

As a statement of personal conviction, the author affirms that only the light of reason can pursue the shadows at the furthest reaches of man's existence, and raises warnings about the dangers in social planning. To ward these off, we must break the chain of causality in social facts by taking a view of the future that allows for diversity and facilitates creativity in a society.

Social models: blueprints or processes?

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History has no meaning.

Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 1945.

Introduction

The study of societies can be approached in one of two ways: either as autonomous systems inexorably moving from one state to some other, predetermined, state, or as an overlapping of various psychological factors describable by variables that transcend the individual—socialized knowledge, shared attitudes, social norms, etc.—and yet fundamentally the collective result of human endeavour and creativity. The first is the position of Karl Marx¹ who accorded meaning to history; the second is the position argued by Karl Popper² who accorded history no meaning.

The significance conceded to history is related to the degree of causality perceived in social systems. Thus, if society is considered to be governed by inexorable 'social laws', then history obviously provides a guide to the uncovering of those laws. But if history is thought to be merely a backdrop to the stage on which the present is played out, affecting the present and the future only to the extent that it affects our behaviour at the moment,³ then all history can do is merely offer insight into how we have reached our present position without necessarily affecting the choices we make now and hence without necessarily affecting the future. Historicism is the term coined to describe the process of analysing social forces, identifying the presumed causality of those forces and then projecting the result on to the future as predictions of high certainty. In commenting on historicists, Popper suggested that they appeared to be compensating for their loss of an unchanging world by clinging to the faith that change can be foreseen 'because it is ruled by an unchanging law'.⁴

The idea that socialism evolves in a predetermined way from capitalism is no longer taken seriously.⁵ And while the struggle against this idea (as exemplified by Popper) may be said to have been successful, this idea, like some Janusian beast, persists by presenting a different face under the name of futurology.

The struggle for an open society, for the idea of freedom⁶ is a truly enduring problem of philosophy, enduring because forces of suppression, if not of evil, forever lurk in the nearby shadow; philosophical because the struggle is a battle of ideas: a fight for the mind of man. Those who hold ideas to be the true causal factor in the shaping of societies recognize that only the light of reason can pursue the shadows at the furthest reaches of man's existence.⁷ In this combat for the mind, the ultimate outcome must be measured in terms of behaviour.⁸ As words forge the reality of our existence, so it is by their effect on our deeds, by the congruence between word and behaviour, that we judge the worth of one philosophy against another. It is this criterion I wish to apply to notions of social planning, social goals, and futurology. In summary, I seek to elucidate the following issue: What alternative conceptions of social planning exist, and what is the integrity of each? (Integrity being defined as the congruence between the stated aims of the philosophy and the behaviours it typically facilitates.)

The notion of social goal-setting

In arguing for a particular programme of social reform, Marx contended that it represented the 'natural law' of social evolution uncovered as the result of his scientific analysis. Although his argument met with well-known success in the past, today it is unlikely that a similar result can be expected, given the abundance of conflicting data, the many alternative theories and the large number of scholars with opposing prejudices.⁹ How ironical, then, that despite these factors and the conceptual decline of historicism, there should arise an even more insidious proposition: that man, being rational, intelligent, clever, knowledgeable and above all a creature of choice, should be able to choose his own destiny!

At an earlier period, Marx sought to uncover the fundamental law of social development and thereby prepared the ground for ambitious politicians who would take actions that could help Nature to get to where she 'wanted' to go. But later, when as an aftermath of the work by Popper, Hayek and others, laws gave way to trends and 'trend management', the need to provide a goal or target for these trends and their management gave birth to futurism.

Sequence of steps

The search for Utopia is not new to Western philosophy, Plato's *Republic* being one of the earlier attempts. However, the notion of trends backed by the capacities of the electronic computer has in our age given the search for Utopia new impetus. This rests conceptually on a very simple sequence of steps, as follows:

Step 1. Identify the social goal or national plan that is to be achieved at some future time. (This is the Utopia and may involve a single objective or outline a whole new social order.)

Step 2. Identify the trends that need to be initiated in order to bring society to the desired future.

Step 3. Undertake the actions required to set society's feet on the path marked by these trends so that, at the proper time, a flowering of the 'better' society will occur—surely the hope of all the effort.

This simple scheme guides both the idealist and the bureaucratic planner. The idealist fixes his eyes on the vision of this 'better' society and passionately proclaims that salvation is at hand if only people will follow him unquestioningly. The bureaucrat, on his part, creates a systematic model incorporating the 'significant' trends—too often ignoring, we would note, both the definition and the criteria of 'significant'—and trend possibilities (usually subsumed under the dreadful word 'scenario') and then turns to the computer for printouts of what needs to be done systematically to set things right. This is the technocratic use of the above scheme. But with what sadness we note that the political consequences of both idealism and central planning are the same, namely, widespread intolerance.

The fallacy of composition

This seemingly simple and direct conceptual approach to social development follows from a 'common-sense' view of decision-making at the personal level. In that view, we simply select our objectives, choose our course of

action for achieving them, and then take the steps required; in short, we decide what we want to do and then do it. There are two fundamental objections, however, to letting this common-sense view guide decision-making at the social level. First of all, this simple view itself is flawed; the decision-making process at the personal level confuses what we may like to do with what is within our reach, given our resources, commitment and perseverance. There is a big difference between setting out to dig a hole in one's yard to build a swimming-pool and attempting single-handedly to shift Mount Everest a metre to the left. Second, and more significant to our argument, there is a flaw in the assumption that the approach to decision-making at this personal level will work at the social level. Even though, flaws and all, this approach often does work for the individual and gives an appearance of being purposeful as well, to argue that it will work at the social level is to ignore the fallacy of composition, which is that decision-making at the social level is not and cannot be regarded as a mere quantitative extension of individual decision-making for the same reason that saving in a recession may be good for the individual but is not good for society.

National goal-setting

From time to time, a nation does attempt to draw up goals for itself. Taking the United States as an instructive example, we find that former President Eisenhower attempted to 'develop a broad outline of co-ordinated national policies and programmes; and to 'set up a series of goals in various areas of national activity'. Later President Johnson established a 'Planning-Programming-Budgeting-System' to put the nation's priorities in order. President Nixon after him declared that 'it is time we addressed ourselves, consciously and systematically, to the question of what kind of nation we want to be'.¹⁰

In my own country, New Zealand, there have been National Development Conferences, and today, there is a New Zealand Planning Council, a Commission of the Future, and a 'Prime Minister's Think Tank'. I find that their collective impact has been minimal. Alvin Toffler crystallized the feeling of futility concerning such social goal-setting when he wrote:

The real, as distinct from the glibly verbalized, goals of any society... are already too complex, too transient, and too dependent for their achievement upon the willing participation of the governed to be perceived and defined so easily.¹¹

Unfortunately, his critique of a decade ago fell into the age-old conceptual trap of a debate over *who* should rule, a confusion between function and form of government.¹²

To ask the question 'who should rule' will inevitably bring psychologically loaded answers. Plato, the philosopher, argued that philosophers should rule; Marx, the communist, argued that communists should rule; Hitler, the Fascist, argued that Fascists should rule; Caesar, the Roman Caesar, said that Roman Caesars should rule. I find it is difficult to accept such relationships as coincidental. The goal-setting approach raises the same question, but merely in different words: who should set the goals?

Unfortunately, concern with this question diverts attention from the

truly important issue: Is it possible, in a diverse society, to establish a set of national goals and then implement those goals without reverting to a dictatorship in one form or another?

Methodological problems

I have treated the issue more fully elsewhere;¹³ here I look at the political problems arising from the goal-setting sequence in Steps 1 to 3 above. The principal problem is that the process is implicitly value-laden. Asking a group to decide what it would like the future to be necessarily involves its values. For no matter what its answer is, the group will give priority to objectives it consider most important. This leads to disagreement between groups—environmentalists and developers, for example—and actually aggravates differences by forcing each group to become entrenched in their chosen position. The ability to reach any consensus slowly becomes impossible and even a willingness to keep issues open may disappear as one group feels threatened and opts for disruptive tactics. This happens regularly in labour disputes and confrontations with environmental and consumer groups. A likely result of this inability of groups to agree on goals is for some élite to select the goals: a political party, a group of wealthy individuals, or bureaucrats. Once goals are set this way, dire consequences ensue for the implementation stage: there is limited scope for minority points of view, debate and active dissension are suppressed, and diversity is recognized to be dangerous. After all, what would happen to those who want to implement their plan if diversity should catch on?¹⁴ The ‘plan’ looms so large in the political process that it must be implemented at all costs, whether or not it is still appropriate or useful. The whole goal-setting exercise takes on the set of a uniqueness. Once the goals have been decided, it becomes unnecessary to think and, as for changing one’s mind about the desirability of one or other goal . . . ?

Given this analysis, debates over who should set the goals seem trivial and pointless, for the very process itself is incongruent with the notions of democracy, individual freedom, and diversity. Can those in positions of political power who claim to be sincere in their advocacy of freedom not see this lack of integrity in goal-setting that renders it a notion to be purged from popular vocabulary and political practice?

The dilemma before us

In response to the question of method, we can now state that in a free society it is not possible to establish a set of national goals and set out to implement these through some plan without destroying the very freedom within which these goals were forged. This is understood intuitively and accounts for the fact that no government dependent on the consent of the governed has ever succeeded even with the first stage of this process. This goal-setting approach leads to the goal becoming a value-laden blueprint for society—a Utopia—and that in turn gives rise to an authoritarian political reality. The approach involves insincerity, intellectual expediency and manipulation and is a process without integrity; in other words, the philosophy *qua* behaviour is incongruent. The dilemma before us is now clear: How can we conceptualize the future, that is, how can we plan, while maintaining the integrity of our philosophy in the present?

Psychological theories of time

A psychological theory of time includes a concept of future time. This is important because ideas shape behaviour; how we think today about the future will causally shape that future. The commonly held theory of time considers planning as producing a 'blueprint' for the future. This theory has a serious methodological flaw in its tendency to define the future in ever greater detail. This leads to the goal-setting approach to social development.

I wish to consider an alternative to this theory, one that represents time as a 'flow of problems'. This sees the past as the time when actions were taken to influence future problems, the present as the time when actions are being taken to influence current and future problems, and the future as the time when anticipated potential problems may occur as current problems. This theory not only overcomes the methodological problems inherent in the 'future action blueprint' theory, but also offers many advantages. For example, it accurately structures individual behaviour in relation to social development, it implicates creativity in social development, and provides a simple conceptual framework within which we can relate human aspirations to environmental constraints and the use of knowledge to overcome these constraints.

This proposed theory also introduces important methodological changes that affect our views of planning and of trends. First of all, planning now becomes a 'contingency exercise'. In thinking of the future, a planner begins to assess potential problems according to their probability, seriousness, and timing and then gives priority to the most serious and most immediate. This assists the politician and society to take timely action that can counteract tomorrow's unpleasantness. This theory of time sees the future as potential problems derived from today's situations. These potential problems also can provide the criteria for establishing today's priorities. Any change in the problems then alters the future derived from them; no attempt is made to squeeze the present into some predetermined mould. Thus we see how opportunity is intrinsic to the theory.

Second, planning also becomes a cognitive skill.¹⁵ Rather than being a unique exercise, it now becomes a conceptual orientation, a way of thinking, and of organizing behaviour.¹⁶

Third, the problem-flow theory of time affects our view of trends, defining a trend as 'the perceived social consequences of a number of people adopting similar behaviours in overcoming a common problem'. A trend is thus a description of social development that subsumes social causality. This is similar to the views of Max Weber¹⁷ and contrasts with those of Marx or Durkheim, both of whom placed causality of social facts in earlier social facts.

Changing a trend

The failure to recognize that trends are abstractions gives rise to an insidious political problem. When a problem is equated with a trend, there is a temptation to find straightforward solutions that purport to get society off the trend line. But, in fact, behaviour can be changed in only two ways: by force or by choice. Consider the situation in which planners have come up with the perfect solution to the 'trend' problem, but it is not to anyone's

liking. By focusing on the trend, we are likely to lose sight of its cause and to forget the fact that to change a trend we must change behaviour, that is, we must deal with people, not abstractions.

To employ force in changing a trend is self-defeating and only possible under suppressive regimes. Thus, we are left with choice and the realization that the solution to an intransigent trend is diversity. A multiplicity of solutions to the problem represented by the trend allows individuals freedom of choice and dissipates the distorting impact of the single option, like petrol-driven motor vehicles as the means of personal transport. However, it is not sufficient for governments simply to seek diversity; they must also facilitate the emergence of creativity from within their people. The quest for our own solutions to our needs is the most powerful social force known, although it does not lead to order.

A free society is a rich tapestry of colour, a diversity made one only in its diversity. More than anything else, then, we must learn tolerance. Moreover, if our neighbour is different, we must rejoice in that difference as the expression of our freedom. Freedom is not a licence however; it is a responsibility. Rousseau argued that man, to be free, must break society's chain. What he failed to realize is that freedom is not found in severing the chain, but depends rather on who holds the end of it. The truly free man is a slave to the hardest taskmaster of all: himself and his principles. To preserve today's freedoms we must rediscover self-discipline.

Epilogue

The essence of the choice before societies might be said to be between two models: the Marxist vision of the perfect commune or the Popperian one of 'piecemeal social engineering'; the one founded on knowledge and reason, the other on uncertainty and the recognition of the limits of knowledge. These alternatives can also be summarized as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Two opposing points of view

| | Problem-solving (Popper) | Goal-setting (Marx) |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Time orientation | Past and present | Present and future |
| Immediate objective | Define problem | Set objectives |
| Inherent philosophy | Seeing what is wrong in the present order | How we would like the world to be |
| Political consequences | Free discussion Access to information Public debate and criticism of government | Implementation of the 'plan' Elimination of debate Suppression of diversity |
| Summary | Elimination of existing evils | Production of a future good |

Goal setting offers a 'blueprint' for society, seeking to implement it as an 'end'; problem-solving, on the other hand, is the implementation of a process: one of seeking out today's problems (wrongs or injustices), attempting to deal with them while knowing full well they will re-emerge

tomorrow in some other guise. These opposing points of view are more than mere philosophy; fundamentally, they are applied psychology, an analysis of the likely consequences of a socialization under different views of social development.

Blueprints or processes? This is the choice. And in it resides conformity and suppression or diversity and freedom. ■

Notes

1. See K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967; translation by Samuel Moore first published in 1888, or K. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago, 1969, for some of Marx's original writings. Alternatively see R. N. Carew Hunt, *The Theory and Practice of Communism*, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1950, for an excellent short account of Marxism. A position similar to Marx's has been argued by many sociologists, for example see Émile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, p. 109, New York, Free Press, 1958, where he states that 'the determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among states of individual consciousness'.
2. K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966 (fifth edition).
3. This is a psychological issue concerning the effect of the 'environment' on behaviour. For an outline of some of these issues, see A. Bry, *A Primer of Behavioural Psychology*, Mentor Books, 1975; J. McVicker Hunt, 'Psychological Development: Early Experience', *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 30, 1979, pp. 103-43; W. F. Hill, *Learning: A Survey of Psychological Interpretations*, San Francisco, Chandler Publishing, 1963.
4. K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, p. 161, London. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957.
5. Many scholars seem to reject historicism without necessarily acknowledging the same; for example, see L. Kolakowski and S. Hampshire (eds.), *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal*, Quartet Books, 1977.
6. I reject the intellectual dilettantism that denigrates freedom (for example, Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*); it ignores socialized knowledge as a causal factor in forging behaviour and social development. At very least 'freedom' is an idea, one offering hope; and hope is the stuff of revolutions.
7. See K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge; An Evolutionary Approach*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972; for arguments developing the notion of 'knowledge' independent of a particular individual; similar notions are implicit in the writings of Kenneth Boulding, see *Beyond Economics*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1968.
8. Socialized knowledge is a causal factor in shaping behaviour while behaviour is a causal factor in shaping socialized knowledge. In other words, causality does not involve 'antecedent social facts' (Durkheim) or individual states of consciousness. Rather, the causality in social systems involves the exchange between the two. It is this non-linear nature of causality that has been ill-understood. The second issue implicated is the impact of ideas on behaviour. See J. Piaget, *The Origin of Intelligence in the Child*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953, for a discussion on the impact of the development of knowledge on the development of behaviour. See also E. R. John and E. L. Schwartz, 'The neurophysiology of information processing and cognition', *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 29, 1978, pp. 1-29, for a fine review of recent work on the neurophysiological impact of semantic and syntactic variation of verbal stimuli. The overwhelming conclusion is that ideas do shape behaviour, though we do not know precisely how.

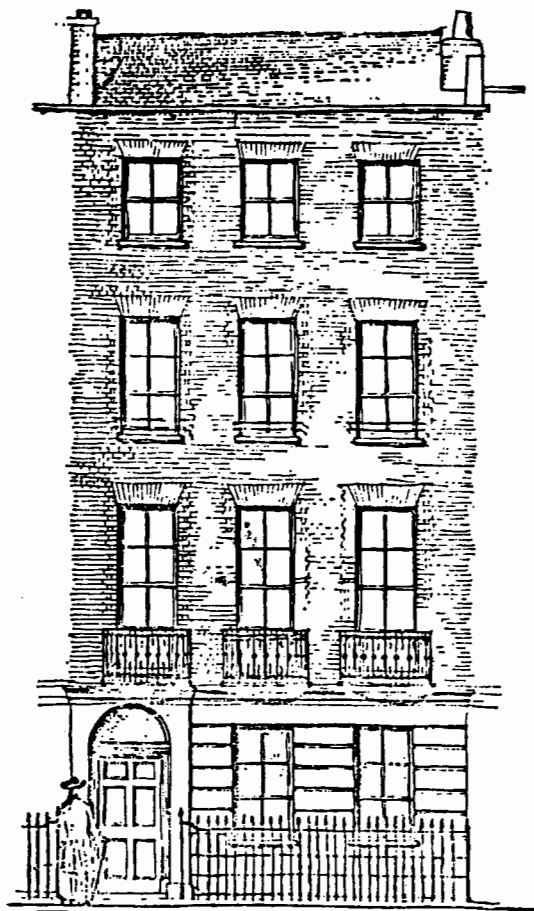
9. See A. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, New York, Random House, 1957; Z. Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages*, New York, Viking Press, 1970; F. A. Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, London, Kegan Paul, 1944.
10. Extracted from Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, London, Bodley Head, 1970.
11. Ibid.
12. The state, within the theory, is given the status of a Platonic form; it is an idea manifest only in specific examples, in forms of government. Governments consist of men with beliefs, values and prejudices; thus all governments are ideological and all ideologies are a matter of choice. Thus the form of government is a function of choice but the functions of government are not, rather they are deduced as sociological necessities, derived directly from the question: 'Does a society need rules?' The answer can only be 'Yes'. It follows that societies need some way of managing conflict within its rules; of updating the rules as appropriate; and of ensuring the rules are obeyed. These, then, are the functions of government, referred to in the West as executive, legislature and judiciary. These functions must be performed by all forms of government, whether they be dictatorships, chieftaincies, tribal councils or duly elected representatives of the people.
13. G. R. Little, "'Process" and Problems: A Philosophy of the Future', *World Future Society Bulletin*, Vol. XII, No. 6, November–December 1978, pp. 26–33.
14. It is generally agreed that such consequences arise today in centralized states. See Z. Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages*, New York, Viking Press, 1970; or M. Voslensky, *Nomenklatura—The Ruling Class in the Soviet Union*, Molden Verlag, 1980.
15. A cognitive skill is a systematized sequence used to structure our knowledge and understanding of some situation into a more effective system so as to improve our handling of the situation. See Jill Larkin, 'Problem-solving in Physics: Structure, Process and Learning', in: J. Scandura and C. Brainerd (eds.), *Structural-Process Models of Complex Human Behaviour*, Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978, for a brief discussion on the cognitive skill of 'problem-solving in physics'.
16. Knowledge, as herein used, is the abstraction from reality used to map behaviour back onto the reality; potential problems are knowledge of the future so used. See F. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
17. M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York, 1964. (Translated by A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons.)

To delve more deeply

HUSAINI, S. Initiative-innovative Patterns of Socio-cultural Rejuvenation: Islamic Ideological and Technological Modernizations, *Islamic Environmental Systems Engineering*, London, Macmillan, 1980.

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