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Philippe Warin

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Stéphane Narath and Frédéric Varone kindly proposed that I write the chapter "A pragmatic constructivism". I wish to thank them warmly for that. I don't know whether the product is acceptable, but their proposal intrigued me and I wanted to take the opportunity of this wonderful gathering to talk about it. I very much regret not being able to do so directly in your presence.

Trained in a tradition of public policy analysis dominated by so-called "cognitive" approaches, I have always considered that the analytical model developed by Peter and the team surrounding him is particularly interesting because of the pragmatic perspective that it affords. As I had never spoken about this to Stéphane or Frédéric, their proposal revealed their talent as mediums! They had guessed my broad adherence to the model developed by Peter, whom I accompany with much interest and pleasure in running a public policy analysis seminar at the Institut Politiques of Grenoble. That is, unless Stéphane and Frédéric, through Peter, had perceived why I found it necessary to import – there where the reference frameworks approach had been produced and taught – a differently instrumented approach whose main merit, in my opinion, is that *it does not stop at the threshold of public policies*,.

This is the very issue that I wish to discuss here, and that I find is not considered adequately in the chapter proposed in the book: the difficulty of cognitive and today discursive approaches to say what policies actually *are*. Analysing an issue of this nature – probably as incorrect as it is pretentious – warrants long detours into the contexts of production and the underlying theoretical plans of the various approaches concerned. Some have started to do so. In particular I have in mind the highly interesting paper by Barbara Lucas – yet another Swiss colleague! – presented at the congress of the French Political Science Association last September. I will limit myself here to a very brief discussion of discursive approaches in public policy analysis, for one reason mainly.

In more and more countries today, public policy analysis is adopting discourse analysis. As David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis have shown, political science in general is doing so, following other disciplines. The reasons put forward to explain this interest relate to the assumption (or the fact, for proponents of discourse theory) that the ascendancy of policy-makers (or public authorities) over the discursive field is essential particularly because the "resources" of policy-makers (in Peter's sense) are weakening. Far more than a strategic accessory in the service of actors' interests (as with Paul Sabatier), political discourse is considered as the main research subject. In recent years many studies have highlighted *political language* and its normative approach to point out the "hegemony of polity" in governance regimes, or the "polity's role" in the reconstruction of stabilized identities when nation states' capacity for integration is overwhelmed by supranational forms of trade and regulation. From this political and scientific context, the *argumentative turn* in policy analysis, promoted in the 1990s by authors such as Franck Fischer (but in embryonic form in earlier comparative work such as that of Hugh Hecló on the development of British and Swedish social policies), seems to be an extension of the reference framework approach. It focuses on the place and role of ideas in the framing of public issues as problems, and of possible solutions.

The pragmatic approach that Peter supports seems to be very different, most probably for several reasons. If this is indeed so, I would like to ask Peter to explain why. After reading his writings and watching him lecturing, I wish to say the following. Research inspired by discursive and previously cognitive approaches (that could be grouped under the term "argumentative approaches") tends to focus a great deal on the analysis of the construction of public problems and their solutions. Yet it makes no reference to concrete public policies and shows little or no interest in their "impacts" and "effects". Hence, between the advocates of these argumentative approaches, and Peter and others (Peter has gathered a following), there is a great divide that is difficult to bridge – a divide between two definitions of what a public policy actually *is*.

Peter considers that a public policy *is* a concrete response to a given social problem, whereas the advocates of argumentative approaches believe that public policies are above all a self-realizing (or "performative") discourse (the public policy *is* the

discourse that pronounced it). As far as I know Bruno Dente was the first to have perceived this tendency in the cognitive approach when he warned its French supporters to be careful not to "*parler de 'la politique du politique' comme politique publique, avec ses acteurs, ses réseaux, etc.*"¹. Was Bruno, for all that, calling for an analysis of public policy as an action intended to transform supposedly problematical behaviours, that incorporates in its realization a share of political work of integration of contradictory interests (between "target groups" and "beneficiary groups", according to Peter)? I don't know and I would have liked to put the question to him.

It would spoil a festive and not only scientific occasion such as this one to talk of the "war of positions". But when I hear it said, *in the wings*, that it is a matter of management studies and not of policy analysis to define public policies as "*a sequence of intentionally coherent decisions or activities, aimed at altering the behaviour of the social groups supposedly at the origin of the problem politically defined as collective*", then I fear the worst!

In any case, we may well wonder whether Peter's definition of public policy does not seriously stick one's oar in the "all discursive" that is unable – in the present state of its applications – to tell us what policies *do* and therefore what they *are*. *Are* policies anything different to what they *do* to the society on which they act? Disavowing the "problem-solving" orientation, as many argumentative approaches do, changes nothing of the fact that policy analysis also has the objective – even if it is not the main one in some people's eyes – of studying "public decisions" and their "impacts" and "effects". Failing to acknowledge this would make policy analysis meaningless, for what would be the point of an analysis incapable of saying what policy-makers actually produce? Let's hope therefore that those convinced by argumentative approaches are neither flashed by a radar on the road, nor develop Alzheimer's disease, nor experience any other such misfortunes, so that they can carry on believing that the road safety policy, the Alzheimer's plan, and many other policies are basically just discourse!

¹ DENTE B. (1995), "Incohérence ou éclatement de l'Etat ?", counterpoint to the article by Bruno Jobert, *in* B. THERET (ed.), *L'Etat, la finance et le social. Souveraineté nationale et construction européenne*. Paris, la Découverte, coll. "Recherches", pp. 244-252.

As we can see, the question is not only one of a "missing link", as Barbara Lucas puts it. It seems particularly complex and even serious, if we consider from this point what the social function of public policy analysis and its teaching ought to be.

We can now conceive that the gap can (partially) be bridged. I will conclude with a few comments and questions in that direction – but this time starting from how the "all discursive" can stick one's oar in Peter's pragmatist approach.

Without going off into grand extrapolations on the philosophical ulterior motives of these two main streams of policy analysis, we can assume that the divide mentioned here is basically the one separating *rationalism* and *relativism*. With you, Peter, I wonder whether there is not a fear of relativism, which evokes both the dissolution of critical meaning and the collapse of scientific rigour.

From hanging around in the wings, I have the impression that the main criticism by the proponents of argumentative approaches, levelled at those which in their opinion – but not in mine, as you have seen – resemble a management study, relates to the well-known denunciation of objectivism and the instrumental rationality of public policies. As Barbara Lucas points out, Martin Rein, John Dryzek, Franck Fischer, John Forester and Deborah Stone, to mention but a few, have contributed to denouncing the image of neutrality and objectivity associated with policy analysis, mainly by highlighting their implicit significations and the values they convey. Dear Peter, is there no response to be given to this strong comment, by urging analysts to focus sharply, for example on the categorization of the target groups that influence the definition of the public problem so much? Without giving up anything fundamental, would it not be advantageous, on this *product* of a policy as on the others, to take more advantage of studying "policy narratives"? The application of your analytical model to environmental policies does not seem to be incompatible with the work of Maarten Hajer who, on this type of policy, has undertaken micro studies of processes of discussion governing the formulation of the general discourse on the definition of the public problem. His approach does not seem to be the goal of policy analysis, but rather an interesting modality for the one that you promote.

Another remark and question. Maarten Hajer and Henk Wagenaar have spoken about "deliberative policy analysis". It is clear that in many countries the state is no longer sovereign, and analyses of "politico-administrative apparatus" attest to that. Hence, deliberation and the democratization of deliberation through citizens' participation (as "beneficiaries" and, why not, "target groups") in the expertise concerning them is, for some (Hajer and Wagenaar; Dryzek; Fischer; Papadopoulos; etc.), precisely a major solution (or "resource"). Now, in the list of resources that incorporate your model, there are two ("political support" and "consensus") that leave room for deliberation and, through them, for fundamentally argumentative processes. Of course that has not eluded you, but do those who apply your model take the time to analyse how, right down to discursive processes, these resources effectively act? Clearly, questions of method and of the required empirical work spare none of our approaches.

But you're certainly not someone that I'll criticize for not telling us to work, work and work even more. For by working on the empirical development of the respective reference frameworks, the gap between them might just be narrowed down a little.

Philippe Warin, CNRS, Pacte/IEP Grenoble.