

# Should "Policy Science" Take the Stage?

(AN EDITORIAL)

Each social science has an aspect that may be called policy science. One can maintain that political science's only authentic and unambiguous mission is to synthesize these portions of social science. Moreover, it may be asserted that the next general task of political science should be to develop policy science.

The scope and method of policy science have been set forth most ably by Harold D. Lasswell, and indeed no one else seems to have used his concept fully. Some affirm that we have always studied public policy and little else. Others call the concept mere verbiage. And many empiricists feel uncomfortable in the presence of a thing so close to political ethics. It is notable that the book called *The Policy Sciences*, though valuable, is barely concerned with the study of the policy orientation. Moreover, we know of no courses that go by such a title.

Furthermore, it would appear strange to advocate policy science inasmuch as contemporary policy science is reacting against the old concentration upon public affairs. But the reaction has really been against legalism, against propaganda, against ethical confusion, against a lack of system, of science and of empiricism. Few would deny that public policy itself was a primary concern.

So the new policy science must begin with a belief that a level of method and theory have been reached that will permit a new preoccupation with policy to prosper without losing the values of science. Recent work on decision-making, the increased sophistication of elite theories, and the methods of case studies and sociology assure more substance to the policy approach.

The risks are great. We may not have the ability now to improve the state of policy science and may cause a general decline in science in the attempt. But the emphasis upon interest groups as sources of theory is wearying. What don't we know about them, and more important, are we in the least likely to find it out? Little fundamental fact and theory are coming from sample surveys *per se*: we need more and more data on people's habits, but it may be the policy science approach that would make best use of the data.

How policy is made seems broader than these subjects and probably is more important as potentially applied science. If we could say in operational language how public policy is made then we could do better toward its making. Political science could then become more like the master science that Aristotle claimed it to be. Its impact on society would be greater, its practitioners more influential, its students and devotees more numerous and intelligent.

It is not sheer ambition that supports this hope; there is some evidence that the respect with which a science's problems are treated determines the general accomplishments of the science as science. So went the career of theology and metaphysics, so went mechanics, both celestial and mundane, so have gone psychology and economics. Let no one be fooled by the romantic agony that summoned great literature from garrets: Byron, Proust, d'Annunzio, Gide, Joyce and O'Neill cut great swaths in life. They had coteries and petticoats, fame and fortune sufficient unto the occasion.

To think that political science will become great if only because it is held in contempt and cares for problems no one is interested in is to fall victim to the beatnik *weltanschauung*. "Until philosophers are kings, or kings . . . have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils. . . ."