

THE CIVIC INTEREST AND THE PURPOSES OF HEW

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Secretary Mathews has asked me to leave the ivory tower to spend some time at HEW as a participant observer. My function is to look, listen, and comment, primarily on the effort to bring conceptual considerations to bear on the formation of social policy. HEW is a new world to me. I have spent eight intense days becoming acquainted with it, particularly the work of the Secretary and his Office. What follows is written as an effort to clarify my first impressions, to conceptualize what I have observed in the hope that it can serve as a talking paper, one that will lead to discussions through which I can deepen my understanding of the problems and possibilities of social policy formation. I start with some meditations on the Management Levels Chart. I look at the chart and focus on Level III, CONCEPTUAL (Bubble Charts); I run through my diverse experiences of the last few days and my prior study of the place of thought in a world of action; and from it all certain basic questions occur to me, which give rise to a series of reflections. In what follows I present two of those questions and the gist of the reflections each provokes, and I then try to apply the central concept that emerges from those reflections to the five purposes that the Secretary has set for HEW.

Question I:

What intellectually, is the process of thinking denoted by level III on the Management Levels Chart? What is the nature of the intellection there described as "conceptual"? This needs to be thought through in order to deal rigorously with the question that seems to be on the minds of many—how does level III relate to levels II and I?

Reflections I:

This question raises the basic problem of the relations between thought and action. The fundamental fallacy to guard against is the nearly universal presumption that the productive application of thought to action must necessarily be technical and programmatic. This fallacy is late in the way the Management Levels Chart is drawn, with the flow leading from the conceptual through ~~the~~ planning to the operational. To avoid this error, the first step should be to broaden the conception of how thought relates to action.

In the technical, programmatic application of thought to action, the principle of causality is operative. One analyzes the causes that give rise to a manifested process; one devises a program that will intervene in that process to alleviate

the problem; and one then implements the program. In this technical relation between thought and action, the relation starts with thought and proceeds to action, and the relation is limited in time, in that it starts, operates, and concludes. We can complement the causal, technical relation between thought and action with a reciprocal, humanistic relation, in which the principle of community or reciprocity--all things are interrelated and in reciprocal interaction--is paramount. One acts and becomes concerned to perceive the implications of this action when all pertaining to it is considered in interrelation; one elucidates through inquiry and criticism, intuition and reflection, all that may be at stake; and one ends with a deeper, more comprehensive awareness of what it is that one is doing, and thus with a more humane, prudent basis for judgment. In this reciprocal relation of thought and action, the relation is simultaneous, founded on action as perceived in thought, and the relation is not limited in time, in that it exists continuously as long as actions are underway or contemplated.

This distinction goes back to the ancient Greeks and can be seen to emerge dimly in pre-Socratic philosophy. Thales and his followers initiated the tradition of causal analysis in natural philosophy with a primitive search for the stuff from which the universe is generated--water, air, earth, fire. Heraclitus, while not completely renouncing interest in causalities, nevertheless formulated the principle of reciprocity--"that which is wise is one, to understand the purpose that steers all things through all things"--and he began to use it in an effort to illuminate significance. In classical Greek philosophy, Socrates, insofar as we know him through Plato, wholeheartedly embraced the principle of reciprocity, and used it as the basis of his interrogations, in which he systematically showed that those adept with causalities, those adept at doing things, were nevertheless deficient in their understanding of what it was that they were doing. Plato, keenly aware of the danger of the polity of power unchecked by understanding, devoted himself to creating a conceptual apparatus by which men of practice might learn how to answer soundly the Socratic questions. There, to my mind, the creative impetus in Greek philosophy ended, and Aristotle, with immense dedication and ability, initiated a long era of conceptual consolidation, in which the distinction between causality and community was not lost, but was left somewhat blurred.

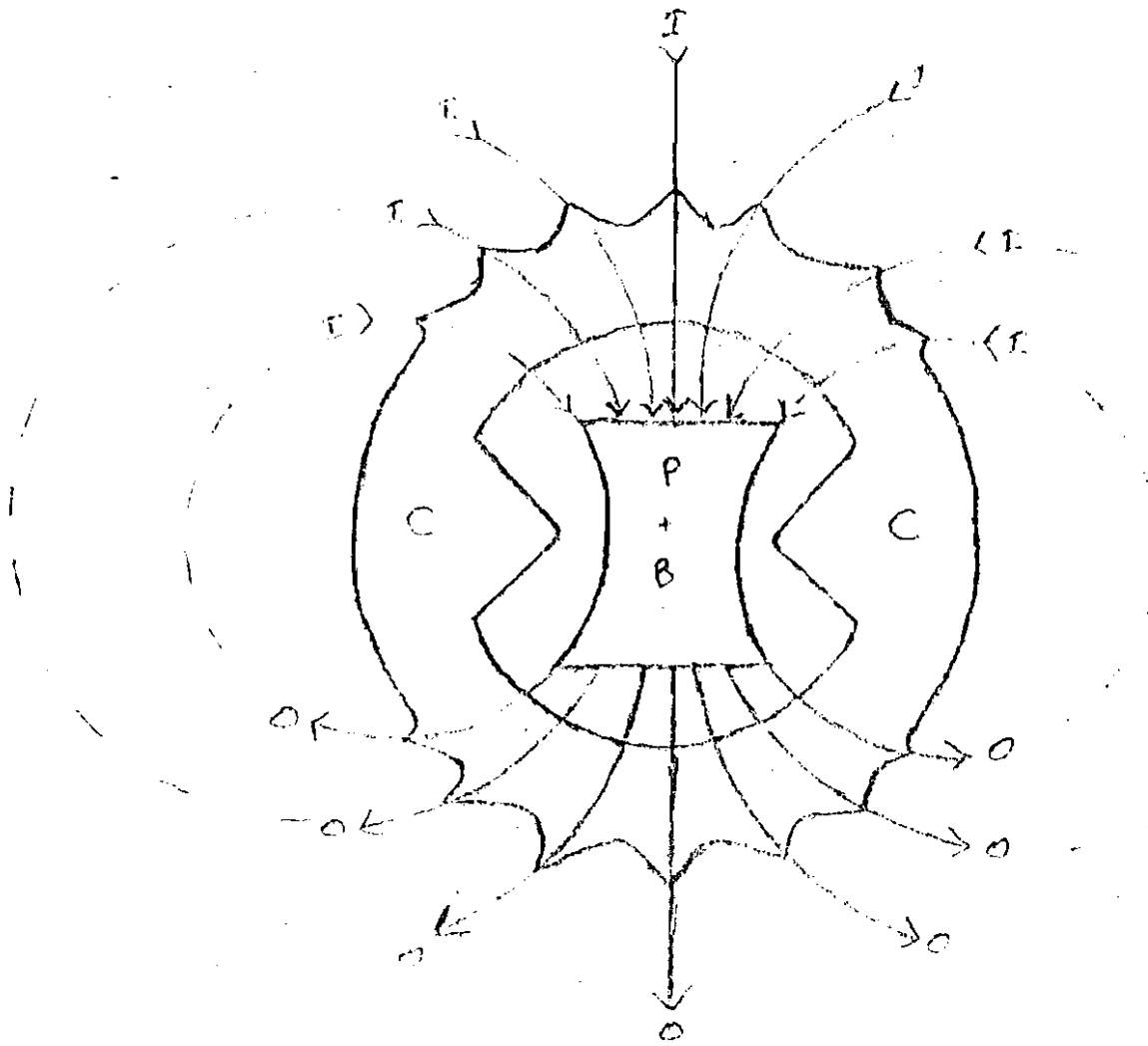
In modern epistemology, the distinction was greatly clarified by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, if one can speak of clarification through a work so opaque. In an important section Kant contended that thinking about phenomena, experience, depended on our capacity to draw connections between them, and that three, fundamental, a priori rules controlled how we drew connections between phenomena. These he called the "Analogies of Experience," the first of which was the principle of permanence--"in all change of appearances substance is permanent." This analogy

provides the foundation for thinking, asserting that there is something about which to think, but it tells little about how the thinking should proceed. That is the function of the second and third analogies. In time, phenomena can be represented either in succession or in coexistence. ~~The~~ When phenomena are represented in succession ~~they/first/are~~ ~~thought/about~~ connections between them are made by means of the principle of production, the law of causality: "all alterations take place in conformity with the law of the connection of cause and effect." When phenomena are represented in coexistence, connections between them are made by means of the principle of community, the law of reciprocity: "all substances, in so far as they can be perceived to coexist in space, are in thoroughgoing reciprocity." The technical, programmatic application of thought to action ~~relies/primarily/on/the/former/analogy,/the/humanistic/reflective/application~~ applies the former analogy, the principle of production, to the process of causation; the humanistic, reflective application applies the latter analogy, the principle of community, to the web of mutual interactions.

Reciprocal, humanistic thinking is not an alternative to technical thinking; and equally, technical, causal thinking is not an alternative to humanistic thinking. As Kant indicated, both modes can be applied to every phenomenon, depending on whether the phenomenon is seen as succeeding from and to another or as coexisting with others. My thesis in this paper rests on the conviction that thought in relation to action will have the greatest human value, will be most sound, when the two systems are both functioning fully in mutual reinforcement. Technical, causal thinking gives rise to actions, which become the occasion for humanistic, reciprocal reflection; reciprocal reflection makes manifest new problems, implications, possibilities, which become the occasion for the technical refinement of existing actions and the causal initiation of new ones.

In recent decades, thinking about social policy in America according to the law of causality has become highly developed and very effective, but very little serious thinking according to the law of reciprocity has been done. That is the essence of the present popular malaise: we have learned how to set in motion vast social programs, but we do not have the conceptual means to explain to those involved in the programs, directly and indirectly, the human significance of them when all things are taken together. As I see it, the current concern in HEW for "level III," the conceptual, is a concern to revitalize humanistic, reciprocal reflection with respect to social policy, so that it can better complement the technical, causal thinking that has become dominant in recent decades in the consideration of social policy.

With these reflections as a preliminary, the following bubble chart can be used to illustrate the ideal relationship



I = Input (legislation, executive orders, public concerns--defines problems at hand)

P + B = Annual Planning/Budgeting (Evaluative -- Level II)

O = Operations = Level I

C = Conceptual = Level III

between level III and levels II and I. (See figure 1)

Two features of this diagram should be noted. First, it depicts the conceptual, not as a level ~~of~~ as in the Management Levels Chart, but as a field of concern that surrounds the technical process of applying thought to action. The vertical flow along a downward axis of time represents the technical process of policy formation and implementation, the planning-programming-budgeting system. Each particular matter passes through that technical process of causal analysis and action always localized in time, but in doing so, it is continuously within the field of conceptual concern, the intent of which is to illuminate significance through ~~the~~ reflection based on the principles of reciprocity, taking each matter in interrelationship with as many others as possible. Ideally, this humanistic, reciprocal reflection that comprises the conceptual field should have a function with respect to each matter at every point as it passes through the technical process. By continuously illuminating the significances in question, the conceptual field draws input into the PPB system. Once a matter is in that system, it informs the decisions to be made in that process with a heightened awareness of all that may be at stake. And then, as a matter becomes operational, the conceptual field contributes to the effectiveness of the operation by clarifying the why and the wherefore of the operation to operators, clients, and public: hence all involved can better act, not only according to the regulations, but also with a personal understanding of the rationale of the regulations.

Second, the diagram describes the ideal situation, which is schematized by having all the inputs actually reach the annual planning and budgeting component. This is of course utopian, for in real experience many potential inputs do not get taken into account; but it is justifiable as a representation of what might be approximated were the technical application of thought to action surrounded by a fully developed field of reciprocal, conceptual concern. The conceptual field functions, not genetically, but teleologically; it culminates, not with instructions, but with interpretations; it contributes, not specification, but coordination. With the technical process of policy formation surrounded by a field of conceptual concern, there is greater ground for depicting the technical as if it functioned ideally. The PPB system can function with or without the conceptual field, but with that field, it will function, not necessarily more ~~efficiently~~ efficiently, but more effectively. The field will capture potential inputs, channeling them towards the PPB cycle by illuminating their potential significance for it. The field will make planning more purposeful by keeping paramount the ultimate human goals to be served through the ends in view. The field will create an arena of action in which diverse efforts are better coordinated and less is lost in mindless cross-purposes by endowing those acting with a better understanding of ~~the~~ what is implicated in their

actions. ~~Such/analytical~~ A conceptual field based on reciprocal thinking can thus have a powerful functionality with respect to action: that is the basis for Secretary Mathews oft reiterated assertion "that it has been the better (or different) view, not the better technique, that has historically solved our major problems."

In sum, then, on asking what, intellectually, the process of thinking denoted by level III is, I have answered that it is humanistic thinking based on the principle of reciprocity, the principle that all things are interrelated and mutually interact, that the significance and value of things is to be understood by comprehending their interrelationships and interactions. Understanding the conceptual in this way, it should be seen as a field of concern, surrounding the technical process of forming social policy, impinging on that process with a heightened awareness at every stage.

Such thinking easily becomes diffuse, shooting off in every which way. When all things are taken as interrelated and interacting, discussion easily becomes disorganized, for everything in some way or other seems relevant, making it hard for a center of concern to emerge or endure. The community of social critics tends to be anarchic, each critic preferring to be a party of one. This is why humanistic thinking has in past decades failed to perform its proper function with respect to social policy: instead of forming into a field of concern surrounding the technical formation of social policy, humanistic, reciprocal reflection has degenerated into a plasma of dissociated, incoherent concerns that bounce randomly off one another, incapable of forming a field of concern surrounding anything, let alone something as complex as social policy.

An alternative to this situation will not be easily created. It is not something that has come about through a lack of concern: social policy is one of the primary topics of reflective criticism. Nor is something that has come about through deficient organization: those thinking reflectively about social policy are reasonably well supported and have many outlets for their views. The present situation seems to have come about through a conceptual deficiency: there is no criterion, no norm, shared by most of those who are thinking reflectively about social policy, by which they can related their views to one another's. This is the second basic question.

Question II:

What, substantively, is the conceptual field of reciprocal conceptual reflections into a coherent field of concern, one that can surround the technical process of forming social policy and impinge upon it at every point? How can such a field be thought through in order to knit together the views of those persons who have the qualities needed to bear constructively on the technical, conceptual reflection to bear constructively on the technical process of forming social policy.

Reflections II:

A conceptual field of concern will come into being when diverse persons with capacities for humanistic, reciprocal thinking, for thinking about things in their interrelationships and interactions, address themselves for a sustained time to a common concern. By a common concern, I do not mean a particular problem, but rather a shared way of framing questions about diverse particular problems. Likewise, I do not mean that all will address particular problems on the same level of generality, for a common concern, to be truly common, must be such that it can deal with the universal and the particular and all in between.

With respect to policy formation, what is most important in this common concern is, functionally, that it provide a middle range of reflection where the particular and the universal meet and interact, ending the present isolations in which reflection on universals is largely a self-contained art unto itself and action on particulars comes largely ad hoc as practical men respond to exigencies. Such a middle range linking universal and particular will not come into being simply through wishful thinking: it must be created and can be created only by using the appropriate intellectual tools, the proper concepts. Thus, if a field of humanistic concern, concern for the reciprocities in all things, can come into being around social policy formation, it will do so because persons with the requisite intellectual capacities come together by ~~using~~ basing their various endeavors on a shared concept, one that organizes their diverse reflections into a coherent realm of discourse, illuminating what is at stake in social policy. The question at hand, hence, is simply, what can that concept be?

A start toward an answer to this question might be made by looking at an area analogous to social policy, namely foreign policy. Without suggesting that the intellectual processes that give rise to foreign policy are ideal, I would suggest that they more nearly approximate those schematized in figure 1 than do those producing social policy. In particular, there is a field of concern surrounding the technical formation of foreign policies that is reflective and reciprocal in character, taking as many things as possible in interrelationship, centering on the concept of the national interest, continuously seeking to define that interest with respect to inputs, plans, and operations. In foreign policy formation, those who come together in a shared concern for defining the national interest do not always agree ~~on the~~ ~~importance of defining~~ in their interpretation of it, but they do generally agree on the importance of defining it and of bringing the concept to bear on technical policy formation at every point. This has made reasonably productive ~~links~~ links possible between the realms of public leadership, executive action, and scholarly re-

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An obvious candidate for this analogue is "the public interest," but it seems to me to be an inadequate candidate. The "public", like the "nation," is an abstract collectivity, but unlike the "nation", which in its relations with other nations can be given fairly concrete meaning, the "public" generally remains abstract and the "public interest" can mean just about anything to anyone; consequently discussions centering on it tend towards incoherence. A proof, significant if not systematic: whereas scholarly authorities on international relations make central and productive use of the concept of "national interest," scholars concerned with domestic politics characteristically discount the concept of "public interest" as substanceless, of significance only as a rhetorical device in the pursuit of power. Thus, David Truman wrote in his influential work, The Governmental Process, "in developing a group interpretation of politics..., we do not need to account for a totally inclusive interest, because one does not exist." (p. 51)

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Truman denied an "inclusive" interest, and that precisely is the problem with the public interest--people have interests, abstractions do not. It is no accident that the national interest works as a concept primarily in ~~of~~ foreign policy, in which the nation can be looked at as an entity acting among other entities, concretely as a fictional person, not as an abstraction. To find a social equivalent for the concept of national interest, one needs to search for a concrete interest that people feel; one needs ~~of~~, not an inclusive public interest, but an essential interest that each person has concerning the arrangements through which he lives with others. Men universally have entered into civic arrangements ~~with~~ with one another, ~~and the~~ and the interest we seek to define--let us call it "the civic interest"--is the interest that people universally have in the civic arrangements, of one sort or another, that they make. If such a universal interest can be specified, a fundamental norm for judging the quality of civic arrangements will have been defined, a ~~of~~ fundamental, formal norm, ~~of~~ applicable. Let us stress its formality: based on a universal interest, it will be, by itself, devoid of particular content; thus it will be applicable to all civic arrangements and the substantive determinant of none. Its value will result, not from its capacity to lay down what is to be done, which as a formal norm it cannot do, but from its usefulness as a standard against which the comparative worth of competing empirical alternatives for action can be judged.

At this point, it is important briefly to make peace with the heritage of political theory. Language is a deficient carrier of truth, and there are deficiencies in the linguistic formulation of all political theories, yet there are certain human truths behind each, even the most perniciously formulated. What I want here to try to formulate, inevitably imperfectly, is yet another attempt to state the human truth behind those previous formulations. It owes a great deal to them, and on some other occasion I might try to show how it relates to the kernel of truth embodied in them—to the concept of justice in ancient political theory, particularly in Plato; to the concept of the social contract in the early modern critics of natural law, particularly in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; to the concept of the state in the political theory of idealism, particularly in Hegel and Fichte; to the concept of human self-realization in the diverse strands of modern historicism, particularly in those running from Marx to Mao, from Nietzsche to Sartre and Camus, from Goethe and Heine to Brecht, Lukacs, and Bloch, from Dilthey to Ortega and Ellul, from Marx and Freud to Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Fromm, from Montesquieu to Jefferson to Dewey. None of these diverse thinkers, to my knowledge, uses the term "civic interest," yet each in one way or another recognizes a norm in human affairs, and whatever it is called, what is important here is to grasp the concept of that norm.

Humans are too protean, their relations too complex, for their lives together to be governed by fixed formulations, be those formulations laid down by instinct or authority. The proposition that man by nature is a political animal asserts that man is by nature so complicated that each person has the problem of governing himself in the midst of his fellows, that each person in his own unique way finds his conduct in relation to others to be a problem that he must, for better or for worse, deal with personally. The most degraded and enslaved person is never under absolute control, an automaton totally governed by another; the most abused prisoner must cope with his master, collaborating, adapting, resisting as his will and the constraints interact. Governance is the interaction of will and constraint, and the primary form of governance is self-governance, the interaction of the person's will with the concrete constraints of his surroundings. Other forms of governance extend the capacity for self-governance of the persons who partake in those forms, creating collective wills to deal with collective constraints. This collective will in its diverse manifestations becomes an important constraint impinging on the personal will of each individual, sometimes putting extremely difficult demands on the person's capacity for self-governance. Conversely, the person's will can become a powerful constraint impinging on the collective will, sometimes putting overwhelming demands on the group's capacity for governance. The civic interest is the norm inherent in this conjunction of wills, personal and collective, each appearing as a constraint impinging on

the other. As this inherent norm, the civic interest formally controls the responsibilities of the person towards the group and the group towards the person: the person should act, whatever the particulars of his actions, in such a way that he preserves and perfects the capacity for governance possessed by the groups in which he partakes, and the group should act, whatever the particulars of its actions, in such a way that it preserves and perfects the capacities for self-governance possessed by those who partake in it.

That, formally stated, is the norm of civic relationships, the civic interest. If in application it is to prove significant, it must prove valuable in illuminating four classes of situations. It should clarify how groups should treat persons when the persons are respecting the civic interest on the one hand and abusing it on the other, and it should illuminate how persons should treat groups when the groups are respecting the civic interest and when they are abusing it. Thus if the concept of the civic interest is to prove applicable it must prove itself by illuminating the four classic problems of political theory, the two positive problems, that of determining the duties of the citizen toward the state and that of establishing the responsibilities of the state toward the citizen, and the two negative problems, that of determining the state's power of enforcement when persons abuse the civic interest, and that of establishing the person's right ~~of~~ to resist and rebel when the state abuses the civic interest.

To follow these four problems through all their ramifications would take us ~~too~~ far too far afield. Instead, let us restate the concept of the civic interest slightly to bring it to bear on the problem of social policy formation, and then perhaps we can test its applicability in that area by seeing whether it is useful in illuminating the five questions put to HEW by Secretary Mathews in the "Planning Guidance Memorandum--1976." Social policy should, whatever its particulars, be consistent with the civic interest. Since social policy concerns ways in which the collectivity impinges upon persons and groups, it means that social policy should, in all its particulars, function to preserve and perfect the capacities ~~of those~~ that people possess for self-governance in its largest sense, meaning responsible personal participation in the full range of the common life, both formally governmental and informally communal. Social policy should act, whatever the particulars of its actions, in a way that enlarges the capacities for self-governance possessed by those it influences: that is the civic interest in social policy.

With this concept of the civic interest, a field of reflective, reciprocal concern can surround the technical formation of social policy. Social actions in health, education, welfare, commerce, business, labor, housing,

agriculture, urban affairs, transportation, and so on, should serve the civic interest, that is, they should enhance the capacity for personal and collective self-governance that each person possesses. Insofar as social actions lead to the degradation of that capacity, they are deficient actions, contrary to the civic interest, no matter how effective they are as means to the immediate ends in view. Surrounding the technical formation of the policies that guide those action, a common concern, a reflective conceptual field should emerge, taking all in interrelationship and interaction, continuously illuminating how the diverse actions taking place, ~~pertaining to~~ health, ~~education, and welfare, and to other aspects of~~ social policy, ~~can~~ planned, or contemplated in health, education, welfare, and other areas, ~~contribute to and~~ may contribute to or distract from the ability of the people involved to conduct, personally and collectively, their lives in responsible autonomy. Let us see how these propositions might apply to the five concerns Secretary Mathews has emphasized for HEW.

Applications: