

PREFACE: EVALUATION AND GOVERNING IN TWO QUOTES OR WHEN THE ARITHMETICIAN MET THE CURATOR

The Method I take... is not yet very usual; for instead of using only comparative and superlative Words, and intellectual Arguments, I have taken the course (as a Specimen of the Political Arithmetick I have long aimed at) to express myself in Terms of Number, Weight, or Measure; to use only Arguments of Sense, and to consider only such Causes, as have visible Foundations in Nature[.]

William Petty 1691 (reprinted with Clavel, 1992)

If you want to inspire confidence, give plenty of statistics—it does not matter that they should be accurate, or even intelligible, so long as there is enough of them

Lewis Carroll 1886 (reprinted 2015)

In its simplest form, according to Scriven (1981), evaluation is an act of selecting between two options: good and bad. As an everyday term, to evaluate means to gauge the value of. It aims to inform decision in a direct sense. It is applied and useful and quotidian. It is not considered “high falutin” sociology (Pawson 2013: 6) and is not practiced as a technology of freespeaking academics or intellectuals (MacDonald 1976). It is based on real problems and real experiences (Donaldson et al. 2009; Seigart and Brisolara 2002). It is overtly—and often unapologetically—value-laden (Mark et al. 2000; Pawson 2013; Greene and Tineke 2001; Sielbeck-Bowen et al. 2002; Weiss 1972; Scriven 1981). Moreover, since its emergence as a specific form of scientific inquiry in the 1960s, to its professionalisation in the 1970s (Weiss 1972), to its epistemological

and methodological advancements in the 1980s (Cronbach et al. 1980; Scriven 1981; Guba and Lincoln 1989) evaluation has had an intractable relationship with the practice and dynamics of governing (Taylor and Balloch 2005; Henkel 1991a, b; Gowin and Millman 1981; Dunsire 1986).

This relationship is complex and analysis of it has drawn on debates surrounding public management, neoliberalism, ‘soft’ power, political economy, evidence-based policy-making, and critical education. At this point, inasmuch as there is a ‘definition’ of evaluation, evaluation is defined and self-defines as *political* (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Guba and Lincoln 1989). Commentators such as Rich (2004) account for its popularity by pointing to the manipulation technocratic, ‘neutral’ narratives by neoliberal governing elites (see also: Hunter 2015; Clarke 2004; Denzin and Giardina 2008; Fischer 2003) and it is treated as a prerequisite to ‘good policy’ by Nagel (2001).

As a starting point to the arguments in *Evaluation and Governing in the 21st Century: Disciplinary Measures, Transformative Possibilities*, I have chosen two quotations which best illustrate critical sociological perspectives on evaluation as it is currently practiced by governing elites. The first is something of the ‘original position’ on the relationship between evidence and policy and is from William Petty’s treatise on ‘political arithmetic’ first published in 1691. In this work, Petty expresses his belief in both the practice—and the possibility—of designing governing approaches through drawing on statistics and measurements. Petty’s arguments epitomise the rationalist perspective of the relationship between evaluation and governing.

The second quotation selected is less complementary of the relationship between evaluation and governing. It is taken from Lewis Carroll’s 1886 report—*Three Years in a Curatorship by One Whom It Has Tried*. Carroll (born: Charles Dodgson), a mathematician himself, was highly critical of rationalism (and, by implication, political arithmetic). The dogmatic, illusionary character of ‘logic’ is a central theme in his satirical writing and his two-part magnum opus—*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)*—are, partly, allegories for both the futility of the ‘quest for knowledge’ and the absurdity of ‘rationalist’ process of knowledge production and science. This allegorical function is made most obvious by Gilles Deleuze’s use of Carroll’s work in his writing on nomadic thought and reason in *The Logic of Sense*. In *Three Years*, Carroll satirises the use

of measurements and statistics through positioning them as tools for supporting a particular perspective and, even where completely unintelligible, creating a sense of transparency. The more statistics there are, the easier it is to justify a particular mode of conduct as numbers are seen, according to the rationalist status quo, as inherently valuable.

Such a perspective is also common within critiques of evaluation's role in governing, particularly that of qualitative and critical social scientists (Denzin and Giardina 2006, 2008) who argue that evaluation evidence is used to legitimise the actions of governing elites regardless of the validity of this evidence. This is a central thread in arguments against the use of Randomised Control Trials (Oakley 2000; St. Pierre 2002) in policy evaluation and in campaigns for the inclusion of collaborative, participatory, and arts-based research methods in evaluation studies (Mertens 1999; Foster 2015; Donaldson et al. 2009; Estrella and Gaventa 1998). Adopting the position that statistics add little but persuasion, advancements in evaluation have focused on what methodological approaches and techniques could assist in usurping the rationalist fantasy and enlivening a transformative relationship between evaluation and governing (see: Fetterman 1994; Mertens 2008; Cousins and Chouinard 2012; Fox et al. 2010).

It is into this debate that *Evaluation and Governing in the 21st Century* sits. Adopting the same perspective as Carroll and critiques of neoliberalism's "love" of numbers (Lather 2005) and the myth of evidence-based policy-making (Hammersley 2013; Sullivan 2011; Rich 2004; Stone 2002), the book presents evaluation as a technology of governing. However, in exploring evaluation's operations as a governing tool, the book will draw on critical sociological theory to unpack the dynamics of this role and the possibilities to reclaim the knowledge-production process for transformative, critical ends.

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