

TOWARD A THEORY OF GUIDED SOCIETAL CHANGE¹

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IF WE OBSERVE A SOCIETY FACED WITH A PROBLEM—POVERTY, RIOTS, UN-safe cars—and formulating a program to deal with it, we can be sure that nine times out of ten the problem will not be solved. If we look again, ten or twenty years later, we shall find that the problem may have been trimmed, redefined, or redistributed, but only infrequently will it have been treated to anyone's satisfaction. Thus, we flatly predict that 15 years from now there will still be massive poverty in the United States (despite the "total war" devoted to its eradication), there will still be outbreaks of violence in the streets during hot summers, and there probably will still be tens of thousands of casualties on the highways each year.

Other societies do not score much better in their systematic attempts to deal with their problems, although the differences in symptom and treatment, we shall see, are not without interest. Nine out of ten underdeveloped countries which as recently as a decade ago optimistically spun master plans for their own development are still underdeveloped.² Even countries which knew a revolution (for example, Bolivia in 1952) or a government oriented toward development and democratization (for example, Bosch's government in the Dominican Republic) did not score much better.³ The Soviet Union's achievements over the last 50 years are impressive, but it has not achieved the goals it set for itself in 1917: to eliminate the state, sharp economic differences and privileges, religion, and maybe the family.⁴ Israel, which set out in 1949 to absorb a massive wave of immigrants, seems instead to be slowly being absorbed by them. In short, the capacity of societies to treat their own problems and to change themselves seems rather limited.

¹ This article is based on a project conducted for the National Science Foundation (GS-1475). The main report of this project is included in my *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

² On the difficulties see Albert Waterston, *Development Planning: Lessons of Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); A. C. Ganson, *The Process of Planning: A Study of India's Five-year Plans, 1950-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), esp. pp. 525-538. See also various reports in Bertram M. Gross, ed., *Action Under Planning: the Guidance of Economic Development* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); Fred G. Burke, *Tanganyika: Preplanning* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), pp. 53-57.

³ See Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Foreign Aid as a Political Instrument, the Case of the Dominican Republic," in John D. Montgomery and Arthur Smithes, eds., *Public Policy*, 14 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration, 1966), pp. 141-160; and John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

⁴ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Soviet Politics: The Dilemma of Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Adam B. Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1960).

SOCIETAL CYBERNETICS

Our purpose is to outline the main sociopolitical factors which, as we see it, significantly affect the relative capacity of a society to act. Our effort is not based on a specific study but is a "theoretical effort," attempting to analyze the factors involved by drawing on a large variety of studies conducted by others, on abstract assumptions about what the relations among factors may or may not be, and on distilled common sense. Above all, we draw on an analogue, from cybernetics.⁵

Cybernetics is the study of steering, of the ways groups of machines, of persons, or combinations of machines and persons, are guided to work jointly to realize goals set by the cybernetic overlayer. Cybernetics is most highly developed in mechanical and electrical systems, where it consists of (1) one or more centers which issue instructions to the units which do the work, and (2) communication lines which carry the instructions from the center(s) to the working units, and return "feedback" information and responses from the subject units. While many cybernetic models omit power, we see it as a third main factor. If the steering units cannot back up their signals with rewards or sanctions, they will frequently be disregarded. A further subtlety is to distinguish, within the centers, between sub-units which absorb and analyze the incoming information and those which make decisions.

When all these elements are available and functioning effectively—communication lines are well "hooked up;" information and decision-making units speak freely to each other—we have an effective control system. Some engineers and managers think that a social system—be it a corporation or a society—can also be run in this manner. As we see it, however, when a cybernetic model is applied to a social unit, it must be taken into account that, for both practical and ethical reasons, the member unit which does the work cannot be coerced to follow "signals" unless they are, at least to some extent, responsive to the member's values and interests. Hence, the downward flow of control signals must be accompanied by an upward flow and a "lateral" (intermember) flow which express what the members wish or are willing to do. We refer to these flows as consensus-building, and to the combination of control and consensus-building, the societal cybernetical mechanisms, as social guidance.

THE ELEMENTS OF SOCIETAL GUIDANCE

The differences between active and passive societies, between those more and those less able to handle their problems, are best studied by examining one cybernetical factor at a time, although effective guidance requires their combination.

Knowledge-units. The main guidance mechanism of societies, whether we like it or not, is the state. When we examine the amount of its funds,

⁵ For basic works on cybernetics, see Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1961), and his *Human Use of Human Beings* (New York: Avon, 1967).

the size of its manpower resources and the extent to which its experts are devoted to the collection and processing of knowledge as compared to other activities, we get an impression of how "knowledgeable" the particular state will be. In looking at contemporary societies, we are immediately struck with one reason they are doing so poorly in their self-management: they spend relatively very little on knowledge and much more on "doing." And, most of the funds that go into the production of knowledge go into natural sciences—the study of the non-social environment. When societies attempt to deal with poverty, riots, and urban problems they often know little about the underlying factors. Blue ribbon commissions appointed to study these factors are composed of prestigious citizens, not experts, and even they can give only a small part of their time. Most social scientists' work, as Herbert Gans recently pointed out, is not policy-oriented and is not readily accessible to key decision-makers.⁶ Few corporations would open an overseas branch on the basis of so little and unsophisticated study as goes into the launching of major national programs of social guidance.

Knowledge that is available must be communicated to the decision-makers. Even in corporations, the planning or R&D unit often has a hard time gaining the ear of the executive board. In society, the social distance between the campus, where many of the best experts reside, and Washington, D.C., is often gigantic, with burned-out scientists, academic statesmen and "operators" frequently blocking the passage. Federal agencies which have their own "think-tanks," such as RAND for the Air Force, do better, at least in terms of their particular goals.

Decision-making. The decision-making strategies followed by the "cybernetic" centers, either explicitly or implicitly, affect the quality of the societal efforts. Anglo-Saxon societies are inclined to be "pragmatic," to "muddle through," making one small decision at a time; they abhor long-range and encompassing planning. Their approach works well when the environment is relatively stable and the system is basically sound. Then, minor revisions do quite nicely. But when basic turnabouts are required, something more than "muddling through," they have a hard time.

Totalitarian societies often err in the opposite direction. They tend to assume that they possess a greater capacity to control the society from one center, over more matters, and for a longer period of time than they actually do. Thus, they overplan and often launch major projects, "Great Leaps," only to be forced to scale them down or recast them at great economic and human cost.

It would be tempting to state that the most effective decision-making strategy is a happy medium. It seems more precise to suggest that the capacity of both pluralistic and totalitarian societies to plan, and hence to make encompassing and anticipatory decisions, rises with improvement in the technology of communication, knowledge storing and retrieval, computation, and research, as has been rapidly occurring since about 1955.

As it is, each society, to some degree, has the decision-making it deserves.

⁶ "Where Sociologists have Failed," Editorial in *Trans-Action*, 4 (Oct., 1967), p. 2.

Decision-making strategies are not chosen in a vacuum but reflect the political structure of the society. Pluralistic societies tend toward muddling through because no central authority—not even the presidency—can impose a set of centrally-made decisions. The decisions reached are affected significantly by the pulling and pushing of a large variety of interest groups. No consistent direction seems possible; zig-zagging is the natural course. Totalitarian societies are more able to travel a straight track, but also tend to run roughshod over the feelings and interests of most of their members.

The conditions under which a "muddling" pattern of decision-making may evolve, more encompassing and "deep" than democratic decision-making, and less inhumane than totalitarian decision-making, depend not only on the availability of new technologies but also on the proper power configuration.

Power. All societies may be viewed as compositions of groupings (by class, ethnic group, region) that differ in their share of societal assets and power. The distribution of power to any one community significantly affects its capacity to treat its problems and to change, if necessary. It is useful to consider the distribution of power from two viewpoints: (1) between the members of the society and the state; (2) among the members of the society.

The state may overpower the society; this occurs either when the state bureaucracies themselves checkmate all other power centers (especially in "pure" military regimes), or—more commonly—in conjunction with some other organization (the Party, the Church) or certain social groupings (such as the landed aristocracy). Or, the state may be weak, overpowered by the society, and fragmented along the same lines as the society. This has occurred in highly feudal societies (e.g., fifth century Europe or ninth century France) and in contemporary tribal societies such as Nigeria (at least up to the time of the recent civil war). When the state is overpowered, societal guidance tends to be unresponsive to most members' needs and values; when it is overpowered, the major agencies for planning and action are knocked out. Only a balanced tension between society and state, each one guarding its autonomy, allows the operation of relatively responsive and active societal guidance. Democracy itself requires such a power distribution: the power of the state to limit conflicts among members to non-violent confrontations and to prevent the over-powering of some members by others; and the autonomous power of the members, to sustain the political give-and-take and to replace those who guide the state if they cease to be responsive to the plurality of the members. Thus, the closer the distribution of power among the members approximates equality the more fully is democracy realized. As the needs of no one group of members are superior to those of others, the only way to make a society responsive to the membership is to give every group an equal hand in guidance. The Scandinavian countries are more democratic than most societies, precisely because they are relatively less inegalitarian.⁷

⁷ Studies which offer evidence relevant to the three preceding points include:

MOBILIZATION AND SOCIETAL CHANGE

The distribution of assets and power in most societies is highly inegalitarian. Consequently some members are able to slant the societal efforts in directions desirable to them. This basic fact is at the root of many societal problems. There is much we could do to eradicate poverty, desegregate, and establish a just and stable peace, but that would cost those who are more powerful part of their worldly goods and—even more important—some of their power.

A society better able to treat its problems thus requires some reduction of power differences. This can be achieved by mobilization of the weaker and underprivileged collectivities. That is the way the working classes made their way into Western societies, and the way Negro-Americans are trying now. The question may be asked: are not those groupings which "hog" the "goodies" and power also those which prevent—by their influence over education, television, jobs, police forces, and so forth—the mobilization of the weaker collectivities? Does not the power to be at the top include the power to keep others at the bottom?

Our answer is that while those at the top do have disproportionate political resources and skills, they cannot prevent the mobilization of the weak for several reasons: (a) processes which they cannot stop if the needs of the economy are to be served (e.g., the spread of education) are assisting the mobilization of the weak; (b) those at the top subscribe to democratic values and make some concessions because of these commitments; and (c) most important, each grouping is free to choose—within the limits of its societal station—how to use whatever resources and skills it commands. Will it be drinking, interpersonal violence, and search for consumer goods, or political organization and action? The transformation which Negro-Americans are now undergoing illustrates both the possibilities and the limits of such self-mobilization. One thing is sure: unless society's guidance mechanism proves responsive to its black members, the transformation of Negro-Americans will not be accomplished. They will not acquire their share of the power, and their problems will not be solved.

There is much more that needs to be said on the subject. (It takes us over

James W. Prothro and C. M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," *Journal of Politics*, 22 (May, 1960), pp. 276-294, where evidence is presented that agreement on "fundamentals" does not exist in the United States on many issues. See also Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," in Joseph R. Fiszman, *The American Political Arena*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), pp. 39-70, and Herbert McClosky, Paul J. Hoffmann, and Rosemary O'Hara, "Issue Conflict and Consensus Among Party Leaders and Followers," *American Political Science Review*, 54 (June, 1960), pp. 406-427. For data on the homogeneity of social characteristics and values among American elite groups, see James N. Rosenau, "Consensus-Building in the American National Community: Hypotheses and Supporting Data," *Journal of Politics*, 24 (Nov., 1962), pp. 639-661; Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency and Influence on Congress," *American Political Science Review*, 57 (March, 1963), pp. 45-56.

seven hundred pages to indicate our viewpoint in *The Active Society*.)⁸ The details are less important than the over-all perspective: society viewed not as a pre-ordained, natural, or rigid structure, but subject to self-directed change by its members, for its members. The social sciences, especially the study of societal guidance, can contribute much to the growth of an active orientation of the society toward itself.

⁸ Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

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Toward a Cybernetic Theory of Societal Processes

An earlier and substantially different version of this article was published in *Medical Opinion and Review*, vol. 4, num. 8 (Aug. 1968), pp. 22-29.

The sixties may be referred to as the domestic huff and puff period: we came; we huffed and puffed about desegregation, elimination of poverty, development of backward countries; and the problems stayed. Why can we not handle our domestic problems more expeditiously and effectively? The answer to this question varies according to the world view or theory of man, society, and history one holds. Some subscribe to a hydraulic theory of national efforts: if the level of effort is pushed up in one place, it will fall lower at all others. Specifically, they blame the war in Vietnam as having drained our resources and energies; but we must note that the country did not handle its domestic affairs much better before the war escalated and most observers do not foresee a major domestic effort once the fighting is finally terminated.¹

Others subscribe to an *elite* theory and blame the leader—be it the President or the mayor. President Nixon is now under criticism for his lack of action on the domestic front. However, his pace can hardly be attributed solely to his personal (or his administration's) shortcomings, for Presidents Johnson, Kennedy and Eisenhower were all—quite justifiably—criticized from the same vantage point. In regard to at least one part of the country, New York City, the question is increasingly asked: Can it be managed at all?

Still others subscribe to a *class* (or economic interest) theory and fault the military-industrial complex, an elite which monopolizes

¹ For typical forecast and analysis, see Charles L. Schultze, 'Budget Alternatives after Vietnam' in Kermit Gordon (ed.), *Agenda for the Nation* (Doubleday and Co., Garden City, New York, 1968), pp. 13-48.

privileges, speaks reforms, but does not really seek them. But we must note that countries said to be free of capitalist ruling classes are not realizing *their* domestic social goals effectively. The USSR's fifty-year-old endeavor to do away with economic differentiation, the state and religion can be characterized at best as moving two steps back for every one it moves forward. Underdeveloped nations form master plans but do not follow their plans. And, Israel, one of the most effective societies, rather than absorbing the immigrants, its top domestic goal, is slowly being absorbed by them.

In addition, there are the *rationalists* who blame our lack of 'know-how' and see at least partial salvation in greater investment in the social sciences and in the accumulation of social knowledge, especially the systematic collection and utilization of data on social processes² and various administrative reorganizations. Finally, there are the newly reinforced *naturalists* who believe that 'human nature' (instincts and genetic predispositions) prevents man from controlling his destiny, or provides him with all he needs to fulfill it. Some key representatives of this school believe we must cease to let our rational processes interfere, thereby losing the capacity to heed our animal base.

All these approaches, it seems to me, are mistaken in that they see one major force or factor as explaining our difficulties to marshal our efforts at societal self-surgery, while actually they are all correct in seeing *a* factor which is important. If we view the role of elites, classes, societal knowledge and organization, our biological limitations and opportunities (and other factors) as *partial* explanations, we may be on the way to eclectically building a theory of societal guidance, of the conditions under which societal processes may be guided toward the goals the membership seeks to realize. Progress in social science over the recent years allows us now to develop a Keynesian theory of *societal* processes, i.e., a theory of the factors which determine our capacity to manage society and of the conditions which will allow us to improve our guiding capacity. Of

2 See 'HEW Urges Annual "Social Report"', *Science*, Vol. 163, Jan. 31, 1969, p. 456; *Toward a Social Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969); and 'Social Goals and Indicators for American Society', May and Sept., 1967 issues of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

course, even once we possess such a theory, however valid, this will only be the first step toward its effective use. At least a generation lapsed after Keynes published his seminal book before it became the basis for economic steerage. Hopefully, application of the theory will not be so long in coming this time around.

The nature of the theory of societal guidance we need can be indicated by drawing upon an *analogue* from cybernetics. (I stress 'analogue' because, to some of my colleagues, the term 'cybernetics' implies a mechanistic approach to social life; as will become evident below, this is not a necessary attribute of a cybernetic approach—surely not of ours.)³ Cybernetics is still most developed in reference to guidance of mechanical and electrical systems. It assumes (a) one or more centers (command posts) that issue signals to the units which carry out the work; (b) communication lines which lead from the center(s) to the working units, carrying the instructions for what is to be done, and 'feedback' lines which carry information and responses from the subject units to the center (in short, two-way communication links). (c) While many cybernetic models omit the conception of power,⁴ we see it as a main factor: if the steering units cannot back up their signals with rewards or sanctions, they will frequently be disregarded (i.e., the command post must be stronger than those who carry out its instructions). (d) A further subtlety is to distinguish, within the command centers, between sub-units which absorb and analyze the incoming information and those which make decisions (i.e., between knowledge makers and policy makers). When all these elements are available and function effectively, that is, communication lines are well linked and not overloaded, information and decision-making units have unimpeded access to each other, etc., we have an effective *control* system.

Some engineers and managers think that a social system, be it of a corporation or of a society, can likewise be managed this way. The government is viewed as the cybernetorial overlayer of society. The White House, Congress, state capitols and city halls provide the

3 For an earlier but fuller discussion of our approach see Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (The Free Press, New York, 1968).

4 Cf. Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (The Free Press, New York, 1963).

command positions. Universities, research institutes, government experts and 'think-tanks'—the knowledge makers. The civil service and the media—the two-way communication lines. As we see it, when a cybernetic model is applied to a social system, one must take into account, for both ethical and practical reasons, that the citizens cannot be coerced to follow 'signals' unless those signals, at least to a significant extent, are responsive to their basic values and interests. If force is used, the system both violates their rights and generates increasing levels of resistance which become a major reason why the society is unable to manage its affairs effectively, whether the goals be collectivization of the farms or abolishing alcoholism. Effective *societal* cybernetics requires that the downward flow of control signals (from the government to the people) be accompanied by effective upward (from the people to the government) and lateral (among citizens) flows of signals, which express the citizens' values and needs. This may sound like a statement from a high school textbook in civics. And indeed this does approximate the textbook model of democratic processes. The reason this must be explicitly included, aside from the fact that an element cannot be left out of a theory just because it is well known, is that, recently—both in the social sciences and in the educated public—it has been widely held that the citizens can be manipulated by their government. If this is true, the mechanic model of cybernetics would suffice as a model for societal theory; downward flows could characterize the process of societal guidance, as policy and its public acceptance could be engineered jointly. It is our position, however, that the power of governments or the mass media to sway the citizenry has been grossly exaggerated. The majority of the citizens are not a mass of atoms, responding to the speeches by national leaders or the stimuli of their TV sets, but are guided chiefly by their biological needs, personalities formed in their youth, positions in the economic structure and positions in the community. It hence does not come as a surprise to us that practically all studies of the effects of manipulative efforts on substantive matters show little or no effect of either the national leadership or the mass media.⁵ These can temporarily rally some segments of the public around a war which is

⁵ Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, *Human Behavior* (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1964), pp. 574 ff.

against the national interest, but not for long; they can make the public shift from one consumer product to another which is at most marginally different. However, the public's political, religious, ethnic, racial or other more deeply rooted preferences cannot be significantly changed.⁶ It is therefore necessary, in seeking to construct a theory of how societies move more effectively toward their own goals, to include *both* the downward flows (to which we refer as societal control) and the upward ones (consensus building) which jointly comprise a theory of societal guidance.

THE ELEMENTS OF SOCIETAL GUIDANCE

The differences between active and passive societies, between those more and those less capable of handling their problems, are best studied by scrutinizing one factor at a time, although effective guidance requires their combination. The theory which emerges is eclectic in the sense that its various components can be seen as representative of those factors previous theories considered sufficient explanations in themselves. *One* such factor is the amount and quality of knowledge an acting social unit possesses. This 'represents' in our scheme the rationalist viewpoint.

Knowledge-units

Upon examination of the amounts of funds, the size of manpower and the extent of expertise devoted to the collecting and processing of knowledge as compared to other activities (e.g., production of goods and services), we gain an impression of how 'knowledgeable' a particular society, government, or federal agency is. Doing so, we are immediately struck with one reason societies often regulate themselves so poorly—they spend relatively very little on knowledge with most of the funds going into the production of knowledge earmarked for the natural sciences (for the study of the non-social environment). When societies deal with poverty, riots, and urban

⁶ Among the studies which demonstrated this point are, Elaine Cumming and J. Cumming, *Closed Ranks—an Experiment in Mental Health Education* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1957); Albert D. Bideman, 'The Image of "Brainwashing"', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (1962).

problems, they often have little knowledge about the underlying factors, and may even incorrectly identify them. One instance of a policy based on insufficient knowledge is one that American society has followed for more than four decades, a highly punitive policy against the users of marijuana. The assumptions on which this policy is based, that the weed is detrimental to health or that it leads its users to the consumption of other, more dangerous drugs, have yet to be demonstrated. Another example of inadequate researching is provided by experts who urge reducing the relief rolls by sending the 900,000 mothers to work, with their children to be left in day-care centers. Nobody has established yet whether or not this would result in psychological problems for young children such as to create more social costs and human misery than that which the system tried to remove.

Blue ribbon commissions are appointed to study other issues, but these commissions tend to be composed of prestigious citizens rather than experts, citizens who can dedicate only a small part of their time to studying the issue at hand.⁷ The President's Commission on Civil Disorder completed its work in about seven months. But its members held full time jobs 'on the side' including such as the mayoralty of New York City or the top position of the United Steel Workers. No wonder the members could devote only a few days to the study of the causes and cures of riots. The situation in the social sciences is not much better: most social scientists' work is not policy-oriented and not readily accessible to key decision-makers. Prestige and promotions go to those who work on theoretical subjects; applied research is discouraged.

The knowledge that is available to experts must be communicated to societal decision-makers before it can be effectively utilized. Even in corporations, the planning as well as the research and development units often have a hard time capturing the attention of key executives. In society, the social distance between the research centers, where many of the best experts work, and Washington, D.C. (let alone city hall and the state capitol) is often vast. 'Retired' scientists,

7 Daniel Bell, 'Government by Commission', *The Public Interest*, No. 3 (Spring, 1966), pp. 3-9; and Robert Blanner, 'Whitewash Over Watts', *Transaction*, Vol. 3 (March-April, 1966), pp. 3-9. 54.

academic statesmen frequently further lengthen the passage. Those federal agencies which have their own 'think-tanks', e.g., RAND for the Air Force,⁸ tend to accomplish more, in terms of their respective goals, which shows the importance of systematic 'input' of information and analysis to policy makers. This may seem obvious, but little action has been taken to correct this situation on the domestic front.

Decision-making

The examination of how consequential are differences in decision-making styles or strategies, stands in our theory for the consideration of the role of elites and leadership. As we see it, Anglo-Saxon societies are inclined to be 'pragmatic', to 'muddle through', making one small decision at a time; they avoid longer-run overall planning.⁹ This approach is quite effective when the environment is relatively stable and the system is basically sound. Then, minor revisions are sufficient. But when major change is required, something more than 'tokenism', these pragmatic societies have a harder time adapting. The war in Vietnam is a case in point. It was escalated gradually, step by step, following neither a 'dove' nor a 'hawk' policy, and it seems without genuine attempts at *basic* change of policy.

Totalitarian societies often err in the opposite direction. They tend to assume they have a much greater capacity to control the society from one center, over more matters, and for a longer period of time than they are actually capable of. Thus, they overplan and often launch major projects, 'Great Leaps', only to be forced to tone them down or revise them at tremendous economic and human cost.¹⁰

It would be tempting to state that the most effective decision-making strategy is a happy medium, between democratic underplanning and totalitarian over-planning. It seems more accurate to suggest that the capacity of both democratic and totalitarian societies

8 For a careful study see Bruce L. R. Smith, 'Strategic Expertise and National Security Policy: A Case Study', in John D. Montgomery and Arthur Smithies (eds.), *Public Policy*, Vol. 13 (1964), pp. 69-106.

9 See Charles E. Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (The Free Press, New York, 1965).

10 For a recent study see James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967).

to make encompassing and anticipatory decisions has increased with the improvements that have been occurring rapidly since about 1955 in the technology of communication, knowledge storage and retrieval, computation, and research. That is, we are rapidly gaining *tools* of societal guidance which were not available before. While no society can effectively manage all the matters which totalitarian states seek to control, we have now the capacity for more societal policy-making and guidance than democracies assumed—quite correctly until recently—is feasible.¹¹

In addition, it may be said that, to some degree, each society has the decision-making pattern which best suits it. Decision-making strategies are not chosen in a vacuum but partially reflect the political structure of the society. Democratic societies tend toward 'muddling through' because there is no powerful central authority, including the presidency, that can impose a master plan, even if this were otherwise desirable. The policies formulated are the outcome of the give and take of a large variety of interest groups, civic groups, political parties, and varying trends in public opinion. Under these circumstances, straight sailing seems difficult; zig-zagging is the natural course. Totalitarian societies can more easily follow one course but are also much more likely to disregard the feelings and interests of most of their constituencies. A 'middling' policy-making—one deeper and more extensive than democratic decision-making, but also much more humane than totalitarian decision-making—requires not only new technologies of communication and control but also the proper power structure in society.¹²

Power

The study of the distribution of power in society and the uses to which it is put represents in our theory the class (or inter-group 'conflict') approach. All societies are composed of sub-groupings of members such as classes, regions, ethnic groups, which differ in the share of the societal assets and power they command. (In our society, obviously, farmhands, black Southerners and Spanish-Americans

11 This point has been made by Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1965).

12 For illustration of this point see Etzioni, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12.

tend to have a smaller proportion of power than their share of the population.) The distribution of power in any one society significantly affects its capacity to treat its problems and to change its structure and policies, if it should be necessary. It is useful to consider the distribution of power from two vantage points: first, between the members of the society and the government and, second, among the members of the society.

The government, and more generally, the state, may overpower the society. This occurs when the state bureaucracies either themselves checkmate most other power centers (e.g., as in contemporary Egypt) or—more commonly—do so in conjunction with some other organization (the Party, in Communist China). On the other hand, the state may be overpowered by society, fragmented the way society frequently is. This has occurred in highly feudalistic societies (e.g., ninth-century France) and continues to occur in contemporary tribal societies (such as Nigeria).

When the state is overpowering, societal guidance tends to be unresponsive to most members' needs and values (as in Stalin's Russia); when it is overpowered, the major societal cybernetic overlayer is knocked out and the society drifts (as is the case in many underdeveloped countries). Only a tense balance between society and state, each one guarding its autonomy, is able to maintain a relatively responsive and active societal guidance. Democracy itself requires such a power constellation: *state power* which limits conflicts among member-groupings (such as classes and races) to non-violent give and take, and prevents the overpowering of some member grouping(s) by others; *autonomous power* of the citizens which maintains the capacity to change the government, i.e., to replace those in power if they cease to be responsive to the plurality of the citizens. The fewer the power differences among the member groupings the more democratic a government can be. As the needs of no member have a superior claim over those of any other, the only way to assure that a society will be responsive to the membership-at-large is to give all members comparable amounts of control over its guidance mechanisms. This means that not just the right to vote, but the socio-economic and educational prerequisites for its effective use, must be extended to all citizens before a democracy can be fully effective.

The special features of the war on poverty illustrate the effect of power relations on societal guidance. The 89th Congress was unusually liberal, due to the anti-Goldwater landslide of 1964, which elected Democrats and liberals where Republicans and conservatives had previously been chosen. This, plus heavy pressure from the President, facilitated passage through Congress of an anti-poverty bill. Its implementation was to rely heavily on 1050 Community Action boards, which would receive anti-poverty funds and manage their programs with 'maximum feasible participation of the poor'. Leaving aside the question whether this would ameliorate the plight of the poor, it surely did not fit the existing power structure, because it by-passed both city hall and the established welfare agencies. In 1966, a fair number of liberals were defeated, less than 3% of the eligible poor voted in elections for the Community Action boards, and by the end of 1967, the anti-poverty program was being restructured so as to bring it under control of the local authorities. Similar points could be made with reference to bussing of school children, attempts to control smoking, or efforts to help the farmhands. A social program needs political backing; if this is not forthcoming, the program will sooner or later be modified or blocked.

The power relations among the groupings which make up a society shift over time due to a great number of processes, including technological changes, the extension of education, and a rise in the level of self-organization of some previously less organized groups (e.g., Negro-Americans).¹³ As power relations change, new programs become feasible, and old ones are undermined. In other cases, new coalitions are formed; for instance, federal aid to education was initiated when a way was found to answer some of the needs of public and parochial schools.¹⁴

Consensus Building

Fortunately, societal guidance is activated not only by power but

¹³ For a good description of the Negro community in Chicago before mobilization see James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics* (The Free Press, New York, 1960).

¹⁴ For a detailed report see Frank J. Munger and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *National Politics and Federal Aid to Education* (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, N.Y., 1962).

also by the moral commitments of the citizens. People are motivated not only by self-interest but also by their conceptions of patriotism, social justice, and freedom. Thus, American advocacy of foreign aid, the United Nations, or civil rights can be explained at best partly by the self-interest or power of their advocates. Such values as humanity, peace, and justice have a key role in American subscription to these policies. Now, there is less than full agreement among the people of any country with regard to the values to which they subscribe or the ways they believe those can be advanced. Nor are such positions unchangeable. A program's chances to be successful are greater assuming a given level of power backing, the more it is in accord with the values of the majority of the citizens (or the more it succeeds in obtaining their endorsement, if initially the policy conflicted with their values).

One of the great unanswered questions of our political life is what new or improved mechanisms for consensus building we will evolve. Elections are too infrequent, too indirect, 'mass' phenomena to satisfy the need, especially as more and more facets of the citizen's life are affected, ever more deeply, by the government. Participation in the control of 'private governments', such as those in charge of universities and hospitals, emerges as one intricate answer. *Peaceful* demonstrations, as a routine political tool, provides another. Neither of these is satisfactory; they serve mainly to illustrate the need for more avenues of 'upward' and 'lateral' participation, and attempts made to answer them.

Active for What?

Assuming a society developed more effective cybernetic systems—better knowledge, more effective decision-making, higher degree of power balancing for its programs and more consensus to endorse them—which values would it promote and what kind of society would it be?

Social philosophers have tried, at least since the days of Plato's academy and the biblical prophets, to answer these questions, to define the Good Society. The resulting Utopias sound attractive but also frequently leave the reader with an acutely frustrated sense of irrelevancy; these Utopias obviously cannot be realized.

The Utopian writers also tend to assume that the writer, philo-

sopher or social scientist can speak for man, identify his values and needs and proclaim them in the form of an ordered platform. As I see it, such a task is both extremely presumptuous (the Utopia maker plays king if not God) and headed for failure.

The values a society effectively manages will have to be those *its* citizens will seek to advance. A Keynesian theory of societal processes informs the citizenry where to turn to get more of the values more fully and more rapidly realized; it does not tell them what their values ought to be. Actually, only as society becomes more active, both in pursuing its goals and in providing for all its citizens a chance of true and full participation, will many of the members and society, itself, discover what the deeper preferences are.

Social science's answer ought to be sheerly 'procedural'; we should point to ways man may be more in command of societal processes and less subject to his blind fluctuations, rather than spell out where precisely he will guide the processes once he is more involved in decision-making. That, by the way, is prescribed in the traditional conception of democracy as the best way for citizens to choose their government and to make it realize their values. True, an active society will promote several key values, without which it cannot be active, such as the greatest possible participation in its political life. This, in turn, requires a free and informed citizenry, and at least a measure of economic affluence so that the struggle for survival will not take up all their time and energies.¹⁵ But all this put together provides only for a rather 'basic' Utopia; the rest will have to be filled in, by the citizens, acting together to make society more responsive to *their* needs and values. An effective theory of societal guidance cannot determine the goals toward which the system should be directed, any more than can the Keynesian theory tell us whether we ought to prefer economic growth over price stability, full employment over growth, etc. Such theories, can, at best, tell us how to achieve our goals once we formulate them and help us to see the available alternatives.

15 S. M. Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53 (1959), p. 71.