



This contribution is based on a keynote address to the 9th UK Evaluation Society Annual Conference, 1–3 December 2003 in Cardiff, Wales, UK.

Getting Evidence into Practice

Perspectives on Rationality

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Introduction

The UK Government's renewed emphasis on evidence-based policy making (EBP) is held to reflect a less ideological, more pragmatic 'third way' to developing and implementing economic and social policies. The new mantra – 'what matters is what works' – signals a resurgence of traditional notions of rationality in policy making. It implies a central role for social research and evaluation in developing robust evidence of how and why policies do, or do not, 'work' and policy-making processes that prioritize the influence of such evidence.

Of course, there is nothing new in the notion that the application of knowledge to the conduct of social affairs improves the prospects for human betterment. This was the conviction of Francis Bacon in the 17th century (Zagorin, 1998), whose advocacy of systematic critical empiricism founded upon careful experimentation was passionately endorsed by John Dewey, in the early 20th century, in his quest for a philosophical basis for the capacity to achieve social progress:

... [I]n the degree in which an active conception of knowledge prevails ... [c]hange becomes significant of new possibilities and ends to be attained; it becomes prophetic of a better future. Change is associated with progress rather than with lapse and fall. Since changes are going on anyway, the great thing is to learn enough about them so that we be able to lay hold of them and turn them in the direction of our desires. (Dewey, 1957: 116)

For me, this represents a more eloquent exposition than is found in contemporary accounts but Dewey's perspective also raises some concerns about the current terms of debate about EBP. In particular, I want to argue that this debate is dominated by the assumptions of 'instrumental rationality' and that we need to adopt a more 'practical' conception of rationality as a basis for an appropriate institutional framework for 'getting evidence into practice'.

I wish to emphasize at the outset that this is not a nihilistic 'demolition job' on EBP. I do not subscribe to the pessimistic diagnosis of some 'postmodernists' about 'a world out of control and beyond the reach of redemptive politics' (O'Sullivan, 1993). Rather, my purpose is to raise and discuss some issues that arise with the EBP project in the interests of seeking to enhance the role of reason in 'attaining the better and averting the worse' (as Dewey [1993] puts it) – a mission to which I have been committed throughout my professional career.

Indeed, it seems to me that, in spite of the postmodernist challenges, a basic optimism about the role of scientific knowledge remains embedded in western liberal democratic political systems. In the 1960s the social sciences became an institutionalized component of government policy making, being seen as a key basis for more effective policy (Wagenaar, 1982). Indeed, Martin Bulmer (1987: 349) has argued that there was considerable over-optimism at this time about the potential role of social science based upon '... an almost euphoric sense that social science really could change the world.' This optimism was shaken in the 1970s and 1980s by a growing scepticism based upon a lack of evidence that social science research was actually influencing policy decisions. This scepticism was reinforced by the Thatcher Government's stance, founded upon Sir Keith Joseph's famous antipathy to social science, characterized by Bulmer (1987) as 'a general hostility to the social sciences and social research, with tinges of philistinism'.

The resurgence of enthusiasm for EBP that accompanied the accession to power of New Labour embodies, on the face of it, a renewed optimism about achieving direct and instrumental use of research in policy-making processes, ushered in by the Prime Ministerial declaration that 'what counts is what works' (Powell, 1999: 23). The Government's preoccupation with EBP has developed in the context of a model of 'modern, professional policy making' that has been propounded by the Cabinet Office. Thus, modern policy making lies at the heart of the 'modernizing government' agenda, which is seeking to make government more responsive and effective in achieving results (Cabinet Office, 1999; Sanderson, 2001, 2002). And the emphasis is very much on results, expressed in the form of measurable targets in government departments' Public Service Agreements (PSAs) with the Treasury (HM Treasury, 2000).

The underpinning rationale of the Government's position on EBP was articulated a couple of years ago by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in a much-quoted lecture to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Blunkett, 2000). He argued that 'rational thought is impossible without good evidence ... social science research is central to the development and evaluation of policy' (Blunkett, 2000: 24); he also emphasized the Government's 'clear commitment that we will be guided not by dogma but by an open-minded approach to understanding what works and why' (Blunkett, 2000: 2); and expressed his 'passionate belief' that 'having ready access to the lessons from high quality research can and must vastly improve the quality and sensitivity of the complex and often constrained decisions we, as politicians, have to make' (Blunkett, 2000: 4).

Although we might express some cynicism about politicians advocating the use

of evidence in decision making, the applied social scientists among us would, I'm sure, agree with Robert Walker's (2001: 307) assessment that 'few would quibble with Blunkett's aspiration to make social science research evidence central to the development and evaluation of policy'.

However, there are those who argue that the relationship between research evidence and better policy decisions is not so self-evident – that the reality is very different. In what follows, some of the issues around the EBP project are discussed by considering two key questions:

1. What role does evidence of 'what works' play in policy making?
2. How can such evidence be made more influential?

I am deliberately leaving aside issues around the nature of 'evidence' and feasibility of producing robust evidence of 'what works' in complex policy initiatives.

What Role Does Evidence of 'What Works' Play in Policy Making?

As Nutley and Webb (2000: 25) argue, the notion of evidence-based policy and practice 'fits well with a rational decision-making model of the policy process.' Within this rational model the focus is on improving the 'instrumental' use of research and evaluation. Thomas Schwandt (1997) locates such an orientation firmly within the 'modernist paradigm of reason' in which rationality is a matter of 'correct' procedure or method in a context where 'policymakers seek to manage economic and social affairs "rationally" in an apolitical, scientized manner such that social policy is more or less an exercise in social technology' (Schwandt, 1997: 74). Within such a framework of 'instrumental rationality', the solution of complex social problems requires better evidence of 'what works' in terms of policy intervention, and more 'rational' policy-making processes in which such evidence can play a stronger role in policy decisions.

Indeed, we can see these assumptions in the Government's approach to EBP in the context of a strong performance-management regime for public services. A recent report by the National Audit Office (2001: 25) argues that the appropriate response to increasing complexity in the policy-making environment is 'to apply more powerful tools and draw on more specialist knowledge to enhance . . . capacity to design and implement successful policies.' 'Reliable and comprehensive information' and 'sound analysis' are crucial to the understanding of problems and the need for policy intervention and they help 'to establish "what works" and to identify optimum opportunities for intervention' (National Audit Office, 2001: 6–7, 26).

There are a number of bases for criticism of this position and I want to consider four. All of these relate to ways in which this framework of 'instrumental rationality' abstracts the process of policy making from its political, normative and organizational context. As with all rationalist conceptions of decision making, the agents involved are presented as seeking to optimize or utility-maximize in relation to clear, given goals. The four bases for criticism refer to different aspects of the context within which policy making and practice take place and

which condition the influence of evidence: political processes; the normative context; the organizational context; and regulatory/accountability frameworks.

First, and very briefly, *politics* – the ‘usual suspect’. As Walker (2000: 162–3) argues: research is but one influence on the policy process and ‘is not always influential, supplanted by the powerful political forces of inertia, expediency, ideology and finance.’

However, the problem with this position derives from the reduction of the role of values and normative commitments to the ‘irrationalities’ of politics, based upon a separation of the realms of ‘objective facts’ and ‘subjective values’ – the classic agenda of ‘instrumental rationality’. The implication of this position is that rationality in policy making can be increased if only politicians would suspend their prejudices and listen to the evidence.

Moreover, this argument is based upon a conventional wisdom about the different ‘assumptive worlds’ of politics and science, with an inappropriate presumption that the world of politics needs to change and become more ‘rational’. I return to this below. Moreover, it neglects a further, more ‘covert’ level of influence which becomes important if we recognize the way in which political processes structure the nature of available evidence by conditioning what gets researched and evaluated. The increasing concern to take account of ‘user requirements’ in decision making about research priorities might be seen as harnessing research more closely to government policy priorities and, of course, a large amount of applied research and evaluation is funded directly by government departments, reflecting closely political priorities for evidence.

In this context, it is worth referring briefly to a recent critique of the influence of the Home Office in shaping available evidence, by Tombs and Whyte (2003). They argue that in addition to ‘overt’ influences (for example, on what gets published) there are important ‘covert’ influences through the shaping of the research agenda. They cite the example of corporate crime, for example through breaches of health and safety law and involvement with organized crime, which, they argue, is neglected as a policy issue in a ‘business-friendly climate’:

This may well suit the government’s strategy of marrying research to the imperatives of policy targeted on the usual suspects. But we will never produce the type of knowledge base that healthy progressive societies need when the government mantra of ‘evidence-based policy’ is so easily translated into ‘policy-based evidence’. (Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 20)

Indeed, this is an important reminder that the scope of the relationship between evidence and policy extends beyond the concern with ‘what works’ – with the effectiveness of existing policy interventions – to address also the issue of ‘what are the social problems that require policy intervention’ (Sanderson, 2002). The fact that this latter issue receives less attention in EBP debates is again indicative of instrumental rationality – the ends of policy are kept out of the equation.

Moving on to the *normative context*, the argument here is that the focus on the ‘irrationality of politics’ is based upon a misconception of the normative context of policy making. A more appropriate conception of the policy-making process,

in my view, is provided by Majone (1989) who sees it more as a 'communicative' process based upon dialogue and argumentation than a 'technical' process based upon scientific evidence. Majone draws on Aristotle in his view of policy analysis as craft work, emphasizing the role of argument – 'a complex blend of factual statements, interpretations, opinions, and evaluations' (Majone, 1989: 63). In this perspective, the ethical-moral dimension figures prominently:

... the choice of policy instrument is not a technical problem that can be safely delegated to experts. It raises institutional, social and moral issues that must be clarified through a process of public deliberation and resolved by political means. (Majone, 1989: 143)

In Majone's view, then, the notion of EBP focuses on the potential role of causal knowledge in improving policy effectiveness to the neglect of the normative, institutional and organizational context in which decisions and choices are actually made and action is taken. From this perspective, then, a 'technical/instrumental' conception of 'what works' cannot provide the foundation for an appropriate notion of 'rationality' in the management of economic and social affairs. Rather it is argued that we need a broader basis for consideration and judgement as to the 'appropriateness' of decisions and actions, which recognizes the importance of 'practice wisdom' exercised in conditions of ethical-moral ambiguity.

The case for a 'practical' conception of rationality is reinforced when we consider the *organizational context* in which professional practice occurs in relation to policy making and public-service delivery. The importance of social relations and 'informal' processes in organizations founded upon tacit knowledge is now widely accepted (Hatch, 1997; Weick, 1995; Moingeon and Edmondson, 1996). These developments in organizational theory have been reinforced by recent thinking about organizations as 'complex adaptive systems' in which the focus shifts from overt, manifest observable 'formal' structures and systems to a notion of structure as 'a set of rules and resources that agents draw on, and reproduce, in the flow of their actions and interactions' (Bouchikhi, 1998: 226–7). In the organizational learning literature, what Easterby-Smith and Araujo (1999: 4) call the 'social perspective' focuses on 'the way people make sense of their experiences at work', emphasizing tacit sources, such as observation and emulation, socialization processes and day-to-day communication. On this view, learning emerges from social interaction that conditions interpretation of meaning and much crucial organizational knowledge exists in tacit, uncodified forms.

However, the importance of the organizational context cannot be considered solely in terms of the 'cognitive' dimension. Thus, a key aspect of practical rationality is the importance of the *normative* context of practice. 'New institutionalists' highlight the role of the informal 'normative order' defined in terms of norms, routines and conventions, which are largely tacit and implicit and deeply ingrained in organizational life (March and Olsen, 1989; Lowndes, 1997). March and Olsen (1989) argue that the focus should therefore be on the 'appropriateness' of action and behaviour, defined in relation to the normative order of obligation and necessity, rather than on the 'rational order' of preference and calculation and consequence.

Therefore, the situation facing professionals working in specific organizational contexts is highly complex. Formal research and evaluation evidence may well provide guidance on 'what is likely to work' but this will need to be assimilated with practice wisdom in coming to decisions on policies or actions that are appropriate in particular circumstances, taking into account relevant ethical-moral considerations. A further important factor influencing this process is the *accountability framework* within which professionals work.

In the context of public-sector reforms over the past two decades, there have been significant shifts in forms and structures of accountability. The OECD (1994) has identified a new paradigm of 'results-oriented management' in which responsibility for operational management is devolved but within a framework of accountability for results. This trend is clearly evident in the UK in the performance-management frameworks now in place across government in the form of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and performance-target regimes. According to Hoggett (1994, 1996) and Clarke and Newman (1997), the growth of performance management embodies a move towards new, 'post-bureaucratic' forms of control in which power shifts from professionals to managers but subject to processes of regulation, audit, inspection and evaluation to achieve enhanced accountability to central government. In their view, the proliferation of performance measurement, quality systems, audit and inspection in the UK represents a 'proceduralism' underpinned by the mechanistic rational-systems model.

Consequently, what might be called 'managerialist accountability' can be seen as the embodiment of this modernist, rationalist project with its emphasis on morally neutral expertise, performance measurement and control and surveillance, manifestations of 'external' principles of authority which have increasingly supplanted 'internal' principles of honesty, fairness and trust as the basis for securing accountability and 'responsible' government. It is these 'virtues' that Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) sees as the basis of good professional practice and high standards of public service but the notion that accountability can rest upon trust in professionals as 'virtuous practitioners' has been subject to serious challenge. Thus, the aim of the rationalist project is to subjugate the practice wisdom and normative basis of professional action to the supposedly more objective and rational 'rigour' of hard evidence and external surveillance and inspection. However, from the perspective of practical rationality that I am advocating, this rationalist project can be seen as having severe limitations. I will briefly discuss two areas of criticism of particular relevance to the prospects for EBP.

The first area of criticism concerns the degree to which frameworks of quantitative performance measures and targets and inspection processes provide an effective basis for promoting evidence-based improvements in performance. A fundamental criticism concerns the inability of static, mechanistic performance indicator systems to capture the complexity of the social world (Dryzek, 1990). Boland and Fowler (2000) argue that they represent 'inept science', promoting an illusion of stability and controllability. Recent research on performance measurement and evaluation in local government has found that central imposition of performance indicators has focused attention on collecting data for monitoring these indicators to ensure accountability to central government at the

expense of evaluation research to understand how well policies and services are meeting local needs and improving the quality of life for local people (Sanderson et al., 1998, 2003). This problem has also been recognized in a recent report by the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2003) on performance measurement, which found that centrally imposed targets can undermine local initiative and motivation to seek improvement.

There appear to be grounds for arguing, then, that the shift to accountability through performance management has promoted a focus on the use of evidence to demonstrate achievement of targets. This might be seen as strengthening the critique of the instrumentalist notion of 'policy-based evidence' discussed above, which provides a rationale for the substantial increase in evaluation by government departments in recent years focused on the extent to which policies and programmes are contributing to the achievement of PSA targets. Thus, although this increase is usually taken to denote a strengthening of EBP, it can be argued that what has actually been strengthened is a narrow, instrumental approach that harnesses evidence to the implementation of 'given' political priorities – the programme of instrumental rationality.

The second area of criticism of 'managerialist accountability' relates to the implications of the shift of power away from professionals and the decline in trust relationships. These implications are emphasized by the Public Administration Select Committee in the report referred to above, which received a large amount of evidence expressing concern that targets failed to take account of professionals' special expertise and judgement and that, as a result, professionals felt undermined (House of Commons, 2003). In such a context it is perhaps not surprising that there has been an increase in managerial and professional behaviour that is inconsistent with the 'virtuous practice' based upon the ethical principles highlighted by MacIntyre (1984). A decade ago Smith (1993, 1995) alerted us to the potential for manipulative behaviour and cheating to ensure that targets were seen to be achieved. More recently, de Bruijn (2002) has indicated how performance-measurement systems can promote 'game playing' by professionals if they feel that they have no ownership of the system and if it fails to value what they see as important. The Public Administration Select Committee report provides several examples of perverse or manipulative behaviour: the cancellation or delay of follow-up appointments at an eye hospital to achieve waiting time targets; the teacher who helped pupils cheat on SAT tests; the hospital that removed the wheels from trolleys to make them 'beds on wheels'; the ambulance service that used 'lay responders' to achieve target response times (House of Commons, 2003).

Such practices are clearly indicative of a culture that is not conducive to taking responsibility for improving performance and to risk-taking and innovation. I would submit the proposition that the 'target culture' is not conducive to an approach to professional practice that encourages the search for evidence and its application in conjunction with practice wisdom, taking into account ethical implications, to make appropriate decisions on how best to address the needs of clients.

How Can Evidence Be Made More Influential?

Much has been written about the quest to increase the influence of research and evaluation evidence on policy. The conventional assumption is that policy making becomes more rational in direct proportion to the influence of evidence on the process. The dominant perspective comprises an analysis of the barriers inhibiting such influence and a set of prescriptions to increase the impact of research on policy. These prescriptions can be seen as addressing four elements.

The first is the political context and I have already referred to the dominance of the rationalist perspective. Indeed, Carol Weiss (1999) emphasizes the importance of a '*climate of rationality*', 'a culture that valued rational behaviour, especially by government.' She argues that 'where the public assumes that policy will be made in response to careful review of existing problems and probing analysis of alternative solutions, reliance on social science becomes the norm.' David Blunkett's ESRC lecture, discussed above, is replete with references to the desirability of such a '*climate of rationality*'.

In recent literature on research impact, increasing emphasis has been placed on a second element – the *institutional framework* within which research evidence and its producers can be brought into closer connection with processes of policy formulation. The key emphasis here is on communicative processes. Thus, in its analysis of government criticisms of social science, the recent report by the Commission on the Social Sciences (2003) argued that the main problem is one of 'communication and interface management' and advocated 'more constructive dialogue'. Similarly, the National Audit Office (2003: 29) emphasized the importance of 'two-way communication between policymakers and researchers'. The communicative or 'dialogical' basis for improving the impact of research is also stressed by Weiss, who argues that:

... such communication should be a two-way conversation, in which evaluators listen as well as speak and come to understand the interpretations and insights of policy makers. And it should be a long-term conversation, part of an ongoing discourse sustained over time. (Weiss, 1999: 483)

The literature provides strong pointers to the need to develop institutional frameworks to promote closer, longer-term working relationships between researchers and policy makers, facilitating improved communication and mutual understanding (Nutley et al., 2002; Walter et al., 2003).

A third area of concern in prescription for enhancing the impact of research addresses issues relating to *research implementation*. A factor that receives considerable emphasis in the literature is the timeliness of research relative to the requirements of decision-making processes. Balthasar and Rieder (2000: 254) identify three key success factors in promoting impact: the scheduling of evaluation research; awareness of 'windows of opportunity' for research to influence the development of policy; and ensuring that the research 'asks the right questions'. There is a tendency towards a rationalist emphasis on 'good planning' as a basis for improving impact but it can be argued that it is more a matter of developing good communicative relationships and mutual understanding than effective planning.

Indeed, perhaps the most important aspect of the implementation of research relates to this broader notion of mutual understanding which influences the more specific issues of timing and relevance. This is often mentioned in the literature but not extensively elaborated upon. The Commission on the Social Sciences (2003: 73) refers to work on the different 'normative worlds' of researchers, policy makers and practitioners. A key implication is that researchers need to be aware of ('in touch with') the 'everyday realities' of policy makers and practitioners in order to enhance its relevance and utility. The more that researchers understand this context the more they will be able to relate findings to 'policy concerns' and the 'realities of practice' and the more likely are policy makers and practitioners to find it useful.

The final area to consider in prescriptions for enhancing the impact of research addresses issues relating to *research dissemination*. This area tends to receive perhaps the most attention in literature on research utilization and impact, to the neglect of the broader institutional framework within which processes producing and using research occur (Nutley et al., 2002). The review by Walter et al. (2003) found evidence of the greater effectiveness of 'active' forms of dissemination such as reminders, incentives, peer review, marketing and educational interventions. Key features of successful dissemination strategies include tailoring approaches to the audience, paying attention to the source of the message and enabling active discussion of research findings. Boaz and Hayden (2002) have argued the case for researchers or evaluators to act as advocates for their research findings, taking a pro-active role in making connections with other researchers undertaking related work and building connections with policy makers and practitioners whilst guarding against threats to independence. This position is, again, consistent with the 'communicative' or 'dialogical' view of the required institutional framework. From this perspective, researchers and evaluators should be active participants in a 'policy discourse' and, in Majone's (1989: xii) terms, need to 'learn rhetorical and dialectical skills – the ability to define a problem according to various points of view, to draw an argument from many different sources, to adapt the argument to the audience'.

This brief discussion of literature on prescriptions to enhance the impact of research on policy indicates that analysis is breaking out of the confines of the traditional rationalist assumptions. Nevertheless, it is clear that such assumptions die hard. According to Weiss (1999: 470), expectations for the use of research and evaluation 'have always had a rationalist cast' as illustrated by David Blunkett's appeal to notions of 'rational common sense' in his call for a stronger link between evidence and policy making. There is still undoubtedly a strong 'rationalist' underpinning to work in this area. John Forester has argued that herein may lie the key reason for the limited impact of research on policy making and practice, and it is worth quoting him at length:

The periodic irrelevance of social science may be far easier to explain than we have thought. For in the face of ambiguous claims, little time, and unsatisfactory data, most practical people, amongst them public policy analysts and planners . . . have to learn not only about feasible outcomes and stable relationships of cause and effect but about value in our possible worlds, about potential significance, import, consequentiality.

Practical people in our lives help us to learn what to want, what to care about, and what we should care for, too. Yet as long as social scientists treat value as essentially irrational, an epiphenomenal dependent variable, or merely the expression of preferences, they will ignore, if not fail to understand entirely, the demands and opportunities of practical judgement and deliberative rationality, the heart of practical enquiry in the applied professions. (Forester, 1995: 64)

Forester brings us squarely into the territory of practical rationality where the influence of research and evaluation evidence depends upon its relevance to the 'assumptive' and 'normative worlds' of policy makers and practitioners and to the complex judgements that they must make on appropriate courses of action. The influence of evidence on policy must adhere in its role in re-shaping or re-constructing the cognitive and normative frames of policy makers and professionals through communicative or 'dialogical' processes. This leads us to hypothesize about some key features of an institutional framework within which research and evaluation evidence can achieve an appropriate level and form of influence within the context of the 'practical judgement and deliberative rationality' that underpins reasoned and reasonable guidance of human affairs:

- the capacity in long-term relationships for researchers and policy makers to develop a better mutual understanding and respect for the practical and ethical-moral contexts in which they work, leading to improved relevance of evidence in relation to policy makers' needs whilst preserving the highest scientific standards;
- the development of a shared commitment by researchers and policy makers to achieving the collective goal of 'better policy and practice' through the application of research and evaluation evidence;
- forms of accountability and regulation that foster the development of high trust relationships to encourage the highest standards of professional practice;
- the capacity for improved dialogue between researchers/evaluators and policy makers about research needs and the design and specification of research and evaluation projects;
- the capacity for improved responsiveness of research and evaluation in relation to the timescales of policy and decision-making processes;
- the use of active forms of dissemination of research and evaluation findings to promote dialogue and discussion to enhance interpretation and application to the relevant policy contexts;
- the commitment on the part of researchers and evaluators to act as advocates for evidence, seeking to enhance its 'voice' in the complex web of cognitive and normative influences on policy and practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to re-emphasize the constructive purpose behind my arguments. I am not seeking to undermine the foundations of the 'modernist' commitment to harnessing reason in the guidance of human affairs. What I am

suggesting is that the contemporary debate about EBP is conducted within the confines of an 'instrumental rationality' that reduces the matter to a technical task of applying robust evidence of 'what works' to promote more effective achievement of given policy goals. In my view this perspective fails to provide us with a sound foundation for the 'rational' guidance of our affairs in a complex world in which the key challenge faced by policy makers is to deal with moral and factual ambiguity.

Thus, I argue that we need to work within a broader conception of rationality to recognize the validity of the range of forms of intelligence that underpin 'practical wisdom', to acknowledge the essential role of fallible processes of craft judgement in assembling what is to be accepted as 'evidence', and to incorporate deliberation, debate and argumentation in relation to the ends of policy and the ethical and moral implications of alternative courses of action. From this perspective, the challenge faced by policy makers is seen not as a *technical* task of reducing *uncertainty* through the application of robust, objective evidence in the pursuit of more *effective* policies, but rather as a *practical* quest to resolve *ambiguity* through the application of what John Dewey calls 'creative intelligence' in the pursuit of more *appropriate* policies and practice.

Such a conception of practical rationality, I would submit, provides a firmer foundation for our collective efforts to resolve the policy dilemmas of our increasingly complex world. It provides a basis for what Stephen Toulmin (2001) has called the 'return to reason' – the restoration of the 'balance of reason' that has been disrupted by the 'quest for certainty' driven by the legacy of Newtonian mechanics. With the balance of reason restored, 'rational assessments' can no longer provide the foundation for 'better policy making'; rather, they take their place within a broader framework as 'stepping stones to reasonable decisions' (Toulmin, 2001: 213). And it is 'reasonable decisions' that we need in order to answer what Zagorin (1998: 224) calls 'Tolstoy's anguished question – what shall we do and how shall we live?' It is this question that tasked John Dewey in his quest to apply intelligence to the solution of human and social problems and 'transform the world for the better'. His is the appropriate final word, in advocating:

... the necessity of a deliberate control of policies by the method of intelligence, an intelligence which is not the faculty of intellect honored in text-books and neglected elsewhere, but which is the sum-total of impulses, habits, emotions, records, and discoveries which forecast what is desirable and undesirable in future possibilities, and which contrive ingeniously in behalf of an imagined good. (Dewey, 1993: 9)

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