

The Conflict between the Traditions

A Case Study of David Easton and of his Critics from the Explanatory, Understanding, and Critical Traditions¹

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Why is it that many debates within political science are characterized more by irrelevance, ignorance, and irrational political conflict than by a real and fair exchange of opinion? And how can we change this almost established order?

In this case study of the Easton debate I will try to show that much of the conflict is due to critics often being influenced more by their choice of function on the world-view level, of subject matter on the metascientific level, and of explanatory model on the scientific level, than by the substance and form of the issues with which they are dealing.

David Easton – who has spent over 35 years developing a framework for a critical mediation of traditions – has, since the early sixties, been inextricably bound up with the merciless struggles within and between the explanatory and understanding traditions, as can be seen from the long row of nicknames he has had to put up with: structural-functionalist, behaviorist, historicist, organicist, mechanist, vitalist, elitist, etc. But, as I intend to show, all these contradictory nicknames result from his critics having analyzed his texts with too limited a conception of science, and/or having concentrated much too much on the scientific level (i. e. the texts concerning the systems model) at the expense of the other levels. So the Easton debate gives us a unique chance to follow the struggles which make reality appear as a diffuse collection of multiple realities held by diverse individuals and groups within political science.

1. The conflict between (and within) the explanatory and understanding traditions

The conflict between (and within) the explanatory and understanding traditions takes place on four different levels, namely 1) the world-view level,

2) the research policy level, 3) the metascientific level, and 4) the scientific level.² On the world-view level the conflict is mostly over the postulate of the explanatory tradition, that there exists no fundamental difference between the natural and human sciences:

1) *The unity of scientific method*: In spite of various differences in the specific concepts and procedures within the diverse fields of research, the methodology of natural science is also applicable to the human sciences, as the logic of research is identical.

2) *The symmetry of explanation and prediction*: In effect, the goals of research – i. e. explanation and prediction – are identical, which also applies to the form in which they are realized: the subsumption of individual cases under hypothetically proposed general laws. The natural sciences as well as the human sciences are looking for lawful generalizations which may function as premises in deductive explanations and predictions. An event is explained by demonstrating that it occurred in accordance with certain laws of nature and due to certain particular circumstances; and if the laws and circumstances are known it is also possible to predict an event by using this deductive form of arguments.

3) *The technological determination of the relationship between theory and practice*: The relationship between theory and practice is mostly a technical one. As soon as you are familiar with the appropriate general laws, and if the relevant initial conditions are manipulable, we can produce a desired state of affairs. But the question of which states of affairs are to be produced is not scientifically resolvable, as it is ultimately a question of decisions. No "ought" is to be derived from

an "is", no "value" from a "fact". Scientific research is "free of values" and strives for nothing but objective, value-neutral results.

4) *The demand for testability*: The distinctive mark of scientific perception is that it is – in principle – testable. To test a hypothesis deductive logic is applied to derive singular observation statements – i. e. statements referring to publicly observable objects or events, which can be said to rapport either perceptual experience or – in any case – to be motivated by such.³

A social scientist, who identifies himself with these four principles, is naturally not very impressed by "verstehen", but regards the intention to understand as either non-scientific or as a heuristic tool belonging to the "context of discovery" rather than to the "context of justification". It is the united attack from the understanding scientists on this very line of reasoning that – despite their heterogeneous composition – makes the tradition appear as a unity:

1) At the logical level the various attempts of the explanatory tradition to transform statements about intentions and actions into an extensional and truth functional language are met by some insurmountable difficulties, because statements about intentional action refer to a domain that is already linguistically structured. Therefore they refer to statements that differ from the statements of physical objects and behavior that the explanatory tradition uses.

2) The explanatory scientists are unable to overcome this complex of problems solely by constructing behavioralistic theories of language, as the reduction of the linguistic communication to "verbal behavior" – as is the case in questionnaires – constructed as a particular dimension of the homeostatic behavior of the organism, is in fact an interpretation of the "sameness of meaning" that is constitutive to such linguistic symbols like the homogeneous response in which these symbols are expressed. The construction of a world-view – in which the communicative interaction is looked upon as being less fundamental than the equalized response sequences – thus conflicts with the situation of the explanatory scientist himself: As a member of a tradition he is pursuing his research within a system of intersubjectively valid rules and regulations, of shared intentions and obligations and so on, and it is consequently his perception of this sameness of meaning which is the

basis of the activities of identifying, describing, correlating and so forth that comprises his research. This experience is neither to be explained away by the results of his research nor subordinated to the constructions that emerge from it.

3) The explanatory tradition's way of reducing meaning to behavior is consequently nothing but a cover for the lacking understanding of the internal connections between such ideas that constitute the behavior at the human level. Actions and ideas are not independent variables, as actions express intentions that cannot be comprehended independently of daily-life language. By disregarding this connection in their methodology, the explanatory scientists postulate that there is in fact no basic difference between the behavior of animals and human beings.

Images and ideas producing global hypotheses about man, society, and history are as such not only confined to social and political philosophy but also to knowledge. Despite allegations to the contrary, the explanatory tradition projects an ideal of science by pretending to define all *authentically* scientific knowledge. For even though it has not developed a metascience special to the human sciences, it has – by its four principles – maintained that what it claims to have discovered with respect to natural sciences should be universally applicable to everything worthy of the title "scientific". In this way it has suppressed the analysis of the daily-life language by *promoting* a nomological social science *prescribing* goals of knowledge which are final, certain, unified, and value free, and which have been expressed in an extensional language and axiomatic terms, characteristic of formal logic and mathematical notation.⁴

Thus the discussion between the two traditions at the world-view level is primarily concerned about what *function* social science performs (and ought to perform) within a *system of global beliefs about the world together with a set of attitudes towards the world so conceived*.⁵ Whereas the explanatory tradition advocates the function *theory construction* and in accordance operates with a philosophical cosmology, which deals with the physical structure and process of nature, the understanding tradition advocates the function *organization of enlightenment* and in accordance operates with a philosophical anthropology that provides global hypotheses about man and his place in the world, ideals and images of man, society, and of history. And in this way they both delimit

a way of life consisting of ethics that provide maxims, goals, and values in order to guide behavior and provide answers to questions about the proper conduct of life.⁶

This again leads to a third function at the world-view level for which proponents are found in both traditions: *political action*. The marxists – who can be found in both traditions – as well as many research workers from the new quasi-critical policy movement and "New Public Administration" are all in accordance with Marx' basic principle that the aim of social science is not only to explain the physical structure and process of nature and to understand man, society, and history, but also to change the world. According to this view the world-view also performs the function of making the different hypotheses unite in the attempt to – through the collective, political action – change the existing.⁷

The discussion related to the question of the functions of science at the world-view level is brought down to the research policy level (which we shall not treat here) where the discussion affects research by articulating explicit and implicit values that originate and acquire salience in society.

The discussion at the research policy level again interacts with the discussion at the metascientific level at which level various theories guide research groups, research, products, and the market on the one hand and science on the other. Metascience which refers to that which is "about" science or which "comes after" science permits the traditions to evaluate various modes for acquiring, producing, and using knowledge.

A major issue at this level is the question of *the subject matter* of the social science.⁸ Whereas the explanatory tradition declares the subject matter to be either the *objective social facts* (structures and institutions) or the *social behavior*, the understanding tradition maintains that the subject matter is the *social definitions* – which is illustrated by the following examples.

When a structural-functionalist from the explanatory tradition reviews a book written by a member of the understanding tradition, the result can be as follows:

"... it would be fortunate if the reader could leave the book (or rather non-book: it is actually a disconnected collection of papers...) after having read only Chapter 2 ... Garfinkel simply fails to generate any insights at all from the approach. His other chapters constitute unrelated excursions into research, in some cases with disastrous results.

In sum, this chapter appears to be not only an ethnomethodological disaster in itself but also evidence of the more general inadequacies of ethnomethodology ... this chapter is another major disaster... without the insights or technical competence of the creative and trained sociologist... Garfinkel elaborates very greatly points which are so commonplace that they would appear banal if stated in straightforward English. As it is, there is an extraordinarily high ratio of reading time to information transfer, so that the banality is not directly apparent upon a casual reading." (James Coleman in George Ritzer's, "Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science", 1975 p. 207)

This quotation is clearly an attack on all the scientists, who do not support the function of theory construction at the world-view level on the ground that an adequate exploration of the relations between the objective social facts is hereby blocked. And the conflict theorist joins his structural-functionalist colleague in this point of view:

"It is not enough to say that what John Lewis or Sartre says does not help us to produce any scientific knowledge of history... We are forced to say that their Thesis produces or can produce effects which are extremely harmful to scientific knowledge... This idealist Thesis mixes everything up, and thus it paralyzes revolutionary philosophers, theoreticians and militants. It disarms them, because in effect it deprives them of an irreplaceable weapon: the objective knowledge of the conditions, mechanisms and forms of the class struggle." (Louis Althusser, "Essays in Self-Criticism", 1976, p. 61)

But it is obvious from the following quotations that the scientist from the understanding tradition totally rejects this theoretical/extensional exploration of structures and institutions in favour of a practical/intentional one:

"When what is going on in any human group can be traced to what agents are doing, it will be termed *praxis* ... what happens in a group will be *intelligible* if one can retrace the steps from what is going on (process) to who is doing what (praxis)." (Sartre in Andrew Collier's, "R. D. Laing: The Philosophy & Politics of Psychotherapy", 1977, p. 56)

"The most complete form of the sociological datum, after all, is the form in which the participant observer gathers it: An observation of some social event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanation of its *meaning* by participants and spectators, before, during, and after its occurrence. Such a datum gives us *more information* about the event under study than data gathered by *any other* sociological method... We have no intention of denigrating the interview or even such *less precise* modes of data gathering as the questionnaire, for there can always be good reasons of *practicality*, econ-

omy or research design for their use. . ." (Becker and Geer in Ritzer, 1975, p. 135 – italics Ritzer's and mine.)

Although the second quotation is a bit more civilized than those of the factists the intention is nevertheless obvious: The exposure of the relations between the objective social facts in order to perform the function of theory construction is extremely tedious in so much as it disregards the essential point, namely to perform the function of organization of enlightenment by examining how the actors themselves define their social situations and the effect of this definition on ensuing action. This view is also obvious when the understanding scientist tries to separate himself from those among the explanatory scientists who support the study of social behavior:

"The distinction between natural science and social science . . . is based on the fact that men are not only objects existing in the natural world to be observed by the scientist, but they are creators of a world, a cultural world, of their own. In creating this world, they interpret their own activities. Their overt behavior is only a fragment of their total behavior. Any social scientist who insists that he can understand all of man's behavior by focusing only on that part which is overt and manifested in concrete, directly observable acts is naive, to say the least." (Psathas in Ritzer, 1975, p. 121)

But, on the other hand, the explanatory behaviorist does not maintain any interest in understanding how the creators of worlds create their own cultural world:

"Autonomous man serves to explain only the things we are not yet able to explain in other ways. His existence depends upon our ignorance, and he naturally loses status as we come to know more about behaviour. The task of a *scientific* analysis is to *explain* how the behaviour of a person as a *physical* system is related to the conditions under which the human species evolved and the conditions under which the individual lives." (B. F. Skinner "Beyond Freedom and Dignity", 1972, p. 20 – italics mine.)

From this point of view it is the function of the organization of enlightenment and the social definitions which are tedious, as the crux of the matter is the construction of theories through the analysis of social behavior. Hereby the behaviorist clearly states that he disagrees with those of his colleagues from the explanatory tradition, who have not yet seen the light but still labour under the mistake that it is possible to construct theories by focusing on the objective social facts:

"Let them therefore specify what properties of social behavior they consider to be emergent and show, by constructing the appropriate deductive systems, how they propose to explain them without making use of psychological propositions. I guarantee to show either that the explanations fail to explain or that they in fact use psychological propositions, in however disguised a form." (Homans in Ritzer, 1975, p. 167)

But the statement of the factist being unable to explain structures and institutions can by this scientist easily be turned into the statement that the behaviorist is unable to explain structures:

"The point is that Homans has never attempted to show how the "reduction" of sociology to psychological principles is useful at the macroscopic levels. . . Concrete behavior is not a function simply of elementary properties, but of the kinds of systems, their various structures and the processes taking place within them . . . these organizations must be described, classified, and otherwise ordered long before their properties can be derived from elementary principles." (Parsons in Ritzer, 1975, p. 165/166)

This intransigent discussion concerning the subject matter of the social sciences – which takes place externally as well as internally between the two traditions at the metascientific level – at last winds up with the different products at the scientific level, comprising any general understanding which can respond to challenge and questions. Depending on which world-view function they perform and which meta-subject they explore, these products appear in three different explanatory models. Those derived from theory construction/behavior appear as causalistic models, those derived from theory construction/social facts appear as quasi-teleological models, and finally those derived from organization of enlightenment/social definitions appear as teleological models. As we cannot treat these models in details, we shall end this preliminary delimitation of the conflict between the two traditions by pointing out the claim of the understanding tradition that the teleological model in opposition to those of the explanatory tradition does not rely for its validity on the truth of nomic connections. The necessity of a practical inference, they say, is a necessity conceived "ex post actu", as the teleological explanation commences from a conclusion and subsequently works its way back to the premises. As such it does not predict behavior because the patterns of behavior are "post-determined" by the premises and not "pre-determined".⁹


1.1 A scheme of analysis for the Easton-debate

By using only a few quotations we have been able to establish that the organization in levels and the distinctions, from which the critical tradition operates, seem to be able to help us with the answer to why reality presents itself as a diffuse collection of multiple realities in political science, and how to dissolve this state of affairs by emancipating the scientific collective from the various forms of dominion, which the competing individuals, groups, and subcultures try to impose upon it. The critical tradition sees the explanatory and understanding tradition as complementary


and not as competing and by doing so they express a wish to transcend the various conflicts within political science by using more time to analyse the theoretical, moral, and political advantages and disadvantages of each approach and less time solely to reproach their opponents for not doing what they themselves would have done.

We will apply this line of reasoning to the Easton-debate by the scheme below illustrating the number of possibilities to get lost in Easton's texts, whether the texts are either (both) analysed from too limited a conception of science or (and) almost exclusively at the scientific level.

		WORLD-VIEW			METASCIENCE			SCIENCE			
		A	B	A,B	A	A	B	A	A	B	
FUNCTION	THE CRITICS										
	EASTON	Theory construction	Organization of enlightenment	Political action	Behavior	Facts	Definitions	Causalistic	Quasi-teleological	Teleological	
	Theory construction	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal							
	Organization of enlightenment	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal							
	Political action	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal							
	Behavior				Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal				
	Facts				Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal				
	Definitions				Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal				
	Causalistic	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch	
Quasi-teleological	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch		
Teleological	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Diagonal	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch	Cross-hatch		



HOW EASTON IS NORMALLY ANALYZED



HOW EASTON OUGHT TO BE ANALYZED

A = THE EXPLANATORY TRADITION

B = THE UNDERSTANDING TRADITION

A + B = THE CRITICAL TRADITION

If Easton makes a distinction between theory construction, organization of enlightenment, and political action at the world-view level; behavior, facts, and definitions at the metascientific level; and causalistic, quasi-teleological, and teleological models at the scientific level, then the critics from both the explanatory and understanding tradition must experience serious problems in handling Easton's distinctions on the different levels – especially if they almost exclusively look upon the texts concerning the systems model – and consequently either judge Easton's model as illogical and difficult to test or as impractical and reducing meaning to behavior and/or facts. At last it is to be expected that the critical critic will turn out to be the one most positive towards the systems model, even though a one-sided focusing at the scientific level, might lead to this critic experiencing Easton's mediations as being somewhat unreflected.

But now let us turn to the Easton-debate in order to analyse the progress of the debate respectively in Easton's "era of explanation" (starting with his "Credo of Behavioralism" from 1962) and in his "era of understanding and political action" (starting with his "Credo of Relevance" from 1969) and at the same time join this analysis to some of his own answers to the major problems at the three levels.

2. The debate of Easton's "Credo of Behavioralism"

After nearly 30 years of research Easton in 1962 submitted the following proposal to a procedure for political studies:

1. Regularities: There are discoverable uniformities in political behavior. These can be expressed in generalizations or theories with explanatory and predictive value.
2. Verification: The validity of such generalizations must be testable, in principle, by reference to relevant behavior.
3. Techniques: Means for acquiring and interpreting data cannot be taken for granted. They are problematic and need to be examined self-consciously, refined, and validated so that rigorous means can be found for observing, recording, and analyzing behavior.
4. Quantification: Precision in the recording of data and the statement of findings requires measurement and quantification, not for their own sake, but only where possible, relevant, and meaningful in the light of other objectives.
5. Values: Ethical evaluation and empirical explanation involve two different kinds of propositions that, for the

sake of clarity, should be kept analytically distinct. However, a student of political behavior is not prohibited from asserting propositions of either kind separately or in combination as long as he does not mistake one for the other.

6. Systematization: Research ought to be systematic; that is to say, theory and research are to be seen as closely intertwined parts of a coherent and orderly body of knowledge. Research untutored by theory may prove trivial, and theory unsupported by data, futile.

7. Pure science: The application of knowledge is as much a part of the scientific enterprise as theoretical understanding. But the understanding and explanation of political behavior logically precede and provide the basis for efforts to utilize political knowledge in the solution of urgent practical problems of society.

8. Integration: Because the social sciences deal with the whole human situation, political research can ignore the findings of other disciplines only at the peril of weakening the validity and undermining the generality of its own results. Recognition of this interrelationship will help to bring political science back to its status of earlier centuries and return to the main fold of the social sciences." (Easton, "The Current Meaning of 'Behavioralism'", 1962, p. 16)

We can from this quotation read the first indication of the symmetry between Easton and the critical tradition: As the critical tradition he sees science as an enterprise (point 7). He differentiates explicitly between "ethical evaluation" (organization of enlightenment) and "empirical explanation" (theory construction) and tells us that "a student . . . is not prohibited from asserting propositions of either kind separately or in combination as long as he does not mistake one for the other" (point 5). Furthermore he writes that "the *understanding* and *explanation* of political behavior logically precede and provide the basis for efforts to utilize political knowledge in the solution of *urgent practical problems*" (point 7), demonstrating that he recognizes the autonomy of the third function "political action".

But despite this explicit distinction between empirical/analytical, moral, and applied science at the world-view level his definition of behavioralism nevertheless became synonymous with the explanatory tradition. And in view of this it is somewhat ironic (but also pardonable) that this tradition never took to the systems model, because they judged it to be illogical and difficult to test – although they did accept the heuristic qualities of the model and used it to form a long row of various theories.

2.1 The Easton-criticism of the explanatory tradition

Eugene J. Meehan – whose pragmatic interactionism is closer to behaviorism than to phenomenology – sees Easton's model as a *system* operating in an *environment*, with demand and support as the input of the system and decisions and actions of authorities as the output of the system. There is a feedback-loop, Meehan writes, which connects authority and membership so that responses of members are communicated to authority and can generate further action by authority. The basic unit of analysis is the interaction – an interaction arising out of the behavior of members of the system – and the concept "system" is defined in purely analytic or nominal terms, as a system comprises any set of interactions that an investigator finds interesting. (Meehan, "Contemporary Political Thought", 1967, p. 170)

Though it would be natural for Meehan to estimate Easton's nominalistic inclinations – if nothing else – it soon becomes apparent that Meehan feels these inclinations to be completely outshone by the analytical and "most consistent and systematic functionalist in political science" (Meehan, 1967, p. 168) – a statement which in connection with the quotation below clearly demonstrates Meehan's attitude towards structural-functionalism:

"Enough has been said, perhaps to indicate the kinds of ambiguities that can creep into a discussion of systems ... It may serve as a warning against careless use of concepts in functional analysis ... Like Parsons, Easton does not think of theory in terms of explanation but in terms of the creation of conceptual frameworks. The result is a highly abstract structure that is logically suspect, conceptually fuzzy, and empirically almost useless." (Meehan, 1967, p. 173/174)

What Meehan finds particularly irritating is the confusion between organicism and mechanism caused by Easton's (deplorable) bond to the quasi-teleological model. On the one hand Easton writes that the task of political science is to reveal the way in which the life-processes or defining functions of political systems are protected, but on the other hand he defines politics as the authoritative allocation of values for a society. As it is impossible (according to Meehan) to substitute the term "system" with the term "interaction" without confusing structural-functionalism and behaviorism these two definitions create a circle impossible to break, which again leads to the conc-

clusion that Easton has not moved at all. But Meehan never reflects upon the possibility that Easton maybe is trying to connect the term "interaction" to both behavior, facts, and definitions, and therefore also to various types of explanatory models. Instead he simply concludes that the systems model is not only illogical but also hard to test, as such mediations are impossible according to his own world-view.

If we leave the "anti-factist" Meehan in order to turn to the factist Jan-Erik Lane and his decent – but somewhat limited – criticism of Easton's model, we will soon experience the feeling of a clash between two models from different traditions. In his analysis Lane imposes a deductive explanatory model upon Easton's texts concerning the systems model, which leads him to conclude that the major error on Easton's part is that he confuses two different theories because he has two ways of presenting his fundamental problem of persistence.

Lane says that Easton on the one hand asks: 1) what are the necessary conditions for the persistence of any kind of political system? And on the other hand he asks: 2) what are the necessary conditions for social order in a society (social order defined as a state in which some kind of political system persists). But as Lane's model springs from a world-view which is not sufficiently comprehensive to see that this dual way of presenting the problem is necessary if you wish to join together the subject matters and explanatory models of the explanatory and understanding tradition in order to make a distinction between various types of change, he ends up in maintaining that Easton has hereby designed two different types of necessary conditions: In 1) those necessary conditions which, if they are not present, exclude every political system and in 2) those necessary conditions which, if they are not present, exclude a political system. While the necessary conditions in 1) set the limit within which political systems can vary, the necessary conditions in 2) set the limit within which a political system can vary. So – according to Lane – Easton mixes up two different theories, that is 1) a general structural-functional theory of the political system and 2) a theory of a political system seen as a functional system.

But if Lane had shown just a little bit of self-criticism towards his own model, he might have been able to see that Easton's model deliberately works with both aspects, as Easton constantly impresses that it is necessary to distinguish between

"system" maintenance and change as a specific system TYPE problem 2) and the persistence of some kind of political decision making processes as a SOCIETAL problem.¹⁰ Even though Lane's own model in this respect is able to "see" Easton's intentions its bond to too narrow a conception of science nevertheless leads to his interpreting its revelations as yet another sign of the logical fallacies of the systems model and its low degree of falsification:

"The theory is not consistent but contains two different theories, which renders it difficult to decide how the sentences of (ET=Easton's theory) should be tested. . . . On the one hand, the functional requisites for the persistence of a political system of any kind are not stated exactly. The same applies to the structural requisites. On the other hand the functions . . . do not satisfy the conditions necessary for a system being called "a functional system" . . . (Jan-Erik Lane, "The Structure of David Easton's Theory", 1970, p. 37)

Easton's attitude towards the problem between individuals and structures also plays a major part in Peter Leslie's Easton-criticism, but as Leslie is more familiar with the conflict theories than Meehan and Lane his criticism is consequently turned against both his behavioristic and structural-functionalistic colleagues. Though Easton himself has explicitly criticized the equilibrium point of view, Leslie says, his predominant theme in "A Framework . . ." is nevertheless that of the automatic response to stress, or of the homeostatic devices which help a system to cope with stress.

On the one hand Easton writes that a political system consists of human beings – read: active human beings in their factual, productive enterprise, as Marx (and Leslie) say(s) – who in the light of their goals may so act as to alleviate stress on the system. But on the other hand he writes that social systems are abstractions from human behavior – or systems of interaction – which, in the case of politics, are related to the authoritative allocation of values. However, as these two definitions – according to Leslie are flagrantly inconsistent – as you cannot transpose the motivations of human beings to a theoretical abstraction to which you attribute biological properties – Easton is placed in a contradictory position, which unables him to cope with the major empirical question, concerning the personal goals and values which, in a given historical context (read: in given relations of production) may incline individual human beings to preserve, change or destroy the regime:

"The deficiencies inherent in the postulation of systems goals are most obvious in revolutionary situations, where a large number of persons – perhaps even a majority of those subject to the dominant political authority – explicitly reject "system" goals (as defined of necessity, by the political leaders or "authorities".) (Peter Leslie, "General Theory in Political Science: A Critique of Easton's Political Science", 1972, p. 59)

If only Leslie had been less inclined to see a political enemy in Easton, he might have been able to perceive that Easton by the term "systems of interaction" is pointing out the analytical nature of knowledge – that is, the fact that all knowledge is tied to a socially produced structure of interest in the life-world of human beings, and that observation consequently requires that we select out of the total reality (the concrete apperceptive mass directly known to the sense if this were genuinely a "knowable" event) those interactions that are of interest to us to our varying criteria. Whereas Leslie (and Marx) refer(s) to active human beings in their factual, productive enterprise, Easton refers to active political beings (i. e. human beings in their political role) in their factual, productive, political enterprise.¹¹

As Leslie fails to see this connection between Easton and Marx, he deems Easton's position as contradictory, and he is hereby on a par with Meehan and Lane that the systems model is neither sufficiently logical nor sufficiently testable, and consequently is unable to perform the common function of the explanatory tradition: theory construction. But contrary to Meehan – who almost looks upon Easton as a colleague who has been misguided by the "bad" factists – and to Lane – who looks upon him as a colleague who does not keep the sacred structural-functionalist fire burning – Leslie primarily sees Easton as a reactionary enemy, who has not yet discovered that the world needs not only explanation but change. In this way Leslie is also a good example of the well-known struggle between conflict theorists and especially structural-functionalists, what can be explicitly read from his regrets that Easton in "A Framework . . ." betrays the dissociation to the concept of homeostasis which he advocated in his first book "The Political System":

"In that book he pointed out that the concept of equilibrium can never be operationalized (even in principle) . . . This criticism is a cogent one, and serves to demonstrate that the concept of homeostasis, as applied to political systems, ought to be abandoned for good and all. (Leslie, 1972, p. 58)

So much for the structural-functionalists, but it did not in any way apply to Easton, as he had already in the introduction to "A Framework . . ." explicitly maintained that he dissociates himself to any uncritical conclusion based on analogy:

"... as I cautioned earlier, the framework elaborated here has not been able to lean on any ready-made model; and no eclectic borrowing from other varying kinds of systems approaches would do. (Easton, "A Framework for Political Analysis", 1965A, xii preface)

"Although in the outcome, systems analysis – as adapted for purposes of social research remains within the same general conceptual terrain in which it has grown up, we shall find by the end of our examination of it that it has gone off in substantially different directions. *Biological and natural* scientists would no longer feel at home in it, although it might well stir faint and nostalgic memories of a conceptual homeland that they once knew." (Easton, 1965A, p. 2, italics mine)

As we have seen during the reading of the explanatory tradition's Easton-criticism, Easton is quite right in maintaining that the biological and naturally orientated, political scientists do not feel at home in his model: The concept of persistence, as they all seem to conclude, must primarily be seen as a logically inadequate attempt to establish a theory of equilibrium, as Easton's analytical position leads to a confusion between the biologically inspired theory of the structural-functionalists concerning political facts and the mechanistically inspired theory of the behaviorists concerning political behavior, which makes the theory almost impossible to test. Furthermore Leslie supplements this criticism with a political one: The model suffers from an ideological/authoritarian predisposition, because it fails to connect the construction of theory with the political action, and this makes it unsuitable to cope with the problem of change – especially where revolutionary situations are concerned.

But not even this statement can stand a closer examination – even though it is as common as the statement of Easton's analogical formation. And before proceeding to the Easton-criticism of the understanding tradition it seems appropriate to put an end to it:

"... the really crucial problems of social research are concerned with the patterns of change. No social institution is stationary; it is in continuous, if at times imperceptible change." (Easton, "The Political System", 1953, p. 42)

"... we need a theoretical framework that helps us understand how the very pie itself comes into existence and changes in its basic content or structure." (Easton, "A Systems Analysis of Political Life", 1965B, p. 475)

In Easton's world of concepts a political system is divided into three important aspects: the authorities, the regime, and the political community, and it is to these three aspects of a specific system *type*, he restricts the concepts "maintenance" and "stability" but also "change". When Easton speaks of persistence, however, this concept is exclusively reserved for referring to a *society* and its capacity to provide the processes through which *some kind* of political decisions can be made, regardless of the *type* of authorities, regime, or political community involved. By this discrimination Easton namely feels that it should be possible to eliminate any confusion between system persistence – meaning the capacity of a *society* to provide for the existence of some kind of political system – and maintenance or change of the authorities, regime or political community as devices contributing to or standing in the way of this *societal* capacity. Therefore it is necessary to be able to distinguish between four various types of change, if it shall be possible to formulate an adequate theory of revolutions:¹²

1) *State change in the system*: These are changes in states of the major variables that do not affect the characteristic mode of operation of the system, however important their impact on the destinies of the members of the system may be. For example, the number of inputs of demands, their content, or their frequency may vary, or the level of support may fluctuate, yet the system may remain of the same general TYPE.

2) *System type (regime) change*: These are the kinds of changes which affect the characteristic way in which political systems process demands and convert them into outputs. Events may occur that lead to fundamental alterations in the values, norms, and structures of the system, transforming it from a democracy to a totalitarian system or vice versa. Usually when the system type changes – as after the Iranian Revolution in the 1970's – the old authorities disappear with the old regime and new personnel emerge to serve under new values, norms, and structures of the successor regime.

3) *Political community change*: These kinds of changes occur when major groups within the community withdraw their support from the existing division of political labor. Nationalist movements that lead to the creation of two or more independent political systems are associated with this

kind of change with Bangladesh as a recent example. Typically, here, both the authorities and the regime will change along with the political community.

4) *Basic system change*: This refers to those instances when the members of a political system find themselves in conflict or under other kinds of stress so severe that they are either unable to continue to make decisions or to get the decisions accepted as binding by most members of the society most of the time. This indicates that a given SOCIETY is unable to provide for the persistence of those processes through which authoritative allocations are characteristically made. Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Korea, and Vietnam are cases in point. In each instance the members of the society bearing these names were unable to sustain processes through which binding decisions could be made for the members of each of these societies. As a consequence the existing societies were destroyed and either divided into two societies or absorbed into another society.¹³

2.2 *The Easton-criticism of the understanding tradition*

Even though it should by now be quite obvious that the systems model is also guided by the question of how it is possible for the political definitions of the actors to become objective, political facticities, Michael Evans in his Easton-criticism clearly shows his wish to represent Easton as a scientist, who both reduces the actor to a mere stimulus-response phenomena and at the same time confines the actor within a self-regulating system.

Evans writes that despite Easton's explicit rejection of the concept of equilibrium in "The Political System", he in "A Framework. . ." proceeds to tell us that the model rests on the idea of a system embedded in an environment and subject to possible influence from it which threatens to drive the essential variables beyond their critical range. This talk of critical ranges, Evans continues, clearly exposes that Easton is more interested in unveiling the universal factors than the conditional ones, and this leads to a confusion of the principles of a causalistic and/or quasi-teleological explanation and the principles of the teleological explanation.

"There is very little evidence that Easton realises that there is a problem here. He deals with processes, events, and (secondarily) with structures, and all this with a

view to distinguishing the universal factors . . . from the conditional ones. . . Easton does not consider significant the distinction between consciously intended and accidental results. . . From the systems point of view, this is perhaps true. But it is difficult to understand precisely what is gained in producing a model which reduces such a crucial distinction to insignificance. Explanations of individual and group actions in terms of reasons, intentions and decisions still seem applicable. . ." (Michael Evans, "Notes on David Easton's Model of the Political System", 1970, p. 120)

We are thus able to follow how the understanding tradition turns the problem of the systems model upside down. The problem is no longer that the logical fallacies of the model impede an accurate explanation/prediction of political phenomena. No, the problem is now that the practical shortcomings of the model impede an accurate understanding/explanation of political phenomena, as Easton's interest in theory construction prevents him from understanding how it is possible that human activity is able to produce a world of things.¹⁴

This very line of reasoning is also the central theme in Dag Anckar's Easton criticism:

"Easton's totally mechanistic view upon human beings is more obvious when he refers to the mass than to the elite. – Outputs result in certain outcomes which function as stimuli, which again result in certain responses from the mass. In other words – we are dealing with a society in which the rulers manipulate the ruled and where the ruled react mechanistically to this manipulation. . . But societies – as opposed to organisms – are characterized by "politics" – by different opinions concerning the composition of the "rulers" and of what functions they ought to have and what interests they ought to look after. And it is upon these different meanings that Easton ought to concentrate instead of neglecting them." (Dag Anckar, "David Easton's Politiska Teori", 1973, p. 82–83, my translation from Swedish).

However, had Evans and Anckar been a little less inclined to blame Easton for not doing what they themselves would have done, they maybe would have realized that their conclusions, concerning Easton's reduction of the subjective definitions to facts and behavior, simply are a product of unresolved problems in their own world-view, as Easton in both his books about the systems model quite explicitly points out that the political system – as a *social* subsystem¹⁵ is fundamentally different from all other systems:

"The members of a political system need not sit back, as it were, to accept stress supinely. . . This is what has

long been unwittingly implied in *equilibrium analysis*. . . What political systems as a type of social systems possess uniquely, *When compared to both biological and mechanical systems*, is the capacity to transform themselves, their goals, practices, and the very structure of their internal organization." (Easton, 1965A, p. 99, italics mine)

"For any social system, including the political, adaptation represents more than simple adjustments to the events in its life. It is made up of efforts, limited only by the variety of human skills, resources, and ingenuity, to control, modify or fundamentally change either the environment or the system itself, or both together." (Easton, 1965B, p. 21)

Consequently, when Evans and Anckar accuse Easton of not being interested in the teleological type of explanation in his systems model, it is primarily because their own positions make them unable to handle Easton's way of linking things together at the metascientific and scientific level by the help of his basic principle at the world-view level concerning the analytical nature of knowledge.

The understanding scientists, Easton says, tend to turn away from the function of theory construction, because they feel that enduring generalizations about society are impossible, as the changing social environment operating on the plastic nature of man, is constantly creating people who respond differently to similar situations. But what many of them fail to see is the fact that this point of view places them in a contradictory position from which no escape is possible, as it is the same as raising the *universal claim* that old generalizations of *necessity* will yield to new ones because of the changing culture.¹⁶

The only possible way out of this contradiction is to accept the principle about the analytical nature of knowledge which springs from the fact that every new-born child must perceive the world as being unintelligible until it has any experience or concepts with which to organize its perception of the world.

It is indeed true, Easton continues, that the teleological model differs from those of the explanatory tradition, because the validity of the teleological explanation does not depend on the validity of the assumed nomic relation involved in it. But even though it is a genuine aspect of the teleological model that it commences from a conclusion and subsequently works its way back to the premises, and as such does not predict behavior, the principle about the analytical nature of knowledge shows us that this model cannot

stand alone, *because the cognitive development of the individual takes place under social boundary conditions*.

All human beings are born into an organized, complex community, and are consequently brought up as members of a grouping of human beings who live together and collectively undertake to satisfy all the minimum prerequisites of group life, Easton tells us.¹⁷ Therefore, the teleological model with its investigation of individual interpretations of and orientations to intersubjective social structures only gives us a one-sided picture of social life, and must be integrated with analyses of the objective structures themselves and of the empirical conditions under which both dimensions develop and change.

The idealistic framework of the understanding tradition has to be incorporated within a dialectical materialistic one since the principle about the analytical nature of knowledge shows us that you can ground the primacy of social structures over individual structures of consciousness in the fact that the rationality structures embodied in the parents/family must first be retrieved by the child in the development of its interactive competence. And on the other hand this very same fact also leads to the determination of the circular, and dialectical process between social and individual learning processes by demonstrating that the earlier societies can only have been changed through the constructive learning of SOCIALIZED individuals themselves.¹⁸

"The explanation and understanding of political phenomena require us to ask how individuals feel about institutions and practises and why they respond in the way in which they do (definitions/the teleological model). A rational calculus of costs and benefits (behavior/the causalistic model) may help to shed some light on these problems. But . . . at any moment in time . . . our social environment imposes certain constraints on our behavior. Any effort to understand the sources, nature and consequences of these constraints drives us to what Durkheim had characterized as SOCIAL FACTS explainable only by other social facts and not by an appeal to individual behavior." (Easton, "Some Limits of Exchange Theory in Politics", 1972, p. 137, parentheses mine)

The incorporation of the teleological model within the materialistic framework of systems analysis springs in this way from a methodological holism which, according to Easton, stands between pure individualistic reductionism and philosophical holism – i.e. a holism which asserts both the need

to take account of the special properties found when individuals interact as an organized group and the need to reduce behavior to observable individual interactions.

The political system – in its capacity of a social sub-system – is a complex and organized entity displaying properties that are different from the properties of its constituent parts and from a mere aggregation of those parts. It is complex in the sense that it is composed of many parts the relationships of which are difficult to sort out, and it is organized in the sense that the parts are not haphazardly related but stand in some determinate order, so that from the relationships characteristic consequences result that are not otherwise attainable: *the authoritative allocations of values*.¹⁹

In this way – and contrary to Evans' and Anckar's opinions – the mediations between conscious goals and contingent circumstances, between intended and unintended consequences, between projected transformations and functional constraints can all be empirically investigated within the framework of the systems model. But the position of Easton – that the construction of an adequate evolutionary explanation must be connected to a theoretical interest, does not signify some elitistic inclinations on Easton's part, as Anckar wants to believe. The systems model represents not only a genuine empirical/analytical mode of analysis, but it also delimits a democratic way of life which stands in direct opposition to that of elitism:

"Elitism, the ideal of the reaction against democracy, yields political and social domination to the rulers. The democratic ideal, wherever it is found, encompasses a credible political sociology by recognizing the superior role of the people. Since the elitist myth of the governing class seeks to eliminate the people in connection with the destiny of society, this myth explodes when it is confronted with the fact that without the people, the rulers are as free spirits wandering lonely, dejected and unemployed in an empty world. *But without rulers dominating their existence*, the people, on the contrary, find that very freedom that calls forth their most creative efforts. Elitism places blind faith in an appropriative governing class. *The democratic ideal incorporates a tempered trust in the wisdom and creative genius of the people.*" (Easton, "The Theory of the Elite: a Study of the Elitist Trends in English Thought", 1947, p 418, italics mine).

As this quotation demonstrates, Easton does not remove the function of organization of enlightenment from his world-view. But in opposition to Anckar he is not trying to reduce this function

to a quasi-empirical/analytical science under the cover of value relativism, as he sees it as performing a genuine moral task.²⁰ Since the systems theorist (the political, economical, cultural a s o) cannot in advance know the course of future development, he is only able to analyse the present in the light of the goals which he wants to see fulfilled. Therefore he cannot allow himself a merely theoretical or quasi-theoretical attitude but must also assume the role of an artist – a critical and reflective moral philosopher, guided by a genuine moral interest:

"Nonconformance for the artist – and the social scientist is an artist first and a social scientist only second – is as difficult as it is for the active revolutionary. But the artist differs from the latter in his ability to appear to conform, even to himself, and yet in reality to be expressing a tendency that leads to the threshold of a new theory. The artist feels the future pressing upon him...The historical task of his critic is to disentangle the future trends from the apparent ambiguities or shortcomings in the present assertions." (Easton, "Harold Lasswell: Policy Scientist for a Democratic Society", 1950, p 458).

This further places the systems theorist/philosopher in a POLITICAL role as an agent acting for a more humane and democratic society, with all the situation-dependency, uncertainty, and risks that the fulfilment of the third function at the world view level – "political action" – implies.²¹

Consequently, the systems framework of Easton is neither reducing definitions to facts and behavior nor reducing the meaning of values to "subjective definitions". It is a mode of analysis based upon a teleological interpretation of past history and providing a theoretical-normative basis for a historically orientated analysis of the present with an interest in the future.

2.3 The Easton-criticism of the critical tradition

Helped by Easton himself we have established the fact that the Easton-criticism of the explanatory and understanding tradition is more guided by their respective world-views than by the form and substance of the issues at stake, and we are therefore entitled to expect the critical tradition to break with the two other views.

Paul F Kress, who can be seen as a forerunner of the critical tradition, immediately breaks with the two other views by insisting that the systems model must primarily be seen as a proposal for a new paradigm because in his definition of a po-

litical system Easton dissociates himself from both the understanding and explanatory tradition:

"Easton rejects the belief that either systems or acting units are given in nature; we see our common sense notions of political institutions expand and dissolve within his analytic grasp, just as phenomenal man reduces himself to interactions." (Paul F Kress, "Self, System, and Significance", 1966, p 8).

Kress does not think that Easton in his model confuses the problem of individuals and structures, as it is framed explicitly in order to cope with both dimensions. But when Easton after all fails to create an extensive mediation between the understanding and explanatory tradition it is owing to the fact that his metascientific and scientific position is not governed by a deliberately elaborated distinction between theory (world picture hypotheses) and practice (way of life) at the world-view level. And, according to Kress, this leads to a reduction of aesthetic problems into empirical/analytical problems, and consequently to a blurring of the relation between knowledge and human interest.

Thus we can follow once more how the view varies according to the tradition to which you belong. The problem is no longer that Easton's model blocks the theory construction (Meehan, Lane, Leslie) or the political action (Leslie) nor merely that it reduces meaning to behavior and facts (Evans, Ankar). No, the problem now is that Easton does not allow his metascientific and scientific mediations to be guided by a reflexive mediation between knowledge and human interest at the world-view level. It is not enough, Kress writes, to offer us a new game at the metascientific and scientific level – on the assumption that we have been constantly playing the wrong game on these levels. We have also got to learn the rules of the game, i.e. the world-view level. If Easton's universe must be accepted as something more than just a new strategy within this SAME game, he continues, we must know what kinds of moves and plays are possible; what kinds of skills are required; how the score is kept; and perhaps most important of all; what constitutes winning, or even playing well.

"... I think we should welcome this essay. We should also remain open to the possibility that systems theory of this sort may someday prove capable of ordering political inquiry in a satisfying manner. But to decide this we need to know more about the nature of the theoretical universe that is offered. What are the rules of the game?

What kinds of problems, values, and knowledge can it express, and which does it favor? *We need in short, to understand it as a universe of discourse as well as a program of inquiry.*" (Kress, 1966, p 12, italics mine).

Easton's non-reflexive attitude on the world-view level also constitutes the central point of Wolf-Dieter Narr's criticism. Narr feels, like Kress does, that the systems model in its attempt to connect individual and structure marks a step forward compared to other bourgeois models of equilibrium, as the concept of support opens up for some vital questions related to the issue of consensus. But, like Kress, Narr also feels that Easton's lack of a theory of knowledge ruins the extraordinary possibilities, which the systems model possesses, as this lack makes the model appear AS IF the system contains some trans-human, self-regulating mechanisms diverting the attention from the fact that it is the authorities, who, through the outputs of the system, control the inputs of the system by the help of feedback.

According to Narr, Easton ruins the possibilities of creating a technically orientated theoretical system by his more or less unconscious linking of a rudimentary concept of existence (persistence) to a concept of dominion much too traditional/institutional. By failing to make an explicit distinction between the extensional/monologic language and the intentional/dialogic language he forfeits his possibilities to create a practically orientated hermeneutical system. And due to his apolitical attitude towards the existing, repressive, capitalistic elite-society he prevents the fusion of these two outlooks into one emancipatory system:

"Die heuristisch-praktische Kraft, ja die Notwendigkeit ein Informations- und Rückkopplungsmodell zu entwickeln, entbindet nicht davon, es in seinen Prämissen theoretisch zu reflektieren und erlaubt nicht alle 'Politik' im angesprochenen humanen Verständnis zu eliminieren. Jedenfalls aber kann eine solche allgemeine Theorie nur als Hemmschuh kritischer und Praxisbezogener Theorie angesehen werden, die auch erkenntniskritisch relevanter ist ... (Wolf-Dieter Narr: "David Eastons Systemanalyse", 1967, p 444).

Apart from the fact that we have already been able to demonstrate that what Kress and Narr call extraordinary possibilities are in fact the nature of systems analysis, it is still interesting to note the positive attitude towards the systems model that is shown by the critical tradition. Both Narr and Kress agree that if only the model were connected to a reflexively developed world-view it would add a major potential to critical theory. We

can therefore finally ask them both these obvious questions: Why look for a consciously developed world-view in the books on the systems model, as they are mainly concerned with the scientific level? Why not instead look for a world-view in the long row of texts written by Easton in the years 1947–1965? Had they indeed done so, they might surely have experienced that the systems model is founded upon a world-view very much in line with the one developed by the well-known critical scientist: Jürgen Habermas.

As is the case with that of Habermas, Easton's world-view represents a systematic attempt to bridge the world-views of liberalism and marxism around two central issues, namely the existential problem concerning the relation elite/mass and the epistemological problem concerning the relation understanding/explanation.

The young Easton, who is extremely soaked in Marx' dialectical materialism, but who cannot fully accept his historical materialism because it leads too easily to utopism (the vision of the coming stateless society) and to one-factor causality (economism), takes his point of departure in the question of how to establish a world-view for a scientific collective acting for a more humane and democratic society released from any kind of ideologically frozen relations of dependence:

"The real problem confronting the undictatorial area of the Western world today in their domestic affairs is how to transfer a larger share of political control to the people. The liberal goal of self-government is far from realized under conditions in which vast accumulations of wealth and economic power leave their impact on the political structure." (Easton, "Walter Bagehot and Liberal Realism", 1949, p. 37, italics mine).

This problem, Easton says, stems from the historical schizophrenia of liberalism – the lacking ability of liberalism to connect theory with practice: On the one hand liberalism offers us a normative democratic doctrine – based upon the principles of freedom, equality, and self-government of the people – which by ignoring the existing material life-conditions of man appears as sheer utopia. On the other hand liberalism offers us a scientific democratic doctrine, which rejects the classical, democratic idea of self-government of the people in favour of the existing capitalistic /elitistic stonewall of reality and all its "invariant" dependences.

However, Easton continues, neither of the doctrines are completely wrong – as a democratic society needs both ideals and rational examination

– and neither of them are completely right – as they both are much too idealistic in nature and need to be tempered with the materialism of Marx.

From a very thorough metascientific, hermeneutical study of the elitists Mosca and Pareto and of the impact of elitism on English thought, Easton gives a new meaning to the classical democratic ideal of self-government of the people by defining a democratic society as a society with a rational interaction – freed from any repressive forms of control – between the authorities and the people in all social sub-systems. And as the scientific community in itself is a social sub-system, Easton consequently begins establishing a theory of knowledge for a community which is able to incorporate idealism within a materialistic framework and which is guided by an emancipatory, democratic interest.

This framework is – in the same way as Habermas' – based upon the distinction between three autonomous functions that each is measured in different criteria: The formation and extension of critical theorems which can stand up to scientific discourse; the organization of processes of enlightenment in which such theorems are applied and can be tested in a unique manner by the initiation of processes of reflexion in particular target groups; and finally the selection of appropriate strategies, the solution of tactical questions, and the conduct of the political struggle. The goal of the first function is true statements, the goal of the second, authentic insights, and the goal of the third, prudent decisions.²²

In the formulation of this framework Easton draws heavily on as well Marxism as the early positivism, and you can almost see the framework as a consequence of his reciprocal criticism of the idealistic and materialistic wing within both schools:

"... it is interesting to note how positivism is caught between the upper millstone of Marcuse's idealist offensive and the nether millstone of Lenin's materialist attack; the squeeze from both sides arises out of positivism's dual nature. It has both ideal and material elements in it and the effort of the two great philosophical schools has been to try to press it into a purist position. . . (the positivists) . . . might well have advanced a revolutionary political theory, but for their own predilections, without changing their methodology one iota. The proneness to conservatism proves to be a function of their preconceptions rather than of their view of method . . . on closer inspection we can see that positivism does not preclude and in fact takes into account elements of instability in the unfolding history and that there is, strangely enough, a clear dialectical movement. . ." (Easton, 1947, p. 257–258, italics mine)

And as the proneness to conservatism in positivism proves to be a function of their preconceptions rather than of their view of method, it is also possible to unite marxism and liberalism²³ within the very same framework by the help of the three autonomous functions: Theory construction, organization of enlightenment, and political action.

Where theory construction is involved the appropriate model of interaction is that of the advancing and argumentative scientific testing of hypotheses, and, ideally, this requires a symmetrical relationship among the partners in discussion to ensure that the outcome is determined solely by the force of the better argument.

But a critical theory cannot, according to Easton, build solely upon theory construction, as its final test is its successful application to processes of enlightenment, and to perform this function an appropriate moral philosophical model of interaction is necessary:

"Failure to realize the function that value-creation plays in empirical research means that the choices of political scientists, will be moulded ... by the implicit and intuitive acceptance of a value framework which they have accidentally acquired." (Easton, "The Decline of Modern Political Theory", 1951, p. 49)

"... certain frameworks such as that of the elite limit the range of vision of the research worker and blind him to certain obvious facts. Without release from this bond large parts of reality must escape the scientist." (Easton, 1950, p. 469)

In the moral discourse – in the sense of a relentless discursive examination of the presuppositions and grounds of any claim to cognitive or normative validity – the position of the partners is usually asymmetrical, as the inability of the "patient" to meet the conditions of a genuine dialogue is the presupposition of this kind of communication, and ideally, it is precisely the aim of enlightenment to make a symmetrical relationship possible. Thus a critical theory serves to enlighten its target groups about the positions they occupy in an antagonistic social system and about their vital interests in this very situation. But although critical theory is developed with the aim of initiating and guiding processes of reflexion and self-emancipation it does not bear the name of specific target groups within itself, as the question of which groups are amenable to enlightenment in a particular situation is first and foremost an empirical question. Consequently, a critical theory must repudiate any a priori answers to such stra-

tegic and tactical questions which arise during the political/democratic struggle.

When it comes to the function of political action there is no single model, appropriate in all situations, for the interaction between political groups striving for emancipation, and political groups opposing such an emancipation from their vested interests in the maintenance of the existing social order. There are situations in which reformism is more effective than revolution – or as Marx says – in which the weapon of criticism is more effective than the criticism by weapons.

As good citizens we must act as best we can, dependent of the situation, without appealing to one single theory, as we find no theory of which the capacity of justification covers all situations. While the theory legitimizes the work of enlightenment and can itself be refuted or corrected if communication fails, it can, a fortiori, by no means legitimize the risky decisions of political action under some concrete conditions. Decisions for political struggle cannot be first justified theoretically and then carried out organizationally.

"Since decisions must be made in practical affairs, where, even at its best, science is usually ignorant of some of the consequences, then the choice must include foresight based on prudence; it becomes the application not only of scientific but also of prudential knowledge." (Easton, "The Political System", 1953, p. 87)

Therefore, the only possible form of justification in connection with the function of political action is a consensus attained in a practical discourse among the participants, who – in the consciousness of their common democratic interests and in the knowledge of the circumstances, predictable consequences and side-effects – are the only ones who can know what risks they are willing to take, and with what expectations. Thus the appropriate political discourse model of interaction, like that of the theoretical discourse, requires a symmetrical relation between the participants: a democratic organization within political groups striving for a genuine interactive democracy and acting on the basis of a consciously formed common will:

"With a general empirical theory woven into a moral theory, we would then have completed the new or post-modern image of social science. We would then have returned to the kind of knowledge prevalent in all ages prior to the late nineteenth century, but at a higher level of understanding and empirical confirmation ... the social scientist-philosopher ... would know the ex-

tent to which he could expect to be empirical and the extent to which he could be moral. He would be clearly aware of the responsibilities and potentialities of each kind of knowledge *without fearing to utilize each separately or together as the situation seemed to demand.* (Easton, "Shifting Images of Social Science and Values", 1955, p. 18, italics mine).

3. The debate of Easton's "Credo of relevance"

The repudiation of the Easton-criticism from the critical tradition and the explication of the three functions in Easton's world-view can help us make his very keen attack towards his behavioralistic "colleagues" in 1969 more intelligible:

1. Substance must precede technique. If one MUST be sacrificed for the other . . . it is more important to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary urgent social problems than to be sophisticated in the tools of investigation.

2. Behavioral science conceals an ideology of empirical conservatism. To confine oneself exclusively to the description and analysis of facts is to hamper the understanding of these same facts in their broadest context. As a result empirical political science must lend its support to the maintenance of the very factual conditions it explores . . .

3. . . . The heart of behavioral inquiry is abstraction and analysis and this serves to conceal the brute realities of politics. The task of postbehavioralism is to break the barriers of silence . . . and to help political science reach out to the real needs of mankind in time of crisis.

4. Research about and constructive development of values are inextinguishable parts of the study of politics. Science cannot be and never has been evaluatively neutral despite protestations to the contrary . . .

5. . . . The intellectuals' historical role has been and must be to protect the humane values of civilization: This is their unique task and obligation. Without this they become mere technicians, mechanics for tinkering with society.

6. To know is to bear the responsibility for acting and to act is to engage in reshaping society. The intellectual as scientist bears the special obligation to put his knowledge to work . . .

7. If the intellectual has the obligation to implement his knowledge, those organizations composed of intellectuals . . . cannot stand apart from the struggles of the day. Politicization of the professions is inescapable as well as desirable." (Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science", 1969, p. 1052)

As we now know the world-view of Easton, it is obvious that these statements do not represent a sudden shift in his view of political science but only a shift in emphasis in the light of a new social situation (point 1) – from theory construc-

tion to organization of enlightenment and political action. Easton feels that the behavioralists have devoted so much energy to the construction of theory that they have lost touch with the brute realities of politics (point 3) and consequently have repressed the function of the organization of enlightenment (point 4) and political action (point 6). As they have helped to support a conservative ideology (point 2) they have become mere mechanics for tinkering with society, and they have in this way repressed their historical role as advocates acting for a more humane and democratic society released from any kind of ideologically frozen relations of dependence (point 5 + 7).

But despite the fact that Easton only repeats himself from his "Credo of Behavioralism" – just in more emphatic terms – this new credo was not well received at all, and there has almost been a conspiracy of silence against it from the explanatory tradition. However, the most interesting response to his new credo is that of the understanding tradition which – owing to Easton's more explicit formulation of a critical attitude – now reveals even more hostile feelings towards him than before.

3.1 The response of the understanding tradition to Easton's "Credo of Relevance"

Though it was to be expected that at least Dag Anckar – in the light of his postulate about the immanent, elitistic inclinations of Easton and his model – would have been able to appreciate the new credo, this is indeed not the case:

"The general tone of Easton's article is astoundingly naive. . . Easton sets up some incomprehensible contradictions. Poor technical skills are not leading to good but to inferior substance, and inferior substance is leading to bad application; a lesser degree of abstraction does not lead to a better but to a worse perception of reality and a poor perception of reality is leading to bad application. However . . . we find – to our surprise – that he is apparently not experiencing any strong contradiction between that kind of "basic research" in which he has been engaged and the action orientated "shift in emphasis" which must occur "at once to take into account the critical times in which we live." (Anckar, 1973, p. 93, my translation from Swedish)

It is of course impossible to imagine the "contradictions" to be an effect of Anckar's home-spun synthesis between von Wright and Popper at the world-view level. Because, in the same way as it was convenient to use von Wright to reject the "scientific" Easton's elimination of the human

actor, it is now convenient to use Popper to reject this "action-orientated shift in emphasis" as naive and non-scientific. But the worse is yet to come as we shall see in the response from the understanding scientist John D. Astin to this new credo. Astin, who sets out to demonstrate that Easton has had nothing to bring to the understanding tradition, starts harping on the same string about Easton's unconscious double role as behaviorist (Easton I) and factist (Easton II).

In his role as Easton I, Astin says, he succeeds in reducing the actor to a mere stimulus-response phenomena who never attaches a subjective meaning to his actions; and when we turn to Easton II, he oppresses the understanding tradition in an even more subtle way by confining the human actor in an equilibristic or persisting system. This Easton, Astin continues, especially crops up in the empirical studies of socialization, and Easton's postulate that these studies are very much concerned about the problem of change must consequently be rejected as pure nonsense having nothing in common with the real thing:

"... the study of the socialization of children is a *venerable and normative* study. There is an immense literature on the subject in both education theory and social psychology. Indeed, it is the heart of both. In neither area is it necessary to postulate an integrating 'persisting' system in order to advance hypotheses... In fact, the postulation of an equilibristic or persistent system thwarts the understanding of a process which the *overwhelming majority* of education theorists and social psychologists consider explicable and significant only in terms of change.²⁴ (John D. Astin, "Easton I and Easton II", 1972, p. 728, italics mine)

This quotation leaves the impression that it is next to a crime (which luckily almost no one but Easton has committed) to study socialization from a factual point of view, and furthermore it seems to postulate that this research group not even counts members from the behavioristic wing of the explanatory tradition. One wonders how Skinner & Co would react to being included in this "venerable and normative study" earmarked for the understanding tradition? Or for that matter – how would Piaget & Co react to this characterization of their work? Piaget is indeed a developmental psychologist, but is this the same as being a member of the understanding tradition? Astin's criticism forms in this way a shining example of the fight between the explanatory and understanding tradition. Astin is totally disinterested in revealing Easton's intentions, as he only wishes to

wip the floor with those among his "colleagues" whose level of ambition reaches beyond his own cognitive relativistic:

"... the empirical theory Easton seeks is placed beyond his grasp; it is *particular change, particular events and institutions* which would be subjects to which any "empirical-oriented, behavioral, operational or causal theory" would be addressed... (Easton)... is a floating object caught up in two whirlpools. He circled about in the orbit of mechanism so long that one felt confident that... he adhered to the vocabulary of cause and effect which he employed; but suddenly he has been flung into the vortex of organicism, and a new vocabulary replaces the old. Since in neither case did he progress beyond vocabulary, it is not a great loss. (Astin, 1972, p. 735, italics mine)

Having satisfied himself that Easton's life-work is in vain Astin only has to make a final comment on the action-orientated Easton III, and this he does unanimously with Dag Anckar. Perhaps, they both say, Easton is now beginning to realize that the individual person is not a cipher in a persisting system, as the development of such a system can only be explained by the purposes which the individual assigns to it and the different meanings the actor attaches to it in the course of time. But as we have shown, they both continue, there is no room for such a conception of political science in the systems model:

"Both mechanism and organicism disallow this conception of the individual person. That Easton proceeds as though mechanism, organicism, and individualism could be comfortably incorporated in a single scheme is evidence of a genuinely hospitable if somewhat uncritical intellect." (Astin, 1972, p. 737, and Astin in Anckar, 1973, p. 93).

So much for the critical tradition; but there was, however, an understanding scientist who took Easton's new credo more seriously, and consequently dug out a more comprehensive Easton-material, namely E. F. Miller.

Miller distinguishes three stages in the development of Easton's thought: In the first stage, which extends from the late 1940's to about 1953, Easton elaborates a comprehensive view of the nature of political science and political theory. In the second stage, extending from 1954-68, he elaborates the systems model, and from 69- Easton moves into a third stage – one of reappraisal. Miller then sets out to demonstrate that Easton's position in the three stages is contradictory, as it reflects an oscillation and a vacillation between

the explanatory and understanding tradition – between the systems view of respectively Hume and Hegel, and between a correspondence theory of truth and a historicist theory of truth:

"In "Framework" . . . he moves from the Hegelian view that all phenomena are related to the Humean view that all phenomena can be related by mind." (E. F. Miller, "David Easton's Political Theory", 1971, p. 185)

"Yet if there are no systems in nature, it is difficult to see how Easton can maintain that the value of a theory lies in the adequacy of its correspondence . . . Easton appears to have moved towards the view, often adopted by historicists. . . , that the theorist imposes meaning on empirical data rather than discovering meaning in the data. . ." (Miller, 1971, p. 219)

But what Miller's limited world-view reveals as an oscillation is in fact a synthesis between the instrumentalistic theory of truth and the correspondence theory of truth in the field of theory construction: Meaning, Easton says, does not lie in the phenomena alone (the correspondence view) nor does it derive exclusively from the utility of the way our socially conditioned minds may order these phenomena (the instrumentalistic view). Meaning arises rather from the dialectical process through which the knower perceives and understands relationships among phenomena and the existential limits these phenomena impose on the process itself. These limits, Easton says, lie in the need to test, through experience, the utility of a particular ordering of phenomena by its contribution to our explanatory and predictive powers.²⁵ From this follows that the question of truth is neither a question of discovering some one and only political system cohering out there in the phenomenal world nor a question of an arbitrarily ordering of that world of complex relationships in terms of our concepts. Truth is rather a question of finding valid correlations in the phenomenal world by the aid of our socially produced and intersubjectively learned concepts: "CONCEPTS ARE NEITHER TRUE NOR FALSE; THEY ARE ONLY MORE OR LESS USEFUL." (Easton, 1965A, p. 33)

When you define knowledge in this way, Easton continues, it becomes possible to view knowledge as RELATED to time as well as being part of a larger HISTORICAL process during which each generation seeks to add to the accumulation of our understanding, seeing explanation and prediction as the ultimate test of validity. With regard to political science this implies that we are free to define politics in any way we wish and to or-

ganize these definitions with the aid of whatever instruments or languages we bring to the knowing process. But from the fact that knowledge is related through the knowing process to the circumstances under which it is produced does not follow that the various shifts over time in our definitions are inexplicable or random. As the scientific and practical utility of our concepts are constrained by our need to find correlations you can view the shifts as a product of the conscious and goal-directed efforts of a collective to improve our knowledge, by whatever criteria of improvement it may have used.

Thus, what Miller reveals as an oscillation and a vacillation is in fact a comprehensive mediation between the explanatory and understanding traditions and curiously enough we can end this case by demonstrating that Miller himself – quite unknowingly – completely succeeds in drawing a picture of Easton as a critical scientist. At the world-view level, Miller tells us, Easton draws a crucial distinction between "value theory" and "causal theory" in preparation for an extensive theoretical/practical system of knowledge differentiating between four types of propositions:

"Descriptive or factual propositions refer to observable facts; causal propositions to the assumed relation between facts; value propositions to the state of affairs that the theorist would like to bring into existence; and applied propositions to the conditions whereby given ends can be attained. Even to speak of different kinds of propositions is deceptive, he adds, since these propositions do not in practice exist in a pure form: "Strictly speaking, we ought to say that these are several logical aspects of propositions since no statement can ever refer exclusively to facts, values or theories." (Miller, 1971, p. 187-188)

Miller here quite explicitly reveals a critical theory which springs from a basic principle concerning the analytical nature of knowledge: Firstly we have "factual" and "causal" propositions connected to the function of theory construction. Secondly we have value propositions connected to the function of the organization of enlightenment, and thirdly we have applied propositions connected to the function of political action.

Final Comments

We have in this case-study tried to explicate the conflict between the understanding and explanatory traditions through an analysis of David Easton and his critics, and we have also tried to dissolve this conflict on the general lines laid down

by Jürgen Habermas' and Easton's critical frameworks. Thus the case has taken inspiration from the fundamental principles of both concerning a critical analysis of texts. Firstly, we have acted according to Habermas' principle that epistemology "as a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as a social theory",²⁶ and secondly we have followed Easton's hermeneutical principle – which many of his critics ought to reflect upon:

"When interpreting the fundamental ideas of an author, one must search always for the element of consistency or unity in the thought so that what at first looks like an apparent weakness may in the end prove to be entirely compatible with the whole context." (Easton, 1950, p.454)²⁷

Notes

- 1 This case study is an extract from my thesis: "A Theoretical Framework for a Critical Mediation of Traditions and its Application to David Easton's Texts", University of Copenhagen, Institute of Political Science, 1980, 197 pages.
- 2 Dunn & Fozouni, "Towards a Critical Administrative Theory", 1975.
- 3 Thomas McCarthy, "The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas", 1978, p. 138/139.
- 4 Thomas McCarthy, "The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas", 1978, p. 150/151.
- 5 Dunn & Fozouni, 1975, p. 38.
- 6 Dunn & Fozouni, 1975, p. 38.
- 7 Curt Sørensen, "Marxism and the Social Order", 1976, p. 590.
- 8 George Ritzer, "Sociology, a Multiple Paradigm Science, 1975, p. 7: "A paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject matter within a science. It serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, how they should be asked, and what rules should be followed in interpreting the answers obtained. The paradigm is the broadest unit of consensus within a science and serves to differentiate one scientific community (or subcommunity) from another. It subsumes, defines, and interrelates the exemplars, theories, and methods and instruments that exist within it."
- 9 Dunn & Fozouni, 1975, p. 51.
- 10 Easton, "Reflections on Criticism" 1973A, p. 39: "By settling on system persistence I sought to raise the question of how *societies* are ever able to provide for the making and implementing of authoritative decisions. . . It appeared to me then – and still does – that by asking as broad a question as this it would be possible to open up and incorporate all major subsidiary questions. . . My writings represent an effort to demonstrate that persistence has this heuristic quality."
- 11 Easton, "A Framework. . .", 1965A, chapter II and III.
- 12 Easton, 1973A, p. 38–43: "Closely related to the suggestion that somehow systems analysis underplays the role of revolutionary change in politics is the notion that it also reduces or underestimates the significance of economic determinants. . . Nothing could be farther from the truth. . . Through systems analysis the impact of social class, modes of production, property relationships . . . and the like can all be traced by the way in which they influence the input of demands and support, the feedback processes, the kinds of outputs or policies that are in fact produced, and the structure of power." p. 42
- 13 Easton 1973B, "Systems Analysis and its Classical Critics". p. 295–296.
- 14 This question is the leading question for the sociology of knowledge school within the understanding tradition. The frameworks of Ritzer (1975), Kuhn ("The Structure of Scientific Revolution", 1962) and Berger and Luckmann ("The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge", 1976) are all guided by this actor-oriented question connected to the metatheoretical level. However, in the debates between for example Kuhn and the "Popperians" the debaters often forget that they are discussing on two *different* levels. Whereas the "Popperians" are concerned with the fulfilment of the function "theory construction" at the world-view level, Kuhn is trying to formulate a metatheory from a diachronic perspective which seeks to explain the genesis, growth, and development of scientific knowledge. (Dunn & Fozouni, 1975, p. 37)
- 15 In opposition to both mechanical and biological systems the social system is a thing with a consciousness, Easton says: ". . . a society is a special kind of human grouping the members of which continually interact with one another and in the process develop a sense of belonging together. This common consciousness . . . reflects the fact that the members of the social system have a basic similarity in their culture and social structure." (Easton, "The Political System", 1953, p. 135)
- 16 Easton, 1953, p. 135–136.
- 18 Therefore Easton's definition of political socialization is as follows: "We shall define *political socialization* as those developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behavior." (Easton, Children and the Political System", 1968, p. 7)
- 19 Easton, "Some Limits of Exchange Theory in Politics", 1972, p. 143–146.
- 20 Easton says: ". . . The mere fact that each expression of a preference is equally relative to circumstances does not in itself mean that we must necessarily conclude that they are equally valuable . . . The position which holds that because preferences are relative, they are by virtue of that fact of equal value is itself an evaluation . . . it argues that because no value judgement can be proved superior, all values must be treated as equally good . . . this invalid interpretation succeeded in converting the study of

- moral ideas into the history of these ideas (Easton, 1953, p. 262–263).
- ²¹ Easton writes: "... if we were to be ruthlessly logical ... we would be compelled also to establish a School of Applied Political Research ... The primary task of this school would be, first, to achieve some consensus of the goals for which political knowledge was to be used ... The second task ... would be to use whatever generalizations were available for the purpose of instructing its students on the application of the scientific knowledge to specific situations." (Easton, 1953, p. 87).
- ²² McCarthy, 1978, p. 206–213.
- ²³ In a personal letter – from which I have Easton's permission to quote – he says: "I am of course of the Great Depression generation, a time when Marxist thinking was far more widespread in North America than it has ever been since. In my classes I have always expressed my indebtedness to Marx and my view of him as one of the mighty triumvirate of social scientists in the nineteenth century if not the mightiest."
- ²⁴ But compare Astin's view to that of Easton in the book in question: "The major drawback of a theoretical perspective that emphasizes system maintenance is that research inspired by a concern for stability ... must overlook a whole range of consequences that socialization has for political diversity, conflict and change." (Easton, 1968, p. 36)
- ²⁵ Easton, 1973B, p. 286–287.
- ²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests", 1978, p. vii.
- ²⁷ Concerning this problem see also the works of Paul Ricoeur.

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