

John N. Warfield

## A CRITIQUE OF THE POLICY PROCESS

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Not long ago I had an opportunity to observe a few episodes in the policy process--that amorphous approach that our federal government and other agencies use to arrive at and administer laws and regulations.

This process incorporates a number of defects, among which I list the following:

- Churchill Disease
- Royal Society Complex
- Dry-Hole Stampede
- Pearl-Casting
- Mahogany on Dry-Rot
- Cadaverous Participation
- Intellectual Rape

I propose to discuss each of these diseases, and to suggest that while they might be appropriate to the Middle Ages, they are "too much" for the Age of Aquarius.

### CHURCHILL DISEASE

Churchill Disease takes its name from that great leader Winston Churchill, who once observed that democracy is a poor kind of government, but tempered this statement with another to the effect that, although poor, democracy just happens to be better than any other kind of government yet discovered.

The Churchill disease is not necessarily contracted by coming in touch with that famous quotation. Usually it is, however, and if one already has the disease, proximity to that quotation will usually aggravate it.

The major symptom of the disease is a belief that because democracy is better than any other form of government, it can't be improved. A side effect of Churchill Disease is damage to the brain that causes one to believe that the only way to find a better kind of government is to find some system that is not yet invented. The possibility of improving the practice of democracy is eliminated forever from the conscious mind by this side effect. Al Smith, the famous New Yorker of the 1920's had a slight case when he said that the only



cure for democracy is more democracy.

While some believe that the Churchill disease can never be cured, there are at least two other beliefs around. One is that it can be cured by writing about how to improve democracy, or talking about how to improve it. The other belief thinks that writing and talking about how to improve democracy may be worthwhile for other reasons, but that the cure to the Churchill disease is to go out and demonstrate how democracy can be improved. Proponents of the latter view hold that writing and discussion can be useful as a step toward curing Churchill disease only if such writing and discussion is contributory toward the planning and conduct of such demonstrations.

#### ROYAL SOCIETY COMPLEX

It is perhaps curious that the first two defects to be discussed both relate to the British Empire in some way. However these are the only two such defects. The rest cannot be pinpointed to have British origins.

The Royal Society Complex has often mistakenly been called the "Pouring on of Holy Water". Persons who use this misnomer are reminded of the important principle of the separation of church and state. Also some may not be familiar with the Royal Society's reasonable entitlement to the name.

The principal manifestation of the Royal Society Complex lies in the substitution of authority for thorough rationale. The concept may go back at least to the fascinating case of Oliver Heaviside, the great British engineer and scientist. Heaviside, who lived in the second half of the nineteenth century, now enjoys (posthumously) the honor of having one of the ionospheric layers named after him. However he also was the first to recognize that if undersea telephone cables were appropriately "loaded", it would be possible to send telephone messages across the ocean by using undersea cables. Heaviside also developed an "operational calculus" that bears his name, in which he found new ways to solve important mathematical problems.



The Royal Society earned title to the name "The Royal Society Complex" when they kept insisting that Heaviside didn't know what he was talking about, and so damaged him as a human being that he finally became a recluse, refusing to leave his residence. He survived because a policeman (or "bobby") brought food to his residence.

Some might say that the Royal Society served the broader society poorly by treating Oliver Heaviside in this manner. But to say this would be to overlook the importance of the exemplary idea that such efforts established as a fundamental rule. You cannot trust what any Royal Society says, or any other body where responsibility for acts does not attach to individual persons. One must not assume from this that the Royal Society, or the National Academies, or any other group is usually wrong. What must be assumed is, that when controversial matters are at stake, one must not assume that they are right. Instead, it is the rationale that must receive meticulous attention, from whatever source it emanates. And where possible, empirical testing should be used to test the rationale itself.

#### DRY-HOLE STAMPEDE

The third type of defect that afflicts the policy process is the practice of staying away, in policy discussions, from ideas or concepts that can provoke a Dry-Hole Stampede. A dry-hole stampede refers to the collective movement of large numbers of living creatures in a common direction, in the mistaken belief that there is some benefit to be gained by such motion, at a time before it has been established whether such benefits can ever be made available.

Notice here that the Dry-Hole Stampede enters the policy process accidentally, and may serve to demolish or impede policymaking because of the drain of resources it imposes upon the policymakers. However the mere threat of a Dry-Hole Stampede often reduces the policy process to a mere token of what it might become, and the threat of it induces certain other defects directly into the process, which we will discuss next.



### PEARL-CASTING

Pearl-Casting afflicts the policy process. This is a disease that is characterized by statements made by persons in policy-making or administrative positions that come "out of the blue", and which hold or appear to hold a promise of benefits to those to whom these statements <sup>are</sup> directed.

One must be careful not to confuse Pearl-Casting with the mere act of promising benefits or of actually delivering benefits. It is not the act of promising or delivering benefits that assures us that Pearl-Casting is present. Rather it is ~~the~~ the nature of such acts, the <sup>large</sup> amount of surprise that is associated with them, and the lack of apparent connection of the acts <sup>or</sup> statements with what has been happening in the immediate past.

Another possible impact of Pearl-Casting, particularly when it takes place in meetings, is to stun the audience out of whatever logical chain of thought they might possibly have been engrossed in, divert them totally to the magnificence of the "pearl", and help destroy forever any idea that policy-making can be systematic and reasoned.

While Pearl-Casting is a disease, and there is no known cure for it, it is one that is deliberately incurred, somewhat like alcoholism. The willingness to take on Pearl-Casting can be in part understood by the fact that it tends to develop antibodies against Dry-Hole Stampede. However it is not a cure for Dry-Hole Stampede, but only a temporary palliative. In some instances, it has even brought on Dry-Hole Stampede. Remarkably, one person may, through Pearl-Casting, cause large numbers of other people to be afflicted with Dry-Hole Stampede, even when the Pearl-Caster manages to avoid the <sup>impact of the</sup> disease.



### MAHOGANY ON DRY-ROT

Mahogany on Dry-Rot is a superficial or cutaneous affliction which has the effect of masking more severe diseases. Its most apparent symptom has been uncovered by the well-known economist, Kenneth Boulding, who gave it the name "spurious saliency". One can often spot Mahogany on Dry-Rot by noting that when an issue believed to be of major importance is being discussed, absolutely vital aspects of the issue are ignored in deference to superficial aspects that appear to do what Dean Acheson once said: "beclouds the dangers and opportunities of our time with an unctuous film".

### CADAVEROUS PARTICIPATION

Cadaverous Participation refers to those endeavors wherein persons are "allowed" or "invited" to "participate" in policy discussions, but the conditions under which such participation takes place are so inhibiting that the participants could be corpses and no one would be the wiser.

Examples would be Congressional hearings where the time allotted is so small in proportion to the attendance, and the availability of policy making figures is so fleeting, that the participation can be worse than no participation at all. (See the next section.)

### INTELLECTUAL RAPE

Intellectual Rape is a highly concentrated disease, readily identified. It occurs when one who is assigned the floor in front of a defenseless audience, uses the occasion to impute to the audience all of the views that the speaker has just propagated. Frequently such an attack is followed by the abrupt departure of the speaker to "fulfill other obligations". The latter aspect of this disease has sometimes been confused with Dry-Hole Stampede *in a miniature form.*