PROGRAM EVALUATION AND THE ESTHETIC DIMENSION
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EVALUATION & HUMANIST THEORY

Program evaluation is usually thought to give an institution a control mechanism. But, control in most cases is not self-control, because the entire evaluation process usually assumes the form of an imposition. The evaluation procedure treats those to be evaluated in an adversary manner. This style of control cannot be indicative of humanism, particularly in view of the fact that this behavioral monitoring is grounded in the 19th-Century rendition of scientific control. Is this the best that can be wished in the field of program evaluation? Does the idea of evaluation itself always have to imply an external locus of personal control? Or, can the concept of behavioral monitoring come to be associated with self-management and self-control?

If humanist social theory hopes to make real advances, it will have to prove itself in the attempt to undertake real social action. Therefore, such a practical area of sociology as evaluation research will have to be considered within the purview of humanist approaches to social analysis. Consequently, the concept of control which is associated with program evaluation will have to be altered. Evaluation must be understood to be nothing more than the process whereby a project of personal social action is monitored to permit ready documentation of its success in meeting its goal. Then, program evaluation could promulgate human values, rather than evaluate the performance of a person or organization against a set of historically mandated requirements.

THE ESTHETIC DIMENSION

How can this change take place? The change can occur only if the world is rendered open so that human action might be capable of registering its mark. This can happen only if the individual can recognize the esthetic dimensions of personal action (Marcuse 1978). Marcuse's esthetic dimension is rendered available by performing what the phenomenological literature terms *epoche.* The performance of the *epoche* suspends the urgency usually demanded by the reality structure. As a result, behavior cannot be thought to be the result of a reality imperative, but must be understood to extend from the motivation inspired by the meanings individually inscribed in the world. No reality structure can be thought automatically to legitimize a particular behavioral repertoire following the recognition of the esthetic dimension.

This esthetic dimension of social existence requires the humanist theorist to view program evaluation as a method of self-management. Self-management here is used in a sense identical to that used recently by Yugoslav sociologists. For program evaluation to facilitate the self-actualization of those evaluated, as is the case in self-management, we must shift from the ontology which presently underpins all evaluation activity. Others have recognized the need for this shift in program evaluation if meaningful results are to be had from evaluation research (Guttentag 1977; Deutscher 1974). Guttentag and Deutscher advocate either a move from deductive- to inductive-research theories, or they leave the issue of establishing performance goals at a stage which merely recognizes the existence of manifest and latent goals. Both approaches fall short of illuminating the esthetic dimension.

Both approaches allow self-actualization through program evaluation to operate in a natural domain. Only the sphere substantiating the theoretical position is altered, without affecting the major assumptions of each position. To use Hegel's famous terminology, merely the quantity of argument is changed, while the quality remains the same. Neither position really advances in a reflective manner, which results in each position merely advancing a limited rendition of the position it originally set out to critique. To introduce the esthetic dimension, reflexivity must be introduced into program evaluation.

TESTABLE THEORY

What type of social theory substantiated in reflective thought can readily be adopted to the research needs of a social-service delivery program? This type of theory is represented by hermeneutic theory. Hermeneutic theory opens the world in an esthetic manner, and outlines every component of the evaluation process according to the understanding that evaluation should not assume the form of an enforcer

mandated to verify the adequacy of be-
havioral performance. Hermeneutic theory
is reflective not merely because it acknow-
ledges the effects of values in research, as
does Gouldner, but because it also tries to
account adequately for the meanings
which constitute all objects of value. I will
illustrate the liberating effect which her-
meneutic theory can have on program
evaluation, by comparing it with a specific
variant of systems theory now in use for
evaluating social-service programs.

SYSTEMS THEORY

The most popular version of systems
theory used to conduct program evaluation
is a management system called *manage-
ment by objectives* (MBO). This manage-
ment system, in tracing its origin to a
source similar to that of systems theory,
recognizes that the only meaningful type of
evaluation is substantiated by anti-
metaphysical principles. System theory's
anti-metaphysical stance represents the in-
tent to avoid theological explanations of
social behavior. This move to a more prac-
tical footing for explaining social action has
a long history in sociology. But such social
theorists as Saint-Simon, Comte, Spencer,
Locke, and most recently, Durkheim and
Parsons, have made precisely the same er-
ror. Their error is to equate the practical
world with the natural world, as if what is
presumed real must also be presumed to
be natural, *sui generis.* Management by ob-
jectives makes a similar error. Though this
system properly emphasizes the idea of
practical action in the development of any
evaluation system, it does not significantly
open the world enough so that practical
action, which is thought to construct the
world, can be seen as esthetic. This can
readily be seen in the method which man-
agement by objectives calls the most
adequate for ensuring worker participation
in the process of constructing a manage-
ment system.

WORKER PARTICIPATION

True worker participation in the labor
process can come only through the sys-
tematic suspension of the logic underpin-
ning that process (Markovic 1975). But it is
by no means certain that a management
system has advanced to this position
merely because it advocates such policies
as worker participation in the work process,
decentralization of administrative decision

making, or worker initiatives to expedite
implementation of labor policies. None of
these practices guarantees worker control
of the labor process, and may merely serve
as a palliative for an intolerable situation.
Note that each of these practices merely
insures that the worker can add some
commentary to the work process. It in no
way assures that the worker will be pro-
vided the latitude to help construct the
policies under which she/he works. Such
discussion is only monological, in that the
worker is informed as to just what propos-
als are deemed legitimate. Only when the
worker can participate in the work process
in a dialogical way can that process be as-
sumed to be inside the worker's sphere of
influence (Habermas 1973).

Just what is meant by the worker being
dialogically involved in the management
process? Authors such as Gorz, Habermas,
and Buber have tried to answer this ques-
tion, and all have advanced to one conclu-
sion: that worker control that is engaged
through a dialogical methodology cannot
be scientific or technological in the Baco-
nian sense. Such control presupposes that
an immutable order is the result of any dis-
cussion, while the dialogical rendition does
not establish order, but rather, in Heideg-
ger's words, "lets order be" in its shimmer
of elusiveness. In this sense, the dialogue
does not serve merely to inform order of its
destiny, but instead, requires that the self-
reflection implicit in any order manifest it-
self, so that all order can provide its own
destiny.

THE NEED TO LISTEN

Habermas refers to his rendition of the
truly participatory discussion as *non-
repressive dialogue,* while Buber calls his
version of this phenomenon the *I-thou* rela-
tion. Both authors require that participants
involved in these types of interaction for the
first time must accomplish one task. They
must really *listen* to the speaker's an-
nouncement instead of imposing a control-
ling form employed to assess the legiti-
macy of the content of the encounter. For
the first time, the investigator must really
concentrate in order to achieve understand-
ing. The concept of listening itself elimi-
nates the possibility of truthfulness of con-
tent being retained as an obvious compos-
ite of meanings. Because of this need to
listen, the legitimacy of any specific com-
posite of content cannot usurp the inten-

tions of another. Consequently, every interactional position should demand that it be recognized in terms of its own particular claim to legitimacy. Only when the worker can act with this type of force, which might be called the force of the world, can it be supposed that the worker is truly involved in the management process.

Management by objectives merely allows for worker or *line-staff* input into the management process in that it does not question the goals of an organization, but merely hopes to reflect the natural goals assumed to be valid from the outset of any investigation. Discussion in this context merely serves to insure that management information is disseminated to all parties to be evaluated. It is in no way sufficiently reflective to assure treating the issue of construct validity. Management by objectives does not require that all the parties involved in the management process must address each other in genuine dialogue. Based on its traditional source, management by objectives recognizes only one aspect of language. It is concerned only with the objective expression of dialogue, instead of the actual tension of the dialogue. In this case, discussion only results in clarifying facts, instead of the actual articulation of facts. Therefore, real worker participation in the process of actualizing facticity is kept to a minimum. Management by objectives basically aims to control through elimination of accidental misunderstandings which are implicit in real, historical, living language.

GOALS

Once the ambiguity of what Merleau-Ponty calls the *wild being* of language is removed from the situation in which the management system is developed, the system inadvertently assumes an autonomous status existing over and against the individuals to be evaluated. When this occurs, self-management is no longer possible. The locus of personal control is no longer within the individual's purview. Program evaluation in this sense no longer is able to penetrate the source of goal-achievement motivation. Instead, it must concern itself with merely assessing whether or not a set of manifest or natural goals has been achieved. If so, what the participants of a program really hope to gain from participating in a social-service program will never be known, except perhaps in a disor-

derly manner. With this approach to program planning, all later program development can hardly be supposed to progress rationally. Community goals may only approximate goals that are thought to exist relative to the service to be provided. One cannot presume that such an approach is humanist-oriented. Without an awareness of the esthetic dimensions of human life, all social life proceeds in a reified and disorderly manner.

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