THE WORLD OF THE POLICY ANALYST

SECOND EDITION

RATIONALITY, VALUES, & POLITICS

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CHATHAM HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
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CHATHAM HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
POST OFFICE BOX ONE
CHATHAM, NEW JERSEY, 07928

Publisher: Edward Artinian
Cover design: Antler and Baldwin Design Group, Inc.
Production Supervisor: Katharine F. Miller
Composition: Bang, Motley, Olufsen
Printing and binding: R.R. Donnelley and Sons Company

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The world of the policy analyst : rationality, values, and politics /
Robert A. Heineman . . . [et al.]. — 2nd ed.
p. cm. — (Chatham House studies in political thinking)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1-56643-047-X
1. Policy sciences. I. Heineman, Robert A. II. Series.
H97.W68 1997
320'.6—dc20 96-46153
CIP

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface to the Second Edition

This edition updates the first edition and in two important areas adds substantially to that treatment of the environment of the policy analyst. In chapters 3 and 4, which are an expansion of the previous chapter 3, William Bluhm elaborates his examination of the cultural context of policy analysis with a new chapter on ethics in policy analysis. Chapter 7 is an addition to the book in which Robert Heineman both traces the movement toward policy devolution to the states and surveys the increasingly influential activities of think tanks. Although the aforementioned individuals have had primary responsibility for these chapters, all of the coauthors have read the manuscript and contributed throughout.

As with the previous edition, our efforts here owe much to many. In particular, we wish to thank Karen Mix and Susan Meacham for their secretarial support and the excellent reference staff of Herrick Memorial Library. Last but certainly not least, we extend our thanks to those readers of the first edition who have taken the time to offer us useful suggestions.

Contents

Introduction

In recent years, policy analysis, as both an academic pursuit and a vocation, has grown in number of practitioners and in reputation. Major universities have instituted curricula centered on policy analysis, and a large amount of literature applying analytical techniques to social problems has been published. At all levels of government and at every stage of the policy process, analytical studies of problems and evaluations of programs have become commonplace. Yet despite the development of sophisticated methods of inquiry, policy analysis has not had a major substantive impact on policymakers. Policy analysts have remained distant from the power centers where policy decisions are made.

Concern about the limited influence of rational analysis in the policy process has had the effect of raising fundamental questions about the orientation and role of policy analysis. It now seems clear that to be politically influential policy analysis must be practiced as an integral part of its broader cultural context. It is not, and cannot be, a separate "scientific" endeavor inherently entitled to the deference of politicians and citizens. Its practitioners must understand that they are both in and of a particular kind of political world and that to maximize their policy effectiveness they must acknowledge the characteristics of that world—that its decentralized, poorly coordinated political institutions enshrine and implement the values of a paradoxical political culture. This book is about these institutional and cultural contexts of policy analysis. The authors have tried to provide students of the policymaking process and future decision makers (policy analysts, administrators, legislators, judges) with a perspective for grasping the manifold dimensions of the world in which policy analysis takes place.

This work is not intended as a how-to-do-it book. Instead, it is a detailed analysis of the situation of the policy analyst. The intention of the authors is to help the analyst become more sensitive to the salient factors that influence the way he or she conceives and executes the task at hand.

The goal of the book is therefore to illustrate the elements of scientific rationality in the enterprise of policy analysis, the ways in which ultimate values and conceptions of moral right and wrong are intertwined with this approach, and the influence of decentralized institutions of political authority on attempts to implement rational moral purpose. The reader may find in this book suggestive clues about ways to become a more rigorous policy analyst. But the focus of this study is not on how to practice that vocation. Instead, it examines the difficult and complex context that practitioners must understand to be as effective as they can be.

This book has two primary purposes: (1) to contribute toward a more realistic understanding of policy analysis in the policy process by examining the normative assumptions that permeate policy analysis; and (2) to explain the essential elements of the political process with which analysts must be prepared to work if they expect their efforts to have reasonable chances for influence. At a minimum, this perspective should make policy analysis a more self-conscious process by encouraging analysts to be aware of the values behind the numbers and how these values necessarily shape the outcomes of both policy analysis and the policy process.

Recent analyses of democratic culture and political processes in America have questioned whether contemporary conditions permit the constructive resolution of social problems. With *The End of Liberalism*[1] in 1969, Theodore J. Lowi was one of the first to provide a thorough critique of the corrosive effects of "interest group liberalism" on the democratic policy process. Lowi, a political scientist, argued that the dominance of interest groups in the policy process had diluted the legitimacy of formal norms and procedures and had undermined the proper role of governmental authority. Government was rapidly becoming little more than an arena for the negotiation of interest-group demands. He concluded that in this context, neither rational planning nor meaningful standards of right and wrong were possible and that the nation was approaching a crisis in public authority. Others have concurred with Lowi's analysis.

Taking a broader perspective, Mancur Olson, an economist, has contended that in democracies freedom of association inevitably leads to economic stagnation. Groups soon discover that manipulation of the government is easier and more profitable than competition in the open market. The scramble to use governmental powers and favors for narrow advantage engenders "an unending process of loophole discoveries and closures with the complexity and cost of regulation continually increasing."[2] Those who are successful in obtaining governmental protection become vested interests who resist change and stifle open competition in their ar-

eas. Adeptness at political manipulation—not efficient, competitive production and marketing—becomes the route to economic success.

A number of commentators have suggested that interest-group dominance in the policy process is leading to a pervasive value relativism. In *After Virtue,* Alasdair MacIntyre, a student of ethics, contends that society and government are enmeshed in the claims of emotivism, the belief that all moral judgments "are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character."[3] In his view, our pluralist culture "possesses no method of weighing, no rational criterion for deciding between claims based on legitimate entitlement against claims based on need."[4] MacIntyre is particularly harsh on assertions that social science expertise can provide the knowledge and means for social change. In a statement perhaps more prescient than he intended, MacIntyre argues that the most effective bureaucrat "is the best actor."[5] In his view, dexterity in manipulating images and beliefs about science and government are the tools of effective power, not the specialized knowledge of policy expertise.

The implications of these assessments of the policy process have to be disturbing to the policy analyst no matter how intrepid he or she may be. In these views, interest-group power is elevating informal relationships and understandings to a level of influence and complexity that threatens to swamp the formal boundaries and procedures of constitutional government. Samuel P. Huntington's comment that in America "effective power is unnoticed power; power observed is power devalued"[6] speaks directly to this point. Under such conditions, the claims of those relying on rational analysis carry little weight when confronting interests adept at working within the interstices of the system. With no widely accepted sources of official or normative legitimacy, values (rational or irrational), become dependent on those with sufficient power to impose their definitions of morality. Group theorists did not cause the fragmentation of the American policy process, but, as thinkers like Lowi have recognized, their failure to provide a more comprehensive model of the political has contributed significantly to the diminution of expectations for American democracy once held by devotees of policy analysis as well as by the public at large.

Not surprisingly, many recent studies of American politics have been pessimistic in tone. Olson finds himself hoping and "searching for a happy ending."[7] Huntington concludes his survey of American political culture with the suggestion that America is not a failure but a "disappointment."[8] Studies dealing directly with the mechanics of the policy process follow a similar tack. At the beginning of his analysis of the implementation process, Eugene Bardach warns the unwary reader that

"this is not an optimistic book."[9] In their earlier treatment of implementation, Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky noted that "the remarkable thing is that new programs work at all."[10] And in his text on the policy process, Thomas Dye asks, "Does government really know what it is doing?" and answers, "Generally speaking, no."[11] Obtaining a broader comprehension of the position of policy analysis in relation to these problems may facilitate understanding and, perhaps, mitigation of them.

The question of normative perspectives and assumptions deserves brief preliminary treatment. A number of commentators have noted the absence of discussion about fundamental values in policy analysis literature and curricula.[12] In a sense, such criticisms are inaccurate, for numerous works have examined ethical issues from a philosophical perspective. The problem has been that, while these discussions have helped to clarify and stimulate, they have tended to be of marginal practical use for the practicing policy analyst. Their exposition of ethical difficulties far too often concentrates on logical rigor, not on the conflicting, changing, and often irrational values that influence political decisions. Used carefully, however, they can demonstrate the limitations of purely utilitarian calculations. An example of this approach that has received some fame is the "trolley problem" stated by Judith Jarvis Thomson.[13]

In the trolley problem, Thomson hypothesizes a runaway trolley headed down a track with a spur. If the trolley remains on the main track, it will hit and probably kill five people. If the driver or a bystander diverts it to the spur, it will kill but one person. Elaborating on this hypothetical situation, Thomson postulates a variety of details and modifications from which she tries to extract moral lessons or generalizations. Models of this sort have important pedagogical uses in the appropriate context but are only tenuously linked to real life. Their fundamental danger is not so much their isolation from the real world as their tendency to suggest to students of analysis imbued with the virtues of analytical precision that values can be defined and approached with similar rigor. Unfortunately, the policy process already contains too many individuals who in their zealous pursuit of particular goals operate with cognitive blinders in their approaches to issues and problems. Far more important to the policy analyst is an understanding of the fundamental, culturally determined normative expectations that inform those who will respond to or be affected by his or her suggestions. In this respect, the policy analyst needs to recognize that contradictory beliefs and irrational positions are not aberrations but inherent facts of the political system that have to be confronted with both flexibility and persuasion.

In the discussions that follow, the term *values* will be used to describe beliefs and attitudes that guide individual behavior in the policy process.

These beliefs and attitudes can be divided into three general categories ranging from broad cultural forces to orientations that are specific to individuals. The least definable and articulate of these categories includes cultural norms and expectations that have deep roots in American culture and that are usually uncritically accepted as valid. Closely related to these and originating from them are ideological positions that provide rationalizations for particular policy views. A reasonably distinct and different set of values can be identified as those positions formed by one's role in the policy process. Agencies, legislative bodies, courts, and interest groups have all developed norms and expectations about goals and appropriate forms of behavior. Policy actors will naturally tend to respond to issues within the framework of the norms and expectations of the institution or organization with which they are affiliated. Although these may appear peripheral to substantive policy issues, they are often in fact determinative of policy decisions. Finally, at the most specific level are those personal beliefs and attitudes that vary from individual to individual. These would include desire for power or fame, concern for integrity, and pursuit of wealth or security. As they are used in this work, values will refer to one of the three categories just described, and in each instance the context should make clear which of these concepts is being considered.

This book assumes a broad definition of policy analysis. It recognizes that analysis relevant to understanding the policy process and to policy decisions may be undertaken from a number of useful viewpoints. Physicians, attorneys, or chemists, if they are working to provide input to policy decisions, could in this capacity be seen as doing policy analysis.[14] The very concept of analysis, of course, presupposes the importance of rational argument and rigorous methodology, and in this respect policy analysis must be differentiated from approaches to the policy process that do not meet, or make minimal use of, these criteria.

Within these broad parameters, considerable diversity exists. Duncan MacRae Jr. argues that policy analysis should be seen as an "applied discipline." From his perspective, policy analysis is concerned with "the constructive analysis of concrete policy choices through research and effective policy advice."[15] Asserting that his use of the term "policy studies" is the same as MacRae's idea of policy analysis, William D. Coplin sees policy studies as "the application of the social sciences to societal problems."[16] Another, broader view of policy analysis has been offered by Thomas R. Dye, who views policy analysis as more concerned with understanding and explaining policy issues. Policy analysts should strive for generally applicable explanations, or theories, of policy issues because "developing scientific knowledge about the forces shaping public policy

and the consequences of public policy is itself a socially relevant activity."[17] The authors conceive of policy analysis in the larger sense of encompassing the application of analytical techniques to social issues for the purpose of both enhanced understanding and improved input into the policy process. In this respect, their concept is close to the broad view first suggested by Yehezkel Dror.[18]

At this stage in the development of approaches to policy analysis, restrictive delineation of what legitimately constitutes policy analysis can easily be more harmful than helpful. Statements such as the recent attempts by Frank Fischer to distinguish between policy analysis and evaluation research do not at this time seem to be sustainable.[19] Policy analysis requires evaluation as an integral part of the continuing cycle of input into policy decisions. But more important, those trained outside the usual disciplines that contribute to schools of policy analysis should be encouraged also to see themselves as analytic contributors to public policy and should have available to them the means for gaining a better understanding and perspective on their position. Policy analysis as a field of endeavor, whether applied or theoretical, is developing techniques and models that may give it a more specific identity and expertise. But the perspective being urged here should be useful and comprehensible to anyone who expects to provide analytical input into the decisionmaking process.

The reader will discover that this book moves from the general, broad issues raised by the emergence of policy analysis to the particulars of the policy process itself. First, the American cultural roots of the ideal of rational social analysis are examined. This is followed by a discussion of some of the important techniques of policy analysis in terms of the assumptions that are essential, although often unarticulated, to them and in terms of their relationship to decision making. Then leading American values are analyzed with reference to their historical development, their present paradoxical character, and the way they fit into recent efforts to analyze systematically the ethical dilemmas in policy analysis. The importance of norms and their effects on political behavior are next illustrated through examination of recent trends in the electorate. This discussion moves naturally into the problems posed to policy recommendations by fragmented policymaking institutions. The courts are treated separately because they differ in important respects from the elected branches in their response to policy analysis and policy issues. In conclusion, proposals for structural reform of the policy process are examined. These are followed by tentative suggestions as to how policy analysis might be made more effective in the policy process and analysts might integrate normative considerations into the specifics of their work.

Obviously, the student is free to pick and choose as he or she sees fit from the ideas offered, but the intent is to provide a broad cultural understanding of the American policy process that will produce a more comprehensive and realistic conception of policy studies than the specialized treatments that dominate the field. The aim is not to denigrate the need for rigorous analysis of social problems but to enhance understanding of the capabilities and limits of policy analysis by placing it in the context in which it functions.

Notes

1. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism,* 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1979).

2. Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 70.

3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 11.

4. Ibid., 229.

5. Ibid., 102.

6. Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 75.

7. Olson, *Rise and Decline of Nations,* 237.

8. Huntington, *American Politics,* 262.

9. Eugene Bardach, *The Implementation Game* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 6.

10. Jeffrey T. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation,* 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 109.

11. Thomas R. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy,* 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1987), 350.

12. Rosemarie Tong, *Ethics in Public Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986), xi; Ira Katznelson, "Rethinking the Silences of Social and Economic Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (1986): 310–13; Bruce L. Payne, "Contexts and Epiphanies: Policy Analysis and the Humanities," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 4 (Fall 1984): 96; Douglas J. Amy, "Why Policy Analysis and Ethics Are Incompatible," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 3 (Summer 1984): 573–91.

13. Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Rights, Restitution, and Risk,* ed. William Parent (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 94–116.

14. Tong, *Ethics,* 41, notes, "To the degree that the roles of the policy analyst and the subject-area specialist are increasingly indiscernible, so too is it more and more difficult to articulate how a policy advisor differs from a policy analyst or a policy specialist."

15. Duncan MacRae Jr., *The Social Function of Social Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 305–6; Duncan MacRae Jr., "Introducing Undergraduates to Public Policy Analysis by the Case Method," in *Teaching Policy Studies,* ed. William D. Coplin (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1978), 129–30.

16. William D. Coplin, ed., *Teaching Policy Studies* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1978), xv.

17. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy,* 7–8.

18. Yehezkel Dror, "Policy Analysts: A New Professional Role in Government Service," *Public Administration Review* 27 (September 1967): 200–203.

19. Frank Fischer, "Policy Expertise and the 'New Class,' " in *Confronting Values in Policy Analysis,* ed. Frank Fischer and John Forester (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1987), 94–126.

CHAPTER I

The Emergence of a Field

A commitment to science and its methods as the most important source of progress has permeated scholarly assumptions about the possibility of a social science. This view and the cultural heritage of American social science have both been exceptionally important influences on the development of policy analysis. Yet today policy analysts find themselves confronting a policy process that is unable to utilize effectively the sophisticated methodologies and related technology that have been developed to examine social issues. Except during rare periods of national crisis, policy analysts have seen recommendations that they have justified on the basis of rational merit submerged in a policy process marked by the proliferation of organized interests and by the growth of institutional complexity and fragmentation. In this context, the values of analytical rigor and logic have given way to political necessities.

The Historical Background

In most important respects, the origins of the anomalous position of policy analysis can be traced to intellectual and social developments that first became salient and began to affect political thinking during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The emergence of increased concern for greater analytical rigor in the study of individual and social behavior provides one of the important sources of contemporary ideas about social science. These ideas in turn have engendered policy analysis as an identifiable endeavor. Basic to these changes was the belief that rational, scientific methods could be applied to the improvement of social conditions. The growth of large industrial organizations led to efforts to control human behavior in the interests of increased efficiency and profit, and Frederick W. Taylor remains famous for his formulation of the principles of scientific management around the turn of the century. Additionally, new views of science, influenced heavily by Charles Darwin, which empha-

sized change and evolving concepts of truth, were used by philosophers and social scientists to buttress their efforts at social reform. Scientific approaches began to be applied directly to social activity and were seen as particularly useful to efforts to improve society.

The Era of Reform

These views moved rather quickly into the realm of public policy and led to what Russell Hanson has termed the "rationalization" of political discourse.[1] The criterion of efficiency was seen as equally applicable to industry and government, and it became fashionable to argue that administration in government should be separated from "politics." Many of these ideas culminated in the Progressive movement, which, although it did not establish extensive welfare programs, did contribute significantly to an increase in government regulatory efforts. Legislation creating such agencies as the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Trade Commission along with other major regulatory legislation give clear indications that the American public was willing to accept government intervention in the private sphere on a much larger scale than ever before. Of particular note was the public's willingness to make the regulatory agencies "independent" by insulating them from the political pressures faced by other agencies. This approach signaled a new deference to experts in the areas being regulated.

This period also marks the beginning of the professionalization of academic social science. This movement was linked closely to the actively reformist motivations of scholars dissatisfied with social conditions and confident in their ability to fashion improvements. Another contributing element was the influence of German ideas on American social scientists. Many Americans studied in Germany, where they saw firsthand the effects of Bismarck's welfare measures and were exposed to the power of the historical method in social analysis. Reflecting on his German educational experience, William Graham Sumner, himself a critic of reform, asserted that the German "method of study was nobly scientific, and was worthy to rank, both for its results and its discipline, with the best of the natural science methods."[2] As a result of these experiences, reform-minded students of society tended to be sympathetic to criticism of the limitations that the laissez-faire doctrines of Herbert Spencer and the classical economists imposed on government. Between 1886 and 1895, no less than six major social science journals were established to assist in the propagation of social science expertise, and by the early 1900s major graduate schools in the United States had assumed the responsibility of preparing social scientists to assist in the formulation of governmental policy.[3]

Dewey's Influence

Probably the single most influential source of intellectual support for the application of rational analysis to social problems in the cause of reform was the thought of John Dewey. Richard Bernstein believes that Dewey's ideas constituted a "distinctive intellectual expression of American culture"[4] and asserts that from the 1890s Dewey was America's intellectual spokesman for practical social reform. Dewey argued that no useful metaphysical absolutes exist. Philosophy and science contribute to truth and progress only as they are applied to changing human conditions. Social scientists must not hesitate to apply the experimental method to social problems. The criteria of truth are grounded in the feelings of individuals in society, and the validity of ideas and social institutions is properly judged by the degree to which they contribute to the improvement of oppressive conditions.

In works like *The Public and Its Problems,*[5] Dewey expressed a tremendous amount of faith in the ability of organized social interests to articulate public values and to effect social reform. For him, government was simply a larger form of organized public interest and as such was subject to the limits and demands made on it by the citizenry. Dewey's support of democratic processes, his application of the scientific perspective to social issues, and his focus on immediate, practical problems appealed to Americans generally and provided philosophical legitimacy for the efforts of social scientists.

In retrospect, one of the most important works for understanding the intellectual lineage of the modern policy analyst in more rigorous social science and for grasping the political effects of the ideas fostered by Dewey was Arthur F. Bentley's *The Process of Government.* Bentley disdained formalism and metaphysical concepts in favor of description of the dynamics of the political process. "We must deal with felt things, not with feelings, with intelligent life, not with idea ghosts."[6] The source of facts, the bedrock of usable data, was group activity. Human behavior was describable and definable only in terms of activity: "There is no idea which is not a reflection of social activity,"[7] and that activity is group activity. Thus, for Bentley, "When the groups are stated, everything is adequately stated,"[8] and he proceeded to describe the political scene of his time in these terms.

Bentley's group approach did not come into vogue among political scientists until after World War II, with the rise to prominence of pluralist interpretations of the political process. But for the early twentieth century, his treatment of politics is important for the insight that it provides into the wide influence of Dewey's ideas and for its reflection of contem-