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Analysis of Deborah Stone's Policy Paradox

Part I POLITICS

The Market and the Polis

In Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox*, she argues that the "rationality project" (policy made with rational, analytic and scientific methods) misses the point of politics. She argues that the underlying analyses are a kind of paradox. She claims that public policy rational rests on three pillars:

- A model of reasoning
- A model of society
- A model of policy making

The model of reasoning is rational decision making where steps are taken to make decisions. They include identifying objectives, identifying alternative courses of action for achieving objectives, predicting and then evaluating the possible consequences of each alternative and then selecting the alternative that maximizes the attainment of the objectives.

A model of society is what Stone calls the *market*. The market consists of members who are autonomous whose interactions consist entirely of trading with one another to maximize their individual well-being. They choose the way that benefits them most.

The model of policy making in the rationality project is where policy resembles an "assembly line." For instance, an issue moves through the legislative process going through each branch of the government where it is studied, amended, approved and passed through resembling an assembly line model.

Stone suggests that instead of the model of society (market), we should use her model of society encompassing the entire political community that she calls the "polis". The differences between the market and the polis models include individual self interests versus the interest of the community at large. Competition is coupled with cooperation in the polis model and there is a strong sense of loyalty and consideration when decisions are made to others. Information in the polis model is "strategically manipulated" in a persuasive manner in ambiguous and incomplete terms.

Part II GOALS

According to Stone, “policy is the rational attempt to attain objectives.” These goals are often used to legitimize policy. In the polis, goals are not always clear cut, but rather contain ambiguities and leave room for interpretation. This first section concentrates on goals. Goals are broken down into four individual segments, equity, efficiency, security and liberty.

Equity

Distributive conflicts force equity to be the first goal for all. The paradox lies in that equality may mean inequality and equal treatment may require unequal treatment. Depending on the particular situation, distribution of resources may be viewed as equal to some and unequal other others

Efficiency

The second goal is efficiency. Stone defines efficiency as “getting the most output for a given input.” Everyone wants efficiency however conflicts arise over who gets the benefits and bears the burdens of a policy? How should we measure the values and costs of a policy? What mode of organizing human activity is likely to yield the most efficient results?

Security

Security can be defined as “meeting basic physical needs for survival.” There are many concepts of need. Government should ensure that people have enough food and shelter to survive. In the polis, complications include the issues of the valuation of the resources, standards of comparison (measuring needs according to a fixed standard or a relative one), purposes of resources (should we provide only resources that meet immediate needs for survival), time (current or future) and units of analysis (should society secure only the needs of people as separate individuals or also people’s relational needs).

In the market there may be a security-efficiency trade off when people are not motivated to work. When they are secure often it results in a decline in productivity. The more security society provides, the bigger its service sector. This large service sector has the lowest rate of productivity in the economy versus in the polis where there is no trade-off. In the polis, human productivity increases with increased security. Productivity is low in the service sector only because it is measured in a way that makes services unproductive by definition.

Liberty

“People should be free to do what they want unless their activity harms other people.” In the polis there are complications to this definition. What harms to individuals should trigger government restraints on liberty? Material harms? Elevated risk of injury or loss? Amenity harms? Emotional and psychological harms? Spiritual and moral harms?

What harms to communities, organizations, and groups should trigger restraints on liberty? Structural harms? Accumulative harms? Harms to a group caused by harms to one of its members? Harms to society or community caused by individual failure to undertake helpful actions?

Whose liberty should be curtailed? When the activities of several different people contribute to causing harms, whose activity should be restrained? When corporate actors cause harms, should their activities be restrained?

Part III PROBLEMS

In the rationality project “a problem definition is a statement of a goal and the discrepancy between it and the status quo. In the polis model problem definition is the “strategic representation of situations.” It is strategic because different groups promote their causes. It is a representation as there are many points of view. There are different types of language used to define and portray policy problems: symbol, numbers, causes, interests and decisions.

Symbols

“Symbolic representation is the essence of problem definition in politics.” The meaning of a symbol depends on individual interpretation. Symbols are used to influence others and control their views. In policy problems there are four aspects of symbolic representation:

- 1) Narrative stories – provide explanations of how things work, gripping one’s imagination and offering the promise of a resolution for a scary problem.
- 2) Synecdoches – a figure of speech where an outlandish example is used to represent the a larger universe
- 3) Metaphors – implied comparisons; using a word that denotes one meaning to describe another; in the polis it is a likeness between two policy problems
- 4) Ambiguity – statements with multiple meanings; it allows the transformation of individual actions into collective purposes.

Numbers

A policy problem is often defined by measuring it. Policy discussions often begin with numbers. Numbers can be metaphors, norms, symbols and stories. They can be ambiguous and create illusions. Also, they make intangible qualities seem divisible. In the polis when people are measured, their fate is at stake. As a result, they consciously

manipulate numbers in the selection of measures. “The power to measure is the power to control.” People try to control how others interpret numbers. Part of the strategic problem definition is the choice of measures.

Causes

In politics causes assign responsibility to problems. In the polis a cause places burden on one set of people over another. Causal stories are crafted with symbols and numbers, shaping alliances and settling the distribution of benefits and costs. Action and consequence create four types of causal theories: mechanical, accidental, intentional and inadvertent. In the polis a casual argument is used to challenge or protect existing policies; assign responsibility for fixing a problem; legitimize fixers of the problem; or create new alliances.

Interests

Interests are the sides in politics – groups with a stake in an issue or affected by it. Interests are also the active side of effects. Effects are consequences of actions. The central question in political analysis of public policy is: how/when/why effects are converted to political interests. Mobilization is the process where effects are converted into efforts to bring change. In market theory some interests are stronger than others. In democratic theories government protects weak, legitimate theories.

Decision

“The hallmark of contemporary policy analysis is its focus on rational methods of decision making.” In a rational decision model a person considers all possible alternatives (infinite) and evaluates all possible consequences. “The essence of the model is to tally up the consequences of different alternatives and choose the one that yields the best results.” Good decisions are the result of cogitation. In the polis decisions control the boundaries of a problem. Goals are wishes and intentions, as well as means to gather support. Ambiguity “leaves a policymaker wiggle room in the future.” The purpose of decisions in the polis is to control the number and kinds of alternatives considered. It is the essence of the political game.

Part IV SOLUTIONS

Policy solutions, in the polis, are rarely static. They are ongoing, changing and multifaceted. There are many avenues to policy solutions, such as inducements, rules, facts, rights and powers. Solutions are aimed at influencing groups and getting them to act, choose or behave in a manner in which they otherwise would not do.

Inducements

Inducements are incentives that are “designed by one set of people, applied by another set and received by the third” (Stone, 2002). In the polis both the giver and the target may be a collective entity that has multiple internal views on the inducement. Therefore the meaning of the inducement is interpreted differently by different individuals. The resulting rewards from the inducement may also create alliances among the winners. Finally, inducements can also be offered through negative sanctions.

Rules

“Rules are indirect commands that work over time” (Stone, 2002). They derive their power from their legitimacy. The political nature of rules is that they include and exclude, unite and divide. Since policy problems are complex and varied, rules are best to be flexible enough to accommodate many situations. Since rules benefit some and exclude others the enforcer of rules are subject to many outside pressures.

Facts

Facts are pieces of data that exist in the polis to be interpreted differently by various constituent groups. In the polis they are rarely neutral and are often used to manipulate. The dominant group may have more influence over the dissemination of facts than the lesser groups.

Rights

In the polis, rights can be both positive (an entitlement) or negative (freedom from restraint). Procedural rights guarantee the manner in which decisions will unfold and substantive rights guarantee the essence of an idea, action or entitlement. Various groups in the polis can be the source of the rights and various groups can be the enforcer of the rights. In the polis rights are rarely stated clearly as they need room for interpretation. The amount of power one has in the polis directly affects the degree to which one benefits from various rights.

Powers

Defining who has membership in the polis and his/her role is directly related to power. The power to make decisions can be held by different types and sizes of groups. In addition, power is also affected by the centralization and decentralization of decision making ability. Strategies are often developed with the aim of redistributing power to the prevailing interest group.