contextuating idea is that of a safe, secure home. Many interpretations have existed of this idea but the important one to those who have become in charge of it, the engineers and architects, is greater safety and security. This is fine, but it is not obvious that this is what most people would like, considering other possible benefits.

No piece of experimental research is likely to alter any of these fundamental primitives. Yet that they exist may be shown to be basic to the formation of policies.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to make a rough argument that what we understand about the world with respect to policy is largely influenced by the way we formulate our descriptions of the situation rather than the decisions we make about them. We may then ask a question about how do we come to do one thing rather than another. I would suggest that certain descriptions make us more likely to act in a certain way and that decisional situations we set up are less significant than the fact that we have eliminated a large number of other possibilities. A whole set of rationalizing techniques exists, for example economic efficiency or distributive equity, which, too, are descriptive contextuating ideas, for resolving in a seeming technical way these "minor" decisional situations.

I have not directly approached the question of the worthwhile-ness of research for public policy. Clearly, my own commitment is to believe that it is. But not as research that searches out explanations within a fixed language, but as research that tries to make a language. The rest is a vital, but somewhat less interesting, machinery.

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