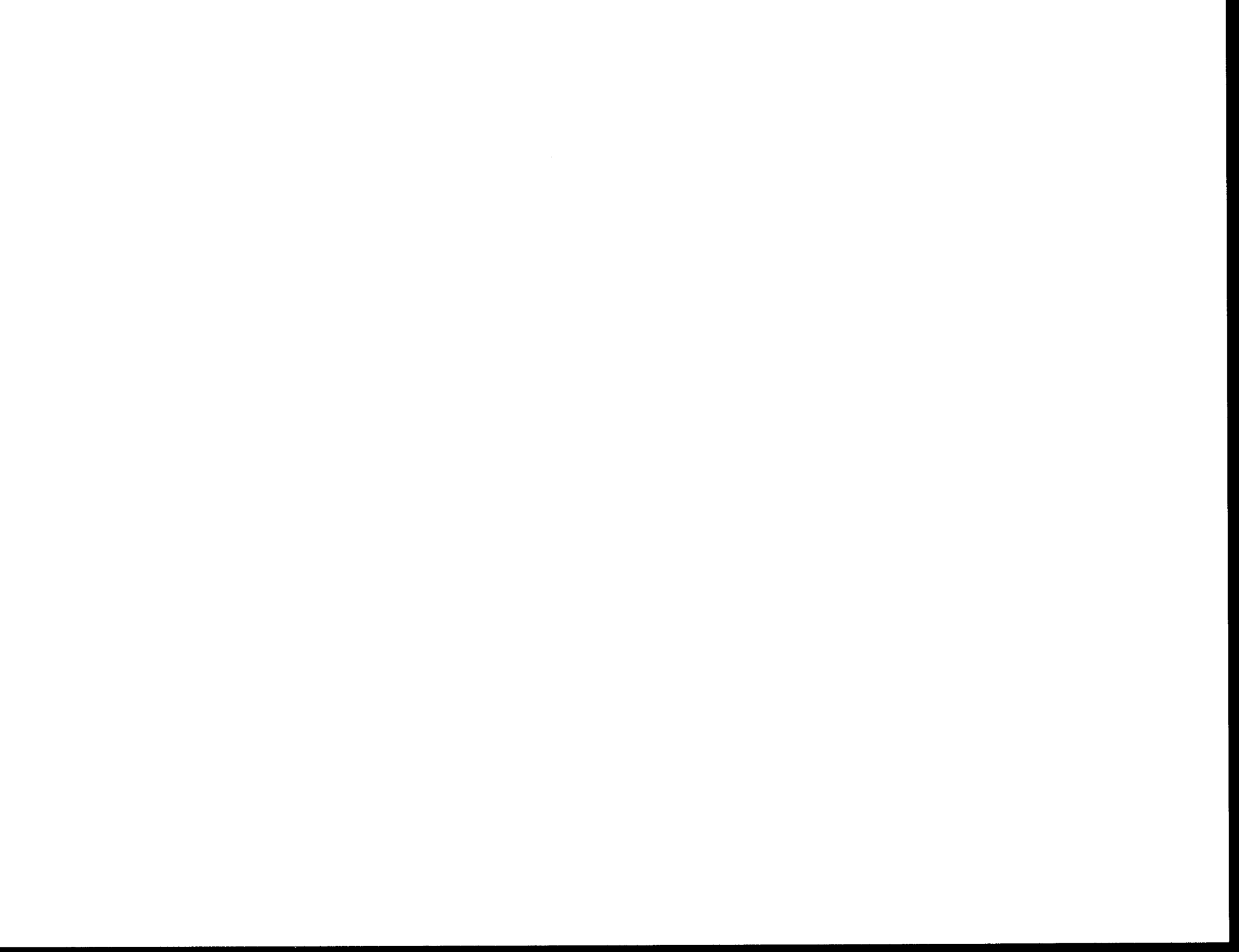


☆
The Manning J. Dauer
Prize Winner 1988
☆

**Philosophical Critiques
of Policy Analysis:
Lindblom, Habermas,
and the Great Society**

Lance deHaven-Smith

University of Florida Press
Gainesville



Preface

THIS BOOK BEGAN as a reaction to my experiences in graduate school at Ohio State University. During my years at OSU, the political science department suffered from a rift, which was common at that time throughout the discipline, between behavioralists and theorists. Although I wandered into the middle of this conflict more or less by accident because of my interest in both traditional theory and public policy, I found that I was unable to maintain any sort of intellectual integrity unless I addressed the issues dividing the two camps. Hence by roughly my second year of graduate school I had taken on the project that has culminated in this book, namely, showing how political theory can be useful in the evaluation of public policy. Little did I know then that this effort would take so long and prove so difficult.

The main impediment I experienced was my own slowness in recognizing that the subject matter of policy analysis is a theory-dependent construct rather than a bundle of self-evident actions and effects. I should have known this after reading the works of Kuhn, Feyerabend, Toulmin, and others in the philosophy of science, but I was misled by my education in the methodology of policy research. The standard approach to policy analysis rests implicitly on a military model which has been inappropriately applied to the evaluation of social programs. Policy analysts speak of "target groups," "delivery systems," and "impacts" because much of their methodology was developed during the 1960s for use in choosing between alternative weapons systems. However, policy and the effects of policy are not obvious things which leap out to the quantifying observer like airplanes, bomb craters, and bodies. Policy is better conceived as a multifaceted effort to mitigate complicated social problems, the causes of which are subject to dispute, than as some sort of projectile aimed at a "target" population.



As straightforward as this conclusion now seems to me, I reached it only through fits and starts as I tried to develop a political-theoretical methodology for policy analysis. I began, in my dissertation at OSU, with the position that narrowly focused policy research could provide crucial tests for choosing between conflicting political theories. In certain respects, this premise proved fruitful. Using the theories developed by Charles Lindblom in *Politics and Markets* and Jürgen Habermas in *Legitimation Crisis*, I analyzed a small employment program for Vietnam-era veterans and found that the theories led me to consider potential program impacts that I would have overlooked if I had used the standard, atheoretical methodology of policy analysis.

However, despite the value of the dissertation as a learning experience, the methodology it proposed did not really satisfy me, for two reasons. First, I was troubled by the argument made in the policy literature that social and political theory are politically impractical. The literature claimed that policy evolves incrementally as programs are adjusted to correct obvious problems, and yet the analytic approach that I was advocating addressed questions about the overall design of the political-economic system.

Second, I suspected that the methodology could not produce evidence to support an informed choice between conflicting political theories. Although at this point I did not fully understand the difficulty of the task, I was certain that the methodology proposed in the dissertation did not go far enough. The presupposition was that findings from a single program could serve as the basis for conclusions about perennial issues in political theory. This, though, failed to resolve how to deal with the normal pattern in policy research (and science) of having observations from a multitude of projects. Can pluralism or critical theory be seriously challenged by the results of a single program? Probably not. If, then, many instances or tests are required, how are we to tally the score when judging conflicting theories?

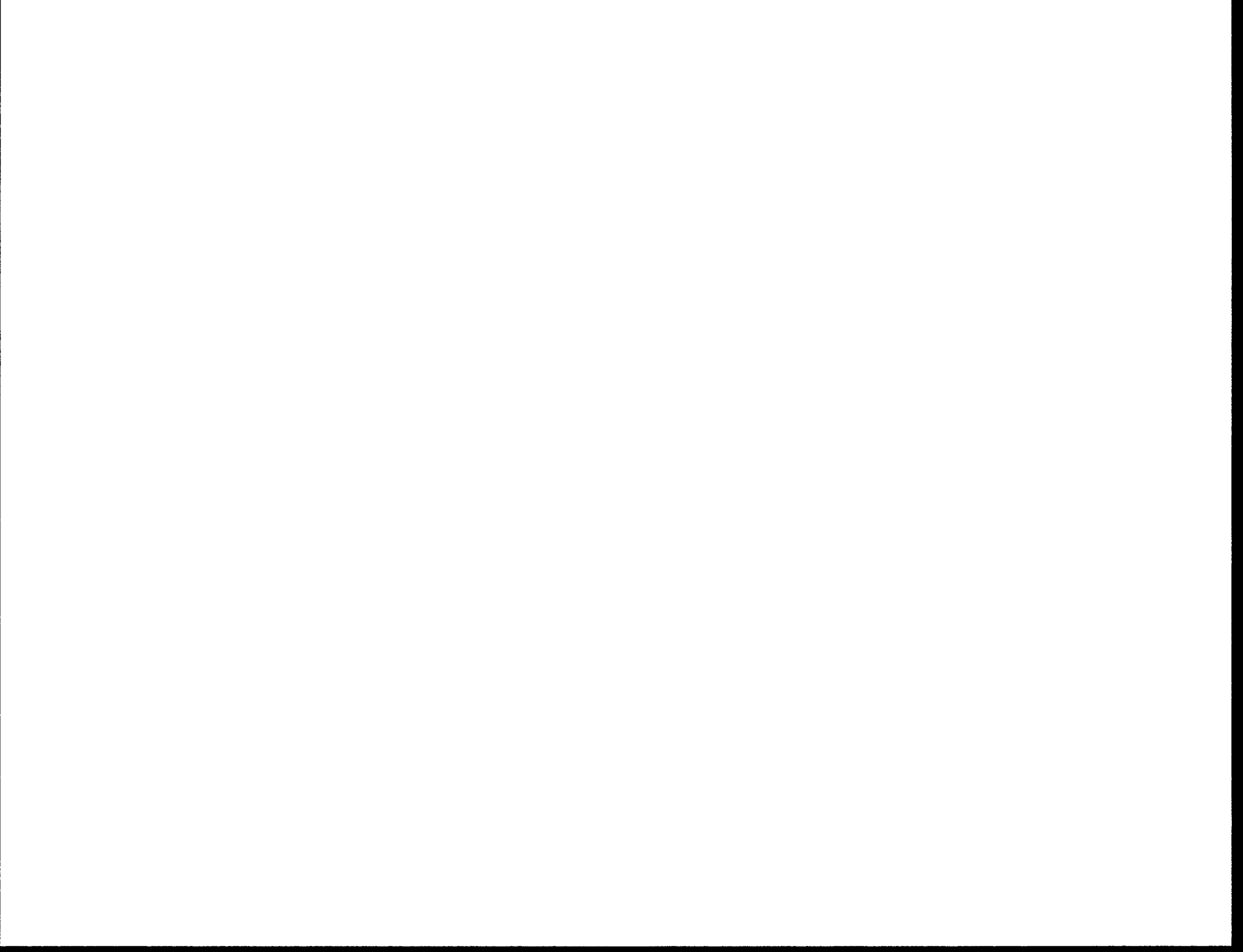
To deal with these weaknesses in the methodology, I decided to analyze policy at a different level. Rather than limiting the research to individual programs, I proposed analyzing "policy frameworks"

such as the New Deal, the Great Society, and the Reagan Revolution. This position was presented in a paper co-authored by Randall B. Ripley (deHaven-Smith and Ripley, 1984).

The shift from individual programs to policy frameworks addressed my concerns about political practicality by changing the research audience. The narrow focus of most policy analysis presupposes that our audience is mid-level legislators and program administrators, but it is not at all clear that this is who we should be advising. My own view is that the political process includes a number of groups who affect policy—notably the electorate, organized interests, and top leaders in government. Political theory may not be particularly relevant to mid-level legislators and bureaucrats, but it has a great deal to say to these other groups.

With respect to my methodological concerns, a focus on policy frameworks helped in the effort to choose between conflicting theories by allowing me to consider the overall weight of the evidence rather than isolated findings. This approach itself would turn out to have problems, but it was an improvement over my initial position, which focused on individual programs. A weight-of-the-evidence strategy required that a domain of inquiry be delineated that, while larger than a single program, was nevertheless limited. Otherwise, the weight of the evidence at any given time was always open to the addition of new facts that might tip the scales in a different direction. The policy frameworks discussed in everyday politics limited the range of programs to be evaluated so that closure was possible in efforts to assess contending theories.

I did not realize the problems entailed by this approach until, in the early stages of writing this book, I began analyzing the Great Society. All along, I had been clinging to empiricist presuppositions that I now believe are highly questionable. My initial approach, which focused on a single program, sought theoretical import by identifying points of disagreement between theories and using policy impacts as a "critical test." Broadening the domain of inquiry to include all of the evidence from a given policy framework simply applied a "critical test" model to multiple programs. By the "weight of the evidence" I meant which of two conflicting political theories



was correct most often in those instances where the theories implied contradictory, or at least dissimilar, hypotheses. But—and here is the problem—if the object-domain is distilled down to include only those points where the theories touch or overlap, the most interesting findings will often be left out. One theory will bring to light one set of findings, and another theory will unearth an entirely different set, but the evidence pertinent to their theoretical disputes will be minimal.

At this point I shifted to my current position. I now believe that political theories give us templates for identifying society-wide “impacts” that extend far beyond program participants. Efforts to choose between theories, while important because they stimulate debate, will always be tentative because theories can be reformulated, the importance attached to different public problems can shift, and evidence can be added or reinterpreted. Realistic objectives for policy analysis are to be cognizant of theoretical issues and to target research where it will be most fruitful at any given time.

I appreciate very much the comments and suggestions I received as I worked on the manuscript. Special thanks go to five colleagues: Randall B. Ripley of Ohio State University, Robert J. Huckshorn of Florida Atlantic University, Charles E. Lindblom of Yale University, Richard Weiner of the University of North Florida, and an anonymous reviewer for the University of Florida Press. In particular, Professor Weiner provided invaluable advice on how I should present my argument, and without him I could not have gotten the book into its final form. I would also like to thank Linda Adams and Ann Cannon for their work in typing the manuscript and helping prepare it for publication. Finally, I am grateful to the staff of the University of Florida Press, whose encouragement sustained me through some difficult times in the publication process.

Chapter 1 Problems of Analysis in the Great Society

POLICY SCIENCES, championed three decades ago by Harold Lasswell (1951) to study changes in the institutional order, are now an accomplished fact, but not in anything near the form that Lasswell envisaged. Most policy research focuses on individual programs and simply assesses whether they achieve policy makers' narrow programmatic objectives.¹ Approaches grounded in comprehensive social and political theory have been rejected because they are supposed to address issues of little interest to legislators and administrators (Truman, 1968; Gans, 1971; Coleman, 1972; Ravenal, 1974).

This book is an attempt to show that policy analysts made a serious mistake when they omitted comprehensive theory from their enterprise. My thesis is that policy analysis without broad, philosophical frames of reference is blind to the most important policy impacts. I make this argument by examining the Great Society from four different perspectives: the cultural theory of poverty on which the Great Society was based; the welfare dependency and supply side theories of the Reagan administration; the pluralist theory of Charles Lindblom; and the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas.² My aim in beginning with interpretations found in national politics and then moving to analyses developed from comprehensive social and political theories is to show that abstract philosophical perspectives provide insights about public policy that narrower viewpoints overlook.

I selected the Great Society as the topic of analysis because to this day it remains controversial. Charles Murray (1984) has written recently that antipoverty programs were self-defeating because, in effect, they paid people to be poor. John Schwarz (1983), on the other hand, says that the Great Society is “America's hidden suc-



cess" in dealing with social problems. These same conflicting perspectives are also evident in debates surrounding the Reagan Revolution, which dismantled many of the programs established in the 1960s and '70s. Supporters of the Reagan policies see Great Society programs as impediments to the economic prosperity which in their view is the only real solution to poverty; opponents of the Reagan Revolution claim that antipoverty programs are needed to maintain equality of opportunity and assure that the benefits of the economy are shared by everyone (Palmer and Sawhill, 1982).

The Same Facts, Different Conclusions

For policy analysts, the failure to resolve this debate over the Great Society should be very puzzling. Because it coincided with the emergence of policy analysis, the Great Society was studied more thoroughly than any other set of policies in history. Individual programs were evaluated with rigorous methodologies, large-scale experiments were conducted on a variety of alternative approaches to the problem of poverty, and the level and distribution of poverty were tracked carefully over time. In some instances, more money was spent on research than on the programs being examined. Given the vast body of information developed from policy research, why does this disagreement over the Great Society persist?

Although other explanations are possible (cf. Aaron, 1978; Nathan, 1986), in my view the disagreement continues principally because the findings provided by policy research are too crude and atheoretical to resolve the issues in question. Evidence from narrowly focused research on program performance is indecisive in political debates because it can be, and is, interpreted in many different ways.

Consider the debate over income transfers and social services. There is almost complete agreement on the evidence, and yet welfare is one of the central issues over which defenders and critics of the Great Society are divided.

No one disputes that welfare undermines work motives among at least a part of the labor force, but liberals and conservatives interpret this fact quite differently. Schwarz (1983, p. 40) says that it is a small problem because the disincentive is limited to a very narrow segment of the population: "it is most likely to be experienced by those Americans who remain at or near the poverty level even when holding down full-time jobs." For Murray (1984, pp. 184-85), on the other hand, welfare's work disincentives are of overriding importance *precisely because* they are concentrated on the working poor:

One may approve or disapprove of Food Stamps and Medicaid and housing assistance, but one result was inevitable. . . . Pride in independence was compromised, and with it a certain degree of pressure on the younger generation to make good on the family tradition.

More importantly, working people who made little money lost the one thing that enabled them to claim social status. For the first time in American history, it became socially acceptable within poor communities to be unemployed, because working families too were receiving welfare.

Hence, whereas Schwarz says that welfare helped millions of people, Murray concludes that it destroyed "status rewards" for the working class and, ultimately, the work ethic of new generations.

The conflict between these perspectives is also immune to data on the duration of welfare participation, specifically in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Just as he discounted the problem of work disincentives, Schwarz (1983, p. 42) sees the problem of welfare dependency as minor.

Critics contend that long-term welfare dependency frequently develops in [welfare] families. However, AFDC actually experiences a very high turnover. One study reports that 75 percent of all AFDC cases close within three years; another puts the figure at 60 percent.



Gilder (1981, p. 150), one of the intellectual architects of the Reagan Revolution, agrees with Schwarz's observation, but he casts it in a different light:

As serious as existing welfare problems may seem, they are dwarfed by the potential crisis. At present, even among the actual AFDC clients, only one-fifth have actually capitulated to the entire syndrome of the welfare culture. Only 20 percent accept the dole as a more or less permanent way of life. That 20 percent, though, takes 60 percent of the money.

Thus for Schwarz the turnover in AFDC is a source of consolation, but for Gilder it means that the problem of "welfare dependency" may become overwhelming. Like optimists and pessimists looking at the same proverbial glass of water, they reach very different conclusions.

Even the so-called feminization of poverty cannot resolve the welfare issue. Over the past fifteen years, poverty has become increasingly concentrated among households headed by females.³ For welfare's defenders, this means that income supports and social services are needed now more than ever, because female heads of households, particularly those with young children, cannot be expected to earn enough to support their families. "Simply put," say Bawden and Palmer of the Urban Institute (1984, p. 198), "the problem is that a growing majority of the poor are in households that benefit little from economic growth." However, Murray asks (1984, p. 32):

What are causes and what are effects? Did reductions in poverty create a new profile of the poor (in effect, weeding out the two-parent families), or did poor people start to behave differently with regard to marriage and divorce?

In Murray's view welfare caused the feminization of poverty by undermining the recipients' family structure, and hence he advocates the elimination of welfare rather than its continuation or expansion.

In short, the facts on program performance do not speak for themselves. Those who base their arguments on findings about the short-term impacts of government programs quickly become victims of misplaced certitude. The findings from most research on public policy admit of many interpretations, and partisan analyses like those of Schwarz, Murray, Gilder, and others stand on shifting ground.

Framing the Possibilities

When evaluating public policies, analysts inevitably place the facts in a context of alternative possibilities. We can see this quite clearly in the debate over income and in-kind transfers. For a defender of welfare, it is impossible to have a society with acceptable jobs for everyone. In Schwarz's words (1983, p. 39):

The government's [welfare] programs were vital in fighting poverty because the private sector was itself incapable of making more than a marginal dent in poverty among the millions of Americans who remained trapped with the weaker economic groups, either too old to get work or channeled into dead-end jobs that often paid little more than half-time wages for full-time work.

For the opponents of welfare, precisely the opposite is true: it is impossible to provide significant amounts of welfare without doing more harm than good. In Gilder's words (1981, pp. 147-48):

Any welfare system will extend and perpetuate poverty if its benefits exceed prevailing wages and productivity levels in poor communities. As long as welfare is preferable (as a combination of money, leisure, and services) to what can be earned by a male provider, the system will tend to deter work and undermine families.

Liberals and conservatives do not disagree about the effects of wel-



fare on work motives, the amount of turnover in AFDC, or the feminization of poverty. They disagree about the possible ways in which poverty can be handled, and this disagreement shapes their interpretation of the facts.

The same principle applies to evaluations of the Great Society as a whole. The issues dividing the Great Society's critics and defenders center on the various forms of society that are considered to be possible or achievable. The policy framework itself was premised on a theory that looks at policy from a historical perspective and points to a future where poverty will have been eliminated. In contrast, the theory guiding the Reagan Revolution focuses on existing, modern industrial societies and concludes that a certain amount of poverty is inevitable. These conflicting conceptions of the sociopolitical possibilities are based on different views of human nature and lead to different conclusions about political strategy, the proper role of government, and the appropriate criteria for interpreting the Great Society's results.

The Historical Perspective

The historical perspective underlying the Great Society was implicit in President Johnson's speech to Congress announcing his new initiative (quoted in Levitan and Taggart, 1976, p. 3):

We stand at the edge of the greatest era in the life of any nation. For the first time in world history, we have the abundance and the ability to free every man from hopeless want, and to free every person to find fulfillment in the works of his mind or the labor of his hands.

Even the greatest of all past civilizations existed on the exploitation of the misery of the many.

This nation, this people, this generation, has man's first chance to create a Great Society.

In this call to action, President Johnson has divided history crudely into the past, the present, and the future. The present differs from the past in having "the abundance and the ability to free every man

from hopeless want," and the future that beckons differs from the present in offering every person the opportunity "to find fulfillment in the works of his mind or the labor of his hands."

Underlying this image of history is a conception of human nature and culture. As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, the Great Society assumed that the poor are trapped within a pathological "culture of poverty," an ambitionless culture developed in response to misery and limited opportunities. The unstated corollary of this thesis is that the rest of the public has a culture characterized by achievement orientations and commitments to democratic norms. The intent of the Great Society was to remove the poor from their misery so that they would adopt the culture of the larger society and join the economic, educational, and political competition.

This premise that the society has a stable and enduring (albeit in some instances not fully distributed) culture has implications for practical politics, substantive policy, and policy evaluation. With respect to politics, it leads to a strategy of reminding the public of the nation's ideals. When reading the 1964 *Economic Report of the President* (hereafter cited as *ERP*), which presented the theoretical foundations of the Great Society, one is struck by its moralistic tone (p. 78):

The nation's attack on poverty must be based on a change in national attitude. We must open our minds and eyes to the poverty in our midst. Poverty is not the inevitable fate of any man. The condition can be eradicated; and since it can be, it must be. It is time to renew our faith in the worth and capacity of all human beings; to recognize that, whatever their past history or present conditions, all kinds of Americans can contribute to their country; and to allow Government to assume its responsibility for action and leadership in promoting the general welfare.

The purpose of this moralistic appeal was to generate "an aroused public conscience" (*ERP*, 1964, p. 77). Government was seen as responsible "for action and leadership" in renewing "our faith in the



worth and capacity of all human beings." To address the culture of poverty, the culture of the nation had to be mobilized.

The theory's policy implications concern the relationship between politics and economics. The assumption that the nation has a culture that is independent of politics and that can be counted on when trying to mobilize support for new initiatives is also part and parcel of the Great Society's premise that government can intervene in the economy without disrupting economic activity. The Great Society assumed that government could function as a sort of economist writ large, as a technician who adapts the labor force to available jobs and stimulates consumer purchasing power. Welfare could be expanded without undermining the work motives of the general population because, supposedly, most workers have a work ethic that does not yield to small economic incentives.

The implication for policy analysis is that the impacts of anti-poverty programs will not extend beyond the poverty population at which they are aimed. The central questions for research are, did the government's resources reach the poor, did the culture of the poor become more achievement oriented, and, if so, did the poor benefit from their increased effort. Again, the assumption is that, because of their relatively pleasant situation and wide-ranging opportunities, the middle and upper classes have a stable culture oriented toward upward mobility. In theory, this dominant culture would not be affected by modest programs aimed at helping the poor.

The Comparative Perspective

The alternative approach used by the Reagan administration of framing the political and economic possibilities by comparing different types of modern industrial societies is evident in the 1982 *Economic Report of the President* (p. 27):

Political freedom and economic freedom are closely related. Any comparison among contemporary nations . . . demonstrates two important relationships between the nature of the political system and the nature of the economic system:

- All nations which have broad-based representative government and civil liberties have most of their economic activity organized by the market.
- Economic conditions in market economies are generally superior to those nations (with a comparable culture and a comparable resource base) in which the government has the dominant economic role.

In this brief analysis, modern industrial societies are classified according to whether or not they have most of their economic activity "organized by the market." Those that do are said to have "generally superior" economic conditions and "broad-based representative government and civil liberties." Presumably, those societies whose economic activity is centrally directed have poorly functioning economies and repressive, undemocratic governments.

The belief that government intervention in the economy has major effects on economics and politics is based on an economic conception of human nature which leaves little room for notions of cultural development or inertia. People are thought of as driven by economic incentives and disincentives. This view is stated clearly in the thesis that the poor manipulate the welfare system to maximize their benefits and avoid work.

As with the historical theory of the Great Society, the comparative theory of the Reagan Revolution has practical, substantive, and analytical implications. The practical implication is that policy makers must appeal, not to the public conscience, but to the electorate's economic rationality. When Ronald Reagan was debating President Carter during the 1980 presidential campaign, he did not rely on the electorate's potential concerns about the poor; rather, he pointed to voters' personal, economic situation. "Are you better off today," he asked, "than you were four years ago?" Similarly, once in office President Reagan sought to develop public support for his budget cuts by making a slew of cuts all at once and packaging them with tax reductions. This strategy assumed that voters would be assessing how the overall budget affected them personally in economic terms. As the 1982 *Economic Report of the President* ex-



plained (p. 46): "If enough cuts can be made simultaneously, most individuals may recognize that, while they may lose from cuts in a specific program, they gain enough from cuts in other programs and in lower taxes to compensate for their losses."

The substantive implication of an economic conception of human nature is that government intervention into the economy will be counterproductive. In theory, efforts to adjust the economy's performance by stimulating consumer demand will not work because the public does not have a set of habits and goals that are firm and enduring. To the contrary, the public will anticipate future policies and change its behavior, thus making efforts to fine-tune the economy backfire. This premise was the basis in part for the Reagan administration's explanation of stagflation: "Stop and go" fiscal and monetary policies produce "inflationary expectations." Consistency and stability are required for policy to be effective.

In analyzing the Great Society, this theory shifts the focus from the poor to the near poor. The hypothesis is that everyone is motivated by economic incentives and trade-offs. If this is true, welfare and social programs will entice the working poor to quit their jobs, because, given their low earnings, these individuals will experience a net gain in income and leisure by becoming eligible for government transfers. Moreover, as taxes are increased to pay for the expansion in welfare necessitated by the withdrawal of the near poor from the labor force, incentives and disincentives will shift and additional people will be attracted to enter poverty. If the process is allowed to continue indefinitely, welfare could destroy the entire social order. Thus, from this perspective the central question for research is what effect did the Great Society's programs have on the work orientations of people just above the poverty line.

At this point, we can begin to see why data from policy research on program performance does not resolve the debate over the Great Society: different theories provide different criteria for selecting and interpreting the evidence. Conservatives believe that the behavior of workers and employers changes rapidly in response to market incentives. Consequently, in evaluating the Great Society they zoom in on income and in-kind transfers and their effects on labor

force entry. That welfare undermined work motives is for them the single most important fact about the Great Society, a fact that stands out from all the other findings. Liberals, on the other hand, believe that we are entering a new age which has the abundance to provide a fulfilling life for everyone. For them the question of relevance is not whether social programs undermined work motives, but whether and to what extent social programs alleviated deprivation. Hence, in their analysis the work disincentives of welfare are shifted to the background and the reductions in poverty associated with income transfers move to center stage. When liberals and conservatives look at the data on program performance, they literally see different things.

Theory-Based Approaches to Policy Analysis

The conclusion we have just reached is not surprising. Many scholars have critiqued the prevailing methodology of policy research by showing that it is insensitive to theoretical issues (for example, see MacRae, 1971; Tribe, 1972; Lowi, 1973; Feldman, 1976; Anderson, 1979). The real difficulty resides not in explicating the theoretical origins of disputes over public policy but in devising an approach to policy research that offers hope for resolving the issues thus uncovered. In the chapters ahead, several proposed strategies will be examined.

One idea for bringing theoretical questions into policy analysis is to treat programs as if they were tests of policy makers' theories or unstated assumptions. This strategy can be traced to Karl Popper, who argued in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1966; first published in 1944) that workaday government activities are actually "piecemeal social experiments." Popper urged social scientists and politicians to use these experiments as an opportunity to develop "an empirical social technology" (pp. 162-63, 291). Today this viewpoint is probably the dominant position of academics in the field of policy studies. It is advocated by such luminaries as Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley (1963), Randall B. Ripley



(1977), and Richard Nathan (1986). The theory-testing model of policy research involves explicating policy makers' assumptions about the problems they are trying to solve, developing hypotheses about program impacts that would be expected on the basis of these assumptions, and then conducting research to see if the predicted impacts occur.

In the next chapter we shall apply this approach to the Great Society and find that it has a serious inadequacy. Specifically, in cases where programs or sets of programs fail to produce their expected impacts, findings from the theory-testing model can always be explained away—as due not to faulty theory but to inadequate funding, poor implementation, improper research, or any number of factors. Thus, an approach that aims at testing policy premises offers little hope for resolving political disputes.

A second proposal is to treat programs as social experiments not for testing just one theory but for choosing between two or more *conflicting* theories. Recognizing that analysts with different perspectives will evaluate the same program in different ways, advocates of this theory-comparison approach see policy research as a means for bringing clashing viewpoints into contact with each other and resolving the conflict with evidence. For example, Alice Rivlin (1974, p. 1) has encouraged policy analysts to assess alternative premises about the “type of activity the central government should undertake”—what she calls “policy strategies.” In a somewhat different vein, Peter G. Brown (1976) has advocated examining programs from a variety of partisan perspectives to assure that different points of view are covered.

We shall try this strategy in chapter 3 and find that it, too, has serious weaknesses. One problem is the difficulty, if not impossibility, of designing research that yields definitive results vis-à-vis conflicting theories. Evidence is always subject to interpretation, and the fact that multiple theories are involved only complicates the matter. Second, even if this first problem is overcome, there remains the possibility that the issues found in politics may themselves be too limited. Despite their many disagreements, advocates of the Reagan Revolution and defenders of the Great Society agree in en-

dorsing the main elements of America's political and economic system, and yet it is certainly possible that the accepted objectives of public policy cannot be achieved without fundamental revisions to the nation's institutions. In short, a strategy of designing research to choose between the conflicting theories found in national politics is open to the charge of having limited vision.

This consideration has led to a third proposal. Although it has not yet been developed in detail, the general idea is to design policy research to evaluate political ideologies and political-economic systems. For example, Sjoberg (1975) advocates developing a “countersystems analysis” where the existing social order is contrasted with a “utopian model” so that researchers can transcend “the inherent tensions between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.” Similarly, Fischer (1980, p. 194) says that policy analysts must assess “ideological systems” because such systems sometimes “produce policies that are politically acceptable but fail to work.” Likewise, Jantsch (1970) calls for analysts to forecast the futures that will follow from different institutional arrangements. He seems to have in mind a futurology linked to current political issues.

I believe that the strategy suggested by Sjoberg, Fischer, and Jantsch is on the right track, but two problems must be overcome for it to be workable. First, methods must be developed for determining what types of political-economic systems are possible and which ones would best achieve our shared values. Otherwise, countersystems analysis, ideological critique, and political futurology rest largely, if not entirely, on the particular preferences of the analyst. The second area where more thought is needed involves political practicality. Philosophers and social theorists interested in policy research have not yet shown that they have something to offer to citizens and policy makers dealing with mundane problems.

My own view is that both of these problems can be solved simultaneously by introducing critical theory and pluralism into the analytical enterprise. In chapters 4 through 7 we shall explore the different ways in which Lindblom and Habermas lead us to evaluate the Great Society. They identify factors that in theory can be manipulated to move through a spectrum of alternative forms of

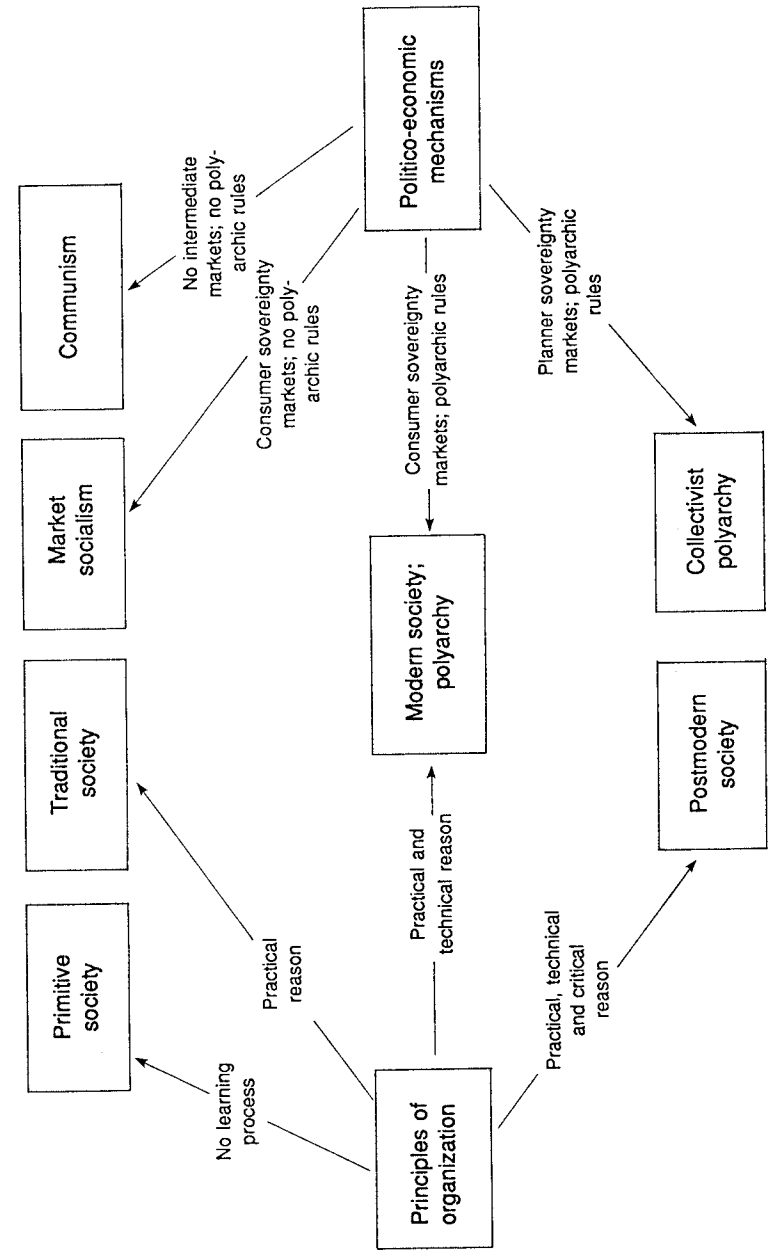


social organization (fig. 1-1). Each of their conceptions of the societal possibilities is like a transparency that can be superimposed on American politics to locate crucial aspects of public policy and trace their effects on the overall society. It is in this latter capacity that the theories offer important new insights and also validate, or fail to validate, their premises. The persuasiveness of each theory depends not so much on its being able to withstand empirical testing but on its ability to show us impacts from the Great Society that otherwise we would have failed to see.

Lindblom argues that the key to altering the scope and nature of public problems is "politico-economic mechanisms," that is, property rights and constitutional rules that determine the strength of government relative to the private sector. In his view, a minor change in politico-economic mechanisms will cause major changes in politics and culture. From this perspective, the most important programs of the Great Society were civil rights laws that altered the balance between government and business. Lindblom's theory allows us to see that the impacts of these programs extended far beyond the groups they were designed to benefit. Not only did civil rights laws expand the employment opportunities and political participation of racial and ethnic minorities; they altered the terms of discourse in American politics, led to the political mobilization of women, homosexuals, senior citizens, and other groups experiencing discrimination, and had profound, positive effects on the public's tolerance of racial and social differences.

Whereas Lindblom directs our attention to the effects of the Great Society on the public's political demands, Habermas turns our focus to the conditions surrounding the policy framework's formulation and evolution. Habermas argues that the driving force in history is an expectation, built into the nature of language, that norms, laws, and institutions will serve the interests of the entire population and not just those of a special group. In his view, policy makers in capitalist societies are having to fend off this expectation by simultaneously correcting some of the inequities of the market, denying that they have control over people's economic circumstances, and defending the market as an equitable allocator of in-

Figure 1-1. Alternative Forms of Society Delineated by Lindblom and Habermas





come. From this perspective, analysts are led to examine what policy makers said and did as the policy framework was developed. Habermas allows us to see that, even though policy makers consistently claimed they were simply providing "a hand and not a hand-out," the Great Society actually became a massive system of social services and income supports.

Of course, the novel observations derived from Lindblom's and Habermas's theories do not provide definitive conclusions about the nature of poverty or the appropriate antipoverty policy. In chapter 8 we shall consider the issue of how to design policy research so that it is of assistance to citizens and legislators in choosing between conflicting social and political theories. By then it will be clear that the kinds of theoretical issues raised by Lindblom and Habermas cannot be avoided. Indeed, we shall see that the prevailing approach to policy analysis is itself premised on a particular conception of politics, political practicality, and public problems. It could not be otherwise, for methodological principles about what phenomena to investigate, how to design research, and who to address with the findings, necessarily rest on substantive assumptions.

