

## Theory, Ideology and Social Policy

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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

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## FOREWORD

The central feature of being part of an academic environment is the development and exchange of ideas. The seminar series at the Social Welfare Research Centre provides opportunities for scholars and practitioners to report data and seek explanations and exchange ideas in a spirit of challenge and contest. The variation of presentation style and ideological content is immense and all contribute to the learning process.

Seminars are often intermediate steps between first thoughts and final productions, and in this seminar delivered in the SWRC on June 1, 1982 Robert Pinker builds on a plenary paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Social Administration Association at the University of Leeds on July 14, 1981. It will ultimately appear as a chapter in a book to be published by Heinemann Educational Books. The SWRC was extremely fortunate to hear this paper from Robert Pinker, who is Professor of Social Work Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The delivery showed fine craftsmanship and provided a formidable challenge.

Many readers will not agree with Professor Pinker's passionate plea for the middle ground. In an attempt to free the discipline of Social Administration from the normative straitjacket of twenty years ago, Pinker rejects both free market liberalism and Marxism as ideological and operational solutions to social policy development on the grounds that any transition would involve irreparable damage to our present society (while many, of course, would argue that it is precisely what is needed!) and massive diswelfares in general. In social science, he argues, we should reject the "vice of indifference, which is the extreme of impartiality, and the vice of ideological commitment, the extreme of concern", and steer a middle course. This paper which attempts to relate theory and ideology in social welfare has elements of challenge, disagreement and debate - the characteristics of a provocative and scholarly seminar paper.

Adam Graycar

Director  
Social Welfare Research Centre.

## Recent Trends in the Debate on Social Welfare

In Britain the discipline of social policy and administration has taken for its subject-matter both the instrumental and the normative dimensions of social welfare. The former has included descriptions and analyses of the institutions and agencies of the social services, the means and procedures for getting things done and the evaluation of policy outcomes, while the latter has had more to do with the ordering of social priorities as part of the debate about policy objectives, and hence with issues of value choice pertaining to the variety of means and ends that are open to any society.

The general direction of emphasis in academic debate and the trends in theoretical development bear witness to the rather uneasy relationship between the claims of scholarly detachment and those of partisan concern. For example almost every major concept that is specific to the discipline carries intensely normative connotations - I need only mention universality and selectivity; residual and institutional models of welfare; positive and negative discrimination; and absolute and relative poverty. All these concepts have been known to resonate with the strains of ideological rhetoric.

Also symptomatic is the relative ease with which our major authors can be grouped into categories defining explicit political commitment. Graham Room uses the categories of liberals, social democrats and neo-Marxists; George and Wilding make their basic distinction between those who are committed to individualism and those who are committed to collectivism, while Taylor-Gooby and Dale talk about individualists, social reformers and structuralists, subdividing each category in order to make ideological positions more explicit.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most striking developments of the past decade has been the increasing range and variety of such categorizations. How is this explained? Throughout the 1950s and 1960s social policy and administration was virtually strait-jacketed by a normative perspective that was broadly social democratic, egalitarian and collectivist. The field was dominated equally by the discovery and analysis of social injustices through largely empirical and positivist methods, and by the redress of those injustices through the agencies of reformist social policy, within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

The orthodoxy was never without its critics. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s free-market liberal economists such as Seldon, Jewkes, Hayek and

Friedman mounted a sustained critique of collectivist social policies.<sup>2</sup> But they did so as outsiders, both academically and politically. Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques were slower to develop, but by the mid-seventies both modes of enquiry had been incorporated into the academic debate about social welfare.<sup>3</sup> At the same time there were significant changes within the established tradition denoting a greater willingness to extend theoretical perspectives and adopt a wider range of methodologies and - perhaps more significantly - a new willingness to challenge the prevailing mood of cautious optimism.

This intellectual transformation drew impetus from the gradual erosion of one of the basic assumptions on which the social-democratic consensus rested - that economic growth could be taken for granted and consequently that redistributive social policies could be implemented within a framework of political consensus. The point was made quite early on - in 1970 - and very forcefully, by Anthony Crosland:

I do assert dogmatically that in a democracy low or zero growth wholly excludes the possibility (of redistribution). For any substantial transfer then involves not merely a relative but an absolute decline in the real incomes of the better-off half of the population (which incidentally includes large numbers <sup>4</sup> of working class voters) and this they will frustrate.

So much, one might say, for the middle-range chicken of social democracy, stretched out in the economic farmyard with its neck wrung. But in fairness one might ask how many other theoretical chickens are still running around the same yard, unaware as yet that their own heads have been chopped off.

In the context of Britain's continuing economic decline, free-market liberals and neo-Marxists alike have been busily arguing that further increases in welfare expenditure might benefit the poor in the short run, but only at the longer-term cost of inflicting further damage on the productive capability of our democratic welfare-capitalist society - an outcome which would be anathema to liberals, but quite acceptable to neo-Marxists. Writers in the social democratic tradition have yet to redefine with some consistency the relationship that ought to exist between the claims of efficiency and equality and the aims of economic and social policy. The institutional contradictions of democratic welfare-capitalism are at the top of nearly everyone's theoretical agenda.

In brief the whole approach to social policy has tilted in the direction of structural issues and applied macro-theory in the solution of social problems. The present trend is away from the pre-Copernican view of social policy, in which the network of welfare institutions is the sun around which all the other institutional planets rotate, sustained in their courses not so much by the music of the spheres as by the egalitarian harmonies of collectivist saints and martyrs.

### Levels and Types of Theorizing

I had better say here what I mean by macro-theory, middle-range theory and micro-theory. The function of macro-theory is to provide clarification and causal explanation at the societal level, with particular reference to the relationship between the total society and its several institutional parts. The function of middle-range theory is in principle the same, but it is mainly related to issues arising at an institutional level, with particular reference to the relationship between the various parts of individual institutions - although the range of analysis often extends to the relationship between whole institutions. The function of micro-theory is again in principle the same, but it is largely concentrated on issues arising within separate parts of a particular institution, with the same qualification that the implications of given data may extend the initial field of enquiry. It also happens that research at this level shifts from a social to a psychological perspective, and in the field of social work this is frequently the case.

The distinct levels of theorizing are not different kinds of intellectual enterprise, but different vantage points and focuses of enquiry which are determined by the nature of the questions we are trying to answer.

However, middle- and micro-levels of enquiry have been predominant. Titmuss, Donnison and Townsend, for example, began their studies at an institutional level and then extended them to institutions other than the social services such as the family, the economy and the polity, to include their wider societal implications. They also narrowed their focus to particular social services such as income maintenance and health care, but here again there are studies which have encompassed the entire range. Some samples of this are Titmuss's The Gift Relationship, Davies' Universality, Selectivity and Effectiveness in Social Policy, Townsend's Poverty in the United Kingdom, and Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy by Hall, Land, Parker and Webb.<sup>5</sup>



It is customary to discriminate between normative theories which assume a conflict model of society and those which assume a consensus model. The most overt conflict models are commonest at the most general level of theorizing about social change. Put very briefly, macro-theory tends to produce radical defences or critiques of the status quo, and to become identified either with holistic prescriptions for structural change or with a cautious approach conditioned by the knowledge that even minor social changes can have large-scale and unintended consequences.

Middle-range and micro-levels of social theorizing produce more limited critiques of the status quo, isolating particular institutional deficiencies or faulty linkages between institutions, and becoming identified with ad hoc policies of social reform - or at least with the assumption that a succession of ad hoc policies will lead gradually to radical change, with a minimum of upheaval.

There is a type of micro-theorizing - in particular that which accords the status of causal autonomy to individuals or small groups - which restricts the possibility of change to the individual level, on the grounds that explanatory sociological generalizations are incompatible with the concept of free will, the exercise of individual responsibility and the acceptance of accountability for one's own actions.

### Theory and Ideology in Social Policy

The characteristic mode of social investigation in social policy and administration has been an empirical procedure embracing the collection and analysis of evidence through observation, experiment and comparison, and the formulation of statements that can be objectively tested and verified. The preponderance of research has been devoted to policy matters with undeniable value implications. We demystify the social world with empiricism and then proceed to remystify it in the light of our values. In other words, there are serious gaps in the relationship between our theories and our methods because the theories are highly normative and because we use the empirical evidence not to test, but to substantiate our theories. This makes it extremely difficult to establish objective forms of knowledge in social policy studies.

I have always found it useful to employ Popper's model which distinguishes

between three kinds of knowledge - a World One, which is a 'world of 'things' - of physical objects'', a World Two, which is a 'world of subjective experiences (such as thought processes)', and a World Three, which is an independent world of objective structures, the product of human minds that forms the elements of our cultural heritage, and our world of scholarship and human institutions.<sup>6</sup> In Popper's World Three, knowledge is public knowledge, and it is objective knowledge in the sense that "It is knowledge without a knower: it is knowledge without a knowing subject."<sup>7</sup>

Popper describes this cultural heritage as a unity embracing science and the arts, and he suggests that the beginnings of science "are to be found in poetical and religious myths, in human fantasy that tries to give an imaginative explanation of ourselves and of our world. Science develops from myth, responding to the challenge of rational criticism: a form of criticism that is inspired by the idea of truth... poetry and science have the same origin. They originate in myths."<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless Popper argues that scientific knowledge advances through a process of deduction, not induction. From the statement of a given problem we develop a theory yielding testable propositions which we attempt to falsify by methods of observation and experiment. Theory is not developed out of observation and experiment; they are the means by which we test theory. Scientific knowledge is distinguished from non-scientific knowledge by the principle of falsifiability, and on that basis scientific knowledge is provisional and never proven in status.

Popper therefore rejects positivism and the inductive approach on the grounds that "It is far from obvious, from a logical point of view that we are justified in inferring universal statements from singular ones, no matter how numerous; for any conclusion drawn in this way may always turn out to be false: no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that all swans are white."<sup>9</sup> He espouses the model of an interpretative social science which seeks to explain human conduct "through the 'situational logic' of the act: that is to say, through the rational reconstruction of the circumstances (goals and knowledge) under which individuals act, and of the consequences of their behaviour."<sup>10</sup> It is an interpretative social science capable of yielding objective knowledge through methods of trial and error and through the public nature of the knowledge itself. But this objective knowledge is provisional because it

rests not on an objective standard of truth, but on a continuous striving towards objectivity through a progressive elimination of false hypotheses.<sup>11</sup>

Popper does not accord scientific status to macro-theories, with their holistic view of society which can only be sustained by total analyses and total explanations. He allows that such theories - notably Marxism and psychoanalysis - are equipped with some explanatory capability - "but in the manner of myths".<sup>12</sup> These macro-theories endorse the possibility of progress and lead to predictions of how certain kinds of change will be brought about; for that matter, all macro-theories of social change are deterministic and mythic rather than scientific.

The Popperian approach to theory is both logically and normatively restricted to a particular view of social policy. It gives no grounds for basing policy on macro-theory, in the first instance because we are not, and will never be, able to predict our future pattern of needs, and hence to create a planned society. Policies, like theories, are always hostages to unintended outcomes, and large-scale policy changes can result in large-scale errors. Piecemeal reform on the basis of trial and error is more conducive to gradual improvement and the correction of small-scale errors. The second objection to large-scale planning is the incompleteness of our knowledge about what individuals want, which makes it inevitable that holistic conceptualizations of need will be based on erroneous assumptions. We have no means of knowing what makes individual people happy, but it is possible to devise social policies that will counter unhappiness and minimize personal suffering, without drastic upheaval of our established social traditions.<sup>13</sup>

For good or ill, however, the range of debate in social policy has extended to macro-issues of social change and social welfare in a very general sense. In the rest of this paper I will therefore explore some of the implications of this development, with reference to the following questions. What is the nature of the relationship between theory and ideology, and are there any useful distinctions to be made between these two modes of thought, and how - if at all - can we preserve some balance between the imperatives of scholarly detachment and ideological commitment in the comparison of competing theories and ideologies?

In Social Theory and Social Policy I adopted Durkheim's distinction between non-normative and normative theory, the former being concerned with

the scientific explanation of causal relationships between phenomena, and the latter not only with explanations of what is, or has been, but with prescriptions of what ought to be, and how it should be achieved.<sup>14</sup> The distinction between normative theory and ideology is especially difficult to draw because it is a matter of degree as well as of kind. I think there are two relevant criteria; first, the general Popperian point as to whether or not the theory is set out in a testable and falsifiable way and, secondly, the degree of unprejudiced consideration that is given to new evidence and alternative explanations.

Both criteria are based on the assumption that there will be alternative explanations under scrutiny, and that there is a scientifically reliable relationship between a given theory and the methods of social enquiry. As long as there is open debate between competing theories, the avenue for falsification and correction will remain open. Generality in theories leads to normative commitment and lessens the likelihood of falsifiable presentation. Thus, paradoxically, general theories of social change tend to be the most resistant to falsification. In these respects general theories of social change are indistinguishable, for all practical purposes, from ideology.

Ideologies are theories of action rather than explanation, but insofar as they are abstractions, they tend to exaggerate both the importance of whatever it is they are meant to preserve or change and the extent to which conservation or change is desirable and possible.

Ideologies, as Oakeshott suggests, "are abstracts of some kind of concrete activity ... abstracts of the political traditions of some society".<sup>15</sup> The traditional styles of managing a society become "abridged into a doctrine of ends to be pursued, the abridgement (together with the necessary technical knowledge) being erroneously regarded as the sole guide to be relied upon".<sup>16</sup> But ideologies are also prone to become caricatures that seek to impose their own rough pattern on the variety of traditions from which they have arisen. Ideologists can too easily mistake the form for the substance by ignoring the fact that every political enterprise is "a consequential enterprise, the pursuit, not of a dream, or of a general principle but of an intimation".<sup>17</sup> Politics, in Oakeshott's view, is never "anything more than the pursuit of intimations, a conversation, not an argument".<sup>18</sup> It is part of an existent tradition which is "not a fixed and inflexible manner of doing things, it is a

flow of sympathy".<sup>19</sup> The more we study that tradition, the less likely we are to mistake its continuities for a "sovereign purpose", or to accept that any summary of the tradition can be a useful guide.<sup>20</sup>

### Commitment, Detachment and Uncertainty

None of the social sciences carries a heavier burden of concern for society than social policy and administration, and this leads to my second fundamental question about the policy sciences as a whole - to what extent can the moral virtues of commitment and concern live in peaceful and productive coexistence with the scientific virtue of scholarly detachment? This is a question that must be broken down into several parts, for example whether or not the virtue of scholarly detachment is nothing more than another manifestation of another ideological position - and whether the very theoretical position we start from inevitably gives an ideological bias to the questions we ask, the evidence we collect and the way in which we interpret it.

What matters is the way in which we use our theoretical framework after we have formulated it. The extent to which we allow our values to bias our selection and interpretation of evidence will depend on whether we treat our theories as positions to be defended or as positions to be tested. "It is", as Magee observes, "a profound mistake to try to do what scientists and philosophers have almost always tried to do, namely prove the truth of a theory, or justify our belief in a theory, since this is to attempt the logically impossible. What we can do, and this is of the highest possible importance - is to justify our preference for one theory over another" - without ever mistaking that preference for a final truth.<sup>21</sup>

Our theories should be treated as conjecture and our methods of scientific enquiry should consist of "bold conjectures and ingenious and severe attempts to refute them".<sup>22</sup> As for the relationship between scholarly detachment and ideological bias, the quest for objectivity depends not only on the integrity of individual scholars, but on the continuous exposure of scholarly work to informed debate. That is why it is vitally important for the subject of social policy and administration to remain answerable to the academic community, notwithstanding its association with politics and policy-making.

The term "ideology" is generally used in two senses, either as an indication of how people's perception and understanding of the social world

are distorted by their social position, with its concomitant personal or collective vested interests, or, in a more general epistemological sense, as a description of the social foundations and contexts of knowledge. All knowledge is open to ideological manipulation in the pursuit and preservation of sectional interests or in the imposition of a crude doctrine of the sort described by Oakeshott. However, those who are most alive to the advantages and pitfalls of this type of relationship between knowledge and power tend to view the world largely in political terms, subjugating all other human ends to the pursuit of power.

This outlook rests on an impoverished view of human nature, a one-dimensional model of "homo-politicus" which is no less limited than the long discredited notion of "homo-economicus". Marxists, however, claim that the class systems of capitalism impose precisely this type of limitation on human development, and that the dominant ideology of a ruling class under capitalism is sufficiently powerful to intrude a "false consciousness" into every citizen's knowledge and perceptions of the world. What Marxists fail to explain, within the terms of their own theory, is how Marxism itself has escaped the distorting influence of ideology when it has emerged in capitalist societies, if this false consciousness is an all-pervasive phenomenon in such societies.

Obviously our theories will differ, and we can only maintain a high level of scholarship by laying them open to all comers. The same applies to different levels of theorizing and different methodologies. For example macro-theories ought to be open to the challenge of middle-range and micro-range theorizing. If, however, a particular macro-theory gains ascendancy, it becomes more difficult to maintain objectivity at middle-range and micro-levels of theorizing; scepticism gives way to orthodoxy and normative anxiety, both of which endanger the whole enterprise of scholarship.

This state of affairs is a challenge to our integrity and not an excuse for polarization at the extremes of detachment or concern. We should not be seduced by sociologists of knowledge who insist that all knowledge is made relative by the normative contingencies of given times and places.

This type of argument seems to be to impose a stultifying model of perfection on scholars at the outset. One might as well use the specious religious argument that since we are all tainted with original sin there is

no point in virtuous behaviour because we will always fall short of perfection.

Anyone who presumes to call himself a scholar has a duty to be as impartial as possible and to be more impartial than other people. This is the sine qua non of the vocation, and, if it cannot be met, then alternative employment should be found. We may not always be capable of separating values from facts, or conscious of the prejudices that have distorted our methods and findings, but we are privileged to work in a community of scholars, and it is our collective duty to subject each other's work to critical scrutiny. This is the only basis on which our theories will remain alive to the challenge of other theories and the challenge of fresh evidence, and only on this basis can academics claim to be heard in the counsels of policy-makers.

Detachment in this sense offers no promise of certainty, at least not within the liberal tradition of scientific and philosophical knowledge. This tradition in the social sciences is described by Ernest Gellner as "an ethic of sour grapes, and of reliably sour grapes", and he continues: "We do not possess certainty and therefore we must be tolerant, and we can be certain that we shall never possess certainty".<sup>23</sup> The ethic of "reliably sour grapes" leaves us with at least a "certain consolation for this undemonstrability of our liberal values. It is of their essence that they should not be demonstrable, we can say: if they were, they would, ipso facto, lose that openness which is their chief merit... we must make a virtue of contingency".<sup>24</sup>

Paradoxically it is intensity of concern that impels normative theorists to assert the scientific status of their theories, in the mistaken belief that scientific knowledge can be equated with certainty rather than provisionality. Their concern keeps them "eagerly scanning the physical sciences for formulae that they can annex, thereby showing that scientific evidence confirms their world picture".<sup>25</sup> Northrop Frye illustrates this kind of anxiety with "the remark attributed to the Caliph Omar, when about to burn the Alexandrian Library, that all the books in it either agreed or disagreed with the Koran, and were therefore either superfluous or blasphemous", and he adds that "Marxism forms the same kind of anxiety-myth today".<sup>26</sup>

If, however, the virtue of concern can lead to a state of anxiety so intense that it encourages bias and resistance against disconfirmation, there is also another tradition of scholarship which asserts a virtue of detachment that can just as easily lead to the vice of indifference - to the abstract

empiricism denounced so many years ago by C. Wright Mills.<sup>27</sup> At its best this tradition is sceptical and anti-Utopian, tending to treat the notion of progress either as mythic in a pejorative sense, or as simply irrelevant. Perhaps the greatest offence which this sceptical tradition of detachment could perpetrate within the discipline would be to challenge that most profoundly held article of faith in social administration, namely, that all social problems are amenable to solution, or at least to amelioration.

As social administrators, we are particularly vulnerable to ideological bias because it is in the nature of our specialized interests that we come into contact with more of the failures and fewer of the successes of government than most other social scientists. And awareness of injustice usually leads to awareness of conflict, or potential grounds for conflict. But there is a fine line between recognizing the truth in conflict models of society and reacting in ways that will intensify the conflict. So we should be judicious in our use of macro-theories, especially highly prescriptive ones: we must relate the parts to the whole, and estimate as far as possible in advance the potential losses as well as the expected benefits of proposed social change. In the perspective of passionate reform the phenomenon of poverty, however residual and however relative, is transformed from evidence of a remediable defect into evidence of a fundamental social malaise.

Social administrators who define the subject in terms of need should not forget, in their concern over needs that are unmet in a minority of cases, that there are also needs that are satisfied in the majority of cases. If they are obsessed with failure, they become obsessed with the need for change, and they lose touch with the present. They come to believe, as Oakeshott puts it, that "To govern is to turn a private dream into a public and compulsory manner of living. Thus politics becomes an encounter of dreams..." and a desire to impose these dreams upon a whole society.<sup>28</sup> And, I would add, the dreams of intellectuals are the stuff of which Utopias are made.

#### Utopianism and Ideology in Social Policy

The Utopia of social administration - its own distinctive pursuit of that unified and unifying vision of the just society - is expressed in the quest for community, a fellowship of equally respected and caring citizens. The paradox of social administration is its need to reconcile the familiar, spontaneous and informal spirit of community with the material elements of



communal welfare, which are delivered through the agencies of distant, rule-governed, formal bureaucracies. We can characterize this paradox in a variety of ways - the reconciliation of personal freedom with two forms of social control, first the informal reciprocities of local attachments and secondly the formal obligations and entitlements of collective social services; or the reconciliation of idiosyncratic needs with universal and equitable levels of provision. And so we could go on trying to mix the waters of Gemeinschaft with the oils of Gesellschaft.

But there is a second paradox within the subject, stranger and more baffling than the first. Nisbet has suggested that the greater part of the history of modern social science can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the realities of industrialization.<sup>29</sup> Social policy and administration, I suggest, began as one response to this challenge - a pragmatic response to the moral claims of the casualties of social and economic change. Its instrumental response was largely bureaucratic - and therefore the scale envisaged was only appropriate to industrial societies. Yet the focus of the response was almost always outside the settings of industrial production, directed towards families in their homes and local communities. It is difficult to say in retrospect whether this bias in the characteristic mode of welfare delivery was the cause or the outcome of a more profound intellectual attitude which was, and still seems to be generally found among practitioners, and that is an indifference to industrialism that borders on hostility.

Insofar as this attitude can be described as a critique, on the face of it capitalism would seem to be the object of attack, but I think that this is largely a matter of coincidence. Beneath the hostility to capitalism is a deeper aversion to the whole process of industrialism, bound up with a kind of pastoral Utopianism, marching towards a Land of Cockayne in which a new generation of urban peasants and craftsmen, purged of the false desires inspired in them by an acquisitive society, will find the satisfaction of their authentic needs in collective harmony and fellowship.

There can be no more depressing way of spending an afternoon than reading about the Utopian blueprints that intellectuals have planned for us. Theories that outline the possibility of progress to a state of near-perfection imply a kind of world in which every Hamlet will be lifted out of his melancholy, every Lear cured of his madness and every Micawber set firmly and permanently on the path of business rectitude.

Here in a nutshell is the explanation for the false consciousness clauses contained in macro-theories that are based on unifying visions of a better society. The human guinea-pigs end up as suitable cases for treatment. The theories which express the authentic vision will reveal to them the true realities of the world, and their place in it. It may be a reality discoverable through the laws of historical necessity, in which case it will eventually be attained through ideological re-education or political transformation. Or it may be discovered through the laws of the free market, in which case it will be revealed by a good stiff dose of less-eligibility or unemployment.

It is always the case that the more totally encompassing a theory is, the richer will be its promise, the more distant its realization, and the more certain and immediate the prospect of some exceedingly unpleasant experiences. Micro-theories, with their emphasis on individual experience, constantly undermine the promise of macro-theories, with their emphasis on collective movements and structural processes. That is why social work stands in such an uneasy relationship to the grander forms of theory, especially those that would lead to radical change. Like the proverbial dustcart trundling in the wake of the Lord Mayor's show, social workers following the processions of change pick up the human bits and pieces.

Social workers today may identify themselves with the minority of deprived citizens who are victims of change in the mixed capitalist society, but if processes of radical change eventually give rise to a more egalitarian society, they are quite likely to find themselves ministering to the needs of a dispossessed and alienated bourgeoisie.

Radical change in social policy does not abolish the criteria by which we allocate welfare goods and services; it simply changes them. Within the framework of relativity we do no more than alter the parameters of felt injustice and loss, and exchange one set of institutional contradictions for another.

Such contradictions will persist for as long as there is disagreement within societies about the relative priority given to the economic, social and political criteria of allocation and entitlement, because each permutation reflects a plurality of views about the nature of equity and a different set of responses to the societal imperatives of economic efficiency,

social need and political stability.

I am critical of free-market liberalism and Marxism because the historical evidence strongly indicates that neither theory could be realized without the creation of such massive transitional diswelfares that the democratic basis of a free society would not survive, and it is my belief that representative democracy is one of the foremost elements in any civilized state of welfare.

But there are also methodological objections to free-market liberalism and Marxism. Their respective sets of concepts give a less than adequate account of social reality. I am not so much of an individualist as to believe that one can ignore the causal significance of social institutions, but the concept of class, for example, is not a sufficiently sophisticated device for analysing the subtle interrelationships between obligation, entitlement, loyalty and conflict which govern the social construction of welfare practice and institutions in complex industrial societies.

At the same time I accept that free-market liberals and Marxists have provided very useful critiques exposing the institutional contradictions that characterize the democratic welfare capitalist society. Such contradictions, however, worry me far less than the suggested remedies. In any case I believe that some institutional contradictions reveal the strengths rather than the weaknesses of a society, indicating a degree of tolerance of conflict and stress.

In the introduction to Marshall's recent book of essays I gave my reasons for holding this view, and I concluded in broad agreement with Marshall's maxim that:

The substitution of the mixed economy for capitalism marks the passage from arguments about values to attempts to analyse a specific historical system - the one which evolved in Britain and most of Western Europe in the first 20 years or so after the war, and still survives in a recognizable though, at least in Britain, a rather battered condition.<sup>30</sup>

Marshall's statement underlines another of my reservations about free-market liberalism and Marxism - that they tend to treat democratic welfare-capitalism as if it were a temporary deviation from either pure socialism or pure capitalism - rather than as a genuine and newly emergent type of

society which must be understood as an entity in its own right. In my opinion it possesses wider options for future development than either of the other traditions currently permits, but what these options are is a matter for speculation, not prediction.

There is a tendency for normative theorists of social change to think in terms of a unilinear process of development in which their own ideal type of society is used as the yardstick for all other types of society. No theory should ever be conceded - either intellectually or politically - such powers of pre-emption.

In my comparative studies the differences between societies have always been more striking than the similarities. The differences are determined by the existence of distinctive cultural traditions and the enduring power of local and patriotic sentiments. Over time, such sentiments give distinctive qualities and directions to common institutional processes such as industrial and urban change, just as they eventually subvert in quite unpredictable ways any political ideologies which might be imposed on a society by either indigenous or alien elites. Insofar as the origins of imposed ideologies can be traced back to social and political theories, we can say that there are no universally relevant social theories, apart from commonplace generalizations.

Paradoxically I feel that our greatest intellectual debt is owed to external theoretical traditions which have been brought into social administration, even though they are the ones with which I find myself in sharpest disagreement. Twenty years ago the discipline was dominated by one set of normative assumptions which were so unquestioningly held that internal theoretical debate was a rarity. The question before us now is what use will we make of our present opportunity? Will we exchange one normative strait-jacket for a choice between several - or will we use the growth in theoretical diversity as a basis for working towards a more objective understanding of the relationship between social stability, social change and social policies in different times and places?

A sensible method of preserving the balance between objectivity and ideological commitment is to treat theories as provisional statements left open to falsification; to preserve openness in intellectual debate; to make a virtue of contingency; and to keep a sense of proportion about the special

interests and unavoidable biases of our subject.

In an applied social science in which theory has direct implications for practical policies and for the quality of people's lives, it ought to be possible to test our theories in the light of experience. But theorists create their own difficulties in establishing causal links between the influence of theory and the welfare of society. They do not like to concede that their theories have been properly applied, or given a fair chance. Marxist critics of capitalism rarely illustrate their arguments by positive reference to existing socialist societies - all of which seem to fall short of the ideal. When monetarist theories fail, we will be told by their exponents that they were misapplied by incompetent practitioners.

My own comparative studies have convinced me that radical social change which owes its rationale to macro-theory of one kind or another is vastly more damaging to human welfare than other forms of social change. Compared to the gigantic calamities of radical change the course and outcome of the British tradition of piecemeal social reform read like a modest success story. To the four horsemen of St. John's apocalypse - war, fire, pestilence and famine - I would add a fifth - the rider of abstract theory, imbued with a vision of the Millenium. From that rider's eyes, bright with pitiless virtue, shines the prospect of the days to come, when men shall "seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them".<sup>31</sup>

In order to avoid such extremes we are forced to return to the focus and normative perspective of the modest theories that occupy the middle ground - an area once given over to the belief that gradual reform within a framework of parliamentary democracy would not only enhance welfare, but would eventually transform our values and our social structure. The critical theories that I have discussed - in conjunction with the evidence of our economic decline - have destroyed all hope of a transformed social structure. Those of us who take the middle ground might therefore begin to look a little more positively at the qualities of democratic welfare-capitalism than writers like Tawney or Titmuss ever felt able to do. If there is to be any true balance in the normative debate about social welfare, this will have to happen.

We have already reached the stage of theoretical debate in our subject at which the notion of consensus and the suggestion that social policies are

rightly concerned with the abatement of unrest are treated as morally reprehensible arguments. It is time that the range of our normative theories and their empirical subject-matter gave a more balanced reflection of the full range of life chances and living standards pertaining in our society. At the same time we have got to accept that there will always be limits to reform in the context of parliamentary democracy - if only because most people are largely content with their lot, and do not live in a permanent state of political agitation over the lot of those who are less fortunate.

It must be counted a kind of mental handicap to be disposed to think about life in largely political terms. There is a simple test for distinguishing an ordinary citizen from an ideologist. The ordinary citizen hopes that history will pass him by, while the ideologist lives in the hope that history will pass no one by.

### Conclusion

Every field of study has two conceptual dimensions, the first being the explanatory scale, or relative ambition, of its theories, ranging from the micro-level to the macro-level, and the second, the normative dimension, ranging from scholarly detachment and the principle of impartiality to ideological commitment and the principle of concern.

In the social sciences we should view with equal suspicion the vice of indifference, which is the extreme of impartiality, and the vice of ideological commitment, the extreme of concern. Scepticism is the natural ally of impartiality, but in order to find natural defences against indifference, I think we have to look outside the social sciences altogether, to forms of art which stimulate our awareness of the tragic and comic dimensions of life. Such awareness is sadly lacking in social policy and administration, even though the discipline is vitally connected with issues such as poverty and injustice - I think, because such conditions were originally seen as problems that could ultimately be solved.

At the opposite extreme our lack of comic awareness leaves us exposed to notions of radical social change, grandiose exercises in social planning and impossible expectations with regard to our fellow men and women. A sense of comedy is the likeliest antidote to such epidemics of high moral purpose.

Theories are highly summarized versions of reality to begin with, and, when they are shielded from full exposure to the evidence of the social world, they become ideologies. Therefore our methods and conduct of enquiry must be based on "accuracy of statement, objectivity of description, and dispassionate weighing of evidence, including the accepting of negative evidence".<sup>32</sup>

I will now assemble my main themes in the form of a research formula which might help in the development and use of testable theories, without detriment to the balance between detachment and commitment. In the first place there must be some agreement on an order of procedure. In either national or comparative studies we should begin with societies as they have been and as they are, before considering what they might become, or ought to become. In this way historically based theories of change take precedence, while predictions - which always invite normatively charged value preference - are deferred to a later stage.

Secondly we should try to avoid using unilinear theories which take for granted the existence of developmental linkages between different societies and different types of society. In other words, we should allow for the maximum, not the minimum range of societal types and development possibilities.

Thirdly we should analyse and evaluate the characteristics of social policies and social welfare in different types of society, with as much objectivity as possible. To comply with this, the ends and means of a society's social services must be seen within that society's own cultural terms of reference. Are the social services effective and efficient in relation to the society's own criteria and its own definitions of need? To proceed in this way is not to equate objectivity with reliance on the dominant cultural welfare norms and practices of the given society, which is more or less what Townsend does in the greater part of Poverty in the United Kingdom.

Fourthly, at every level of enquiry, we should cover the broadest possible spectrum of policies and needs, so that our conclusions will take account of successful developments as well as failures.

Fifthly, for reasons that I have already given, our hypotheses and theories should be directed at what seem to be the institutional contradictions arising at the various levels of welfare practice and service provision. It is quite safe to assume that such contradictions will exist, and that their importance and type will vary just as much between societies

as will the policies designed to resolve or reduce them.

In listing what I think are some of the most important parameters of enquiry I will not try to allocate them to different levels of theorizing, because the development of our understanding ought to grow out of the interaction between the levels of theorizing. My list includes the balance between statutory, voluntary and private forms of provision, within a broadly Titmussian framework; the balance of power between central and local governments; the ways in which social services are used as agencies of security and control; how these imperatives of security and control coexist with those of freedom and risk, both within and outside the sphere of welfare activities; and the nature and extent of felt obligation and entitlement and of familial and extra-familial altruism, and the degree to which these informal welfare practices are strengthened, weakened or modified by formal social services.

Lastly I would channel the research into three sets of related questions from which issues of value conflict are bound to emerge. The first group of questions would ask what are the characteristic forms of positive and negative discrimination in a given society - who are the beneficiaries and who are the losers; what criteria and whose criteria of allocation and entitlement are being applied; and which people do and which do not accept these criteria as legitimate? The second group of questions would relate to the possibilities of policy change; the extent to which policy changes are dependent on other institutional processes; and the degree to which the nature and rate of change are democratically determined in the society. The third group of questions would be evaluative ones about the gains and losses associated with particular types of social change; the proportion in which particular social policies are both agents of change and reactors to change; and the extent to which given ideologies of political action derived from normative theories have an influence on change, or accurately predict the outcome of change.

The proximity of social policy and administration to political processes and the lives of ordinary people is a mixed blessing. In theoretical matters it reduces the risk that ideological visions will be mistaken for reality or that detachment will degenerate into indifference. On the other hand, in the more general framework of welfare studies - which is particularly focused on social failure - it is an open invitation to dispense with objectivity in the cause of natural concern.





# NOTES

1. Graham Room, The Sociology of Welfare: Social Policy, Stratification and Political Order, Basil Blackwell & Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1979, p.41 passim; V. George and P. Wilding, Ideology and Social Welfare, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976; Peter -Gooby and Jennifer Dale, Social Theory and Social Welfare, Edward Arnold, London, 1981, p.55 passim.
2. M. Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1962; F.A. Hayek, The Road to Serfdom, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979; J. and S. Jewkes, The Genesis of the British National Health Service, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1961; Arthur Seldon, "Crisis in the Welfare State:", Encounter, vol.XXIX no.6, 1967, p.56. The Hobart Series published by the Institute of Economic Affairs made a significant and sustained contribution to the revival of liberal market critiques of collectivist social policies and to the development of alternative welfare policies.
3. Some of the best recent Marxist contributions are J. O'Connor, The Fiscal Crisis of the State, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1973; R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, Quartet, London, 1973; I. Gough, The Political Economy of the Welfare State, Macmillan, London, 1979; N. Ginsburg, Class, Capital and Social Policy, Macmillan, London, 1979; Taylor-Gooby and Dale, op. cit.
4. Quoted by Keith G. Banting in Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s, Macmillan, London, 1979, p.98, from A Social Democratic Britain, Fabian Society Tract 404, London, 1971, p.2.
5. Bloddyn Davies in association with Mike Reddin, Universality, Selectivity and Effectiveness in Social Policy, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1978; Richard M. Titmuss, The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1970; Phoebe Hall, Hilary Land, Roy Parker and Adrian Webb, Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1975; Peter Townsend, Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1979.
6. See Karl Popper, Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography, Fontana/Collins, London, 1980, pp.180 passim; Karl R. Popper, Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1981, pp.155-6; and Bryan Magee, Popper, Fontana/Collins, London, 1975, p.60.
7. Popper, Objective Knowledge, pp.109 & 156 passim. See also Karl R. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Hutchinson, London, 1972 - "My use of the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' is not unlike Kant's. He uses the word 'objective' to indicate that scientific knowledge should be justifiable, independently of anybody's whim: a justification is 'objective' if in principle it can be tested and understood by anybody... The word 'subjective' is applied by Kant to our feelings of conviction (of varying degrees)", p.44.
8. Karl Popper, "Creative Self-Criticism in Science and in Art", Encounter, vol. LIII no.5, November 1979, p.12.

9. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, p.27. See also Anthony Giddens, "Positivism and Its Critics", in Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet (eds), A History of Sociological Analysis, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1979, p.270.
10. Giddens, op. cit. p.268. See also Popper, Unended Quest, where Popper summarizes the development of his thought on "the method of situational analysis" - pp.117-18.
11. "Our ignorance is vast. But that is clearly not all: we cannot, of course, overlook the existence of the natural sciences and their brilliant successes. Yet when we examine these sciences somewhat more closely we discover that they consist not of positive or certain knowledge, but of bold hypotheses which are continuously improved - or even eliminated altogether - by rigorous criticism. This produces a gradual approximation to the truth. We have, then, no positive or certain knowledge. But there is such a thing as hypothetical or conjectural knowledge" - Karl Popper, "On Reason and the Open Society", Encounter, vol. XXXVLLL no. 5, May 1972, p.17.
12. Magee, op. cit. p.46; Karl Popper, Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, pp.37-8.
13. See Karl R. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, pp.64 & 83 passim.
14. Robert Pinker, Social Theory and Social Policy, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1971, pp.97-8.
15. Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays, Methuen, London, 1981, p.121.
16. Ibid. p.122.
17. Ibid. p.124.
18. Ibid. p.125.
19. Ibid. p.126.
20. Ibid. p.128.
21. Magee, op. cit. p.26.
22. Popper, Objective Knowledge, pp.80-81.
23. Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1964, p.111.
24. Ibid. p.113.
25. Northrop Frye, The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society, Methuen, London, 1974, p.18.
26. Ibid. pp.19-20.
27. C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, chs 2 & 3, pp.33-86.

28. Oakeshott, op. cit. p.186.
29. Nisbet is, of course, not the only sociologist to interpret the development of the subject in this way. In doing so, he associates industrial change with "revolutionary democracy". See R.A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1970, especially ch. 2, p.21 passim.
30. T.H. Marshall, The Right to Welfare and Other Essays, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1981, p.123.
31. The Revelation of St. John the Divine, ch. 9:6.
32. Frye, op. cit. p.42. See also Maurice Broady, Social Administration: Some Current Concerns, Inaugural Lecture, University of Swansea, 1972, for a perceptive and clear discussion of the relationship between objectivity and impartiality. Objectivity, he says, "has to do chiefly with techniques", but he goes on to distinguish between scrupulous validation and dispassionate and impartial argument within a critical academic community - p.21.