Classics in Public Policy

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Chapter 2

Public Policymaking

Public policymaking is the totality of the decisional processes by which a government decides to deal or not to deal with a particular problem or concern. It is a never-ending process. Nineteenth-century British statesman Lord Salisbury (1830–1903) is usually credited with first remarking: "There is no such thing as a fixed policy, because policy like all organic entities is always in the making."

There are two distinct and opposite theories seeking to explain the mechanisms that produce policy decisions or nondecisions. The first might be called the rational decision-making approach and it generally has been attributed to political scientist Harold D. Lasswell (1901–1978). In his book *The Future of Political Science* (1963), he posited seven significant phases for every decision:

1. The intelligence phase, involving an influx of information;
2. The promoting or recommending phase, involving activities designed to influence the outcome;
3. The prescribing phase, involving the articulation of norms;
4. The invoking phase, involving establishing correspondence between prescriptions and concrete circumstances;
5. The application phase, in which the prescription is executed;
6. The appraisal phase, assessing intent in relation to effect, and
7. The terminating phase, treating expectations (rights) established while the prescription was in force.

Of course there is an immediate problem with this and every other such list. It is impossible to do. No matter how rational we would hope to be there is no way anyone can gather *all* the facts and take into account *every* consideration. Therefore, decision makers exercise what the Nobel Prize winning economist Herbert Simon (1916–2001) in *Administrative Behavior* (1947) called "bounded rationality." The "bounds" are what people put on their decisions. Simon asserts that: "It is impossible for the behavior of a single, isolated individual to reach any high degree of rationality. The number of alternatives he must explore is so great, the information he would need to evaluate them so vast that even an approximation to objective rationality is hard to conceive." Consequently, humans make decisions on satisfactory as opposed to optimal information. Inventing a new word, Simon said that decision makers "satisfice" when they accept a satisfactory and sufficient amount of information upon which to base a decision. Thus in the real world we are forced to reject the "rational comprehensive" approach and "satisfice" rather than "maximize."

A rejection of this approach was urged by Charles E. Lindblom, (1917–) the leading proponent of the second theory of policy decision making—the incremental approach. In his most famous article, "The Science of 'Muddling Through'," *Public Administration Review* (1959), reprinted here, Lindblom took a hard look at the rational models of the decisional processes of government. He rejected the notion that most decisions are made by rational (total information) processes. Instead, he saw such decisions—indeed, the whole policy-making process—as dependent upon small incremental decisions that tend to be made in response to short-term political conditions. Lindblom's thesis essentially held that decision making was controlled infinitely more by events and circumstances than by the will of those in policy-making positions. Disjointed incrementalism as a policy course was in reality the only truly feasible route, since incrementalism "concentrated the policymaker's analysis on familiar, better-known experiences, sharply reduced the number of different alternative policies to be explored, and sharply reduced the number and complexity of factors to be analyzed." Moreover, Lindblom argued that incrementalism was more consistent with the pluralistic nature of American democracy where individuals are free to combine to pursue common interests, whose contention "often can assure a more comprehensive regard for the values of the whole society than any attempt at intellectual comprehensiveness."

The rational and incremental models, useful intellectual tools for conceptualizing the decision-making process, have encouraged much subsequent modeling. For example, there is the "split the difference" compromise model that combines the two. Mixed scanning is the decision making model put forth by sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1929–) in "Mixed Scanning: 'Third' Approach to Decision Making," reprinted here. This calls for seeking short term solutions to problems by using both incrementalism and rational-comprehensive approaches to problem solving. For example, a foreign policy analyst responsible for reviewing political developments in Europe might superficially scan all recent developments (the comprehensive approach) but focus only on those political problems that have changed since the last scanning (the

incremental approach). In this way the analyst saves time by dealing in detail only with those situations that truly demand attention.

But in reality all such models may be not much more than mind games for policy wonks. The real world of political executives and harried legislators is not an intellectual arena so much as it is a bare knuckles political arena. Decisions in the political arena are influenced far more by the perception of a situation than by any rational concept of objective reality. It is far more than the difference between a pessimist seeing a glass half empty while the optimist sees the same glass as half full. One actor in the decisional drama may view a program as absolutely essential for the national interest while another actor is equally certain that it is nothing more than an example of petty bureaucrats wasting the taxpayers' money.

Policymakers bring two kinds of intelligence to bear on their thinking. First is their mental ability to cope with complicated problems. Second is the information they have on and the experience they have with the issue at hand. Both kinds of intelligence are then filtered through their ideological predispositions and personal biases before an attitude toward any given problem is set. Thus political decisions are seldom made on the objective merits of a case because a case only has merit in the eyes of a political decision maker if he or she is intelligent enough to see it and, equally important, was ideologically and politically predisposed to support it.

Policy is hierarchical. The broadest, most overarching policy is made at the top. Then increasingly more focused policies must be made at every level on down. For example, the president of the United States sits at the top of the foreign policy-making pyramid. Dozens of layers below him sit thousands of clerks in the visa sections of hundreds of embassies and consulates making policy—that is, making decisions—on who may legally enter the United States. To be sure, policy at the bottom is heavily impacted by laws and regulations. But to the extent that these low-level officials, what Michael Lipsky calls street-level bureaucrats, have any discretion at all, they are making policy. And if you are on the receiving end of that policy, whether as a visa applicant or a motorist receiving a traffic citation from a police officer, the policy is as real to you as if it were coming from higher levels in the policy-making hierarchy. Lipsky's analysis of "Street-Level Bureaucrats as Policy Makers" is reprinted here.

Policy analysts have long been critical of the "either/or" nature of the rational versus the incremental approaches to decision making. A model advocated by Deborah Stone holds that the political community, the polis, is better able to deal with the ambiguity of less than perfect information—information often "spun" by "spin doctors"—than with the look at hard facts approach of the rational model. While rational analysis does not lend itself to the inconsistencies of real life, the polis model assumes it. In *Policy Paradox* (first chapter reprinted here) *and Political Reason* Stone contends that political communities constantly and inherently struggle over ideas and exchange meanings that are not mutually exclusive. While the rational model assumes that there are objective facts that can be applied, Stone finds that "behind every policy issue lurks a contest over conflicting, though equally plausible, conceptions of the same abstract goal or value."

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The Science of "Muddling Through" (1959)

Charles E. Lindblom

Suppose an administrator is given responsibility for formulating policy with respect to inflation. He might start by trying to list all related values in order of importance, e.g., full employment, reasonable business profit, protection of small savings, prevention of a stock market crash. Then all possible policy outcomes could be rated as more or less efficient in attaining a maximum of these values. This would of course require a prodigious inquiry into values held by members of society and an equally prodigious set of calculations on how much of each value is equal to how much of each other value. He could then proceed to outline all possible policy alternatives. In a third step, he would undertake systematic comparison of his multitude of alternatives to determine which attains the greatest amount of values.

In comparing policies, he would take advantage of any theory available that generalized about classes of policies. In considering inflation, for example, he would compare all policies in the light of the theory of prices. Since no alternatives are beyond his investigation, he would consider strict central control and the abolition of all prices and markets on the one hand and elimination of all public controls with reliance completely on the free market on the other, both in the light of whatever theoretical generalizations he could find on such hypothetical economies.

Finally, he would try to make the choice that would in fact maximize his values.

An alternative line of attack would be to set as his principal objective, either explicitly or without conscious thought, the relatively simple goal of keeping prices level. This objective might be compromised or complicated by only a few other goals, such as full employment. He would in fact disregard most other social values as beyond his present interest, and he would

for the moment not even attempt to rank the few values that he regarded as immediately relevant. Were he pressed, he would quickly admit that he was ignoring many related values and many possible important consequences of his policies.

As a second step, he would outline those relatively few policy alternatives that occurred to him. He would then compare them. In comparing his limited number of alternatives, most of them familiar from past controversies, he would not ordinarily find a body of theory precise enough to carry him through a comparison of their respective consequences. Instead he would rely heavily on the record of past experience with small policy steps to predict the consequences of similar steps extended into the future.

Moreover, he would find that the policy alternatives combined objectives or values in different ways. For example, one policy might offer price level stability at the cost of some risk of unemployment; another might offer less price stability but also less risk of unemployment. Hence, the next step in his approach—the final selection—would combine into one the choice among values and the choice among instruments for reaching values. It would not, as in the first method of policymaking, approximate a more mechanical process of choosing the means that best satisfied goals that were previously clarified and ranked. Because practitioners of the second approach expect to achieve their goals only partially, they would expect to repeat endlessly the sequence just described, as conditions and aspirations changed and as accuracy of prediction improved.

By Root or by Branch

For complex problems, the first of these two approaches is of course impossible. Although such an approach can be described, it cannot be practiced except for relatively simple problems and even then only in a somewhat modified form. It assumes intellectual capacities and sources of information that men simply do not possess, and it is even more absurd as an approach to policy when the time and money that can be allocated to a policy problem is limited, as is always the case. Of particular importance to public administrators is the fact that public agencies are in effect usually instructed not to practice the first method. That is to say, their prescribed functions and constraints—the politically or legally possible—restrict their attention to relatively few values and relatively few alternative policies among the countless alternatives that might be imagined. It is the second method that is practiced.

Curiously, however, the literatures of decision-making, policy formulation, planning, and public administration formalize the first approach rather than the second, leaving public administrators who handle complex decisions in the position of practicing what few preach. For emphasis I run some risk of overstatement. True enough, the literature is well aware of limits on man's capacities and of the inevitability that policies will be approached in some such style as the second. But attempts to formalize rational policy formulation—to lay

out explicitly the necessary steps in the process—usually describe the first approach and not the second.[1]

The common tendency to describe policy formulation even for complex problems as though it followed the first approach has been strengthened by the attention given to, and successes enjoyed by, operations research, statistical decision theory, and systems analysis. The hallmarks of these procedures, typical of the first approach, are clarity of objective, explicitness of evaluation, a high degree of comprehensiveness of overview, and, wherever possible, quantification of values for mathematical analysis. But these advanced procedures remain largely the appropriate techniques of relatively small-scale problem-solving where the total number of variables to be considered is small and value problems restricted. Charles Hitch, head of the Economics Division of RAND Corporation, one of the leading centers for application of these techniques, has written:

> I would make the empirical generalization from my experience at RAND and elsewhere that operations research is the art of sub-optimizing, i.e., of solving some lower-level problems, and that difficulties increase and our special competence diminishes by an order of magnitude with every level of decision making we attempt to ascend. The sort of simple explicit model which operations researchers are so proficient in using can certainly reflect most of the significant factors influencing traffic control on the George Washington Bridge, but the proportion of the relevant reality which we can represent by any such model or models in studying, say, a major foreign-policy decision, appears to be almost trivial.[2]

Accordingly, I propose in this paper to clarify and formalize the second method, much neglected in the literature. This might be described as the method of *successive limited comparisons.* I will contrast it with the first approach, which might be called the rational-comprehensive method.[3] More impressionistically and briefly—and therefore generally used in this article—they could be characterized as the branch method and root method, the former continually building out from the current situation, step-by-step and by

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[1]James G. March and Herbert A. Simon similarly characterize the literature. They also take some important steps, as have Simon's recent articles, to describe a less heroic model of policy-making. See *Organizations* (John Wiley and Sons, 1958), p. 137.

[2]"Operations Research and National Planning—A Dissent," 5 *Operations Research* 718 (October, 1957). Hitch's dissent is from particular points made in the article to which his paper is a reply; his claim that operations research is for low-level problems is widely accepted.

For examples of the kind of problems to which operations research is applied, see C. W. Churchman, R. L. Ackoff and E. L. Arnoff, *Introduction to Operations Research* (John Wiley and Sons, 1957); and J. F. McCloskey and J. M. Coppinger (eds.), *Operations Research for Management,* Vol. II, (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956).

[3]I am assuming that administrators often make policy and advise in the making of policy and am treating decision-making and policy-making as synonymous for purposes of this paper.

small degrees; the latter starting from fundamentals anew each time, building on the past only as experience is embodied in a theory, and always prepared to start completely from the ground up.

Let us put the characteristics of the two methods side by side in simplest terms.

Assuming that the root method is familiar and understandable, we proceed directly to clarification of its alternative by contrast. In explaining the second, we shall be describing how most administrators do in fact approach complex questions, for the root method, the "best" way as a blueprint or model, is in fact not workable for complex policy questions, and administrators are forced to use the method of successive limited comparisons.

Intertwining Evaluation and Empirical Analysis (Ib)

The quickest way to understand how values are handled in the method of successive limited comparisons is to see how the root method often breaks down in *its* handling of values or objectives. The idea that values should be clarified,

Rational-Comprehensive (Root)	**Successive Limited Comparisons (Branch)**
1a. Clarification of values or objectives distinct from and usually prerequisite to empirical analysis of alternative policies.	1b. Selection of value goals and empirical analysis of the needed action are not distinct from one another but are closely intertwined.
2a. Policy-formulation is therefore approached through means-end analysis: First the ends are isolated, then the means to achieve them are sought.	2b. Since means and ends are not distinct, means-end analysis is often inappropriate or limited.
3a. The test of a "good" policy is that it can be shown to be the most appropriate means to desired ends.	3b. The test of a "good" policy is typically that various analysts find themselves directly agreeing on a policy (without their agreeing that it is the most appropriate means to an agreed objective).

4a. Analysis is comprehensive; every important relevant factor is taken into account.	4b. Analysis is drastically limited:
	  i) Important possible outcomes are neglected.
	  ii) Important alternative potential policies are neglected.
	  iii) Important affected values are neglected.

5a. Theory is often heavily relied upon.	5b. A succession of comparisons greatly reduces or eliminates reliance on theory.

and in advance of the examination of alternative policies, is appealing. But what happens when we attempt it for complex social problems? The first difficulty is that on many critical values or objectives, citizens disagree, congressmen disagree, and public administrators disagree. Even where a fairly specific objective is prescribed for the administrator, there remains considerable room for disagreement on sub-objectives. Consider, for example, the conflict with respect to locating public housing, described in Meyerson and Banfield's study of the Chicago Housing Authority[4]—disagreement which occurred despite the clear objective of providing a certain number of public housing units in the city. Similarly conflicting are objectives in highway location, traffic control, minimum wage administration, development of tourist facilities in national parks, or insect control.

Administrators cannot escape these conflicts by ascertaining the majority's preference, for preferences have not been registered on most issues; indeed, there often *are* no preferences in the absence of public discussion sufficient to bring an issue to the attention of the electorate. Furthermore, there is a question of whether intensity of feeling should be considered as well as the number of persons preferring each alternative. By the impossibility of doing otherwise, administrators often are reduced to deciding policy without clarifying objectives first.

Even when an administrator resolves to follow his own values as a criterion for decisions, he often will not know how to rank them when they conflict with one another, as they usually do. Suppose, for example, that an administrator must relocate tenants living in tenements scheduled for destruction. One objective is to empty the buildings fairly promptly, another is to find suitable accommodation for persons displaced, another is to avoid friction with residents in other areas in which a large influx would be unwelcome, another is to deal with all concerned through persuasion if possible, and so on.

How does one state even to himself the relative importance of these partially conflicting values? A simple ranking of them is not enough; one needs ideally to know how much of one value is worth sacrificing for some of another value. The answer is that typically the administrator chooses—and must choose—directly among policies in which these values are combined in different ways. He cannot first clarify his values and then choose among policies.

A more subtle third point underlies both the first two. Social objectives do not always have the same relative values. One objective may be highly prized in one circumstance, another in another circumstance. If, for example, an administrator values highly both the dispatch with which his agency can carry through its projects *and* good public relations, it matters little which of the two possibly conflicting values he favors in some abstract or general sense. Policy questions arise in forms which put to administrators such a question as: Given the degree to which we are or are not already achieving the values of dispatch and the values of good public relations, is it worth sacrificing a little

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[4]Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning and the Public Interest* (The Free Press, 1955).

speed for a happier clientele, or is it better to risk offending the clientele so that we can get on with our work? The answer to such a question varies with circumstances.

The value problem is, as the example shows, always a problem of adjustments at a margin. But there is no practicable way to state marginal objectives or values except in terms of particular policies. That one value is preferred to another in one decision situation does not mean that it will be preferred in another decision situation in which it can be had only at great sacrifice of another value. Attempts to rank or order values in general and abstract terms so that they do not shift from decision to decision end up by ignoring the relevant marginal preferences. The significance of this third point thus goes very far. Even if all administrators had at hand an agreed set of values, objectives, and constraints, and an agreed ranking of these values, objectives, and constraints, their marginal values in actual choice situations would be impossible to formulate.

Unable consequently to formulate the relevant values first and then choose among policies to achieve them, administrators must choose directly among alternative policies that offer different marginal combinations of values. Somewhat paradoxically, the only practicable way to disclose one's relevant marginal values even to oneself is to describe the policy one chooses to achieve them. Except roughly and vaguely, I know of no way to describe—or even to understand—what my relative evaluations are for, say, freedom and security, speed and accuracy in governmental decisions, or low taxes and better schools than to describe my preferences among specific policy choices that might be made between the alternatives in each of the pairs.

In summary, two aspects of the process by which values are actually handled can be distinguished. The first is clear: evaluation and empirical analysis are intertwined; that is, one chooses among values and among policies at one and the same time. Put a little more elaborately, one simultaneously chooses a policy to attain certain objectives and chooses the objectives themselves. The second aspect is related but distinct: the administrator focuses his attention on marginal or incremental values. Whether he is aware of it or not, he does not find general formulations of objectives very helpful and in fact makes specific marginal or incremental comparisons. Two policies, X and Y, confront him. Both promise the same degree of attainment of objectives *a, b, c, d,* and *e.* But X promises him somewhat more of *f* than does Y, while Y promises him somewhat more of *g* than does X. In choosing between them, he is in fact offered the alternative of a marginal or incremental amount of *f* at the expense of a marginal or incremental amount of *g.* The only values that are relevant to his choice are these increments by which the two policies differ; and, when he finally chooses between the two marginal values, he does so by making a choice between policies.[5]

As to whether the attempt to clarify objectives in advance of policy selection is more or less rational than the close intertwining of marginal evaluation

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[5]The line of argument is, of course, an extension of the theory of market choice, especially the theory of consumer choice, to public policy choices.

and empirical analysis, the principal difference established is that for complex problems the first is impossible and irrelevant, and the second is both possible and relevant. The second is possible because the administrator need not try to analyze any values except the values by which alternative policies differ and need not be concerned with them except as they differ marginally. His need for information on values or objectives is drastically reduced as compared with the root method; and his capacity for grasping, comprehending, and relating values to one another is not strained beyond the breaking point.

Relations Between Means and Ends (2b)

Decision-making is ordinarily formalized as a means-ends relationship: means are conceived to be evaluated and chosen in the light of ends finally selected independently of and prior to the choice of means. This is the means-ends relationship of the root method. But it follows from all that has just been said that such a means-ends relationship is possible only to the extent that values are agreed upon, are reconcilable, and are stable at the margin. Typically, therefore, such a means-ends relationship is absent from the branch method, where means and ends are simultaneously chosen.

Yet any departure from the means-ends relationship of the root method will strike some readers as inconceivable. For it will appear to them that only in such a relationship is it possible to determine whether one policy choice is better or worse than another. How can an administrator know whether he has made a wise or foolish decision if he is without prior values or objectives by which to judge his decisions? The answer to this question calls up the third distinctive difference between root and branch methods: how to decide the best policy.

The Test of "Good" Policy (3b)

In the root method, a decision is "correct," "good," or "rational" if it can be shown to attain some specified objective, where the objective can be specified without simply describing the decision itself. Where objectives are defined only through the marginal or incremental approach to values described above, it is still sometimes possible to test whether a policy does in fact attain the desired objectives; but a precise statement of the objectives takes the form of a description of the policy chosen or some alternative to it. To show that a policy is mistaken one cannot offer an abstract argument that important objectives are not achieved; one must instead argue that another policy is more to be preferred.

So far, the departure from customary ways of looking at problem-solving is not troublesome, for many administrators will be quick to agree that the most effective discussion of the correctness of policy does take the form of comparison with other policies that might have been chosen. But what of the situation in which administrators cannot agree on values or objectives, either abstractly or in marginal terms? What then is the test of "good" policy? For the root

method, there is no test. Agreement on objectives failing, there is no standard of "correctness." For the method of successive limited comparisons, the test is agreement on policy itself, which remains possible even when agreement on values is not.

It has been suggested that continuing agreement in Congress on the desirability of extending old age insurance stems from liberal desires to strengthen the welfare programs of the federal government and from conservative desires to reduce union demands for private pension plans. If so, this is an excellent demonstration of the ease with which individuals of different ideologies often can agree on concrete policy. Labor mediators report a similar phenomenon: the contestants cannot agree on criteria for settling their disputes but can agree on specific proposals. Similarly, when one administrator's objective turns out to be another's means, they often can agree on policy.

Agreement on policy thus becomes the only practicable test of the policy's correctness. And for one administrator to seek to win the other over to agreement on ends as well would accomplish nothing and create quite unnecessary controversy.

If agreement directly on policy as a test for "best" policy seems a poor substitute for testing the policy against its objectives, it ought to be remembered that objectives themselves have no ultimate validity other than they are agreed upon. Hence agreement is the test of "best" policy in both methods. But where the root method requires agreement on what elements in the decision constitute objectives and on which of these objectives should be sought, the branch method falls back on agreement wherever it can be found.

In an important sense, therefore, it is not irrational for an administrator to defend a policy as good without being able to specify what it is good for.

Non-Comprehensive Analysis (4b)

Ideally, rational-comprehensive analysis leaves out nothing important. But it is impossible to take everything important into consideration unless "important" is so narrowly defined that analysis is in fact quite limited. Limits on human intellectual capacities and on available information set definite limits to man's capacity to be comprehensive. In actual fact, therefore, no one can practice the rational-comprehensive method for really complex problems, and every administrator faced with a sufficiently complex problem must find ways drastically to simplify.

An administrator assisting in the formulation of agricultural economic policy cannot in the first place be competent on all possible policies. He cannot even comprehend one policy entirely. In planning a soil bank program, he cannot successfully anticipate the impact of higher or lower farm income on, say, urbanization—the possible consequent loosening of family ties, possible consequent eventual need for revisions in social security and further implications for tax problems arising out of new federal responsibilities for social security and municipal responsibilities for urban services. Nor, to follow another line of repercussions, can he work through the soil bank program's

effects on prices for agricultural products in foreign markets and consequent implications for foreign relations, including those arising out of economic rivalry between the United States and the USSR.

In the method of successive limited comparisons, simplification is systematically achieved in two principal ways. First, it is achieved through limitation of policy comparisons to those policies that differ in relatively small degree from policies presently in effect. Such a limitation immediately reduces the number of alternatives to be investigated and also drastically simplifies the character of the investigation of each. For it is not necessary to undertake fundamental inquiry into an alternative and its consequences; it is necessary only to study those respects in which the proposed alternative and its consequences differ from the status quo. The empirical comparison of marginal differences among alternative policies that differ only marginally is, of course, a counterpart to the incremental or marginal comparison of values discussed above.[6]

Relevance as Well as Realism

It is a matter of common observation that in Western democracies public administrators and policy analysts in general do largely limit their analyses to incremental or marginal differences in policies that are chosen to differ only incrementally. They do not do so, however, solely because they desperately need some way to simplify their problems; they also do so in order to be relevant. Democracies change their policies almost entirely through incremental adjustments. Policy does not move in leaps and bounds.

The incremental character of political change in the United States has often been remarked. The two major political parties agree on fundamentals; they offer alternative policies to the voters only on relatively small points of difference. Both parties favor full employment, but they define it somewhat differently; both favor the development of water power resources, but in slightly different ways; and both favor unemployment compensation, but not the same level of benefits. Similarly, shifts of policy within a party take place largely through a series of relatively small changes, as can be seen in their only gradual acceptance of the idea of governmental responsibility for support of the unemployed, a change in party positions beginning in the early 30's and culminating in a sense in the Employment Act of 1946.

Party behavior is in turn rooted in public attitudes, and political theorists cannot conceive of democracy's surviving in the United States in the absence of fundamental agreement on potentially disruptive issues, with consequent limitation of policy debates to relatively small differences in policy.

Since the policies ignored by the administrator are politically impossible and so irrelevant, the simplification of analysis achieved by concentrating on policies that differ only incrementally is not a capricious kind of simplification. In addition, it can be argued that, given the limits on knowledge within which

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[6]A more precise definition of incremental policies and a discussion of whether a change that appears "small" to one observer might be seen differently by another is to be found in my "Policy Analysis," 48 *American Economic Review* 298 (June, 1958).

policy-makers are confined, simplifying by limiting the focus to small varia-tions from present policy makes the most of available knowledge. Because policies being considered are like present and past policies, the administrator can obtain information and claim some insight. Non-incremental policy pro-posals are therefore typically not only politically irrelevant but also unpre-dictable in their consequences.

The second method of simplification of analysis is the practice of ignoring important possible consequences of possible policies, as well as the values attached to the neglected consequences. If this appears to disclose a shocking shortcoming of successive limited comparisons, it can be replied that, even if the exclusions are random, policies may nevertheless be more intelligently for-mulated than through futile attempts to achieve a comprehensiveness beyond human capacity. Actually, however, the exclusions, seeming arbitrary or ran-dom from one point of view, need be neither.

Achieving a Degree of Comprehensiveness

Suppose that each value neglected by one policy-making agency were a major concern of at least one other agency. In that case, a helpful division of labor would be achieved, and no agency need find its task beyond its capacities. The shortcomings of such a system would be that one agency might destroy a value either before another agency could be activated to safeguard it or in spite of another agency's efforts. But the possibility that important values may be lost is present in any form of organization, even where agencies attempt to compre-hend in planning more than is humanly possible.

The virtue of such a hypothetical division of labor is that every important interest or value has its watchdog. And these watchdogs can protect the inter-ests in their jurisdiction in two quite different ways: first, by redressing dam-ages done by other agencies; and, second, by anticipating and heading off injury before it occurs.

In a society like that of the United States in which individuals are free to combine to pursue almost any possible common interest they might have and in which government agencies are sensitive to the pressures of these groups, the system described is approximated. Almost every interest has its watchdog. Without claiming that every interest has a sufficiently powerful watchdog, it can be argued that our system often can assure a more compre-hensive regard for the values of the whole society than any attempt at intel-lectual comprehensiveness.

In the United States, for example, no part of government attempts a com-prehensive overview of policy on income distribution. A policy nevertheless evolves, and one responding to a wide variety of interests. A process of mutual adjustment among farm groups, labor unions, municipalities and school boards, tax authorities, and government agencies with responsibilities in the fields of housing, health, highways, national parks, fire, and police accom-plishes a distribution of income in which particular income problems neglected at one point in the decision processes become central at another point.

Mutual adjustment is more pervasive than the explicit forms it takes in negotiation between groups; it persists through the mutual impacts of groups upon each other even where they are not in communication. For all the imperfections and latent dangers in this ubiquitous process of mutual adjustment, it will often accomplish an adaptation of policies to a wider range of interests than could be done by one group centrally.

Note, too, how the incremental pattern of policy-making fits with the multiple pressure pattern. For when decisions are only incremental—closely related to known policies, it is easier for one group to anticipate the kind of moves another might make and easier too for it to make correction for injury already accomplished.[7]

Even partisanship and narrowness, to use pejorative terms, will sometimes be assets to rational decision-making, for they can doubly insure that what one agency neglects, another will not; they specialize personnel to distinct points of view. The claim is valid that effective rational coordination of the federal administration, if possible to achieve at all, would require an agreed set of values[8]—if "rational" is defined as the practice of the root method of decision-making. But a high degree of administrative coordination occurs as each agency adjusts its policies to the concerns of the other agencies in the process of fragmented decision-making I have just described.

For all the apparent shortcomings of the incremental approach to policy alternatives with its arbitrary exclusion coupled with fragmentation, when compared to the root method, the branch method often looks far superior. In the root method, the inevitable exclusion of factors is accidental, unsystematic, and not defensible by any argument so far developed, while in the branch method the exclusions are deliberate, systematic, and defensible. Ideally, of course, the root method does not exclude; in practice it must.

Nor does the branch method necessarily neglect long-run considerations and objectives. It is clear that important values must be omitted in considering policy, and sometimes the only way long-run objectives can be given adequate attention is through the neglect of short-run considerations. But the values omitted can be either long-run or short-run.

Succession of Comparisons (5b)

The final distinctive element in the branch method is that the comparisons, together with the policy choice, proceed in a chronological series. Policy is not made once and for all; it is made and re-made endlessly. Policy-making is a process of successive approximation to some desired objectives in which what is desired itself continues to change under reconsideration.

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[7]The link between the practice of the method of successive limited comparisons and mutual adjustment of interests in a highly fragmented decision-making process adds a new facet to pluralist theories of government and administration.

[8]Herbert Simon, Donald W. Smithburg, and Victor A. Thompson, *Public Administration* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 434.

Making policy is at best a very rough process. Neither social scientists, nor politicians, nor public administrators yet know enough about the social world to avoid repeated error in predicting the consequences of policy moves. A wise policy-maker consequently expects that his policies will achieve only part of what he hopes and at the same time will produce unanticipated consequences he would have preferred to avoid. If he proceeds through a *succession* of incremental changes, he avoids serious lasting mistakes in several ways.

In the first place, past sequences of policy steps have given him knowledge about the probable consequences of further similar steps. Second, he need not attempt big jumps toward his goals that would require predictions beyond his or anyone else's knowledge, because he never expects his policy to be a final resolution of a problem. His decision is only one step, one that if successful can quickly be followed by another. Third, he is in effect able to test his previous predictions as he moves on to each further step. Lastly, he often can remedy a past error fairly quickly—more quickly than if policy proceeded through more distinct steps widely spaced in time.

Compare this comparative analysis of incremental changes with the aspiration to employ theory in the root method. Man cannot think without classifying, without subsuming one experience under a more general category of experiences. The attempt to push categorization as far as possible and to find general propositions which can be applied to specific situations is what I refer to with the word "theory." Where root analysis often leans heavily on theory in this sense, the branch method does not.

The assumption of root analysts is that theory is the most systematic and economical way to bring relevant knowledge to bear on a specific problem. Granting the assumption, an unhappy fact is that we do not have adequate theory to apply to problems in any policy area, although theory is more adequate in some areas—monetary policy, for example—than in others. Comparative analysis, as in the branch method, is sometimes a systematic alternative to theory.

Suppose an administrator must choose among a small group of policies that differ only incrementally from each other and from present policy. He might aspire to "understand" each of the alternatives—for example, to know all the consequences of each aspect of each policy. If so, he would indeed require theory. In fact, however, he would usually decide that, *for policy-making purposes,* he need know, as explained above, only the consequences of each of those aspects of the policies in which they differed from one another. For this much more modest aspiration, he requires no theory (although it might be helpful, if available), for he can proceed to isolate probable differences by examining the differences in consequences associated with past differences in policies, a feasible program because he can take his observations from a long sequence of incremental changes.

For example, without a more comprehensive social theory about juvenile delinquency than scholars have yet produced, one cannot possibly understand the ways in which a variety of public policies—say on education, housing, recreation, employment, race relations, and policing—might encourage or discourage delinquency. And one needs such an understanding if he undertakes

the comprehensive overview of the problem prescribed in the models of the root method. If, however, one merely wants to mobilize knowledge sufficient to assist in a choice among a small group of similar policies—alternative policies on juvenile court procedures, for example—he can do so by comparative analysis of the results of similar past policy moves.

Theorists and Practitioners

This difference explains—in some cases at least—why the administrator often feels that the outside expert or academic problem-solver is sometimes not helpful and why they in turn often urge more theory on him. And it explains why an administrator often feels more confident when "flying by the seat of his pants" than when following the advice of theorists. Theorists often ask the administrator to go the long way round to the solution of his problems, in effect ask him to follow the best canons of the scientific method, when the administrator knows that the best available theory will work less well than more modest incremental comparisons. Theorists do not realize that the administrator is often in fact practicing a systematic method. It would be foolish to push this explanation too far, for sometimes practical decision-makers are pursuing neither a theoretical approach nor successive comparisons, nor any other systematic method.

It may be worth emphasizing that theory is sometimes of extremely limited helpfulness in policy-making for at least two rather different reasons. It is greedy for facts; it can be constructed only through a great collection of observations. And it is typically insufficiently precise for application to a policy process that moves through small changes. In contrast, the comparative method both economizes on the need for facts and directs the analyst's attention to just those facts that are relevant to the fine choices faced by the decision-maker.

With respect to precision of theory, economic theory serves as an example. It predicts that an economy without money or prices would in certain specified ways misallocate resources, but this finding pertains to an alternative far removed from the kind of policies on which administrators need help. On the other hand, it is not precise enough to predict the consequences of policies restricting business mergers, and this is the kind of issue on which the administrators need help. Only in relatively restricted areas does economic theory achieve sufficient precision to go far in resolving policy questions; its helpfulness in policy-making is always so limited that it requires supplementation through comparative analysis.

Successive Comparison as a System

Successive limited comparisons is, then, indeed a method or system; it is not a failure of method for which administrators ought to apologize. None the less, its imperfections, which have not been explored in this paper, are many. For

example, the method is without a built-in safeguard for all relevant values, and it also may lead the decision-maker to overlook excellent policies for no other reason than that they are not suggested by the chain of successive policy steps leading up to the present. Hence, it ought to be said that under this method, as well as under some of the most sophisticated variants of the root method—operations research, for example—policies will continue to be as foolish as they are wise.

Why then bother to describe the method in all the above detail? Because it is in fact a common method of policy formulation, and is, for complex problems, the principal reliance of administrators as well as of other policy analysts.[9] And because it will be superior to any other decision-making method available for complex problems in many circumstances, certainly superior to a futile attempt at superhuman comprehensiveness. The reaction of the public administrator to the exposition of method doubtless will be less a discovery of a new method than a better acquaintance with an old. But by becoming more conscious of their practice of this method, administrators might practice it with more skill and know when to extend or constrict its use. (That they sometimes practice it effectively and sometimes not may explain the extremes of opinion on "muddling through," which is both praised as a highly sophisticated form of problem-solving and denounced as no method at all. For I suspect that in so far as there is a system in what is known as "muddling through," this method is it.)

One of the noteworthy incidental consequences of clarification of the method is the light it throws on the suspicion an administrator sometimes entertains that a consultant or adviser is not speaking relevantly and responsibly when in fact by all ordinary objective evidence he is. The trouble lies in the fact that most of us approach policy problems within a framework given by our view of a chain of successive policy choices made up to the present. One's thinking about appropriate policies with respect, say, to urban traffic control is greatly influenced by one's knowledge of the incremental steps taken up to the present. An administrator enjoys an intimate knowledge of his past sequences that "outsiders" do not share, and his thinking and that of the "outsider" will consequently be different in ways that may puzzle both. Both may appear to

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[9]Elsewhere I have explored this same method of policy formulation as practiced by academic analysts of policy ("Policy Analysis," 48 *American Economic Review* 298 [June, 1958]). Although it has been here presented as a method for public administrators, it is no less necessary to analysts more removed from immediate policy questions, despite their tendencies to describe their own analytical efforts as though they were the rational-comprehensive method with an especially heavy use of theory. Similarly, this same method is inevitably resorted to in personal problem-solving, where means and ends are sometimes impossible to separate, where aspirations or objectives undergo constant development, and where drastic simplification of the complexity of the real world is urgent if problems are to be solved in the time that can be given to them. To an economist accustomed to dealing with the marginal or incremental concept in market processes, the central idea in the method is that both evaluation and empirical analysis are incremental. Accordingly I have referred to the method elsewhere as "the incremental method."

be talking intelligently, yet each may find the other unsatisfactory. The relevance of the policy chain of succession is even more clear when an American tries to discuss, say, antitrust policy with a Swiss, for the chains of policy in the two countries are strikingly different and the two individuals consequently have organized their knowledge in quite different ways.

If this phenomenon is a barrier to communication, an understanding of it promises an enrichment of intellectual interaction in policy formulation. Once the source of difference is understood, it will sometimes be stimulating for an administrator to seek out a policy analyst whose recent experience is with a policy chain different from his own.

This raises again a question only briefly discussed above on the merits of like-mindedness among government administrators. While much of organization theory argues the virtues of common values and agreed organizational objectives, for complex problems in which the root method is inapplicable, agencies will want among their own personnel two types of diversification: administrators whose thinking is organized by reference to policy chains other than those familiar to most members of the organization and, even more commonly, administrators whose professional or personal values or interests create diversity of view (perhaps coming from different specialties, social classes, geographical areas) so that, even within a single agency, decision-making can be fragmented and parts of the agency can serve as watchdogs for other parts.

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Mixed Scanning: A "Third" Approach to Decision Making (1967)

Amitai Etzioni

In the concept of social decision-making, vague commitments of a normative and political nature are translated into specific commitments to one or more specific courses of action. Since decision-making includes an element of choice, it is the most deliberate and voluntaristic aspect of social conduct. As such, it raises the question: To what extent can social actors decide what their course will be, and to what extent are they compelled to follow a course set by forces beyond their control? Three conceptions of decision-making are considered here with assumptions that give varying weights to the conscious choice of the decision-makers.

Rationalistic models tend to posit a high degree of control over the decision-making situation on the part of the decision-maker. The incrementalist approach presents an alternative model, referred to as the art of "muddling through," which assumes much less command over the environment. Finally, the article outlines a third approach to social decision-making which, in combining elements of both earlier approaches, is neither as utopian in its assumptions as the first model nor as conservative as the second. For reasons which will become evident, this third approach is referred to as mixed-scanning.

The Rationalistic Approach

Rationalistic models are widely held conceptions about how decisions are and ought to be made. An actor becomes aware of a problem, posits a goal, carefully weighs alternative means, and chooses among them according to his estimates of their respective merit, with reference to the state of affairs he prefers. Incrementalists' criticism of this approach focuses on the disparity between the requirements of the model and the capacities of decision-makers.[1] Social decision-making centers, it is pointed out, frequently do not have a specific, agreed upon set of values that could provide the criteria for evaluating alternatives. Values, rather, are fluid and are affected by, as well as affect, the decisions made. Moreover, in actual practice, the rationalistic assumption that values and facts, means and ends, can be clearly distinguished seems inapplicable:

> . . . Public controversy . . . has surrounded the proposal to construct a branch of the Cook County Hospital on the South Side in or near the Negro area. Several questions of policy are involved in the matter, but the ones which have caused one of the few *public* debates of an issue in the Negro community concern whether, or to what extent, building such a branch would result in an all-Negro or "Jim Crow" hospital and whether such a hospital is desirable as a means of providing added medical facilities for Negro patients. Involved are both an issue of *fact* (whether the hospital would be segregated, intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of the character of the neighborhood in which it would be located) and an issue of *value* (whether even an all-Negro hospital would be preferable to no hospital at all in the area). In reality, however, the factions have aligned themselves in such a way and the debate has proceeded in such a manner that the fact issue and the value issue have been collapsed into the single question of whether to build or not to build. Those in favor of the proposal will argue that the facts do not bear out the charge of "Jim Crowism"— "the proposed site . . . is not considered to be placed in a segregated area for the exclusive use of one racial or minority group"; or "no responsible officials would try to develop a new hospital to further segregation"; or "establishing a branch hospital for the . . . more adequate care of the indigent patient load, from the facts thus presented, does not represent Jim Crowism." At the same time, these proponents argue that whatever the facts, the factual issue is secondary to the overriding consideration that "there is a here-and-now need for more hospital beds. . . . Integration may be the long-run goal, but in the short-run we need more facilities."[2]

In addition, information about consequences is, at best, fractional. Decision-makers have neither the assets nor the time to collect the information required

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[1]See David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 48–50 and pp. 111–143; Charles E. Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 137–139. See also Jerome S. Bruner, Jacqueline J. Goodnow, and George A. Austin, *A Study of Thinking* (New York: John Wiley, 1956) chapters 4–5.

[2]James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1960), p. 189.

for rational choice. While knowledge technology, especially computers, does aid in the collection and processing of information, it cannot provide for the computation required by the rationalist model. (This holds even for chess playing, let alone "real-life" decisions.) Finally, rather than being confronted with a limited universe of relevant consequences, decision-makers face an open system of variables, a world in which all consequences cannot be surveyed.[3] A decision-maker, attempting to adhere to the tenets of a rationalistic model, will become frustrated, exhaust his resources without coming to a decision, and remain without an effective decision-making model to guide him. Rationalistic models are thus rejected as being at once unrealistic and undesirable.

The Incrementalist Approach

A less demanding model of decision-making has been outlined in the strategy of "disjointed incrementalism" advanced by Charles E. Lindblom and others.[4] Disjointed incrementalism seeks to adapt decision-making strategies to the limited cognitive capacities of decision-makers and to reduce the scope and cost of information collection and computation. Lindblom summarized the six primary requirements of the model in this way:[5]

1. Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey and evaluation of all alternatives, the decision-maker focuses only on those policies which differ incrementally from existing policies.
2. Only a relatively small number of policy alternatives are considered.
3. For each policy alternative, only a restricted number of "important" consequences are evaluated.
4. The problem confronting the decision-maker is continually redefined: Incrementalism allows for countless ends-means and means-ends adjustments which, in effect, make the problem more manageable.
5. Thus, there is no one decision or "right" solution but a "never-ending series of attacks" on the issues at hand through serial analyses and evaluation.
6. As such, incremental decision-making is described as remedial, geared more to the alleviation of present, concrete social imperfections than to the promotion of future social goals.

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[3]See review of *A Strategy of Decision* by Kenneth J. Arrow in *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 79 (1964), p. 585. See also Herbert A. Simon, *Models of Man* (New York: Wiley, 1957), p. 198, and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of the Budgetary Process* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), pp. 147–152.

[4]Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through'," *Public Administration Review,* Vol. 19 (1959), pp. 79–99; Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953); *Strategy of Decision, op. cit.;* and *The Intelligence of Democracy, op. cit.*

[5]Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy, op. cit.,* pp. 144–148.

Morphological Assumptions of the Incremental Approach

Beyond a model and a strategy of decision-making, disjointed incrementalism also posits a structure model; it is presented as the typical decision-making process of pluralistic societies, as contrasted with the master planning of totalitarian societies. Influenced by the free competition model of economics, incrementalists reject the notion that policies can guided in terms of central institutions of a society expressing the collective "good." Policies, rather, are the outcome of a give-and-take among numerous societal "partisans." The measure of a good decision is the decision makers' agreement about it. Poor decisions are those which exclude actors capable of affecting the projected course of action; decisions of this type tend to be blocked or modified later.

Partisan "mutual-adjustment" is held to provide for a measure of coordination of decisions among a multiplicity of decision-makers and, in effect, to compensate on the societal level for the inadequacies of the individual incremental decision-maker and for the society's inability to make decisions effectively from one center. Incremental decision-making is claimed to be both a realistic account of how the American polity and other modern democracies decide and the most effective approach to societal decision-making, i.e., both a descriptive and a normative model.

A Critique of the Incremental Approach as a Normative Model

Decisions by consent among partisans without a societywide regulatory center and guiding institutions should not be viewed as the preferred approach to decision-making. In the first place, decisions so reached would, of necessity, reflect the interests of the most powerful, since partisans invariably differ in their respective power positions; demands of the underprivileged and politically unorganized would be underrepresented.

Secondly, incrementalism would tend to neglect *basic* societal innovations, as it focuses on the short run and seeks no more than limited variations from past policies. While an accumulation of small steps could lead to a significant change, there is nothing in this approach to guide the accumulation; the steps may be circular—leading back to where they started, or dispersed—leading in many directions at once but leading nowhere. Boulding comments that, according to this approach, "we do stagger through history like a drunk putting one disjointed incremental foot after another."[6]

In addition, incrementalists seem to underestimate *their* impact on the decision-makers. As Dror put it, "Although Lindblom's thesis includes a number of reservations, these are insufficient to alter its main impact as an ideological reinforcement of the pro-inertia and anti-innovation forces."[7]

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[6]Kenneth E. Boulding in a review of *A Strategy of Decision* in the *American Sociological Review,* Vol. 29 (1964), p. 931.

[7]Yehezkel Dror, "Muddling Through—'Science' or Inertia?" *Public Administration Review,* Vol. 24 (1964), p. 155.

A Conceptual and Empirical Critique of Incrementalism

Incrementalist strategy clearly recognizes one subset of situations to which it does not apply—namely, "large" or fundamental decisions,[8] such as a declaration of war. While incremental decisions greatly outnumber fundamental ones, the latter's significance for societal decision-making is not commensurate with their number; it is thus a mistake to relegate nonincremental decisions to the category of exceptions. Moreover, it is often the fundamental decisions which set the context for the numerous incremental ones. Although fundamental decisions are frequently "prepared" by incremental ones in order that the final decision will initiate a less abrupt change, these decisions may still be considered relatively fundamental. The incremental steps which follow cannot be understood without them, and the preceding steps are useless unless they lead to fundamental decisions.

Thus, while the incrementalists hold that decision-making involves a choice between the two kinds of decision-making models, it should be noted that (a) *most incremental decisions specify or anticipate fundamental decisions, and* (b) *the cumulative value of the incremental decisions is greatly affected by the related fundamental decisions.*

Thus, it is not enough to show, as Fenno did, that Congress makes primarily marginal changes in the federal budget (a comparison of one year's budget for a federal agency with that of the preceding year showed on many occasions only a 10 per cent difference[9]), or that for long periods the defense budget does not change much in terms of its percentage of the federal budget, or that the federal budget changes little each year in terms of its percentage of the Gross National Product.[10] These incremental changes are often the unfolding of trends initiated at critical turning points at which fundamental decisions were made. The American defense budget jumped at the beginning of the Korean War in 1950 from 5 per cent of the GNP to 10.3 per cent in 1951. The fact that it stayed at about this level, ranging between 9 and 11.3 per cent of the GNP after the war ended (1954–1960), did reflect incremental decisions, but these were made within the context of the decision to engage in the Korean War.[11] Fenno's own figures show almost an equal number of changes above the 20 per cent level as below it; seven changes represented an increase of 100 per cent or more and 24 changes increased 50 per cent or more.[12]

It is clear that, while Congress or other societal decision-making bodies do make some cumulative incremental decisions without facing the fundamental

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[8]Braybrooke and Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision, op. cit.,* pp. 66–69.

[9]Richard Fenno, Jr., *The Power of the Purse* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), pp. 266ff. See also Otto A. Davis, M. A. H. Dempster, and Aaron Wildavsky, "A Theory of the Budgetary Process," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 60 (1966), esp. pp. 530–531.

[10]Samuel P. Huntington, quoted by Nelson E. Polsby, *Congress and the Presidency* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 86.

[11]*Ibid.*

[12]Fenno, *The Power of the Purse, Loc. cit.*

one implied, many other decisions which appear to be a series of incremental ones are, in effect, the implementation or elaboration of a fundamental decision. For example, after Congress set up a national space agency in 1958 and consented to back President Kennedy's space goals, it made "incremental" additional commitments for several years. Initially, however, a fundamental decision had been made. Congress in 1958, drawing on past experiences and on an understanding of the dynamics of incremental processes, could not have been unaware that once a fundamental commitment is made it is difficult to reverse it. While the initial space budget was relatively small, the very act of setting up a space agency amounted to subscribing to additional budget increments in future years.[13]

Incrementalists argue that incremental decisions tend to be remedial; small steps are taken in the "right" direction, or, when it is evident the direction is "wrong," the course is altered. But if the decision-maker evaluates his incremental decisions and small steps, which he must do if he is to decide whether or not the direction is right, his judgment will be greatly affected by the evaluative criteria he applies. Here, again, we have to go outside the incrementalist model to ascertain the ways in which these criteria are set.

Thus, while actors make both kinds of decisions, the number and role of fundamental decisions are significantly greater than incrementalists state, and when the fundamental ones are missing, incremental decision-making amounts to drifting—action without direction. A more active approach to societal decision-making requires two sets of mechanisms: (a) high-order, fundamental policy-making processes which set basic directions and (b) incremental processes which prepare for fundamental decisions and work them out after they have been reached. This is provided by mixed-scanning.

The Mixed-Scanning Approach

Mixed-scanning provides both a realistic description of the strategy used by actors in a large variety of fields and the strategy for effective actors to follow. Let us first illustrate this approach in a simple situation and then explore its societal dimensions. Assume we are about to set up a worldwide weather observation system using weather satellites. The rationalistic approach would seek an exhaustive survey of weather conditions by using cameras capable of detailed observations and by scheduling reviews of the entire sky as often as possible. This would yield an avalanche of details, costly to analyze and likely to overwhelm our action capacities (e.g., "seeding" cloud formations that could develop into hurricanes or bring rain to arid areas). Incrementalism would focus on those areas in which similar patterns developed in the recent

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[13]For an example involving the Supreme Court's decision on desegregation, see Martin Shapiro, "Stability and Change in Judicial Decision-Making: Incrementalism or *Stare Decisis,*" *Law in Transition Quarterly,* Vol. 2 (1965), pp. 134–157. See also a commentary by Bruce L. R. Smith, *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 61 (1967), esp. p. 151.

past and, perhaps, on a few nearby regions; it would thus ignore all formations which might deserve attention if they arose in unexpected areas.

A mixed-scanning strategy would include elements of both approaches by employing two cameras: a broad-angle camera that would cover all parts of the sky but not in great detail, and a second one which would zero in on those areas revealed by the first camera to require a more in-depth examination. While mixed-scanning might miss areas in which only a detailed camera could reveal trouble, it is less likely than incrementalism to miss obvious trouble spots in unfamiliar areas.

From an abstract viewpoint mixed-scanning provides a particular procedure for the collection of information (e.g., the surveying or "scanning" of weather conditions), a strategy about the allocation of resources (e.g., "seeding"), and—we shall see—guidelines for the relations between the two. The strategy combines a detailed ("rationalistic") examination of some sectors—which, unlike the exhaustive examination of the entire area, is feasible—with a "truncated" review of other sectors. The relative investment in the two kinds of scanning—full detail and truncated—as well as in the very act of scanning, depends on how costly it would be to miss, for example, one hurricane; the cost of additional scanning; and the amount of time it would take.

Scanning may be divided into more than two levels; there can be several levels with varying degrees of detail and coverage, though it seems most effective to include an all-encompassing level (so that no major option will be left uncovered) and a highly detailed level (so that the option selected can be explored as fully as is feasible).

The decision on how the investment of assets and time it takes to be allocated among the levels of scanning is, in fact, part of the strategy. The actual amount of assets and time spent depends on the total amount available and on experimentation with various inter-level combinations. Also, the amount spent is best changed over time. Effective decision-making requires that sporadically, or at set intervals, investment in encompassing (high-coverage) scanning be increased to check for far removed but "obvious" dangers and to search for better lines of approach. Annual budget reviews and the State of the Union messages provide, in principle, such occasions.

An increase in investment of this type is also effective when the actor realizes that the environment radically changes or when he sees that the early chain of increments brings no improvement in the situation or brings even a "worsening." If, at this point, the actor decides to drop the course of action, the effectiveness of his decision-making is reduced, since, through some high-coverage scanning, he may discover that a continuation of the "loss" is about to lead to a solution. (An obvious example is the selling of a declining stock if a further review reveals that the corporation is expected to improve its earning next year, after several years of decline.) Reality cannot be assumed to be structured in straight lines where each step towards a goal leads directly to another and where the accumulation of small steps in effect solves the problem. Often what from an incremental viewpoint is a step away from the goal ("worsening") may from a broader perspective be a step in the right direction, as when the temperature of a patient is allowed to rise because this will hasten

his recovery. Thus mixed-scanning not only combines various levels of scanning but also provides a set of criteria for situations in which one level or another is to be emphasized.

In the exploration of mixed-scanning, it is essential to differentiate fundamental decisions from incremental ones. Fundamental decisions are made by exploring the main alternatives the actor sees in view of his conception of his goals, but—unlike what rationalism would indicate—details and specification are omitted so that an overview is feasible. Incremental decisions are made but within the contexts set by fundamental decisions (and fundamental reviews). Thus, each of the two elements in mixed-scanning helps to reduce the effects of the particular shortcomings of the other; incrementalism reduces the unrealistic aspects of rationalism by limiting the details required in fundamental decisions, and contextuating rationalism helps to overcome the conservative slant of incrementalism by exploring longer-run alternatives. Together, empirical tests and comparative study of decision-makers would show that these elements make for a third approach which is at once more realistic and more effective than its components.

Can Decisions Be Evaluated?

The preceding discussion assumes that both the observer and the actor have a capacity to evaluate decision-making strategies and to determine which is the more effective. Incrementalists, however, argue that since values cannot be scaled and summarized, "good" decisions cannot be defined and, hence, evaluation is not possible. In contrast, it is reasonable to expect that the decision-makers, as well as the observers, can summarize their values and rank them, at least in an ordinal scale.

For example, many societal projects have one primary goal such as increasing birth control, economically desalting sea water, or reducing price inflation by one-half over a two-year period. Other goals which are also served are secondary, e.g., increasing the country's R & D sector by investing in desalting. The actor, hence, may deal with the degree to which the *primary* goal was realized and make this the central evaluative measure for a "good" policy, while noting its effects on secondary goals. When he compares projects in these terms, he, in effect, weighs the primary goal as several times as important as all the secondary goals combined. This procedure amounts to saying, "As I care very much about one goal and little about the others, if the project does not serve the first goal, it is no good and I do not have to worry about measuring and totaling up whatever other gains it may be providing for my secondary values."

When there are two or even three primary goals (e.g., teaching, therapy, and research in a university hospital), the actor can still compare projects in terms of the extent to which they realize each primary goal. He can establish that project X is good for research but not for teaching while project Y is very good for teaching but not as good for research, etc., without having to raise the additional difficulties of combining the effectiveness measures into one numerical index. In effect, he proceeds as if they had identical weights.

Finally, an informal scaling of values is not as difficult as the incrementalists imagine. Most actors are able to rank their goals to some extent (e.g., faculty is more concerned about the quality of research than the quality of teaching).

> One of the most imaginative attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of programs with hard-to-assess objectives is a method devised by David Osborn, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. . . . Osborn recommends a scheme of cross-multiplying the costs of the activities with a number representing the rank of its objectives on a scale. For instance, the exchange of Fulbright professors may contribute to "cultural prestige and mutual respect," "educational development," and gaining "entrée," which might be given scale numbers such as 8, 6, and 5, respectively. These numbers are then multiplied with the costs of the program, and the resulting figure is in turn multiplied with an ingenious figure called a "country number." The latter is an attempt to get a rough measure of the importance to the U.S. of the countries with which we have cultural relations. It is arrived at by putting together in complicated ways certain key data, weighed to reflect cultural and educational matters, such as the country's population, Gross National Product, number of college students, rate of illiteracy, and so forth. The resulting numbers are then revised in the light of working experience, as when, because of its high per capita income, a certain tiny middle-eastern country turns out to be more important to the U.S. than a large eastern European one. At this point, country numbers are revised on the basis of judgment and experience, as are other numbers at other points. But those who make such revisions have a basic framework to start with, a set of numbers arranged on the basis of many factors, rather than single arbitrary guesses.[14]

Thus, in evaluation as in decision-making itself, while full detailed rationalism may well be impossible, truncated reviews are feasible, and this approach may be expected to be more effective in terms of the actors' goals than "muddling through."

Morphological Factors

The structures within which interactions among actors take place become more significant the more we recognize that the bases of decisions neither are nor can be a fully ordered set of values and an exhaustive examination of reality. In part, the strategy followed is determined neither by values nor by information but by the positions of and power relations among the decision-makers. For example, the extent to which one element of mixed-scanning is stressed as against the other is affected by the relationship between higher and lower organizational ranks. In some situations, the higher in rank, concerned only with the overall picture, are impatient with details, while lower ranks—especially experts—are more likely to focus on details. In other situations, the higher ranks, to avoid facing the overall picture, seek to bury themselves, their administration, and the public in details.

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[14]Virginia Held, "PPBS Comes to Washington," *The Public Interest,* No. 4 (Summer 1966), pp. 102–115, quotation from pp. 112–113.

Next, the environment should be taken into account. For instance, a highly incremental approach would perhaps be adequate if the situation were more stable and the decisions made were effective from the start. This approach is expected to be less appropriate when conditions are rapidly changing and when the initial course was wrong. Thus, there seems to be no one effective decision-making strategy in the abstract, apart from the societal environment into which it is introduced. Mixed-scanning is flexible; changes in the relative investment in scanning in general as well as among the various levels of scanning permit it to adapt to the specific situation. For example, more encompassing scanning is called for when the environment is more malleable.

Another major consideration here is the capacities of the actor. This is illustrated with regard to interagency relations by the following statement: ". . . the State Department was hopelessly behind. Its cryptographic equipment was obsolescent, which slowed communications, and it had no central situation room at all."[15] The author goes on to show how as a consequence the State Department was less able to act than was the Defense Department.

An actor with a low capacity to mobilize power to implement his decisions may do better to rely less on encompassing scanning; even if remote outcomes are anticipated, he will be able to do little about them. More generally, the greater a unit's control capacities the more encompassing scanning it can undertake, and the more such scanning, the more effective its decision-making. This points to an interesting paradox: The developing nations, with much lower control capacities than the modern ones, tend to favor much more planning, although they may have to make do with a relatively high degree of incrementalism. Yet modern pluralistic societies—which are much more able to scan and, at least in some dimensions, are much more able to control—tend to plan less.

Two different factors are involved which highlight the difference in this regard among modern societies. While all have a higher capacity to scan and some control advantages as compared to nonmodern societies, they differ sharply in their capacity to build consensus. Democracies must accept a relatively high degree of incrementalism (though not as high as developing nations) because of their greater need to gain support for new decisions from many and conflicting subsocieties, a need which reduces their capacity to follow a long-run plan. It is easier to reach consensus under noncrisis situations, on increments similar to existing policies, than to gain support for a new policy. However, the role of crises is significant; in relatively less passive democracies, crises serve to build consensus for major changes of direction which are overdue (e.g., desegregation).

Totalitarian societies, more centralist and relying on powers which are less dependent on consensus, can plan more but they tend to overshoot the mark. Unlike democracies which first seek to build up a consensus and then proceed, often doing less than necessary later than necessary, totalitarian societies, lacking the capacity for consensus-building or even for assessing the various resis-

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[15]Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 27.

tances, usually try for too much too early. They are then forced to adjust their plans after initiation, with the revised policies often scaled down and involving more "consensus" than the original one. While totalitarian gross misplanning constitutes a large waste of resources, some initial overplanning and later down-scaling is as much a decision-making strategy as is disjointed incrementalism, and is the one for which totalitarian societies may be best suited.

A society more able to effectively handle its problems (one referred to elsewhere as an *active society*)[16] would require:

1. A higher capacity to build consensus than even democracies command.
2. More effective though not necessarily more numerous means of control than totalitarian societies employ (which new knowledge technology and better analysis through the social sciences may make feasible).
3. A mixed-scanning strategy which is not as rationalistic as that which the totalitarian societies attempt to pursue and not as incremental as the strategy democracies advocate.

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[16]Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

6

Street-Level Bureaucrats as Policy Makers (1980)

Michael Lipsky

Public service workers currently occupy a critical position in American society. Although they are normally regarded as low-level employees, the actions of most public service workers actually constitute the services "delivered" by

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government. Moreover, when taken together the individual decisions of these workers become, or add up to, agency policy. Whether government policy is to deliver "goods"—such as welfare or public housing—or to confer status—such as "criminal" or "mentally ill"—the discretionary actions of public employees are the benefits and sanctions of government programs or determine access to government rights and benefits.

Most citizens encounter government (if they encounter it at all) not through letters to congressmen or by attendance at school board meetings but through their teachers and their children's teachers and through the policeman on the corner or in the patrol car. Each encounter of this kind represents an instance of policy delivery.

Public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work are called *street-level bureaucrats* in this study. Public service agencies that employ a significant number of street-level bureaucrats in proportion to their work force are called *street-level bureaucracies.* Typical street-level bureaucrats are teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers and other court officers, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and provide services with them. People who work in these jobs tend to have much in common because they experience analytically similar work conditions.[1]

The way in which street-level bureaucrats deliver benefits and sanctions structure and delimit people's lives and opportunities. These ways orient and provide the social (and political) contexts in which people act. Thus every extension of service benefits is accompanied by an extension of state influence and control. As providers of public benefits and keepers of public order, street-level bureaucrats are the focus of political controversy. They are constantly torn by the demands of service recipients to improve effectiveness and responsiveness and by the demands of citizen groups to improve the efficacy and efficiency of government services. Since the salaries of street-level bureaucrats comprise a significant proportion of nondefense governmental expenditures, any doubts about the size of government budgets quickly translate into concerns for the scope and content of these public services. Moreover, public service workers have expanded and increasingly consolidated their collective strength so that in disputes over the scope of public services they have become a substantial independent force in the resolution of controversy affecting their status and position.

Street-level bureaucrats dominate political controversies over public services for two general reasons. First, debates about the proper scope and focus of governmental services are essentially debates over the scope and function of these public employees. Second, street-level bureaucrats have considerable impact on people's lives. This impact may be of several kinds. They socialize citizens to expectations of government services and a place in the political community. They determine the eligibility of citizens for government benefits and sanctions. They oversee the treatment (the service) citizens receive in those programs. Thus, in a sense street-level bureaucrats implicitly mediate

aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state. In short, they hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship.

Conflict over the Scope and Substance of Public Services

In the world of experience we perceive teachers, welfare workers, and police officers as members of separately organized and motivated public agencies. And so they are from many points of view. But if we divide public employees according to whether they interact with citizens directly and have discretion over significant aspects of citizens' lives, we see that a high proportion and enormous number of public workers share these job characteristics. They comprise a great portion of all public employees working in domestic affairs. State and local governments employ approximately 3.7 million in local schools, more than 500,000 people in police operations, and over 300,000 people in public welfare. Public school employees represent more than half of all workers employed in local governments. Instructional jobs represent about two-thirds of the educational personnel, and many of the rest are former teachers engaged in administration, or social workers, psychologists, and librarians who provide direct services in the schools. Of the 3.2 million local government public employees not engaged in education, approximately 14 percent work as police officers. One of every sixteen jobs in state and local government outside of education is held by a public welfare worker.[2] In this and other areas the majority of jobs are held by people with responsibility for involvement with citizens.

Other street-level bureaucrats comprise an important part of the remainder of local government personnel rolls. Although the U.S. Census Bureau does not provide breakdowns of other job classifications suitable for our purposes, we can assume that many of the 1.1 million health workers,[3] most of the 5,000 public service lawyers,[4] many of the employees of the various court systems, and other public employees also perform as street-level bureaucrats. Some of the nation's larger cities employ a staggering number of street-level bureaucrats. For example, the 26,680 school teachers in Chicago are more numerous than the populations of many of the Chicago suburbs.[5]

Another measure of the significance of street-level bureaucrats in public sector employment is the amount of public funds allocated to pay them. Of all local government salaries, more than half went to public education in 1973. Almost 80 percent of these monies was used to pay instructional personnel. Police salaries comprised approximately one-sixth of local public salaries not assigned to education.[6]

Much of the growth in public employment in the past 25 years has occurred in the ranks of street-level bureaucrats. From 1955 to 1975 government employment more than doubled, largely because the baby boom of the postwar years and the growing number of elderly, dependent citizens increased state and local activity in education, health, and public welfare.[7]

Street-level bureaucracies are labor-intensive in the extreme. Their business is providing service through people, and the operating costs of such agencies reflect their dependence upon salaried workers. Thus most of whatever is spent by government on education, police, or other social services (aside, of course, from income maintenance, or in the case of jails and prisons, inmate upkeep) goes directly to pay street-level bureaucrats. For example, in large cities over 90 percent of police expenditures is used to pay for salaries.[8]

Not only do the salaries of street-level bureaucrats constitute a major portion of the cost of public services, but also the scope of public services employing street-level bureaucrats has increased over time. Charity was once the responsibility of private agencies. The federal government now provides for the income needs of the poor. The public sector has absorbed responsibilities previously discharged by private organizations in such diverse and critical areas as policing, education, and health. Moreover, in all these fields government not only has supplanted private organizations but also has expanded the scope of responsibility of public ones. This is evident in increased public expectations for security and public safety, the extension of responsibilities in the schools to concerns with infant as well as postadolescent development, and public demands for affordable health care services.[9]

Public safety, public health, and public education *may* still be elusive social objectives, but in the past century they have been transformed into areas for which there is active governmental responsibility. The transformation of public responsibility in the area of social welfare has led some to recognize that what people "have" in modern American society often may consist primarily of their claims on government "largesse," and that claims to this "new property" should be protected as a right of citizens.[10] Street-level bureaucrats play a critical role in these citizen entitlements. Either they directly provide public benefits through services, or they mediate between citizens and their new but by no means secure estates.

The poorer people are, the greater the influence street-level bureaucrats tend to have over them. Indeed, these public workers are so situated that they may well be taken to be part of the problem of being poor. Consider the welfare recipient who lives in public housing and seeks the assistance of a legal services lawyer in order to reinstate her son in school. He has been suspended because of frequent encounters with the police. She is caught in a net of street-level bureaucrats with conflicting orientations toward her, all acting in what they call her "interest" and "the public interest."[11]

People who are not able to purchase services in the private sector must seek them from government if they are to receive them at all. Indeed, it is taken as a sign of social progress that poor people are granted access to services if they are too poor to pay for them.

Thus, when social reformers seek to ameliorate the problems of the poor, they often end up discussing the status of street-level bureaucrats. Welfare reformers move to separate service provision from decisions about support payments, or they design a negative income tax system that would eliminate social workers in allocating welfare. Problems of backlog in the courts are met with proposals to increase the number of judges. Recognition that early-childhood

development largely established the potential for later achievement results in the development of new programs (such as Head Start) in and out of established institutions, to provide enriched early-childhood experiences.

In the 1960s and early 1970s the model governmental response to social problems was to commission a corps of street-level bureaucrats to attend to them. Are poor people deprived of equal access to the courts? Provide them with lawyers. Equal access to health care? Establish neighborhood clinics. Educational opportunity? Develop preschool enrichment programs. It is far easier and less disruptive to develop employment for street-level bureaucrats than to reduce income inequalities.

In recent years public employees have benefited considerably from the growth of public spending on street-level bureaucracies.[12] Salaries have increased from inadequate to respectable and even desirable. Meanwhile, public employees, with street-level bureaucrats in the lead, have secured unprecedented control over their work environments through the development of unions and union-like associations.[13] For example, teachers and other instructional personnel have often been able to maintain their positions and even increase in number, although schools are more frequently under attack for their cost to taxpayers. The ratio of instructional personnel in schools has continued to rise despite the decline in the number of school-age children.[14] This development supplements general public support for the view that some street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers and police officers, are necessary for a healthy society.[15]

The fiscal crisis that has affected many cities, notably New York and more recently Cleveland and Newark, has provided an opportunity to assess the capacity of public service workers to hold onto their jobs in the face of enormous pressures. Since so much of municipal budgets consists of inflexible, mandated costs—for debt service, pension plans and other personnel benefits, contractually obligated salary increases, capital expenditure commitments, energy purchases, and so on—the place to find "fat" to eliminate from municipal budgets is in the service sector, where most expenditures tend to be for salaries. While many public employees have been fired during this crisis period, it is significant that public service workers often have been able to lobby, bargain, and cajole to minimize this attrition.[16] They are supported in their claims by a public fearful of a reduced police force on the street and resentful of dirtier streets resulting from fewer garbage pickups. They are supported by families whose children will receive less instruction from fewer specialists than in the past if teachers are fired. And it does not hurt their arguments that many public employees and their relatives vote in the city considering force reductions.[17]

The growth of the service sector represents the furthest reaches of the welfare state. The service sector penetrates every area of human needs as they are recognized and defined, and it grows within each recognized area. This is not to say that the need is met, but only that the service state breaches the barriers between public responsibility and private affairs.

The fiscal crisis of the cities focuses on the service sector, fundamentally challenging the priorities of the service state under current perceptions of

scarcity. Liberals have now joined fiscal conservatives in challenging service provision. They do not do so directly, by questioning whether public services and responsibilities developed in this century are appropriate. Instead, they do it backhandedly, arguing that the accretion of public employees and their apparently irreversible demands upon revenues threaten the autonomy, flexibility, and prosperity of the political order. Debates over the proper scope of services face the threat of being overwhelmed by challenges to the entire social service structure as seen from the perspective of unbalanced public budgets.

Conflict over Interactions with Citizens

I have argued that street-level bureaucrats engender controversy because they must be dealt with if policy is to change. A second reason street-level bureaucrats tend to be the focus of public controversy is the immediacy of their interactions with citizens and their impact on people's lives. The policy delivered by street-level bureaucrats is most often immediate and personal. They usually make decisions on the spot (although sometimes they try not to) and their determinations are focused entirely on the individual. In contrast, an urban renewal program might destroy a neighborhood and replace and substitute new housing and different people, but the policy was prolonged, had many different stages, and was usually played out in arenas far removed from the daily life of neighborhood residents.

The decisions of street-level bureaucrats tend to be redistributive as well as allocative. By determining eligibility for benefits they enhance the claims of some citizens to governmental goods and services at the expense of general taxpayers and those whose claims are denied. By increasing or decreasing benefits availability to low-income recipient populations they implicitly regulate the degree of redistribution that will be paid for by more affluent sectors.

In another sense, in delivering policy street-level bureaucrats make decisions about people that affect their life chances. To designate or treat someone as a welfare recipient, a juvenile delinquent, or a high achiever affects the relationships of others to that person and also affects the person's self-evaluation. Thus begins (or continues) the social process that we infer accounts for so many self-fulfilling prophecies. The child judged to be a juvenile delinquent develops such a self-image and is grouped with other "delinquents," increasing the chances that he or she will adopt the behavior thought to have been incipient in the first place. Children thought by their teacher to be richly endowed in learning ability learn more than peers of equal intelligence who were not thought to be superior.[18] Welfare recipients find or accept housing inferior to those with equal disposable incomes who are not recipients.[19]

A defining facet of the working environment of street-level bureaucrats is that they must deal with clients' personal reactions to their decisions, however they cope with their implications. To say that people's self-evaluation is affected by the actions of street-level bureaucrats is to say that people are reactive to the policy. This is not exclusively confined to subconscious processes. Clients of street-level bureaucracies respond angrily to real or perceived injus-

tices, develop strategies to ingratiate themselves with workers, act grateful and elated or sullen and passive in reaction to street-level bureaucrats' decisions. It is one thing to be treated neglectfully and routinely by the telephone company, the motor vehicle bureau, or other government agencies whose agents know nothing of the personal circumstances surrounding a claim or request. It is quite another thing to be shuffled, categorized, and treated "bureaucratically" (in the pejorative sense), by someone to whom one is directly talking and from whom one expects at least an open and sympathetic hearing. In short, the reality of the work of street-level bureaucrats could hardly be farther from the bureaucratic ideal of impersonal detachment in decision making.[20] On the contrary, in street-level bureaucracies the objects of critical decisions— *people*—actually change as a result of the decisions.

Street-level bureaucrats are also the focus of citizen reactions because their discretion opens up the possibility that they will respond favorably on behalf of people. Their general and diffuse obligation to the "public interest" permits hope to flourish that the individual worker will adopt a benign or favorable orientation toward the client. Thus, in a world of large and impersonal agencies that apparently hold the keys to important benefits, sanctions, and opportunities, the ambiguity of work definitions sustains hope for a friend in court.

This discussion helps explain continued controversy over street-level bureaucracies at the level of individual service provision. At the same time, the peculiar nature of government service delivery through street-level bureaucrats helps explain why street-level bureaucracies are apparently the primary focus of community conflict in the current period, and why they are likely to remain the focus of such conflict in the foreseeable future. It is no accident that the most heated community conflicts since 1964 have focused on schools and police departments, and on the responsiveness of health and welfare agencies and institutions.[21] These are the sites of the provision of public benefits and sanctions. They are the locus of individual decisions about and treatment of citizens, and thus are primary targets of protest. As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward explain:

> . . . people experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end product of large and abstract processes, and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances against specific targets. . . . People on relief [for example] experience the shabby waiting rooms, the overseer or caseworker, and the dole. They do not experience American social welfare policy. . . . In other words, it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the targets of their anger.[22]

While people may experience these bureaucracies as individuals, schools, precinct houses, or neighborhood clinics are places where policy about individuals is organized collectively. These administrative arrangements suggest to citizens the possibility that controlling, or at least affecting, their structures will influence the quality of individual treatment. Thus we have two preconditions for successful community organization efforts: the hope and plausibility that

individual benefits may accrue to those taking part in group action and a visible, accessible, and blamable collective target.[23]

Community action focused on street-level bureaucracies is also apparently motivated by concerns for community character. The dominant institutions in communities help shape community identity. They may be responsive to the dominant community group (this has been the traditional role of high schools in Boston) or they may be unresponsive and opposed to conceptions of community and identity favored by residents, as in the case of schools that neglect the Spanish heritage of a significant minority. Whether people are motivated by specific grievances or more diffuse concerns that become directed at community institutions, their focus in protesting the actions of street-level bureaucracies may be attributed to the familiarity of the agency, its critical role in community welfare, and a perception at some level that these institutions are not sufficiently accountable to the people they serve.

Finally, street-level bureaucrats play a critical role in regulating the degree of contemporary conflict by virtue of their role as agents of social control. Citizens who receive public benefits interact with public agents who require certain behaviors of them. They must anticipate the requirements of these public agents and claimants must tailor their actions and develop "suitable" attitudes both toward the services they receive and toward the street-level bureaucrats themselves. Teachers convey and enforce expectations of proper attitudes toward schooling, self, and efficacy in other interactions. Policemen convey expectations about public behavior and authority. Social workers convey expectations about public benefits and the status of recipients.

The social control function of street-level bureaucrats requires comment in a discussion of the place of public service workers in the larger society. The public service sector plays a critical part in softening the impact of the economic system on those who are not its primary beneficiaries and inducing people to accept the neglect or inadequacy of primary economic and social institutions. Police, courts, and prisons obviously play such a role in processing the junkies, petty thieves, muggers, and others whose behavior toward society is associated with their economic position. It is a role equally played by schools in socializing the population to the economic order and the likely opportunities for different strata of the population. Public support and employment programs expand to ameliorate the impact of unemployment or reduce the incidence of discontent; they contract when employment opportunities improve. Moreover, they are designed and implemented to convey the message that welfare status is to be avoided and that work, however poorly rewarded, is preferable to public assistance. One can also see the two edges of public policy in the "war on poverty" where the public benefits of social service and community action invested neighborhood institutions with benefits for which potential dissidents could compete and ordinary citizens could develop dependency.[24]

What to some are the highest reaches of the welfare state are to others the furthest extension of social control. Street-level bureaucrats are partly the focus of controversy because they play this dual role. Welfare reform founders on disagreements over whether to eliminate close scrutiny of welfare applications

in order to reduce administrative costs and harassment of recipients, or to increase the scrutiny in the name of controlling abuses and preventing welfare recipients from taking advantage. Juvenile corrections and mental health policy founder on disputes over the desirability of dismantling large institutions in the name of cost effectiveness and rehabilitation, or retaining close supervision in an effort to avoid the costs of letting unreconstructed "deviants" loose. In short, street-level bureaucrats are also at the center of controversy because a divided public perceives that social control in the name of public order and acceptance of the status quo are social objectives with which proposals to reduce the role of street-level bureaucrats (eliminating welfare checkups, reducing parole personnel, decriminalizing marijuana) would interfere.

Public controversy also focuses on the proper kind of social control. Current debates in corrections policy, concerning automatic sentencing and a "hard-nosed" view of punishment or more rehabilitative orientations, reflect conflict over the degree of harshness in managing prison populations. In educational practice the public is also divided as to the advisability of liberal disciplinary policies and more flexible instruction or punitive discipline and more rigid, traditional approaches. The "medicalization" of deviance, in which disruptive behavior is presumed cause for intervention by a doctor rather than a disciplinarian, is another area in which there is controversy over the appropriate kind of social control.

From the citizen's viewpoint, the roles of street-level bureaucrats are as extensive as the functions of government and intensively experienced as daily routines require them to interact with the street ministers of education, dispute settlement, and health services. Collectively, street-level bureaucrats absorb a high share of public resources and become the focus of society's hopes for a healthy balance between provision of public services and a reasonable burden of public expenditures. As individuals, street-level bureaucrats represent the hopes of citizens for fair and effective treatment by government even as they are positioned to see clearly the limitations on effective intervention and the constraints on responsiveness engendered by mass processing.

NOTES

1. These definitions are analytical. They focus not on nominal occupational roles but on the characteristics of the particular work situations. Thus not every street-level bureaucrat works for a street-level bureaucracy [for example, a relocation specialist (a type of street-level bureaucrat) may work for an urban renewal agency whose employees are mostly planners, builders, and other technicians]. Conversely, not all employees of street-level bureaucracies are street-level bureaucrats (for example, file clerks in a welfare department or police officers on routine clerical assignments).

The conception of street-level bureaucracy was originally proposed in a paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in 1969. "Toward a Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy." It was later revised and published in Willis Hawley and Michael Lipsky, eds., *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 196–213.

2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Public Employment in 1973, Series GE 73 No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 9. Presented in Alan Baker

and Barbara Grouby, "Employment and Payrolls of State and Local Governments, by Function: October 1973," *Municipal Year Book, 1975* (Washington, D.C.: International City Managers Association, 1975), pp. 109–112, table 4/3. Also, Marianne Stein Kah, "City Employment and Payrolls: 1975," *Municipal Year Book, 1977* (Washington, D.C.: International City Managers Association, 1977), pp. 173–179. These figures have been adjusted to represent full-time equivalents. For purposes of assessing public commitments to providing services, full-time equivalents are more appropriate statistics than total employment figures, which count many part-time employees.

3. Jeffry H. Galper, *The Politics of Social Services* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 56.

4. Lois Forer, *Death of the Law* (New York: McKay, 1975), p. 191.

5. *New York Times,* April 4, 1976, p. 22.

6. Baker and Grouby, "Employment and Payrolls of State and Local Governments."

7. *New York Times,* July 10, 1977, p. F13.

8. Of four cities with populations over one million responding to a *Municipal Year Book* survey, the proportion of personnel expenditures to total expenditures in police departments averaged 94 percent and did not go beyond 86 percent. Cities with smaller populations showed similar tendencies. These observations are derived from David Lewin, "Expenditure, Compensation, and Employment Data in Police, Fire and Refuse Collection and Disposal Departments," *Municipal Year Book, 1975,* pp. 39–98, table 1/21. However, the variation was much greater in the less populous cities because of smaller base figures and the fact that when cities with smaller bases make capital investments, the ratio of personnel to total expenditures changes more precipitously.

That public expenditures for street-level bureaucracies go to individuals primarily as salaries may also be demonstrated in the case of education. For example, more than 73 percent of all noncapital education expenditures inside Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas goes toward personal services (i.e., salaries). See Government Finances, Number 1, Finances of School Districts, 1972 U.S. Census of Government (Bureau of the Census, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce), table 4.

9. Many analysts have discussed the increasing role of services in the economy. See Daniel Bell, *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Alan Gartner and Frank Reissman, *The Service Society and the Consumer Vanguard* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Victor Fuchs, *The Service Economy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). On transformations in public welfare, see Gilbert Steiner, *Social Insecurity* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), chap. 1; on public safety, see Allan Silver, "The Demand for Order in Civil Society," in David Bordua, ed., *The Police: Six Sociological Essays* (New York: John Wiley, 1967), pp. 1–24.

10. Charles Reich, "The New Property," *Yale Law Journal,* vol. 72 (April, 1964): pp. 733–787.

11. Carl Hosticka, "Legal Services Lawyers Encounter Clients: A Study in Street-Level Bureaucracy" (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976), pp. 11–13.

12. See Frances Piven's convincing essay in which she argues that social service workers were the major beneficiaries of federal programs concerned with cities and poor people in the 1960s. Piven, "The Urban Crisis: Who Got What and Why," in

Richard Cloward and Frances Piven, *The Politics of Turmoil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 314–351.

13. J. Joseph Loewenberg and Michael H. Moskow, eds., *Collective Bargaining in Government* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972). A. Laurence Chickering, ed., *Public Employee Unions* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1976); and Margaret Levi, *Bureaucratic Insurgency* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1977).

14. The decline is a function of the lower birthrate and periodicity in the size of the school-age population originally resulting from the birth explosion following World War II. See Baker and Grouby, *Municipal Year Book, 1975,* pp. 109ff., on serviceability ratios.

15. This perspective remains applicable in the current period. However, in reaction to this tendency, programs that would eliminate service mediators and service providers, such as negative income taxation and housing allowances, have gained support. Fiscal scarcity has brought to public attention questions concerning the marginal utility of some of these service areas.

16. Consider the New York City policemen who, in October 1976, agreed to work overtime without pay so that a crop of rookie patrolmen would not be eliminated. *New York Times,* October 24, 1976, p. 24.

17. There can be no better illustration of the strength of the organized service workers and their support by relevant interests than the New York State Assembly's overriding of Gov. Hugh Carey's veto of the so-called Stavisky bill. This legislation, written in a period of massive concern for cutting the New York City budget, required the city to spend no less on education in the three years following the fiscal collapse than in the three years before the crisis, thus tying the hands of the city's financial managers even more. *New York Times,* April 4, 1976, p. E6; April 18, 1976, p. E6.

18. The seminal work here is Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

19. Martin Rein, "Welfare and Housing," Joint Center Working Paper Series, no. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Joint Center for Urban Studies, Spring, 1971, rev. Feb. 1972).

20. On the alleged importance of bureaucratic detachment in processing clients see Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: John Wiley, 1964), p. 66.

21. See National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report* (New York: Bantam, 1968); Peter Rossi et al., *Roots of Urban Discontent* (New York: John Wiley, 1974).

22. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), pp. 20–21.

23. Michael Lipsky and Margaret Levi, "Community Organization as a Political Resource," in Harlan Hahn, ed., *People and Places in Urban Society* (Urban Affairs Annual Review, vol. 6) (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1972), pp. 175–199.

24. See James O'Connor's discussion of "legitimation" and his general thesis concerning the role of the state service sector, in O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973). On social control functions in particular policy sectors see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (New York: Pantheon, 1971); Galper, *The Politics of Social Services;* Richard Quinney, *Criminology* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975); Ira Katznelson, "Urban Counterrevolution," in Robert P. Wolff, ed., *1984 Revisited* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973), pp. 139–164.

7

Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making (1997)

Deborah Stone

Paradoxes are nothing but trouble. They violate the most elementary principle of logic: Something cannot be two different things at once. Two contradictory interpretations cannot both be true. A paradox is just such an impossible situation, and political life is full of them. Consider some examples.

Losing Is Winning

When the Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives after the 1994 midterm elections, passing a balanced-budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution was tops on their legislative agenda. Republicans had long criticized Democrats for profligate government spending and high deficits. Getting a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget would be a powerful legal weapon they could use to cut government programs drastically. Early in 1995, it looked like both houses of Congress would pass the budget amendment easily. As time got closer to a Senate vote in March, however, the Republicans didn't seem to have the 67 votes necessary to pass a constitutional amendment. Senator Bob Dole, the Republican majority leader, kept postponing the vote, hoping to pick up more support, but eventually he brought the bill to a vote without having 67 votes lined up. Why would he bring the matter to a vote, knowing that the Republicans would fail to pass it? On the eve of the vote, he explained: "We really win if we win, but we may also win if we lose."[1]

After the vote, the headlines were unanimous: "Senate Rejects Amendment on Balancing the Budget; Close Vote Is Blow to GOP," went the *New York Times'* verdict. "GOP is Loser on Budget Amendment," echoed the *Boston Globe.*[2] What did Dole mean by claiming that a loss could be a victory?

Politicians always have at least two goals. First is a policy goal—whatever program or proposal they would like to see accomplished or defeated, whatever problem they would like to see solved. Perhaps even more important, though, is a political goal. Politicians always want to preserve their power, or gain enough power, to be able to accomplish their policy goals. Even though a defeat of the balanced-budget amendment was a loss for Republicans' policy goal, Dole thought it might be a gain for Republicans' political strength. (So, apparently, did the *New York Times,* whose sub-headline read "Risk to Democrats.") Republican leaders acknowledged that they had lost a constitutional device that would have helped them immensely in redeeming their campaign pledge to enact the "Contract with America." But they also saw some important political gains. Senator Orrin Hatch, the chief sponsor of the amendment, called the vote "a clear delineation between the parties." A Republican pollster explained how the vote might help Republican candidates in the next Congressional election: "It lays out the differences as sharply as we could want them: We want to cut spending, and they don't."[3] Dole, already campaigning for the presidency, used the occasion to lambaste President Clinton for "abdicating his responsibility" to control federal deficits, while Republicans in both houses talked about making Democrats pay at the polls in the next election. "As far as I'm concerned," Newt Gingrich crowed, "it's like a fork in chess. They can give us a victory today; they can give us a victory in November '96."[4]

Parades: Recreation or Speech?

An Irish gay and lesbian group wanted to march in Boston's annual Saint Patrick's day parade. The organizers of the parade wanted to stop them. The gay and lesbian group said a parade is a public recreational event, and therefore, civil rights law protected them against discrimination in public accommodations. The parade organizers claimed a parade is an expression of beliefs, really an act of speech. Their right to say what they wanted—by excluding from the parade those with a different message—should be protected by the First Amendment. Is a parade a public recreational event or an act of self-expression? Might it be both? What would you do if you were a justice on the Supreme Court and had to decide one way or the other?[5]

For or Against Welfare?

When asked about public spending on welfare, 48 percent of Americans say it should be cut. But when asked about spending on programs for poor children, 47 percent say it should be increased, and only 9 percent want cuts.[6]

Do Americans want to enlarge or curtail welfare spending? It all depends on how the question is framed. . . .

Which Came First—The Problem or the Solution?

In the 1950s, a federal program for mass transit was proposed as a solution to urban congestion. Subways and buses were presented as a more efficient means of transportation than private cars. In the late 1960s, environmental protection was the word of the day, and mass transit advocates peddled subways and buses as a way to reduce automobile pollution. Then with the OPEC oil embargo of 1972, Washington's attention was riveted by the energy crisis, and mass transit was sold as an energy-saving alternative to private automobiles. Was this a case of three problems for which mass transit just happened to be a solution, or a constant solution adapting to a changing problem?[7]

Babies: Product or Service?

New reproductive technologies have fundamentally changed the way people can have babies and create families. "Baby M" was born in 1986 as the result of a contract between William Stern and Marybeth Whitehead, both married, though not to each other. The contract provided for Mrs. Whitehead to be artificially inseminated with Mr. Stern's sperm, to bring the baby to term in her womb, and then to give the baby to Mr. and Mrs. Stern to raise as their child. In return, Mr. Stern would pay Mrs. Whitehead $10,000, plus expenses.

After the birth, Mrs. Whitehead decided she wanted to keep the baby, who was, after all, her biological daughter. The case went to court. Although the immediate issue was who would win the right to raise "Baby M," the policy question on everybody's mind was whether the courts should recognize and enforce surrogate motherhood contracts. Most states prohibit the sale of babies in their adoption laws. So the question of paramount importance was whether a surrogate motherhood contract is a contract for the sale of a baby or for a socially useful service.

On the one hand, Mrs. Whitehead could be seen as renting her womb. Like any professional service provider, she agreed to observe high standards of practice—in this case, prenatal care. According to the contract, she would not drink, smoke, or take drugs, and she would follow medical advice. Like any physical laborer, she was selling the use of her body for a productive purpose. By her own and the Sterns' account, she was altruistically helping to create a child for a couple who could not have their own.

On the other hand, Mrs. Whitehead could be seen as producing and selling a baby. She underwent artificial insemination in anticipation of a fee—no fee, no baby. She agreed to have amniocentesis and to have an abortion if the test showed any defects not acceptable to Mr. Stern. She agreed to accept a lower fee if the baby were born with any mental or physical handicaps—low-value baby, low price.

Is a surrogate motherhood contract for a service or for a baby?

How can we make sense of a world where such paradoxes occur? In an age of science, of human mastery over the innermost and outermost realms, how are

we to deal with situations that will not observe the elementary rules of scientific decorum? Can we make public policy behave?

The fields of political science, public administration, law, and policy analysis have shared a common mission of rescuing public policy from the irrationalities and indignities of politics, hoping to make policy instead with rational, analytical, and scientific methods. This endeavor is what I call "the rationality project," and it has been a core part of American political culture almost since the beginning. The project began with James Madison's effort to "cure the mischiefs of faction" with proper constitutional design, thereby assuring that government policy would be protected from the self-interested motives of tyrannous majorities.[8] In the 1870s, Christopher Columbus Langdell, dean of the Harvard Law School, undertook to take the politics out of law by reforming legal training. Law was a science, he proclaimed, to be studied by examining appellate court decisions as specimens and distilling their common essence into a system of principles. There was no need for either students or professors to gain practical experience.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the rationality project was taken up in spades by the Progressive reformers, who removed policy-making authority from elected bodies and gave it to expert regulatory commissions and professional city managers, in an effort to render policy making more scientific and less political. The quest for an apolitical science of government continues in the twentieth century with Herbert Simon's search for a "science of administration," Harold Lasswell's dream of a "science of policy forming and execution," and the current effort of universities, foundations, and government to foster a profession of policy scientists.

This book has two aims. First, I argue that the rationality project misses the point of politics. Moreover, it is an impossible dream. From inside the rationality project, politics looks messy, foolish, erratic, and inexplicable. Events, actions, and ideas in the political world seem to leap outside the categories that logic and rationality offer. In the rationality project, the categories of analysis are somehow above politics or outside it. Rationality purports to offer a correct vantage point, from which we can judge the goodness of the real world.

I argue, instead, that the very categories of thought underlying rational analysis are themselves a kind of paradox, defined in political struggle. They do not exist before or without politics, and because they are necessarily abstract (they are categories of *thought,* after all), they can have multiple meanings. Thus, analysis is itself a creature of politics; it is strategically crafted argument, designed to create ambiguities and paradoxes and to resolve them in a particular direction. (This much is certainly awfully abstract for now, but each of the subsequent chapters is designed to show very concretely how one analytic category of politics and policy is a constantly evolving political creation.)

Beyond demonstrating this central misconception of the rationality project, my second aim is to derive a kind of political analysis that makes sense of policy paradoxes such as the ones depicted above. I seek to create a framework in which such phenomena, the ordinary situations of politics, do not have to be explained away as extraordinary, written off as irrational, dismissed as folly, or disparaged as "pure politics." Unfortunately, much of the literature

about public policy proceeds from the idea that policy making in practice deviates from some hypothetical standards of good policy making, and that there is thus something fundamentally wrong with politics. In creating an alternative mode of political analysis, I start from the belief that politics is a creative and valuable feature of social existence.

The project of making public policy rational rests on three pillars: a model of reasoning, a model of society, and a model of policy making. The *model of reasoning* is rational decision making. In this model, decisions are or should be made in a series of well-defined steps:

1. Identify objectives.
2. Identify alternative courses of action for achieving objectives.
3. Predict the possible consequences of each alternative.
4. Evaluate the possible consequences of each alternative.
5. Select the alternative that maximizes the attainment of objectives.

This model of rational behavior is so pervasive it is a staple of check-out-counter magazines and self-help books. For all of its intuitive appeal, however, the rational decision-making model utterly fails to explain Bob Dole's thinking or behavior at the time of the balanced-budget amendment vote. Did he attain his objective or didn't he? Did he win or lose? Worse, the model could not help formulate political advice for Dole beforehand, for if we accept his reasoning that he wins either way, then it doesn't matter which way the vote goes and he should just sit back and enjoy the play. Of course, Dole was not only reasoning when he claimed that losing was winning. He was also trying to manipulate how the outcome of the vote would be perceived and how it would influence future political contests between the Republicans and the Democrats. In fact, all the Republican credit-claiming and victory speeches upon losing the vote suggest that politicians have a great deal of control over interpretations of events, and that the political analyst who wants to choose a wise course of action should focus less on assessing the objective consequences of actions and more on how the interpretations will go. If politicians can attain their objectives by portraying themselves as having attained them, then they should be studying portraiture, not cost-benefit analysis.

A model of political reason ought to account for the possibilities of changing one's objectives, of pursuing contradictory objectives simultaneously, of winning by appearing to lose and turning loss into an appearance of victory, and most unusual, of attaining objectives by portraying oneself as having attained them. Throughout this book, I develop a model of political reasoning quite different from the model of rational decision making. Political reasoning is reasoning by metaphor and analogy. It is trying to get others to see a situation as one thing rather than another. For example, parades can be seen as public recreational events, or as collective marches to express an idea. Each vision constructs a different political contest, and invokes a different set of rules for resolving the conflict. Babies created under surrogate motherhood contracts are a phenomenon quite unlike anything we already know. The situ-

ation is not exactly like professional service, not exactly like wage labor, not exactly like a contract for pork bellies, not exactly like a custody dispute between divorced parents, and not exactly like an adoption contract. Legislatures and courts deal with the issue by asking, "Of the things that surrogate motherhood isn't, which is it most like?"

Political reasoning is metaphor-making and category-making, but not just for beauty's sake or for insight's sake. It is strategic portrayal for persuasion's sake, and ultimately for policy's sake. This concept of political reason is developed and illustrated throughout the book, and I take up the idea directly again in the last chapter.

The *model of society* underlying the contemporary rationality project is the market. Society is viewed as a collection of autonomous, rational decision makers who have no community life. Their interactions consist entirely of trading with one another to maximize their individual well-being. They each have objectives or preferences, they each compare alternative ways of attaining their objectives, and they each choose the way that yields the most satisfaction. They maximize their self-interest through rational calculation. The market model and the rational decision-making model are thus very closely related.

The market model is not restricted to things we usually consider markets, that is, to systems where goods and services are bought and sold. Electoral voting, the behavior of legislators, political leadership, the size of the welfare rolls, and even marriage have all been explained in terms of the maximization of self-interest through rational calculation. The market model posits that individuals have relatively fixed, independent preferences for goods, services, and policies. In real societies, where people are psychologically and materially dependent, where they are connected through emotional bonds, traditions, and social groups, their preferences are based on loyalties and comparisons of images. How people define their preferences depends to a large extent on how choices are presented to them and by whom. They want greater welfare spending when it is called helping poor children, but not when it is called welfare. Sometimes, as in the case of "Baby M," they are not quite sure what they are buying and selling, or whether they have engaged in a sale at all.

In place of the model of society as a market, I construct a model of society as a political community. . . . [I set] forth the fundamental elements of human behavior and social life that I take to be axiomatic, and [contrast] them with the axioms of the market model. I start with a model of political community, or "polis," because I began my own intellectual odyssey in this territory with a simple reflection: Both policy and thinking about policy are produced in political communities.

The observation may be trite, but it has radical consequences for a field of inquiry that has been dominated by a conception of society as a market. To take just one example, the market model of society envisions societal welfare as the aggregate of individuals' situations. All behavior is explained as people striving to maximize their own self-interest. The market model therefore gives us no way to talk about how people fight over visions of the public interest or

the nature of the community—the truly significant political questions underlying policy choices.

The *model of policy making* in the rationality project is a production model, where policy is created in a fairly orderly sequence of stages, almost as if on an assembly line. Many political scientists, in fact, speak of "assembling the elements" of policy. An issue is "placed on the agenda," and a problem gets defined. It moves through the legislative and executive branches of government, where alternative solutions are proposed, analyzed, legitimized, selected, and refined. A solution is implemented by the executive agencies and constantly challenged and revised by interested actors, perhaps using the judicial branch. And finally, if the policy-making process is managerially sophisticated, it provides a means of evaluating and revising implemented solutions.

So conceived, the policy-making process parallels the cognitive steps of the rational model of decision making. Government becomes a rational decision maker writ large—albeit not a very proficient one. Much of the political science literature in this genre is devoted to understanding where and how good policy gets derailed in the process of production. This model of policy making as rational problem solving cannot explain why sometimes policy solutions go looking for problems. It cannot tell us why solutions . . . turn into problems. It only tells us things are working "backward" or poorly.

The production model fails to capture what I see as the essence of policy making in political communities: the struggle over ideas. Ideas are a medium of exchange and a mode of influence even more powerful than money and votes and guns. Shared meanings motivate people to action and meld individual striving into collective action. Ideas are at the center of all political conflict. Policy making, in turn, is a constant struggle over the criteria for classification, the boundaries of categories, and the definition of ideals that guide the way people behave.

. . . Each idea is an argument, or more accurately, a collection of arguments in favor of different ways of seeing the world. Every chapter is devoted to showing how there are multiple understandings of what appears to be a single concept, how these understandings are created, and how they are manipulated as part of political strategy. Revealing the hidden arguments embedded in each concept illuminates, and may help resolve, the surface conflicts. . . .

As I demonstrate throughout the book, the political careers of most policy issues are not nearly so simple as this three-part formula would suggest. For example, people do not always perceive a goal first and then look for disparities between the goal and the status quo. Often, they see a problem first, which triggers a search for solutions and statement of goals. Or, they see a solution first, then formulate a problem that requires their solution (and their services). Nevertheless, I use this framework because it expresses a logic of problem solving that is widespread in the policy analysis literature and because it parallels the models of rational decision making and the policy-making process.

[I then present a discussion] about goals—not the specific goals of particular policy issues, such as expanding health insurance coverage or lowering

health care costs, but the enduring values of community life that give rise to controversy over particular policies: equity, efficiency, security, and liberty. These values are "motherhood issues": everyone is for them when they are stated abstractly, but the fight begins as soon as we ask what people mean by them. These values not only express goals, but also serve as the standards we use to evaluate existing situations and policy proposals.

One tenet of the rationality project is that there are objective and neutral standards of evaluation that can be applied to politics, but that come from a vantage point outside politics, untainted by the interests of political players. . . . Behind every policy issue lurks a contest over conflicting, though equally plausible, conceptions of the same abstract goal or value. The abstractions are aspirations for a community, into which people read contradictory interpretations. It may not be possible to get everyone to agree on the same interpretation, but the first task of the political analyst is to reveal and clarify the underlying value disputes so that people can see where they differ and move toward some reconciliation.

There might well have been other ideas in the section on goals. Justice, privacy, social obligation, and democracy come to mind. Equity, efficiency, security, and liberty begged more insistently for political analysis only because, sadly, they are invoked more often as criteria in policy analysis. Once having read this book, the reader will have no trouble seeing some of the paradoxes in other criteria.

. . . There are many modes of defining problems in policy discourse, and each mode is like a language within which people offer and defend conflicting interpretations. "Symbols" and "Numbers" are about verbal and numerical languages, respectively, and both examine devices of symbolic representation within those languages. We also define problems in terms of what causes them ("Causes"), who is lined up on each side ("Interests"), or what kind of choice they pose ("Decisions"). Here, too, I might have chosen other categories; for example, one could examine problem formulation according to different disciplines, such as economics, law, political science, or ethics. I did not choose that framework because it would only perpetuate the somewhat artificial divisions of academia, and the categories I did choose seem to me a better representation of modes of discourse in political life.

. . . [I] start from the assumption that all policies involve deliberate attempts to change people's behavior, and each chapter in this section deals with a mechanism for bringing about such change—creating incentives and penalties ("Inducements"), mandating rules ("Rules"), informing and persuading ("Facts"), stipulating rights and duties ("Rights"), and reorganizing authority ("Powers").

The common theme of this part is that policy instruments are not just tools, each with its own function and its own appropriateness for certain kinds of jobs. In the standard political science model of the policy-making process, policy solutions are decided upon and then implemented, though things usually go awry at the implementation stage. The task of the analyst is to figure out which is the right or best tool to use, and then to fix mistakes when things don't

go as planned. I argue, instead, that each type of policy instrument is a kind of political arena, with its peculiar ground rules, within which political conflicts are continued. Each mode of social regulation draws lines around what people may and may not do and how they may or may not treat each other. But these boundaries are constantly contested, either because they are ambiguous and do not settle conflicts, or because they allocate benefits and burdens to the people on either side, or both. Boundaries become real and acquire their meaning in political struggles. The job of the analyst, in this view, is to understand the rules of the game well enough to know the standard moves and have a repertoire of effective countermoves.

If deep down inside, you are a rationalist, you might want to know whether the topics covered by the chapters are "exhaustive" and "mutually exclusive." They are most assuredly not. Our categories of thought and modes of argument are intertwined and not easily delineated. That is one reason, I shall argue, why we have and always will have politics. Then, too, I remind you that I am trying to demonstrate precisely that essential political concepts are paradoxes. They have contradictory meanings that by formal logic ought to be mutually exclusive but by political logic are not. I do hope, however, that my categories at least provide a useful way to divide up an intellectual territory for exploration, and at best provide a new way of seeing it.

As for whether my categories are exhaustive, I can only plead the quintessential political defense: I had to draw the line somewhere.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Jill Zuckman, "No Voting, More Anger on Budget," *Boston Globe,* March 2, 1995, p. 1.

2. Both headlines on front page. *New York Times,* March 3, 1995; *Boston Globe,* March 5, 1995.

3. Quotations in "GOP Is Loser on Budget Amendment," *Boston Globe,* March 5, 1995, p. 1.

4. Quotation from "Senate Rejects Amendment on Balanced Budget," *New York Times,* March 3, 1995. p. A1.

5. Linda Greenhouse, "High Court Lets Parade in Boston Bar Homosexuals," *New York Times,* June 20, 1995, p. A1.

6. Jason DeParle, "Despising Welfare, Pitying Its Young," *New York Times,* December 18, 1994, p. E5.

7. John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984), p. 181.

8. This was the argument of his *Federalist Paper No. 10.*

Review Questions

1. Why is incrementalism the essence of Charles Lindblom's "Science of 'Muddling Through'"? How is incrementalism used to explain the politics behind all budgetary processes in government?

2. Why is the "mixed scanning" advocated by Amitai Etzioni considered a hybrid approach to decision making? Is "mixed scanning" a useful technique when reading a newspaper?

3. How does Michael Lipsky explain how bureaucrats at the lowest levels of their organizations get to make policy? Can you give examples of your personal interactions with "street-level bureaucrats"?

4. What does "the polis" refer to in Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox and Political Reason?* How does her "polis model" differ from other models of political decision making?