THE ARGUMENTATIVE TURN IN POLICY EXPERTISE:

DELIBERATION AS POSTPOSITIVIST PRACTICE

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This essay examines public policy expertise and policy deliberation, and organizational decision-making from the perspective of the “argumentative the turn” that emerged in the fields of policy studies, public administration, and planning in the 1990s (Fischer and Forester 1993). While discussion of policy expertise and advice-giving in politics is in no way new, the practices of expertise and advice has been changing over the later part of the past of the 20th century. The paper seeks to show that the argumentative turn can be usefully employed to interpret these changing patterns, as well to offer a number of potentially useful prescriptions. Toward this end, the discussion begins with a brief discussion of the long history of thought about political expertise and advice, moving from political philosophy to social science. It then examines the limits of the social scientific approach and presents the new argumentative approach that has emerged as its challenger especially as reflected in the field of policy analysis. In the third part of the essay, the advantages of an postpositivist argumentative approach to policy inquiry are presented and several practical contributions to policy deliberation based on its tenets are outlined. The discussion closes with an examination of the further postpositivist challenges posed by policy deliberation and the argumentative approach.
From Philosopher King to Policy Analyst

The role of political wisdom and policy advice—and argumentation about both—are scarcely new topics in government and political science. The importance of politically-relevant counsel, and who should offer it, in the realm of politics can be traced back to the earliest discussions on statecraft. In Western political thought, it is a prominent theme in the writing of Plato about the need for a philosopher-king, in Machiavelli’s discussion of the Prince, Francis Bacon's New Altantis, St. Simon and August Comte’s theory of technocracy, Thorstein Veblen’s emphasis on the engineers in the price system, the “Brain Trust” of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, the writings of the policy intellectuals of the Great Society of the 1960s, and modern-day think tanks since Reagan and Thatcher (Fischer 1990). During the past three decades, moreover, it has been a central theme in the literature of policy analysis.

Today, the topic of policy expertise and advice-giving has also attracted new interest in a number of European countries in particular. There has been considerable political and academic discussion about the role of policy advice from unelected experts to whom top politicians have turned for ideas, even in some cases for defining components of their political agenda. In Germany, for example, former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder engaged a group of external experts, many of whom were from the business community to come up with a new design for overhauling the countries social welfare system. This expert-oriented “Hartz Commission,” named after the former personal manager of Volkswagen, developed a controversial program that was more or less adopted outright by the Social Democratic government, despite much public opposition and dissatisfaction with the onerous burdens it was to subsequently imposed on the unemployed and the poor. Described by some as a new pattern of governance, this approach has been dubbed as the politics of the “Raeterrepublic,”
referring ironically to the earlier Soviet model of government by councils (which had a brief
life of its own in Munich after WWI). The concern has emerged as well in discussions of
constitutional development in the European Union, seen to be carried out by experts far too
removed from the citizens of the countries that the proposed constitution would bind together.
It is a discussion all the more intensified by the rejection of the proposed document by the
French and the Dutch citizenries, more or less on the grounds that it was an idea put forward by
distant technocrats with little knowledge of or interest in everyday European life.

Historically, a central theme running through the literature on the subject has focused
minimizing or replacing political argumentation with more rigorous forms of thought. Within
this tradition, we also find a shift from wise men, such as Plato's philosopher-king to
scientifically grounded advice, emerging first in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, a model utopian society
planned and administered by scientists (Bacon 1980). Somewhat later, St. Simon and August
Comte spelled out a theory of technocratic governance that more specifically featured social
scientist (Fischer 1990). Underlying these later writings was a “positivist” epistemological
challenge to earlier forms of philosophical knowledge, characterized as a form of “negativism.”
Rather than hard core empirical analysis upon which testable theory for building a better theory
of society could be founded, such earlier modes of inquiry were seen to rest on speculation and
critique. They offered no basis for basis for “social progress.”

The emphasis on positivism and technocratic policymaking in government and politics
took on practical dimensions in the early 20th Century, especially in the United States. Much of
Continental Europe, by contrast, remained wedded to the more philosophic Germanic
understanding of knowledge (extending back to Kant and Hegel) and thus adverse to the
narrower techno-empirical orientation of the technocratic movement. What is more, the focus
on public policy emerged more as an American than a European project, in part because of a less philosophical, more pragmatic approach to knowledge and its uses. Indeed, these differences continued to separate the two communities well into the later part of the century.

The story of technocracy in the United States has its roots in the “Progressive Era” around the turn of the 20th century. Leading Progressive writer, Herbert Croly, influenced by the writings of Comte, advocated the role of expertise in government as a reform strategy for addressing the economic and social problems confronting a rapidly industrializing nation. Indeed, he advocated the use of the principles of Taylorism and “Scientific Management” as the basis for governmental reform (Wiebe 1955). In line with the enthusiasm of the era, leading University of Chicago sociologist, Lester Ward even argued that legislators should have training in the social sciences to be qualified for office, if not be social scientists themselves (Fischer 1990). It was, in short, science rather than political deliberation that counted in the Progressive vision of the good society.

Drawing support from the theories of positivism emerging at the time, the movement constituted a “mentality” as much as it did a set of scientific principles (Fischer 2003). The resulting empirical or “behaviorial” approach to the newly developing social sciences was at first closely related to the problem-oriented social reform movements of the 20's and 30's. Indeed, throughout this period, the objective of writers such as Walter Lippman (1961) was to replace the “irrational public” and corrupt political parties with technocratic administration based on the finding of the new sciences of governance.

The influence of this “Progressive” creed is attested to by the election of two Progressive presidents in the U.S., one a Republican--Theodore Roosevelt--and the other a Democrat--Woodrow Wilson. These elections and the politics surrounding them reflected the would-be
“value-free” nature of scientific management and the “nonideological” approach to good
government through expertise that it prescribed. Indeed, Wilson, himself a political scientists
(and often considered the father of the American discipline of Public Administration), called
for scientifically explicating the efficient practices of Prussian bureaucracy and applying
them—indeed, of culture or context, to American government. In the process, this new
field of inquiry and its practices would replace the traditional emphasis on legal-rational
bureaucratic authority with social scientific principles of organization and management
(Wilson 1987).

Technocracy received renewed support in the 1920s from Thorstein Veblen (1933)
and his call to replace the capitalist price system with the decisions of efficient engineers. The
goal for Veblen was to eliminate waste and encourage efficiency in the American economy
through methods and practices of experts. Pinning his hopes on the political possibilities posed
by a newly emerging professional class, he called on the “absentee owners” of corporate
America to transfer their power to reform-minded technocrats and workers. Throughout this
early work, the term “technocracy” was seen as a positive new direction for government. The
message was straightforward: replace the talk of politicians with the analyses of the experts.
Some technocratic thought was influenced by emerging socialist governments emphasizing
planning, although it was often difficult for this enthusiasm to be explicitly expressed,
especially when it related to the newly formed Soviet Union.

A major expansion of the Progressive ideas came with New Deal “Brain Trust” of the
1930s, also adding a new dimension of expert advice. Particularly influential were the writings
of John Maynard Keynes, holding out the possibility of technically managing the economy
(Graham 1976). This period saw a large-scale influx of economists and social scientists in
Washington, employed in policy planning and related activities throughout the growing administrative state. It also featured a change in the politics of the policy process, or what came to be called the New Deal “Liberal Reform Strategy” (Karl 1965). The political strategy brought experts and politicians together, through so-called “Blue Ribbon” advisory commissions, to identify and analyze contemporary social and economic problems. The reports of these commissions were then turned into central components of the liberal reform agenda by party politicians, subsequently offered to voters in electoral campaigns. In the European context, it is interesting to note that in the years preceding the development of this strategy, Max Weber advanced the idea of the expert-oriented Enquete Commission in Germany for what would be the Weimar Republic, which was later to take on some of the same features.

In the postwar period the emphasis on the role of empirical social science in political advisement took full form in the development of the field of policy analysis, from Harold Lasswell to Aaron Wildavsky. Although policy analysis emerged in less grandiose terms than Lasswell had envisioned it, including his recognition to include more than empirical investigation, the field and its practices that emerge in the 1960s was dominated by positivist-based methods.

**Technocratic Expertise and the Rise of Counter-Expertise: Policy Argumentation**

In the 1960s, during the Democratic Party's “Great Society” reform program, the same expert-oriented liberal reform strategy of earlier decades is now found to be operating _inside_ the White House. Liberal policy experts gave birth to an outpouring of poverty programs, under both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, as well as the technocratic planning and execution of the Vietnam War, directed by the technocratic Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara (Wood 1993). Enjoying easy access to President Johnson, these policy
professionals produced a nearly unprecedented array of programs and bills that gave shape to the administration's War on Poverty. Daniel Moynihan (1965), a social scientist in the Administration, called it the "professionalization of reform." The leading presidential historian, Theodore White (1967), referred to the period as "the golden age of the 'policy intellectuals.'" For White, it was nothing less than a new system of power in American politics. Acting in concert with political leaders in both the White House and Congress, these new policy advisors were the "driving-wheels" of the Great Society. As a new generation of policy experts with special problem-solving skills, they sought to shape the country’s defences, redesign the cities, put an end to poverty, reform the schools, and more. They represented a bridge across the gap between government and the producers of ideas. The White House served as "a transmission belt," packaging and processing scholars' ideas to be sold to Congress as programs.

Of necessity, the scope of these efforts gave rise to new tools for program management and analysis, including the systematic development of a field of inquiry called "policy analysis." Universities, more than enthusiastic by the turn to policy expertise, rushed in to take advantage of an outpouring of Congressional monies for both the development and evaluation of such public program. This led to countless doctoral dissertations, and in turn, extensive theoretical and methodological discussions that became the foundation of the new field. Designed to bring social science out of the "Ivory Tower," policy analysis was to confer "social relevance" through problem-solving and informed advice. Public policy rapidly jumped in political science to become the most fashionable disciplinary specializations. Indeed, it became the "in" topic in the social sciences.
This liberal policy strategy interested many foreign observers, as both a positive and necessary development. In Germany, for example, leading social scientists such as Fritz Scharpf and Renate Mayntz adopted and promoted these ideas and policy scientific techniques as part of a new steering apparatus for the state (Saretzki 2006). In Denmark and Sweden scholars similarly turned to policy analysis as a tool for managing and controlling the social welfare state, emphasizing in particular the problems of policy implementation and evaluation (Furubo 2006). But the positive benefits didn’t emerge so rapidly. By the late 1970s, the practice of policy analysis appeared to many as a disappointment: If the goal was to solve social problems, there was little to show in the way of a clear-cut payoff. This perception emerged in Europe as well as the United States.

The result was more than a measure of academic soul-searching and give rise to two responses. One was methodological; the problem was first to seem to be a lack of empirical rigor and the need for better methodological tools and theories. Systems analysis and computers were held out by many as the way to rectify the limited success of the endeavor. But others started to rethink policy analysis more in terms of “enlightenment” than problem-solving per se. This view recognized that policy was as much about the discussion of values as it was about facts, if not at times more so.

And the late 1970s and 80s were just such a period, as values became a central political theme of the neo-conservative governments that emerged in both the U.S. and Europe. The neo-conservatives theorists of the time took the development of policy advice in a different direction. For them, the liberal policy experts constituted a “new class” that imposed its own liberal agenda on citizens who hadn’t asked for their advice (Fischer 1990). Instead of rejecting the strategy, though, it was redirected in the U.S. and Britain to what came to be
called the “War of Ideas” carried out by a network of high-visibility, well-funded conservative think tank experts (Fischer 1991). Emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and supply-side economics, the “counter intelligencias” in these think tanks began to perform two primary functions. One was to organize regularized discussions between conservative economic and political leaders and leading conservative academic. And the other involved helping to shape the conservative policy agenda through these interactions, an outcome of which in the U.S. was to bring Ronald Reagan to the White House. An unmistakable success, the effort resulted in the conservative political climate that still last today. It was a process also to be found in Britain in the 1970s, where it played an important role in helping to bring Margaret Thatcher to power. It was also copied in Germany (Leggewie 1987).

Strictly speaking, though, American-style of policy analysis remained suspect in many European countries. Indeed, in Britain, and even more so in Germany, the discipline has only been slowly embraced. To the degree that conservatives took an early interest in formal policy analysis, they turned the focus from policy development to implementation and evaluation, as post-hoc evaluation research was could be conveniently employed to document the failures of liberal policy programs, even when that was not its intended purpose. But the main thrust of think tanks was the politicization of policy advice, which tended to undercut the technocratic legitimation of policy science. As ideological “counter-argumentation” returned in full public view, techno-scientific expertise was increasingly demystified. Softening their claims to nonpartisanship—or dropping it altogether—many policy experts began to operate in an argumentatively contentious adversarial style that openly featured their political biases (Tolchin 1985). Some even described themselves as “hired guns,” likening the role more to that of the lawyer with his or her client, rather than the scientific expert giving objective advice.
THE ARGUMENTATIVE TURN AS POSTPOSITIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Whereas policy analysis had emerged enshrouded in an neopositivist conception of knowledge—and the “overdetermined” technocratic understanding of policy making long associated with it—the new emphasis on adversarial argumentation unwittingly opened the door to a very different kind of postpositivist orientation based on a social constructivist conception of knowledge, a dialectical model of argumentation, and the interpretive methods common to both. In short, it gave rise to the “argumentative turn” (Fischer and Forester 1993). If the new politics suggested the need for a different understanding of knowledge, the influential works were those of Habermas (both his critique of scientism and the theory of communicative competence), Foucault (his theory of disciplinary control and discursive power), social constructivism (e.g., Kuhn in the U.S., Woolgar in the UK, Latour in France, and Knorr-Cetina in Germany), the practical discourse and rhetoric of Toulmin and McClosky, and the pragmatism of Dewey and Pierce. These theoretical perspectives have interacted in various ways over the past three decades to offer a different way of looking at policy expertise, the processes of analytic inquiry, policy argumentation, and public deliberation.

Some of this work has involved a micro focus on particular communicative practices; other efforts have taken a larger theoretical perspective examining discourse and public deliberation. None of it has evolved in a linear fashion, but taken together it has offered a wealth of new ideas and ways of thinking that were brought to bear on the policy and planning disciplines. Most fundamentally, these perspectives recognize that social reality is constituted through language rather than merely mirrored back by it. All of them appreciate how discourse and practical rhetoric depict and characterize reality, including some parts of it and excluding others.
As an interpretive orientation, the argumentative turn understands social reality and the empirical observations of it to only exist in relation to intellectual constructs used for thinking about them. In so far as these constructs are grounded in values that shape our perceptions of reality, the researcher’s findings are not a report of that which is “out there,” as positivism would have it, but rather part of a process that creates that version of reality. Knowledge in the social world, then, “is a human construction never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing” (Guba 1990:26). In this view, theory and knowledge can never be fully probed. Not only can knowledge never be value-free, there can be no definitive criteria for choosing one theory over another. Furthermore, knowledge in and of the social world is the product of a dialogic logic that understands knowledge to be the result of a confrontation among differing interpretations, the outcome of which can be a constructive synthesis leading to a new intersubjective understanding (Guba and Lincoln 1989). This understanding, then, is the basis for the consensus that comes to be called knowledge, at least until some point in time when the consensus is successfully challenged.

Unlike the positivist conception of knowledge, such consensus does not rest on a reality independent of those who shape and share it. In so far as the possibility of further confrontations with differing points of view always remains open, the construction of a consensus is never fully finished or complete. There can be progress in the production of consensus, but such knowledge can never by proved in the standard sense of the term. The process by which the production of such a consensus is shaped becomes the special interest of social constructivist investigation.

The social constructivist perspective thus describes a world that is richer and more complex than the empiricist theories offered to explain it. Rather than break reality down into
variables to be measured, it strives to coherently incorporate the multiplicity of theoretical perspectives and explanations that bear on a particular event or phenomenon. In Toulmin's (1983:113) words, postempiricist coherence theory brings to bare "the range and scope of interpretive standpoints that have won a place." Along side quantitative analysis, the postempiricist orientation includes the historical, comparative, philosophical, and phenomenological perspectives. Quantitative empirical research, in the process, loses it privileged claim among modes of inquiry. Although it remains an important component of theory construction, it no longer offers the crucial test.

Whereas scientific policy-making has always been hostile to the “irrationalities” of political argumentation, those developing the “argumentative turn” have posited the argument itself as the basic unit of real-world policy-making and analysis. Policy becomes understood here as ‘crafted argument’ (Stone 1988). The goal of such postpositivist policy analysis shifts then to improving arguments through the illumination of the “contentious dimensions of policy questions, explaining the intractability of policy debates, identifying the defects of supporting arguments, and elucidating the political implications of contending prescriptions” (Hawkesworth 1988).

Policy analysis, from this perspective, is better defined as a ‘craft’ than as a science in the positivist understanding of the term. In this view, the professional policy analysts employ knowledge and skills acquired as much or more through imitation, experience, and practice than formal methodological training. The task of the policy analysis depends, as Majone (1989: 43–4) puts it, 'more on “knowing how” than “knowing that”'. Rather than a purely logical activity, following the social constructivist perspective, such policy-analytic work is a social process. The repertoire of craft knowledge and skills exercised by the analyst constitutes
procedures, conventions, and judgments that combine social, institutional, and personal factors. In deciding whether specific data is of acceptable quality the policy analyst “applies standards that derive from his own experience but also reflect the professional norms of teachers and colleagues, as well as culturally and institutionally determined criteria of adequacy” (Majone 1987).

Much of the experimental knowledge on which such judgments rest is often as tacit as it is explicit. Thus successful practice, as in the case of traditional crafts, depends on a highly personal knowledge on the part of the crafts-person of tools, materials, and tasks. Rather than dealing with materials such as stone or wood, the policy analyst as crafts-person, works with technical tools, data, concepts, and theories to structure evidence and arguments that support particular conclusions. Although the basic principles and precepts of the craft can never to fully spelled out, especially those that constitute a form of tacit knowledge based on experience, the good craftsman can generally determine good from bad work (Majone 1989: 66). In order to properly understand and appreciate these craft-oriented aspects of policy analysis and to be able to competently judge the quality of the end product, the analyst needs to learn how to explicate and explore the microstructures a policy argument. Such exploration of the activities of the policy analysis would be of little more than academic interest if it were enough to simply examine the policy-analytic conclusions against real-world outcomes. But complexity and uncertainty make it necessary to supplement outcome criteria with process criteria-oriented considerations. In the final analysis, a policy analysis has to be judged in terms of the nature of the problem, the context in which it is situated, the use of appropriate methods, the degree of uncertainty surrounding the related issues, and the like.
In this perspective the focus shifts to the policy argument and its features. In this regard, Majone (1989: 63) suggests that the structure of a policy argument can be understood as a complex blend of factual statements, interpretations, opinion, and evaluation. The function of the argument itself is to provide the links that connect the relevant data and information to the conclusions of an analysis. Beyond connecting data and information, from the postpositivist perspective, the policy argument has to also include and clarify the normative dimensions that intervene between findings and conclusions. The extension of this approach needs to establish the nature of the interconnections among the empirical data, normative assumptions that structure our understandings of the social world, the interpretive judgements involved in the data-collection process, the particular circumstances of a situational context (in which the findings are generated or the prescriptions applied), and the specific conclusions (Fischer 1995). The scientific acceptability of the conclusions depends ultimately on the full range of interconnections, not just the empirical findings.

Whereas neo-positivists see their approach as more rigorous and therefore superior to less empirical, less deductive methods, this model of policy argumentation actually makes the task more demanding and complex (McClosky 1994; Fischer 2003). Not only does it encompass the logic of empirical falsification, it includes the equally sophisticated normative questions within which it operates. The researcher still collects the data, but now has to situate or include them in the interpretive framework that gives them meaning. No longer is it possible to contend that such normative investigations can be ignored, as if they somehow relate to another field of inquiry. This involves a multi-methodological framework for integrating these component parts. In *Evaluating Public Policy* (Fischer 1995), I have outlined such a framework based on insights drawn from the informal logic of practical reason. In this model,
empirical finding are normatively explored in an interrelated set of normative contexts, from local, to societal and ideological, each with their own logical requirements.

Policy analysis, as deliberative craft, thus seeks to bring a wider range of contextually sensitive empirical and normative criteria to bear on the argument under investigation. As Hawkesworth (1988) explains, the reasons provided in support of alternative policy arguments organize evidence, marshal data, apply explanatory criteria, address multiple levels of deliberation, and employ various strategies of presentation. But the reasons given to support one theory over another seldom, if ever, offer definitive proof of the validity of a competing alternative. Through the processes of deliberation and debate, a consensus emerges among particular researchers concerning what will be taken as valid explanation. Although the choice is sustained by factual and normative reasons that can be articulated and advanced as support for the inadequacy of alternative interpretations, it is the practical judgment of the community of researchers and not the data themselves that establishes the accepted explanation. To be sure, the informal logic of practical reason cannot guarantee the eternal verity of particular conclusions, but the social rationality of the process is far from haphazard or illogical.

From this perspective, the role of the postpositivist expert is that of an interpretive mediator operating between the available analytical frameworks of social science and competing local perspectives, including the local situational knowledge of the relevant citizens. The dialectical exchange can be likened to a conversation in which the understandings of both the policy analyst and the citizens are extended through discursive interactions. Thus, exchanges among policy experts, citizens, and policymakers are restructured as a discussion with multiple voices. Recognizing the epistemic importance of these deliberative relationships, as well as the
importance of the citizen’s perspective, various writers advocate a bottom-up approach to policymaking and offers an approach for bringing together the relevant parties (Bogason 2000).

The task is to enlarge the range of political possibilities through a greater recognition of dialectics of contestation and its implications for expanding the spectrum choice, although the judgment of the analyst can never substitute for the choices of the political community. Postempiricism thus requires a participatory practice of democratic deliberation. “By encouraging policy-makers and citizens to engage in rational deliberation upon the options confronting the political community,” as Hawkesworth (1988:193) has put it, postempiricist analysis “can contribute to an understanding of politics which entails collective decision-making about a determinate way of life.”

The argumentative turn also emphasizes the productive capacities of deliberation—namely, its ability to generate ways of thinking and seeing that open new possibilities for problem-solving and action. Or in Habermas’s (1987) language, it focuses on “communicative power.” Well designed argumentative processes are seen to facilitate communicative competencies and thus citizen learning, which draws attention to the democratic potential of policy analysis. It thus extends Lasswell's earlier call for a “policy sciences of democracy”.

**DELIBERATIVE POLICY INQUIRY AS DIALECTICAL ARGUMENTATION: FROM THEORY TO METHODS**

From the kind of work outlined above, we can begin more practically to construct a new ways of thinking about and designing alternative argumentation-oriented inquiry systems for policy deliberation and decision-making. The starting point for such a system is the adoption of a dialectical understanding of inquiry and the recognition that the most
fundamental aspect of inquiry is the identification of ways of seeing (Lincoln and Guba 1989; Guba 1990; Fischer 2003). While the technical aspects of problem solving still have an important role to play in policy formulation and evaluation, even more significant from the perspective of dialectical argumentation is the way in which the actors see a particular problem and thus shape the issue agenda. In contemporary methodological vernacular, this is discussed in terms of problem framing. The process of framing is the basis for not only identifying the problem, but also for defining it. In this sense, the processes of framing predetermine the direction and nature of the technical analysis that might follow. From the argumentative perspective, then, inquiry has the broader function of enlightenment than the narrower problem-solving orientation traditionally associated with policy science.

The insight is not altogether new to the field of policy studies. Although working in a different context, Carol Weiss (1990) advanced the “enlightenment function” as the goal for policy analysis in an earlier critique of traditional policy analysis methods. In an effort to explain the failure of policy decision-makers to readily adopt the analyses of policy analysis, she argued that the contribution of much of the work was misunderstood. While it did not offer unquestioned policy solutions, namely the conventional goal of the discipline, it did supply enlightening perspectives to the relevant decision-makers. And in many ways, this contribution to the broader processes of deliberation and argument counts as much or more than the narrower focus on achieving administrative goal. This important insight makes clear that the limitations of rigorous scientific policy research in no way renders the enterprise useless. Although Weiss did not draw it out per se, her emphasis on enlightenment also implied alternative ways of seeing a problem, potentially introducing a phenomenological understanding of social and political reality. Based on this and other similar insights,
postpositivist policy analysis shifts the focus to the processes of policy argumentation. How does argumentation work? And how can it be better informed?

Once we stress different ways of seeing as the essential contribution of the enlightenment function, it becomes easier to recognize the dialectic role of conflict over empirical consensus in postpositivist inquiry. It is not that consensus is unimportant, but rather that it tends to operate more within normative frameworks than it works to open them up. This in turn facilitates the technical orientation that continues to dominate policy analysis. From the dialectical perspective, it is the clash of ideas that leads people to a deeper and potentially more enduring consensus, although the path to such consensus is generally longer and more time consuming. But such argumentative conflict takes the inquirers beyond an easy consensus based on conventional ways of view things, typically embedded in a given set of power relations and their discursive constructs.

A dialectical/argumentative approach, then, begins with the normative rather than the empirical task. Instead of fitting the norms and values into the empirical framework, the task is to test empirical findings within normative frameworks. In this view, normative-based analysis can be facilitated by an organized deliberation among competing normative positions. Designed to both identify potential conflicts or create consensus, the model emphasizes the interactive and productive role of communication in cognitive processes. Unlike the more abstract or academic modes of reason removed from the real world., the power of critical judgment depends on potential agreement with others. In fact, such judgment depends on, even anticipates, communication with others.

In such a scheme, policy analysts and decision-makers each take on the assignment of preparing arguments for and against particular policy positions. In the process, they spell out
their positions in the deliberation and leave the task of taking apart the arguments of those on
the opposing side, including the alternative empirical evidence used to support them. Such
policy argumentation begins with the realization that the policy analysts and decision-makers
do not have solid answers to the questions to be deliberated or even unambiguous methods for
obtaining the answers. They seek to organize the established data and fit it into the normative
frameworks that underline and support their own arguments. Each then confronts the other
with counter proposals, comparing the underlying assumptions and findings being used, both
normative and empirical. The grounds or criteria for accepting or rejecting a proposal is the
same grounds for accepting or rejecting a counterproposal and must be based on precisely the
same data. The goal is to synthesize the competing positions into a meaningful perspective
capable of generating a workable consensus. The problem posed by the absence of appropriate
evaluative criteria can be mitigated by designing rational procedures to govern the formal
communication between the various points of view that bear on the decision-making process.
Toward this end, some have suggested that legal courtroom procedures can offer insights into
the development of rules for governing such discursive policy deliberations (MacRae 1976).

In so far as the argumentative model reverses the analytical process--from the standard
task of fitting qualitative data about norms and values into an empirical model through
quantification to the process of judging the empirical data against a normative framework--the
central locus of the judgmental process is expanded from the expert community to include the
inquirers of the practical world of action. In this model, each participant would cite not only
what he or she take to be the relevant causal relationships, but also the norms, values, and
circumstances to support or justify a particular decision. The final outcome of evaluative
inquiry is determined by the giving of reasons and the assessment of practical arguments rather
than technical demonstration and verification. As in interpretive explanation generally, the valid interpretation is the one that survives the widest range of criticisms and objections. Such interpretive evaluations, as practical arguments, connect policy options and situations by illuminating the features of those situations that provide ground for policy decisions.

In this scheme, the formalized deliberation is itself seen as the most instructive part of the analytical process. The technique is designed to clarify the underlying goals and norms that give shape to competing positions, and enables qualitative judgment to be exercised in as unhampered a way as possible. The free exercise of normative judgment, released from the restrictions of the formal policy model, increases the chance of developing a synthesis of normative perspectives that can provide a legitimate and acceptable basis for decisions and actions based on the strongest possible argument. Even if analysts cannot agree, the argumentative approach provides a procedure for probing the normative implications of recommendations and for indicating potentially consensual conclusions that can offer productive ways to move forward. In the process, it also makes clear the basic points of dissensus that stand in the path of agreement.

A principal advantage of this approach is that it better informs the policy decision-making process than does traditional empirical policy analysis. It mirrors, in particular, the way real-world policy deliberation actually works. In politics, politicians and policy decision-makers advance proposals about what to do based on normative arguments. Empirical questions seldom drive the process in politics and policy. They come into play, to be sure. But they mainly do so when there are reasons to doubt factual aspects of the argument.

And here again there have been policy-relevant moves in this direction, mainly emerging in organization theory. The path-breaking but mainly neglected work of C. West
Churchman (1971) and his colleagues on dialectical inquiry systems for managerial decision-making is based on a dialectic understanding of deliberation. Unfortunately, this important line of theoretical work that has gotten lost in the return to traditional decision-practices in more conservative times, such as rational choice theory and “evidence-based policy making.”

The basic methodological observations are also found in work by George (1972) and Porter (1980) dealing with the task of organizing expertise advice in policy areas such as national security and economic policy-making at the presidential level. The basic assumption underlying what George calls ‘multiple advocacy’ is that a competition of ideas and viewpoints, rather than reliance on analyses and recommendations from advisors who share the perspectives of the policymakers, is the best method for developing security policy. As such, multiple advocacy is described as a process of debate and persuasion designed to expose the policymaker systematically to competing arguments made by the advocates themselves. Through the efforts of an “honest broker,” his approach attempts to ensure that all interested parties are genuinely represented in the adversarial process, and that the debate is structured and balanced.

These argumentative approaches represent important steps toward the development of a dynamic methodology designed to facilitate complex dialectical exploration of facts and values, empirical and normative inquiry, throughout the policy decision process (Mitroff 1971). At minimum, the work of these theorists go a considerable distance toward removing the ideological mask that has often shrouded policy analysis and the resultant expertise drawn from it. Like any step forward, however, it only brings us to the next set of hurdles. One of them has to do with the scope of participation. Although Churchman and his followers focus rather narrowly on managerial decision-making, such a communications approach would not need to
be confined to the interactions between organizational policy-makers and policy analysts. Ideally, it could be extended to the range of differing interests and political viewpoints drawn from the policy environment. Importantly, it is a consideration taken up by a major scientific organization in the United States, the National Research Council, an arm of the US Academy of Science.

**EXTENDING DELIBERATION: CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

Over the past decade or more there has been an increasing recognition of the need for deliberative interaction with the broader public in policy-analytic inquiry. An important sign of the extend of this development has been the National Research Council’s call for an “analytic-deliberative” method for bringing together a wider range of stakeholders. Although the Council focuses on policy issues related to science, technology, and the environment, it proposals are broadly applicable to policy analysis more generally. Specifically, the Council has taken the position that coping with technological and environmental risks requires “a broad understanding of the relevant losses, harms, or consequences to the interested and affected parties, including what the affected parties believe the risks to be in particular situations.” It thus becomes necessary to find ways to incorporate the perspectives of these groups into the processes of policy analysis and decision-making.

Toward this end, the organizations are counseled to make special efforts to ensure that the interested and affected parties find reasonable the basic analytic assumptions about risk-generating processes and risk estimate methods. Although recognized to often be time-consuming and cumbersome, at least in the near term, the Council argues that it is wiser “to err on the side of too-broad rather than too-narrow participation.” Organizations are advised “to
seriously assess the need for involvement of the spectrum of interested and affected parties at each step, with a presumption in favor of involvement.”

The methodological challenge is described as the need to develop “an analytic-deliberative method” capable of bringing together citizens and experts. Such a deliberative method is required to guide a participatory process capable of “broadly formulating the decision problem, guiding analysis to improve decision participants’ understanding, seeking the meaning of analytic findings and uncertainties, and improving the ability of interested and affected parties to participate effectively in the risk decision process” (National Research Council 1996). The process must have an appropriately diverse range of participation representing the spectrum of interested and affected parties, of decision makers, and of specialists in risk analysis at each stage of the process. Most important is the need for participation in the early stages of problem formulation.

In this view, analysis and deliberation are presented as complementary approaches to gaining knowledge about the world, forming understanding on the basis of knowledge, and reaching agreement among participants. Whereas analysis “uses rigorous, replicable methods, evaluated under the agreed protocols of an expert community,” deliberation is a process “in which participants discuss, ponder, exchange observations and views, reflect and attempt to persuade each other.” Deliberation, moreover, just doesn’t come at the end. It is important at each step of the process that informs decisions, from deciding which problems to analyze to how to describe scientific uncertainty and negotiate disagreement. Such structured deliberation contributes to sound analysis by adding knowledge and perspectives that improve understanding and contributes to the acceptability of problem characterization by addressing
potentially sensitive procedural concerns. As the Council puts it, “deliberation frames analysis, analysis informs deliberation, and the process benefits from the feed back from the two.”

For organizing such a deliberative process, the Council takes the additional step of advocating that organizations of reaching out with technical assistance to unorganized or inexperienced groups inexperience in matters of risk analysis and regulatory policy. As the Council puts it, “if some parties that are unorganized, inexperienced in regulatory policy, or unfamiliar with [the] related science are particularly at risk…it is worthwhile for responsible organizations to arrange for technical assistance to be provided to them from sources that they trust.” In this regard, the Council suggests that experts must at times assume the role of facilitators.

Such deliberation cannot, to be sure, be expected to end all controversy. It does not guarantee that policy decision makers will attend to the results of such deliberation, prevent disappointed participants from attempting to delay or walk away from the outcomes. Controversies, in this view, are seen as constructive in helping to identify weak points from which scientific expertise can benefit rather than merely as impediment in the path of expert decision-making. Not only do controversies encourage in--depth analysis to identify and explicate the social implications of a policy solution, they can also surface partly conflicting assessments of programs and policies that can then be further articulated and consolidated in the course of a controversy. In this view, the proper function of a controversy is the identification and evaluation of potential problems, that is, as an informal complement to conventional methods of policy analysis.

Examined against the Council’s earlier technocratic beginnings in risk analysis and management, this newer emphasis on public-oriented deliberation can only be judged as an
impressive advance. Although technocratic practices still remain dominant, the fact that many of the contemporary methods in technology policy analysis and risk assessment were initially influenced by the Council itself holds out hope for change, even if it only comes slowly and reluctantly. The acknowledgement of the centrality of participation and deliberation by this prestigious body should not be underestimated. In this regard, the shift of the Council from its earlier technocratic perspective to a deliberative-analytical model is important documentation of a move toward an argumentative approach to public policy.

But again the step forward brings us to the next issue. From a postpositivist perspective based on the findings of social constructivism, the question turns more specifically to the divide between empirical and normative deliberation. Must analytic work and normative deliberation remain separate, complementary processes? The challenge of postpositivism is to bring them into closer interaction with one another.

CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVE

Whereas the “analytic-deliberative” approach advanced by the National Research Council remains attached to conventional notions about science, in particular the epistemic division between the empirical and the normative inquiry, the postpositivist perspective seeks to move beyond this divide by opening up to critical scrutiny the practices of science itself. Of essential importance here is the fact that the normative elements lodged in the construction of empirical policy research rest on interpretive judgments and need to be made accessible for examination and discussion. Recognizing that the social meanings underlying policy research are always interpreted in a particular sociopolitical context--whether the context of an expert community, a particular social group, or society more generally--a fully developed postpositivist deliberative approach focuses on the ways such research and its findings are
themselves built upon normative social assumptions that, in turn, have implications for political decision-making. That is, they are embedded in the very understandings of the objects and relationships that policy science investigates. Indeed, the very construction of the empirical object to be measured is sometimes at times at stake.

For this reason, empirical policy science cannot exist independently of normative constructions. While introducing deliberation as a complement to the analytic process is an important advance over a narrow technical orientation, from the postpositivist perspective it can only be understood as a platform from which the next step can be taken. Beyond a complementary approach, deliberation has to be moved into the analytical processes as well. Beyond understanding empirical and normative inquiry as separate activities that can potentially inform one another, they need to be seen as a continuous process of inquiry along a deliberative spectrum ranging from the technical to the normative. As deliberation and interpretative judgment occur in both empirical and normative research, they need to be approached as two dimensions along a continuum.

It is important to concede that postpositivist policy inquiry enters here relatively uncharted territories. From a range of practical experiments, such as consensus conferences and citizen juries, it is evident that citizens are more capable of participating in deliberative processes than generally recognized. But questions about the extent of participation, as well as when and where it might be appropriate, pose complicated questions and thus need to assume a central place on the research agenda. Particularly challenging is the question of the degree to which citizens can actually engage in the analytic aspects of inquiry. Various research projects demonstrate that they can participate in at least parts of it, but where should we draw the line (Wildavsky 1997)? Reconceptualizing empirical and normative inquiry along an interpretive
continuum offers an approach for pursuing the answers to these questions. Elsewhere I have proposed that such investigation be taken up as a component of a new research specialization called “policy epistemic” (Fischer 2000).

The goal of policy epistemics would be to explore way in which the empirical/normative divide can be opened up to facilitate a closer, more meaningful deliberation among citizens and experts. As such, policy epistemics would focus on the ways people communicate across differences, the flow and transformation of ideas across borders of different fields, how different professionals groups and local communities see and inquire differently, and the ways in which differences become disputes. Following the lead of Willard (1996), it would take the “field of argument” as a unit of analysis. As polemical discussion, argumentation is the medium through which people--citizens, scientists, and decision-makers--maintain, relate, adapt, transform, and disregard contentions and background consenses.

Whereas traditional policy analysis has focused on advancing and assessing technical solutions, policy epistemics would investigate the way interpretive judgments work in the production and distribution of knowledge. In particular, it would examine the social assumptions embedded in research designs, the specific relationships of different types of information to decision-making, the uses of information, the different ways arguments move across different disciplines and discourses, the translation of knowledge from one community to another, and the interrelationships between discourses and institutions.

Elaborating our understanding of the epistemic dynamics of public controversies would allow for a more enlightened understanding of what is at stake in a particular dispute, including the evaluation of both competing viewpoints and the effectiveness of policy alternatives. In doing so, the differing, often tacitly held, contextual perspectives and values could be
juxtaposed, the viewpoints and demands of experts, special interests groups, and the wider public directly compared, and the discursive dynamics among the participants could be scrutinized. This would by no means side-line or even exclude scientific assessment; it would only situate it within the framework of a more comprehensive evaluation.

These are questions that underlie the kinds of concerns and problems that confront policy decision-makers and citizens. There is no shortage of literature illustrating the ways in which failures in policymaking are often attributable to simplistic technocratic understandings of the relationship of between knowledge and politics. It is just to these sorts of differing rationalities underlying citizens’ and experts responses to each other that policy epistemics would turn our attention. While such work would not need to absorb the energies of the field as a whole, it would become one of the important specializations in policy analysis. Those who engage in it could work to facilitate democracy while at the same time studying more specially the processes that are involved in attempting to extend it. Short of providing policy solutions per se, it would go considerable distance toward making an applied policy discipline more relevant to the needs and interests of both political decision-makers and the citizens. And not least important, as Rorty (1979) has put it, it would help us “keep the conversation going” (Rorty 1979).

REFERENCES

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