
2 Promoting the Policy Orientation: Lasswell in Context

Douglas Torgerson

When *The Policy Sciences: Recent Trends in Scope and Method* appeared in the early 1950s (Lerner and Lasswell, 1951), the book represented a challenge to an orientation then prevailing in the social sciences. That orientation saw the social scientific project as a patient and painstaking accumulation of knowledge about society. The application of knowledge was not ruled out, but it was also not something to be rushed into prematurely. The contributors to *The Policy Sciences*, a host of distinguished figures from a broad range of the social sciences, generally took a different approach. This approach was particularly given voice by Harold D. Lasswell, a co-editor of the volume, in the book's central chapter, "The Policy Orientation" (Lasswell, 1951b). Following a direction set by the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey in the early part of the twentieth century, Lasswell conceived the social sciences as methods of social problem-solving and thus proposed that they be understood as policy sciences.¹

Lasswell's proposal in *The Policy Sciences* that the social sciences be shaped through a policy orientation was a public expression of an idea that he had been working on since the early 1920s. As a student and later faculty member at the University of Chicago, Lasswell came under the influence there of Charles E. Merriam—a leading figure in American political science—and, by the 1930s, Lasswell was to emerge as the outstanding representative of the Chicago school of political science. Despite its disciplinary base, the Chicago school was highly interdisciplinary and, responding to both philosophical pragmatism and political progressivism, focused on the identification and solution of practical social problems. This practical focus did not mean a lack of theoretical concern. Especially in the case of Lasswell, there was indeed serious attention to theoretical questions. As a consequence, his conception of the policy orientation was both original and sophisticated.

Context was a chief theoretical and practical concern for Lasswell, and the aim of this chapter is to understand that focus while placing Lasswell himself in context. The policy orientation was Lasswell's proposed solution to what Dewey had, in the 1920s, formulated as "*the problem of the public*" in regard to the potential of developing an intelligent, democratic civilization (1984, 365). The policy orientation thus takes on a key historical role for Lasswell, as he emphasizes with his argument that "developmental constructs" are of central significance to the contextual focus of inquiry (1971a, 67–69). As we shall see, Lasswell's idea of using developmental constructs to orient inquiry in the context of historical change is profoundly indebted to a view of history advanced in Marxian theory. Lasswell, however, also signals a clear departure from Marx not only by identifying quite a different historical hero, but also by stressing that inquiry and action in the face of an indeterminate future have a necessarily speculative character.

The protagonist in the story Lasswell tells is a critically enlightened policy profession devoted to the cause of democracy. Lasswell portrays the emergence of a policy orientation in the social sciences as an historical development of major importance, and—by drawing attention to it and encouraging it—he seeks to give it shape and direction. However, his promotion of the policy

orientation emerged from a context in which liberal democracy, having been severely challenged by the anti-democratic forces of Fascism and Bolshevism, could easily seem the only viable form of democracy.

Discussions of policy professionalism and democracy have since Lasswell's time taken on a different tenor, rendering dubious his confidence in advancing the "policy sciences of democracy" (1951b). Not only have the apparent technocratic implications of that phrase become widely suspect, but democracy itself is being rethought along discursive—or deliberative—lines (e.g., Dryzek, 2000). The image of discursive democracy envisions vital public discourses playing a significant role in shaping the policy domain. At the same time, critical approaches to policy inquiry have emerged to reinforce connections between policy discourse and public discourse (e.g., Forester, ed., 1985; Fischer and Forester, eds., 1993; Hajer and Wagenaar, eds., 2003). Although these approaches often owe clear conceptual debts to Lasswell, they also anticipate democratic developments in the policy orientation that would prove unsettling to his position.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLICY ORIENTATION

The story that Lasswell tells is in a broad sense a version of the story of modern progress, and his promotion of a policy sciences profession certainly has something in common with nineteenth century positivism and its anticipation of governance by a "priesthood" of experts (Aaron, 1969, ch. 2). There is, however, a paradox in this connection. By the time Lasswell was to promote his proposal for a policy orientation, there was already a distinctly technocratic tone to the policy field, one troubling enough for him that he registered a clear objection.

Lasswell was displeased by the common image of policy-analytic work as mere tinkering to adjust the operations of an existing mechanism. "Running through much of the modern work that is being done on the decision process," Lasswell complained, "is the desire to abolish discretion on the part of the chooser and to substitute an automatic machine-like routine" (1955, 387). He especially took exception to the formalism of rational decision-making models guided by game theory: "In effect the player becomes a computing machine operating with 'built-in' rules in order to maximize built-in preferences" (1955, 387). Against this "preference for automation," Lasswell endorsed a "preference for creativity" (1955, 389). His proposal for the policy orientation thus includes a distinctly critical note (cf. Tribe, 1972). To grasp the significance of this critical element, the main sources of his approach need attention.

On the central role of pragmatism, he was quite explicit: "The policy sciences are a contemporary adaptation of the general approach to public policy that was recommended by John Dewey and his colleagues in the development of American pragmatism" (1971a, xiii–xiv). During the early twentieth century, pragmatism signalled a break with formalism—with an intellectual propensity to take at face value culturally established categories and frames of reference (see Torgerson, 1992). Although tending to share the embrace of science characteristic of the progressive era, pragmatism also recognized science as a thoroughly human and fallible institution. Scientific knowledge could prove itself useful for human purposes, but it could not provide any certain foundation for a "religion of humanity," as nineteenth century positivism had imagined (Aaron, 1969, ch. 2; Torgerson, 1992).

In a pragmatist vein, Lasswell portrayed the social process as ultimately a seamless fabric, indicating that the identification of seams for the purpose of research pertained to "the context of culture" (1971a, 17–8). The perspective of a participant in a cultural context was the point of departure for conceptualization and observation; inquiry involved a continuous, interwoven process of participant-observation (1971a, 3, 58, 74–75). As Lasswell developed a framework for the conduct of inquiry, he thus proposed mapping the social process and the policy process in terms of categories

and symbols drawn from a cultural context, and his framework came with no more guarantee than that it appeared helpful *in this context*.

Disavowing any claim to absolutely valid categories, Lasswell leaves everything open, in principle, to question and revision. What, then, might sustain confidence in his approach? If his categories and procedures are simply elements in a cultural envelope folding back upon itself, does inquiry not remain within its limitations? What Lasswell does is to focus upon inquiry itself as a process that, even though a seam within a cultural fabric, possesses a unique significance. Inquiry has a special status within culture. This is because of the reflexive capacity of inquiry, its peculiar capacity to turn back upon itself and, in doing so, to alter the very culture that envelops it.

Already in his first book, Lasswell had recognized a key principle for inquiry: “We must, as part of our study, expose ourselves to ourselves” (Atkins and Lasswell, 1924, 7). Reflexive insight into self and context holds a central place in Lasswell’s proposed policy orientation. In elaborating the reflexive character of inquiry, Lasswell looked beyond pragmatism to two key figures, Freud and Marx. In Freudian psychoanalysis and the Marxian critique of ideology, Lasswell saw a point of methodological convergence necessary in mapping the context of inquiry. Insight provided a means for breaking through both psychopathological and ideological constraints on inquiry.

Lasswell repeats the story of modern progress, but in a version that departs from the conventional storyline. For he introduces a standpoint of critical reflection able to expose psychopathological and ideological features of the modern world. Lasswell’s critical posture leads him to question specific elements of modernity, but not to dismiss its promise. Modernity, in his view, is an incomplete project that comes with no guarantee of a happy ending. The path of modern development conceivably leads in a desirable direction, but quite undesirable outcomes are also distinct prospects. No longer is it possible, on this account, to naively rely upon the positivist notion of the inevitable progress of humanity to an orderly industrial civilization. In Lasswell, the smooth, dynamic exterior of the modern world at times appears as a front for irrational forces, the constraints and threats of which pose a problem that can potentially be resolved only if consciously recognized (see Torgerson, 1990). A fixation on machine-like routines would not be part of the solution, but central to the problem. In Lasswell’s narrative of the policy orientation, the policy professional clearly emerges as the hero of the story. Yet crucial to the story is how this hero is to become self-aware in the context of a larger pattern of historical development.²

WORLD REVOLUTION AND THE POLICY ORIENTATION

Lasswell portrays the emergence of the policy orientation as a major event in world history, elaborating his conception in a manner parallel with, and in contradistinction to, the Marxian vision of a world revolution brought about through the agency of the proletariat. The policy orientation, on Lasswell’s account, is part of a development that is “distinctive” of his times: “the rise to power of the intellectual class.” The world, he argues, is in the midst of a “permanent revolution of modernizing intellectuals”: a crucial role for intellectuals is inescapable, in his view, because of the problems presented by “the complexities of large-scale modern civilization” (1968, 185; cf. 1965b).

The increasing importance of intellectuals comes, in his view, with both promise and threat. Intellectuals could simply form part of oligarchic and bureaucratic structures operating for the benefit of the few at the cost of the oppression and indignity of the many. A policy profession devoted to democracy would depend on a critical stance toward context, and crucial to this posture would be a questioning of the obvious. Although the examination of a familiar world might seem to promise little in the way of interesting results, Lasswell emphasizes the importance of what is not readily apparent—“The world about us is much richer in meanings than we consciously see” (1977, 36)—and he offers a striking exaggeration, “to put the truth paradoxically”: “The whole aim of the scientific student of society is to

make the obvious unescapable . . .” (1977, 250). The emergence of a critically oriented policy profession would, in Lasswell’s view, count among those developments in intellectual life that have promoted “breakthroughs’ . . . in the decision processes of history” (1958b, 190).

When first advancing the importance of a critical orientation to context, Lasswell in the mid-1930s explicitly invokes a central text of Marxian theory—first published in the early 1920s—the “exposition of the dialectical method” in Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* (Lasswell, 1965a, 18n; cf. Lukács, 1971). What Lasswell proposes is a reflexive project that recapitulates much of the form, if not the content, of Lukács’s critique of capitalism. Especially significant is Lasswell’s accent on grasping the whole both as an objective configuration and as a site of action. It is thus that Lasswell recommends “an act of creative orientation” allowing inquirers to locate themselves in an “all-encompassing totality” (1965a, 12). A comprehension of the whole is not to be gained by objective analysis alone, but also requires an active posture in regard to the field of social relationships. No such comprehension can, in principle, ultimately be completed. Inquiry not only is an open-ended process, but is itself part of the pattern of historical development through which the overall totality is constituted—part of an emerging process that remains always open to change.

Lasswell, of course, does not invoke the standpoint of the proletarian class or of revolutionary theory inspired by it. He is also highly suspicious, on methodological grounds, of any Marxian account of future historical development that suggests inevitability rather than emphasizing indeterminacy. In stressing the world historical rise of intellectuals, Lasswell replaces the proletarian class and revolutionary theory with a critically informed policy profession. His move here bears a similarity to Karl Mannheim’s (1936) claim that modern intellectuals have a significant capacity to free themselves from ideological constraints. At the same time, Lasswell’s move is subject to the same suspicion that critics influenced by Lukács have cast upon Mannheim’s claim: that it is oblivious to the full force of dominant interests and, as such, is part of the ideological constraints helping to constitute and reinforce that power (e.g., Adorno, 1967).

What is nonetheless striking in Lasswell is the manner in which he proposes a deliberate project to overcome irrational constraints. The aim of the project is to gain insight into what Lasswell’s terms the “self-in-context” (1971a, 155). By this term, Lasswell understands the self in terms of both world history and depth psychology. Indeed, psychoanalytic insight offers a complement to the Marxian dialectic to help in grasping “the symbolic aspects of historical development” (1965a, 19). In Lasswell’s conception, insight discloses to a person features of the self-in-context that are “ordinarily excluded from the focus of full waking attention by smooth working mechanisms of ‘resistance’ and ‘repression’” (1958a, 97). It is through such insight that one lessens the constraint of “anxieties” that inhibit inquiry (1958a, 97; cf. 1977, ch. 3).

By seeking to reduce constraints on inquiry, Lasswell aims to enhance rationality. Well aware that no narrow rationalism is capable of this task, Lasswell invokes the psychoanalytic technique of free-fantasy as necessary to overcome both “self-deception” and the bounds of logical thought (1977, 36–37). What he takes from psychoanalysis is the lesson that “logic” is not only insufficient to rational inquiry, but is by itself a constraint. The constraint of the logical must be relaxed in order to gain insight into what is obvious, even though normally obscure. “The mind,” he argues, “is a fit instrument for reality testing when both blades are sharpened—those of logic and free-fantasy” (1977, 37). Insight into the self-in-context brings into focus surreptitious forces, thereby denying them their hidden and “privileged position” (1951a, 524).

Although Lasswell’s touchstone here is psychoanalysis, he introduces a qualification that is of key significance in focusing inquiry: “Traditional psychoanalysis laid so much emphasis on the ‘deeper’ motivations that it failed to provide for proportionate, contextual insight into social reality at different levels.” What Lasswell suggests is that psychoanalytic technique be adapted to a broader “reality critique,” so as to increase individual and collective awareness of the overall institutional context (1971a, 158; cf. 1976, 168).

Reaching intellectual maturity in the period following the First World War, Lasswell is hopeful that a civilization guided by intelligence can overcome the grim realities and irrationalities of the post-war world. He is impressed by the potential of emerging technology and social planning not only to alleviate wants, anxieties, and hostilities, but also to thereby provide leisure conducive to intellectual and aesthetic creativity. Yet this promise of an intelligent civilization comes with no guarantee. This is so especially in Europe, which had long fascinated Lasswell from afar and which he directly encounters through a series of extended visits during the 1920s (see Torgerson, 1987, 1990). There the post-war scene of the early 1920s presents a frightful panorama of irrationalities—antagonism, vindictiveness, brutalizing scarcity—suggesting the distinct prospect that the potential for an intelligent civilization will be eclipsed by criminality and violence. Even in America, the hopes that progressivism had pinned on the advance of science and democracy are dimmed by the advent of professionalized propaganda capable of targeting and manipulating a mass society.

It is in the wake of the First World War that propaganda emerges as a perplexing problem. Shaped in his outlook by progressivism and concerned that the public might be “bamboozled” by propaganda techniques (Lasswell, quoted in Torgerson, 1990, 349), Lasswell focuses on the problem in his Ph.D. thesis, published in 1927 under the title *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. Propaganda, as Lasswell describes it (1971b, 221–222; cf. 1928), involves “the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion”; but with an increasingly educated populace, propaganda is also “a concession to the rationality of the modern world.” For, with its pretensions to being a “rational epoch,” modernity thrives on “argument” and prefers “decorum and the trappery of intelligence.” The rise of propaganda makes it possible to envision the dystopian prospect of an apparently democratic society being governed by “an unseen engineer” (as he quotes an earlier writer). Lasswell’s point in studying propaganda, however, is to render this prospect impossible by bringing “much into the open that is obscure.”

Lasswell’s effort to promote a critically informed policy profession can thus be read, in large part, as a response to the increasing significance of professional propagandists, who depend upon the rationality of the modern world, yet also undermine it through systematic efforts to mobilize the irrationalities of psychopathology and ideology. Through their critical orientation, the policy sciences promise intelligence capable of leading modern civilization away from an irrational path. This task requires not routine thinking, but reflexivity and creativity. For a key “feature of the policy orientation,” according to Lasswell, is the significance it attaches to an “act of creative imagination” that is able to introduce an innovative policy “into the historical process” (1951b, 12).

THE TASK OF CONTEXTUAL MAPPING

In promoting the policy orientation, Lasswell developed a conceptual framework that was designed for a project of “mapping” the policy process in relation to the larger social process (see Brunner, 1991). His often terse specification of the elements of this framework—an enumeration of professional tasks and values together with sequential phases of decision making—gives a surface appearance that hardly distinguishes his framework from the standard check lists that now abound in conventional policy textbooks. This superficial impression is quickly belied, however, by the substance of his proposal and its most distinguishing feature, the principle of “contextuality” (Lasswell, 1971a, ch. 2).

The mapping of the policy process in connection with the social process involves a deliberate task of mapping self-in-context whereby inquirers orient themselves to the overarching context in which they are located—and of which they and their work are a part. Lasswell’s proposal for the policy orientation thus crucially depends upon a project of contextual mapping and orientation. “It is... impossible,” Lasswell maintains, “for anyone to escape an *implicit* map of the self-in-context” (1971a, 155). A common practical feature of social life, the mapping of context poses a particular

problem for professional inquirers because they must render the map explicit as part of a sustained effort to refine their orientation to context.

The inquirer is not a detached observer, but “a participant observer of events who tries to see things as they are” (Lasswell, 1971a, 3; cf. 58, 74–75), an actor trying to make sense of self and world. As one who is never entirely separate from the process nor ever entirely absorbed by it, the inquirer must crucially possess the flexibility of one able to engage as well as disengage; of one who, taking nothing as finally fixed, grasps how the emerging patterns of the process influence—and are reciprocally influenced by—the actors within it (Lasswell, 1965a, 4–6, 16–17, ch. 2). Yet as an actor, the inquirer does not simply map self-in-context so as to gain an orientation to an immediate domain of action. A bigger picture, a “total configuration” (1965a, 19), is also of pressing relevance. Hence, even though one is concerned with specifics, one is at the same time aware that “subtle ties bind every part to the whole” (1971a, 2).

This emphasis on the whole does not mean that the project of contextual orientation ever comes to rest in a final conclusion. Always unfinished, the project develops through one’s continuing effort to come to grips with a vast, complex, and at times bewildering world. Although a complete grasp of the whole is, in a sense, continuously presupposed in the course of any inquiry, the whole can never be directly apprehended once and for all. An understanding of the whole is constructed, rather, through meticulous work, disciplined and refined in a continuing search for relevant evidence. “The meaning of any detail depends,” moreover, “upon its relation to the whole context of which it is a part” (Lasswell, 1976, 218). The whole, then, can never be seized as a final conclusion because it remains an inexhaustible context enveloping the process of inquiry.

Not only is the context inexhaustible in its scope and complexity; it is also constantly changing. The inquirer shifts between focusing on an overall configuration as something stabilized in form at a particular moment and as a pattern that changes in an historical process (1965a, 4–5). Contextual orientation, in other words, turns on a “principle of temporality” (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, xiv). Within a changing context, the inquirer seeking improved contextual orientation must examine history in order to consciously elaborate developmental constructs (cf. Eulau, 1958).

A developmental construct draws upon evidence of historical trends and conditions, formulating the image of a future that can be anticipated, but not predicted. Although aiming for “nothing less than correct orientation in the continuum which embraces past, present, and future” (Lasswell, 1965a, 4), the image of development that the inquirer constructs is unavoidably tentative, open-ended, and subject to revision. Uncertainty is inescapable because future events remain matters that “are partly probable and partly chance” (1971a, 11). As a model, a developmental construct is “speculative” (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, xxiii); based in concrete evidence, but necessarily going beyond it, the model is an imaginative creation.

Nonetheless, imagination is not to run counter to the evidence, and Lasswell thus sharply differentiates between developmental constructs that are deemed probable and ones that are thought preferable. Although it is necessary to set out preferable paths of historical development when determining the possibility and plausibility of different courses of action, Lasswell insists upon distinguishing clearly between wishful thinking and what we expect to actually happen (1971a, 68). Elaborated in the course of unfolding events, a developmental construct is disciplined, in particular, by the “crucial test” of emerging events and is subject to revision as potentialities of the future become “actualized in the past and present of participant observers” (1965a, 13).

There is, however, a significant twist in Lasswell’s argument that complicates the otherwise clear distinction between developmental constructs as being either probable or simply preferable. For the elaboration of a developmental construct is itself an historical event and, by changing how people see themselves and direct their actions, has a capacity to shape future potentialities. Alluding to notions of self-fulfilling and self-denying prophecies, Lasswell formulates the point in this way: “The act of considering the shape of things to come is itself an event that is not without effect on the ensuing events” (1980, 518). Simply by focusing attention on a future prospect as a goal, a developmental construct

can, in principle, make it more likely. Indeed, Lasswell's very conception of the policy orientation as an emerging historical phenomenon involves the promotion of such a future goal.

POLICY PROFESSIONALISM

Lasswell's promotion of the policy orientation emerged from explicit plans he formulated during the 1940s while a policy advisor in Washington during World War II (Goldsen, 1979; cf. Lasswell, 1943a, 1943b, 1941c). However, these formulations were themselves refinements of ideas that were a part of his thinking in the mid-1920s when, in the midst of European chaos following World War I, he identified a potential for intellectual leadership to guide an intelligent civilization. Noting ambivalent tendencies in modernity, he could perceive the potential for a rationally ordered society that would combine technological advancement with intelligent communication and artistic cultivation. Yet, for Lasswell, this potential remained haunted by the distinct possibility of its opposite, a world of violence and scarcity, of psychopathology and propaganda (see Torgerson, 1990).

As Lasswell comes to promote the policy orientation, he explicitly locates his conception within an elaboration of developmental constructs. What he takes as given is the historical rise of intellectuals. His call for a clear policy orientation in the social sciences is a call to focus on this historical development and to shape it. For, regarding the advent of intellectuals with some ambivalence, he emphasizes as a "fundamental issue" the question of democracy versus oligarchy: "whether the overriding aim of policy should be the realization of the human dignity of the many, or the dignity of the few (and the indignity of the many)" (1971a, 41).

Although Lasswell endorses a policy profession devoted to democracy, he readily envisions—especially with rise of specialists on violence—the possibility of a profession devoted to oligarchy (1968, 186; 1971a, 43; cf. 1941b). In his principal attempt to elaborate concrete developmental constructs, indeed, Lasswell draws attention to two sharply divergent possible futures: (1) a democratic commonwealth, and (2) a "garrison-police state" (1965b, 37; cf. 1941b). A "democratically oriented policy science" (1951b, 11) appears, for Lasswell, to be necessary both to attain a commonwealth of general human dignity and to avert the "threatened...regimentation of a garrison-police state," which—in a provocatively dystopian formulation—he conceives as "a world concentration camp" (1976, 222; cf. 1958b, 197). "If we are in the midst of a permanent revolution of modernizing intellectuals," he argues, "the succeeding phase obviously depends in no small degree on perfecting the policy sciences that aid in forestalling the unspeakable contingencies latent in tendencies already more than faintly discernable" (1965b, 96).

Commitment to a policy science of democracy is, according to Lasswell, not to be derived from any abstract, transcendent principle. Nonetheless, he indicates that there is something about inquiry itself that tends to foster professional commitment to democracy. In a pragmatist gesture, Lasswell stresses the process of inquiry as itself being valuable. The upshot of this, for Lasswell, is that the process of contextual mapping is itself of indispensable value to the policy orientation. Without seeking to ground professional commitment to democracy in a principle external to the process of inquiry, Lasswell finds it hard to see how someone committed to the contextual principle of inquiry could avoid a commitment as well to a democratic commonwealth (1968, 182).

The policy scientist, by Lasswell's conception, has an orientation distinguished by a "principal value goal": "*enlightenment* about the policy process and its interaction with the social context..." (1974, 181). For Lasswell, consistent commitment to this goal is a matter of principle for inquiry. In actual situations, such a commitment is typically subject to pressures undermining it. To be sustained, it requires vigilance counteracting "the threats and temptations of power" (1974, 177). The policy profession is faced with the task of creating a space where distorting pressures can be effectively resisted: no relevant information can be withheld, and unconventional insights are not only to be heard, but deliberately encouraged. Those engaged in a common project of inquiry demand openness from

themselves and others (1971a, 3). As portrayed by Lasswell, the policy professional depends upon both collective support and a “life-long cultivation of the . . . potential for rationality” (1958a, 97).

The obvious pressures arising from a context of power are only part of the problem. Basic to the whole enterprise are matters of personal and collective identity. The identity of a person is bound to collective identity through a symbolic medium—through “myth and ideology” (Lasswell, 1958b, 168, 31, 214; cf. Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950, ch. 6)—and, once they are formed, collective symbols of identity exhibit a remarkable persistence (1958b, 169). However, a collective project of inquiry requires that conventional symbols not be taken for granted, but questioned as part of an effort to develop a “distinctive” professional identity (1971a, 120): “Do we not . . . discover among social scientists some unwillingness to give prominence to hypotheses that may be widely interpreted as inconsistent with prevailing ideology?” By posing this rhetorical question (1961, 112), Lasswell draws attention to irrationalities that pose barriers to inquiry, a problem that leads him to seek “procedures” able to make “the mind . . . fit for rational clarity” (1958a, 90).

A deliberate project of contextual mapping is needed to expose irrationalities and thereby diminish the distortions they might work on the process of inquiry: “The enlightened person is aware of his assumptions about the past, present, and future of himself, his cultural environment, and his natural environment. Our recommended goal is to provide undogmatic access to inclusive versions of reality, so that the chances are increased that the individual will use his own capacities of imagination and judgment” (Lasswell, 1971a, 155–56). This need is of decisive importance in “policy training operations” because “the cognitive map is rarely brought deliberately or fully into the open unless the individual is exposed to an instructional experience that rewards him by bringing the implicit image of reality to the full focus of waking awareness” (1971a, 155). Lasswell thus stresses that the individual inquirer depends upon an institutional context, upon “agencies of enlightenment” (1971a, 97), in order to gain educational experiences able to enhance insight into self-in-context (1971a, ch. 8) as part of the collective development of professional identity (1971a, ch. 7).³

To diminish the effect of irrational constraints on the conduct of inquiry, a project of contextual mapping brings key formative influences to full, conscious attention. The purpose is to diminish socio-psychological resistances—to employ “the contextual principle,” not only to counter individual psychopathologies detrimental to inquiry, but also “to remove the ideological blinders from our eyes” at a collective level (Lasswell, 1976, 220): “The conscious process itself may be under the domination of repetitive compulsions which are outside the awareness of the thinker” (Lasswell, 1958a, 92). Here the point of the policy sciences is not to effect control, but to free inquiry:

It is insufficiently acknowledged that the role of scientific work in human relations is *freedom* rather than prediction. By freedom is meant the bringing into the focus of awareness of some feature of the personality which has hitherto operated as a determining factor upon the choices made by the individual, but which has been operating unconsciously. Once elevated to the full focus of waking consciousness, the factor which has been operating “automatically and compulsively” is no longer in this privileged position. The individual is now free to take the factor into consideration in the making of future choices. (Lasswell, 1951a, 524)

Freeing inquiry from psychopathological and ideological constraints is possible because any ordering of social relationships depends upon “meanings” that are, as Lasswell puts it, “subject to change *with* notice (with insight)”; it is the force of “insight” and “awareness” that provides for changes in “the current meaning” and, indeed, the “context” of action (1965b, 33–34). Following Freud’s affirmation of “the efficacy of insight,” Lasswell maintains that scientific conclusions about “human interactions” should be placed in “a special category” precisely because they “may produce insight,” thus modifying “future events” and “changing the scientifically established relationships themselves” (1956, 114–15)

Lasswell's conception of the policy orientation ultimately depends upon the efficacy of such insight. The contextual mapping of policy professionals involves "a quest for identity" through which individuals "loosen the bounds of the culture into which they are born by becoming aware of it..." (Lasswell, 1958b, 194). The process is one that both breaks the hold of "current stereotypes" and creates new "key symbols of identity" (1958, 193). Policy professionalism thus develops through the deliberate testing and fashioning of personal and collective identities.

THE POLICY ORIENTATION AND THE PUBLIC

When John Dewey published *The Public and Its Problems* in 1927, he was responding to significant doubts about the democratic capacity of the public that had arisen among fellow progressives in the wake of the First World War. The honeymoon of the progressive marriage of science and democracy came to an abrupt end in light of the effectiveness of wartime propaganda in manipulating mass society. The crucial figure in underscoring the shortcomings of public opinion was Walter Lippmann (1965), who concluded that an enlightened elite of experts was needed to avoid irrationality in modern society. In a direct response to Lippmann, Dewey agreed that experts were important, but explicitly insisted on the greater importance of enlightening the public: "The enlightenment of public opinion still seems to me to have priority over the enlightenment of officials and directors" (1983, 344).

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey warned of an oligarchy of experts and identified the central problem for the public as that of creating conditions of communication in which the citizenry could be enlightened through discourse: "The essential need... is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public" (1984, 365). Recognizing the substantial difficulty posed by propaganda, Dewey indicated that solving "*the* problem of the public" would require an expertise in propaganda sufficient to counteract its influence.

By the mid-1920s, Lasswell was establishing himself as the leading scholarly expert on propaganda, and he saw irrationality among the public as linked to the problem of the irrationality of experts. In the 1930s, he called for improvements in "the methods and the education of social administrators and social scientists" (1977, 203) as being of key importance in developing a "politics of prevention" (1977, ch. 10) capable of reducing the social tensions that exacerbate irrationalities in society. In the context of such irrationalities, he feared, politics typically becomes a projection of irrational impulses that intensifies problems rather than resolving them.

Lasswell's case for a preventative politics is based on the concern that "the public may be dissolved into a crowd" (1977, 192). He takes it as characteristic of democracy that policy be determined significantly more by "discussion" than by "coercion" (1977, 192). In the midst of psychopathological projections of private motives onto public concerns, he is doubtful of the potential of "belligerent crusades to change the world" (1977, 94). He also is dubious about the contention of democratic theorists that "social harmony depends upon discussion," particularly discussion that formally involves all who are affected by a policy issue (1977, 196). Of what, then, is the "politics of prevention" to consist? "In some measure it will proceed by encouraging discussion among all those who are affected by social policy, but this will be no iron-clad rule. In some measure it will proceed by improving the machinery of settling disputes, but this will be subordinated to a comprehensive program, and no longer treated as an especially desirable mode of handling the situation" (1977, 197). Lasswell is vague on how such a comprehensive program is to be instituted in the face of powers resistant to it, but it is clear that he sees a power in rationality itself, in the discovery of a truth: "Our problem is to be ruled by the truth about the conditions of harmonious human relations, and the discovery of the truth is the object of specialized research..." (1977, 197). Knowledge develops and spreads throughout society, he suggests, while advancing a formulation that a Marxian critic might brand as a kind of idealism: "The politics of prevention does not depend upon a series of changes in the organization of government. It depends upon a reorientation in the minds of those who think about society..." (1977, 198; cf. 203).

Lasswell's manifest concern here is less to enlighten the population than to immunize it. During a time when he sees the forces of Fascism and Bolshevism mounting clear threats, he wants to protect the future of liberal democracy from the anti-democratic potentials of an irrational mass society. In this context, he even endorses propaganda in the cause of democracy. His politics of prevention would be the project of a psychoanalytically enlightened elite of "political psychiatrists" (1965a, 19–20, 181). Here Lasswell formulates the most technocratic version of his position (cf. Horwitz, 1962; Bachrach, 1967, ch 5).

Inclined more toward Dewey than Lippmann, however, Lasswell does not accept disillusionment with public opinion. Indeed, in the early 1940s, he looks back to his European travels of the 1920s and recalls antidemocratic dismissals, during that period, of liberal democratic institutions, such as open public discourse and parliamentary assemblies. Proclaiming in the title of a book the potential of *Democracy through Public Opinion*, he maintains that what democracy needs is "a new way to talk" (1941a, ch. 7): a mode of informed public discourse that is resistant to the irrationality of propaganda. This potential can be realized if the professional adopts the role of "clarifier" in educating and enlightening public opinion (1941a, 89).

Realizing this potential is the task that Lasswell (1951b) assigns to the policy sciences of democracy following World War II. Policy professionals are to oppose oligarchy through a commitment to widespread participation in the "shaping and sharing" of power (1971a, 44–48): "The aim," as Lasswell puts it, "is to subordinate the particular interests of a profession to the discovery and encouragement of public interest. This implies direct community participation as well as client service" (1971a, 119). The profession is thus devoted to the "encouragement of continuous general participation" (1971a, 117).

The policy profession stands in an educative role with regard to the public, addressing *the* problem of the public—as Dewey conceived it—by fostering conditions that would diminish forces of irrationality while eliciting and developing the potential of the populace for involvement in intelligent communication: "The contemporary policy scientist perceives himself . . . as a specialist in eliciting and giving effect to all the rationality of which individuals and groups are capable at any given time" (1971a, 120). Lasswell saw such development of the public as a way of encouraging democracy in a complex society reliant upon specialist knowledge. Indeed, he believed that democracy would be reinforced if the provision were made to give "everyone who is involved in a public controversy an expert who can say whatever there is to say on his behalf." The effect, he hoped, would be to "serve rationality" by bringing "to the focus of attention" matters that might otherwise be neglected in the policy process (1971a, 121). Arguing that critical insight should extend beyond the policy profession, he advocated "the dissemination of insight on a vast scale to the adult population" (1976, 196). Practiced in the context of a critically enlightened public, politics could become something other than a projection by individuals of their psychological problems onto public issues, as Lasswell had conceived it in 1930 in his *Psychopathology and Politics* (Lasswell, 1970). Political participation could, indeed, become part of the development of a "democratic character" (Lasswell, 1951a; 1976, ch. 7).

Yet, contrary to Lasswell's hopes for the policy orientation, the actual tendency has been the development of a professional identity marked by institutional allegiances to a sphere of organizations—that primarily of state agencies and large private corporations—that tends to reinforce tendencies toward oligarchy and bureaucratism. This observation would not have shocked Lasswell, who once noted that the effect of "professional training" was typically one of promoting "self deception rather than self analysis" (1977, 37). Alert to "pitfalls," he anticipated the failure of "many initiatives" (1971a, 132). He knew that intellectuals must learn "the conditions of survival in the arenas of power" (1971a, 125) as they "find themselves caught in a net of interlocking interest" (1965b, 91). Despite these problems, Lasswell (1970b) insisted upon the importance of developing a professional identity that would offer institutional protection against irrationalities wrought by political power. A commitment to inquiry was "no private act" (1974, 183) and, as he had learned from pragmatism, depended upon a community of inquirers.

Lasswell's account of the policy orientation thus culminates in a paradox. He announces a world revolution of intellectuals whose task it is to lead society away from irrationality and toward an intelligent democratic civilization. However, the policy profession that Lasswell portrays as the agent of historical change is—as he himself clearly recognizes—liable to be entrapped by the very oligarchical and bureaucratic forces that should be opposed in the name of democracy. Still, on its own grounds, there is a plausible rationale to Lasswell's proposal, for he believes that intellectuals are going to be important whatever course history might take. Thus the orientation of intellectuals is bound to be important.

Lasswell's view of history focused perhaps too much on the prospect of an apocalyptic confrontation between forces of coercive oligarchy and liberal democracy for him to adequately grasp the dangers of more subtle kinds of oligarchy, particularly ones that operate surreptitiously through a technocratic idiom. The notion of the professional, for Lasswell, involves critical enlightenment, unwavering integrity, and courageous devotion to public service. However, in a context dominated by technocratic discourse, how can professionalism develop and sustain an adequately critical focus on the mystique of professionalism?

By Lasswell's account, the policy orientation appears in the singular, manifest as the development of a single profession with a distinctive identity. But is policy professionalism here not pictured too much as a discrete, cohesive entity? What is needed, perhaps, is to focus on the diversity of the range of policy-relevant inquiries, rather than trying to place them all under one heading. Indeed, when we examine concretely the relationships among various intellectual orientations and specific political interests, the beguiling images of calm technocratic discourse give way to the recognition of a politics of expertise, in which experts contend with one another (Fischer, 1990).

Lasswell did not want a policy orientation fractured along political lines. He insisted, rather, on a community of inquirers as a coherent collective enterprise capable of guiding the development of an intelligent civilization. As he witnessed the post-war chaos of European civilization in the early 1920s, Lasswell believed that intellectuals were capable of developing a consensual orientation for this purpose (Torgerson, 1987, 11–17, 20–27). Since that time, he supposed that inquiry could issue in a shared professional orientation through which the public could be enlightened. Central to his own effort was the development of a framework for policy professionals that would identify key symbols able to adequately guide the focus of attention in policy inquiry. He did not claim, however, that his framework was the only one possible, allowing that it was “one of many possible approaches to the policy sciences” (1971, xiv). Indeed, at the end of his career, he made a notable shift away from the notion that a single consensual map might guide policy professionals and the public. As he faced blatant differences among professionals, he allowed for a plurality of maps by suggesting that the public should be systematically exposed to alternative perspectives (1979, 63).

Exhibiting no narrow rationalism, Lasswell focuses on the importance of an enlightened public for an intelligent, democratic civilization. In the end, nonetheless, his account of the policy orientation not only recapitulates the old rationalist pattern of reason ruling the passions, but also repeats the gesture of making a rational elite the hero of the story. Despite Lasswell's pragmatism and careful democratic qualifications, it can be said with little exaggeration that the basic image is one of reason on top, calming and ordering a mass of unruly impulses below. The centrality of this image in Lasswell's account can readily be recognized by contrasting it with the inverse image to be found in Lukács's Marxian conception. There the very possibility of critical insight arises from the social position of the subordinate class. What Lukács saw as a source of critical insight, Lasswell views as a site of irrational impulses that are prone to propagandistic manipulation.

As its direct significance declined in the late twentieth century, the Marxian perspective came to inspire post-Marxian strategies seeking the democratization of advanced industrial societies. In these strategies, a fixation on the agency of one class-based social movement gave way to a recognition of the diversity of new social movements. Bringing strikingly unconventional perspectives to political discourse, moreover, these movements came to fashion themselves as publics (see, e.g., Angus, 2003).

At the same time, the impetus toward a radically democratic transformation of society was attenuated by a concern with immediate reform and the consequent adoption of policy orientations. The emerging publics were not enlightened from above or supplied with experts of the kind envisioned by Lasswell. Instead, these publics found themselves in ambivalent positions, creating critical distances between themselves and the official institutions dominating policy processes while—at the same time—seeking to intervene in policy deliberations (Torgerson, 2003, 1999). The publics of a diverse civil society thus found their own voices and shaped their own experts, ones knowledgeable about specific policy matters and able to engage in the politics of expertise (Fischer, 1992).

Challenging Lasswell's account of the policy orientation, these developments minimally suggest a need for revisions. The story now becomes more complicated, as Lasswell seems to have partly anticipated with his late allowance for a diversity of professional perspectives. No longer do we have a story of *the* policy orientation of professionals, who are housed within established institutions while paradoxically working to critically enlighten themselves and the public. Rather, we have a story of a plurality of policy orientations based not only in established institutions, but also in diverse publics of civil society. There are still professionals in this story, but their privileged position as agents of an intelligent civilization is at least partially displaced. If professionals are to promote democratization, they cannot simply retain secure positions in connection with state agencies and other powerful organizations, but must seek critical distances from them, taking as a point of reference the multiple publics whose voices now enter into the domain of policy discourse.

NOTES

1. This essay draws upon the results of previous treatments of Lasswell (see Torgerson, 1985, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1995).
2. Lasswell's own promotion of a critically reflexive policy profession itself becomes part of the story he tells, though this is not the place to fully discuss the implications that the narrative form of the policy orientation might have for the study of policy discourse.
3. On specific recommendations by Lasswell for an educational program (e.g., insight training, devil's advocacy, continuous decision seminars), see Torgerson (1985, 247).

REFERENCES

- Aaron, R. (1969). *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*, Vol. 1. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Adorno, T.W. (1967). *The sociology of knowledge and its consciousness. prisms*. S. Weber, (trans), pp. 35–50. London: Neville Spearman.
- Angus, I. (2001). *Emergent Publics: An Essay on Social Movements and Democracy*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Atkins, W.E. and H.D. Lasswell (1924). *Labor Attitudes and Problems*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Bachrach, P. (1967). *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Brunner, R.D. (1991). The policy movement as a policy problem. *Policy Sciences*, 24, 65–98.
- Dewey, J. (1983). Review of W. Lippmann, Public Opinion. In J.A. Boydston (ed), *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, Vol. 13, pp. 337–344. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press (originally published, 1922).
- Dewey, J. (1984). The Public and Its Problems in J.A. Boydston (ed), *John Dewey: The Later Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 235–372. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press (originally published, 1927).
- Dryzek, J. (2000). *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eulau, H. (1958). H.D. Lasswell's developmental analysis. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 11, 229–241.
- Fischer, F. (1990). *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Fischer, F. (1992). Participatory expertise: toward the democratization of policy science. In W.N. Dunn and

- R.M. Kelly (eds), *Advances in Policy Studies Since 1950*, pp. 351–376. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press.
- Fischer, F. and Forester, J. (eds). (1993). *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Forester, J. (ed). (1985). *Critical Theory and Public Life*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Goldsen, J.M. (1979). Harold Lasswell as policy adviser and consultant. In M.S. McDougal et al., *Harold Dwight Lasswell, 1902–1978*, pp. 78–81. New Haven: Yale Law School.
- Hajer, M. and Wagenaar, H. (eds), (2003). *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horwitz, R. (1962). Scientific propaganda: Harold D. Lasswell. In H.J. Storing (ed), *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, pp. 225–304. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1926). Review of W. Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 31, 533–535.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1928). The function of the propagandist. *International Journal of Ethics*, 38, 258–268.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1941a). *Democracy through Public Opinion*. Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1941b). The garrison state. *American Journal of Sociology*, 46, 455–468.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1941c). Letter to Anna P. and Linden Lasswell, May 25. *Harold D. Lasswell Papers* (Box 56), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1943a). Personal policy objectives. Memorandum, October 1. *Harold D. Lasswell Papers* (Box 145), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1943b). Proposal: the institute of policy sciences. Memorandum, October 1. *Harold D. Lasswell Papers* (Box 145), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1951a). Democratic character. In *The Political Writings of Harold D. Lasswell*, pp. 465–525. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1951b). The policy orientation. In D. Lerner and H.D. Lasswell (eds), *The Policy Sciences*, pp. 3–15. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1955). Current studies of the decision process: automation versus creativity. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 8, 381–399.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1956). Impact of psychoanalytic thinking on the social sciences. In L.D. White (ed), *The State of the Social Sciences*, pp. 84–115. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1958a). Clarifying value judgment: principles of content and procedure. *Inquiry*, 1, 87–98.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1958b). *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. New York: Meridian Books.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1961). The qualitative and the quantitative in political and legal analysis. In D. Lerner (ed), *Quantity and Quality*, pp. 103–116. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1965a). *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*. New York: The Free Press (originally published, 1935).
- Lasswell, H.D. (1965b). The world revolution of our time: a framework for basic policy research. In H.D. Lasswell and D. Lerner (eds), *World Revolutionary Elites*, pp. 29–96. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1968). Policy sciences. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 12, 181–189.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1970). Must science serve political power? *American Psychologist*, 25, 117–125.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1971a). *A Pre-View of Policy Sciences*. New York: American Elsevier.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1971b). *Propaganda Technique in World War I*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (originally published as *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, 1927).
- Lasswell, H.D. (1974). Some perplexities of policy theory. *Social Research*, 14, 176–189.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1976). *Power and Personality*. New York: W.W. Norton (originally published, 1948).
- Lasswell, H.D. (1977). *Psychopathology and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (originally published, 1930).
- Lasswell, H.D. (1979). *The Signature of Power*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1980). The future of world communication and propaganda. In H.D. Lasswell, D. Lerner and H. Speier (eds), *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, Vol. 3, pp. 516–534. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.
- Lasswell, H.D. and Kaplan, A. (1950). *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Lerner, D. and H.D. Lasswell (eds), *The Policy Sciences: Recent Trends in Scope and Method*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lippmann, W. (1965). *Public Opinion*. New York: The Free Press (originally published, 1922).
- Lukács, G. (1971). *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. R. Livingstone (trans.). London: Merlin Press (originally published in German, 1923).
- Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. L. Wirth and E. Shils (trans.). New York: Harcourt, Brace and World (originally published in German, 1929).
- Torgerson, D. (1985). Contextual orientation in policy analysis: the contribution of Harold D. Lasswell. *Policy Sciences*, 18, 241–261.
- Torgerson, D. (1987). Political vision and the policy orientation: Lasswell's early letters. Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 3–6.
- Torgerson, D. (1990). Origins of the policy orientation: the aesthetic dimension in Lasswell's political vision. *History of Political Thought*, 11, 339–351.
- Torgerson, D. (1992). Priest and jester in the policy sciences: developing the focus of inquiry. *Policy Sciences*, 25, 225–235.
- Torgerson, D. (1995). Policy analysis and public life: the restoration of phronesis? In J. Farr, J.S. Dryzek, and S.T. Leonard (eds), *Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions*, pp. 225–252. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Torgerson, D. (1999). *The Promise of Green Politics: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Torgerson, D. (2003). Democracy through policy discourse. In M. Hajer and H. Wagenaar (eds), *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*, pp. 113–138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tribe, L.H. (1972). Policy science: analysis or ideology? *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2, 66–110.