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The "Science" of Social Policy: Max Weber Revisited¹

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I

Introduction

Science documents two sources of knowledge--sense and reason. Further, according to Kant, "The nature of the outer empirical world is not known, what becomes known is that which is perceived." Human constructs represent outer reality. They do not express reality directly as it is in original nature. The aim of the social scientist can never be to eliminate the relative perspective of social reality. It is to understand and explain it within a larger cultural framework. The nature of this task brings the social scientist "close" to defining the social reality within a broader cultural praxis. Any policy--essentially, a set of judgments and hence, conclusions, must always be tempered with this thought in mind.

Scientific values imply causation. Here, the comment on Heisenberg phenomenon--namely that the process of study and observation in the physical science modifies the data, equally applies to the science of social policy formulations. Study and observation which utilize a set of definitions which assume certain value-positions, clearly have an effect (dependent variable) on the nature of conclusions to be reported. Here we are arguing that the values that do define social "problems" have been seldom discussed. Hunger, for example, can either be an evidence of functional motivation extant on the economic market place which encourages a populace to participate in the societal mainstream or it could be an evidence of a social malaise relating to an economic injustice in the social structure. Deeply anchored in such prognostications is the view of causation. Further, social scientists attempt to explain causal statements, insofar as the conceptual phenomena are interrelated. Concepts form a link between the observer, the observed, and the object (purpose) of the observation.

Any policy organizes our empirical observations (data) which in turn, explains our cultural reality. Causal conceptual clarifications, as formal explanations, are the primal task of the science of social policy. These concepts tell us just what it is that we

¹An earlier version of this paper was read at The Council of Social Work Education, Phoenix, 1977. Steven Burnett provided research assistance.

seek to formulate. As implied earlier, any politica--the science of government, involves perceptions of cultural reality as the policy planner perceives. What we are actually dealing with then, are abstractions from our perceptions of reality. On the surface this would appear to be a very shaky foundation upon which to base concrete conclusions. However, this must be so. We must establish some finite restrictions--call them boundaries, parameters, etc., to get a grip on the conceptual underpinnings of the observed events, and the policy outcomes. These finite boundaries are artificial for the simple reason that they have been created by us and are not found in nature.

The implications of the above statement for the science of policy formulations are chiefly two-fold. First, social policy by definition involves value judgments. As a general rule, the sooner the investigator articulates his or her position, the sooner the second stage could be instigated--viz., once the perception of the social scientists' abstracted (from observed events) social reality has been put forth, one can underline (and thus examine) formal causal propositions. A failure to articulate this task results in the fundamental scientific inconsistency of means and ends. Here the extended remark by Max Weber is quite à propos:

It (consistency) can, in so far as it sets itself this goal, aid the acting willing person in attaining self-clarification concerning the final axioms from which his desired ends are derived. It can assist him in becoming aware of the ultimate standards of value which he does not make explicit to himself or which he must presuppose in order to be logical. The elevation of these ultimate standards, which are manifested in concrete value-judgments, to the level of explicitness is the utmost that the scientific treatment of value judgments can do without entering into the realm of speculation. As to whether the person expressing these value-judgments should adhere to these ultimate standards is his personal affair; it involves will and conscience, not empirical knowledge.

An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he should do--but rather what he can do--and under certain circumstances--what he wishes to do. (Weber, 1949:54; italics in the original).

In the formulation of the science of social policy, the design is the slave and not the master. The fundamental confusion, or the interlocation of means and ends, rests with this view. Designs which allow the policy-planners to test his or her assumptions, cannot be efficiently and effectively developed without the conceptual clarity. All too often experimental designs have

prescribed the explanation of cultural events. More importantly, the need for a particular "scientific" design has been arbitrated by the planner's desire not to underline his or her value dispositions. Resultantly, since individuals are involved in events which one defines as "problems", the tendency by this group has been to seek "answers" within the individuals involved. This is a fruitless exercise. As we know, if the individual is eliminated, social life would still continue. Therefore, the explanation must be sought in the nature of society itself. It follows then that the determination of the cause of "social" events must be sought in the interactions preceding it, not within the conscious state of the individual. Any scientific design which fails to underline such a basic premise postulates a diagnostic dilemma.

Let us begin with an example from medicine. Under this dilemma, the physician is faced with the problem of arriving at a conclusion as to the cause of a condition based on too little data, too soon, versus arriving at a more certain conclusion with enough data, but too late to be of any use for the patient. Thus, we propose conceptual positions ultimately decide the design, and concomitantly, the nature of information (datum) to be obtained. This failure establishes the distinction between the scientist and therapist. To be a therapist is to seek solutions to specific values as conditions and further, these conditions justify the end to be desired. The scientist, to the contrary, views conditions as means to entertain further assumptions of an outcome. Both are applied. The critical difference in the view of the science of social policy making is that the scientist-planner views the social conditions as dynamic; whereas, therapist-solvers' weltanschauung is static. The dynamic view articulates the sources of knowledge which contribute to a systematic examination of a cause. It is heuristic; while the other is reformistic.

The scientific view of social policy formulation cannot hope to provide "locked" norms and ideals from which directives for immediate day to day activities can be distilled. At best, this formalistic view purports to examine in detail the value-assumptions involved in the development of policy propositions. For ultimately, the critical difference centers in the scientific conduct of means and ends. Furthermore, this conduct is no different from the vast majority of human conduct. Such an existential proximity has indeed been differentiated in the aftermath of the "sputnik age". An ethical-product (to speak in operational terms) of the scientific process should act as an aid to the policy analyst in a type of self-clarification concerning the "truth" about his or her desired ends. Such an approach or declaration of policy assumptions is not a semantic hyperbole. To be explicit is to be scientific. It is only when the assumptions of intent (a formalistic approach) become

particularistic, end-in-itself, that the diagnostic dilemma begins. It becomes reformistic. The critical characteristic in such a formulation assumes that one has already settled on the end. It is exactly these values (ends) which must be the objects of our research. For a proof to be scientifically and systematically valid (both internal and/or external) and reliable, it must be so regarded (not necessarily approved) by all. Only then it is a fruitful effort.

Further, such formulations cannot be "true" only contextually in one specific time-frame. The area of social policy contains the possibilities for the greatest difficulty in this area. It is slowly becoming historically-bound. There seems to be a growing trend of "solving" isolated "problems" dealing with this particular historical space-time only. The proponents of such "one-shot" studies must be called into question not only with regard to the discipline as a whole, but also to the problems that they purport to solve.

The diachronic view is completely lost and with it any historical-comparative analysis is forgotten. Unfortunately, in America such an "Isolationist impulse" has become as widespread and damaging as it is unique. All too often, in the United States, the public sector in the name of party partisanship has exacerbated such a diagnostic dilemma. For example, compare Graham Wallis' "great society" with that of President Lyndon B. Johnson's reformistic ideals. Empirical-cultural-reality is a political value, only because we place a partisan opinion on it. We only perceive what is significant (valuable); all other historical premises are forgotten.

II

The Pedagogy of Policy Science - Max Weber²

²Key English translations of Max Weber's works are: Max Weber (1947), The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, translated by A. R. Henderson and T. Parsons, The Free Press; Max Weber (1947), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, translated, edited and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Kegan Paul; Max Weber (1948), The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by T. Parsons, Allen and Unwin; Max Weber (1949), The Methodology of Social Sciences, translated and edited by E. A. Shils and H. N. Finch, The Free Press; Max Weber (1968), Economy and Society, edited by Gunther Roth and Claus Wittich, Bedminster Press. Writings on Max Weber are: Reinhard Bendix (1962), Max Weber an Intellectual Portrait, Anchor Books; Raymond Aron (1964), German Sociology, The Free Press; Julien Freund (1968), The Sociology of Max Weber, Pantheon Books; Arun Sahay (1971), Max Weber and Modern Sociology, Routledge and Kegan Paul; and J. E. T. Eldridge (1971), Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality, Charles Scribner's Sons.

With this prolegomenon on the cultural-historical content of the Science of Social Policy, I have set my next task to closely examine the pedagogy of Max Weber. What follows then is almost a textbook derivation on the implication of the science of social policy as articulated by Max Weber in his various writings.

In the study of policy sciences, man is both the subject and object of social inquiry. Policy science is ultimately "social" knowledge, so it cannot be developed in the same vein as "stars and molecules". For Weber, the framework of policy science is a value concept. Culture forms the *prima facie* evidence. Our social reality provides the empirical context of culture in terms of its relevance or significance for us. Cultural sciences select certain aspects of the world that present relevance for the observer (Weber, 1949:72).

Weber does not accept the idea of constructing a closed system of concepts in which social policy is synthesized in an universal classification. He surmises that we must abandon the illusion of thinking that knowledge can provide the essence of the 'things', the laws of God and nature. Such a metaphysical conception must be rejected. Social reality is not reducible to a system of laws. Concepts are simply instruments for apprehending the world. Understanding remained for Weber, the unique approach of the policy sciences. Ideal type is an instrument to apprehend the cultural reality. This concept signifies, in methodological terms, the freedom from metaphysical prejudices. Thus multiplicity of ideal-types could be generated, according to the directions of our interest and the needs of policy formulations.

The sense of imposition of ideal type involves the view of "social" man as the creator of society which generates a sociology of policy action (clearly in contrast to the sociology of social system derived from the problem of order). This method is analytical-historical. It must provide the analytic task of history to find a causal explanation. Policy science is then an empirical science. It must attempt to understand as much as possible how man evaluates, appraises, creates, and destroys his various social relationships.

Policy Action as Social Action

Policy actions are social in nature. Weber suggests "action is social insofar as by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals). It takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber, 1947:88). He categorizes social action in four parts:

(a) zueckrational, (b) wertrational, (c) affectually-oriented action, (d) traditionally-oriented action.

Zueckrational is the most goal-oriented. It is an orientation which seeks rationally defined ends. Wertrational is the value-oriented action. Its orientation is rational but the end is absolute. Affectually oriented action underscores emotions and feelings of the actor. Its orientation is affective. Finally, traditionally oriented action rests its end on "long practice" borne out by customary practices.

Yet the question remains--how does policy action as social action seek legitimacy? Weber defines legitimate order as "social action which is oriented to certain determinate maxims or rules and their orientation includes the recognition that they are binding on the actor or the corresponding action constitutes a desirable model for him to initiate (Weber, 1947:124). In the final analysis, Weber viewed that major types of authority relationships (traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational) rested on the basis of domination. Hence, stability, he stated, inversely is an outcome of domination. Legitimacy of a system of domination is the important *raison d'etre* to the stability of an authority relationship. "State", he surmised, was a "compulsory political association" to the extent that it claimed "monopoly" to the legitimate use of force in the fulfillment of order. Legitimate domination exercises power. Power provides a successful claim to the exercise of authority. It provides maintenance of order, despite resistance.

No commentary of Weber's view of policy sciences would be complete without discussion of his conception of comparative policy sciences. The cornerstone of Weberian analysis is historical. He viewed history as a process of rationalization. The vast forces of his extensive comparative scholarship employed causal tour de force of necessary antecedent social conditions in the examination of policy questions. Unlike Marx, he viewed the development (evolution) of cultural production of policy throughout history increasingly becoming rational. This evolution of historical rationality suggests the development of an "universal ethic" (Smelser, 1976:115). It provides the examination of social reality as an outcome of open ethical considerations. For example, bureaucracy, he surmised, is an outcome of historical-cultural forces from ascriptive to achieved society. Social conditions have transformed the forces of traditional authority to legal-rational authority. This transition is embedded in the transformation of social conditions.

His chief methodological strategy in the examination of

social change as mentioned earlier, was "ideal type". He offers a definition.

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytic construct (Gedankenbild). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality. (Weber, 1949:90, underlining in the original).

This ideal-type is related to an historical idea. What is then the significance of such ideal-type constructs to policy science? In an important way, Weber viewed the explanation of policy sciences in the historical-analytic reality of cultural configurations. The "logic" of cultural sciences, helps us to employ this (ideal-type) methodological strategy in order to interpret historical-causal "viewpoints". In the final analysis, the proper relevance of any policy-science provides a judgment of our cultural reality. It is interpretative (Weber, 1949:150).

III

Summary

To summarize--the science of social policy, according to Weber, implies the following conclusion:

- (a) The aim of the social scientist can never be to eliminate the relative perspective of social reality. The task is to explain this reality within a cultural framework.
- (b) Any policy is a set of formal judgments--abstractions from perceptions of reality.
- (c) Values do define social "problems".
- (d) The science of social policy views social conditions as "means" and not "ends". Hence, the underlining of assumptions is an imperative task.

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