

interpretation

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Volume 11 number 1

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Book Reviews

Bureaucrats, Policy Analysts, Statesmen: Who Leads? Edited by Robert Goldwin. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980. Pp. 133. \$10.25.)

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The title of this collection of seven original essays suggests that an understanding of the task of contemporary political leadership must combine both the traditional and the novel. Statesmanship has been studied, discussed, and debated for several thousand years. Bureaucracy, as we commonly understand the term, is a much more recent phenomenon, and has been the subject of systematic reflection for less than a century. Policy analysis is newer still, barely a decade or two old. Most simply defined, it is the application of the data gathering and analytical techniques of the social sciences to the matter of choosing among specific public policy alternatives.

Policy analysis is one of the few true growth fields in American academia. In recent years many of our most prestigious universities have established advanced graduate programs in public policy, and others are not far behind. A vivid indication of the academic respectability of this new field of study is the fact that both Harvard University and the University of California at Berkeley now offer doctorate degrees in the field. The popularity of such programs stems from their avowed purpose to improve political decision making. Politicians, it is claimed, will make better policy in areas like health, transportation, and education if they are informed by the results of systematic policy analysis. The policy analyst becomes the indispensable aid to the practical politician. For over a decade in this country, university faculty and administrators have debated whether the knowledge generated at universities can or should be applied to solve society's problems. Those responsible for the creation of public policy programs have answered an emphatic "yes."

The first purpose of Robert Goldwin's collection is to assess the contribution of policy analysis to political leadership. Six of the essays address this issue explicitly. The first, by Edward Banfield, attacks policy analysis for the failure of its formal analytical (often mathematical) techniques to capture political reality, for its tendency to make public issues even *more* difficult to handle by emphasizing the complex interrelationships and consequences involved in any policy decision, and for its inability to help with the essential tasks of political leadership. The next three essays all defend policy analysis, though for somewhat different reasons. Mark Moore, a professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University—the leading institution for instruction in the new science—defends policy analysis as an essential aid to intuition and judg-

ment in making the numerous “particular substantive choices” demanded of political leaders in the contemporary world. Laurence Silberman, reflecting on his experience as undersecretary of labor, praises the use of policy analysis in evaluating programs which more often serve the interests of governmental bureaucracies than the citizens. Gustave Shubert of the Rand Corporation relates several examples of how analyses done by Rand improved governmental decisions in the areas of housing, welfare, and energy, among others.

The next two essays take a more critical approach to what policy analysis can contribute to wise leadership. In his case study of the debate in Congress on natural gas deregulation in 1977–78, Michael Malbin argues that the heavy reliance on sophisticated econometric analyses only obscured the underlying economic and political assumptions which were the real issue. Herbert Storing, in a comprehensive reflection on American statesmanship left unfinished at the time of his death in 1977, takes strong issue with the notion, central to systems analysis or policy analysis, that all rational decision making is essentially economic in nature. The volume’s final essay, by Werner Dannhauser, focuses not on policy analysis but on the relationship of statesmanship to bureaucracy, and argues that while statesmanship is very much in jeopardy in the modern world, the great threat is not bureaucracy (or presumably policy analysis) but the political philosophy that informs liberal democracy.

None of the contributors to this volume argues that the techniques of modern social science will replace intuition, sound judgment, and prudence. The issue, as articulated here, is not whether contemporary statesmanship can be reduced to policy analysis, but rather whether policy analysis is really necessary for sound political leadership in the modern world. Does it, in a word, actually improve political decision making? It is a weakness of this volume that it includes no proponents of the most radical claims for policy analysis, for the view held by some of its practitioners that the unrefined deliberations of practical politicians must eventually give way to the sophisticated techniques of a comprehensive social science. The range of debate is thus circumscribed by the rather moderate character of the claims made for policy analysis and, one might say, the good sense of its defenders in this volume. But this is also the source of the volume’s greatest strength. Because the case for policy analysis is so reasonably and effectively presented, it must be taken seriously even by those who are normally skeptical about the claims of modern social science (a group that includes many readers of this journal).

The case for policy analysis begins with the sensible proposition that in reaching decisions on complex public policy issues the intuition of politicians is not a sufficient guide. Shubert shows, for example, that if one wants to decide how best to meet the housing problem in large cities, it is necessary first to determine precisely what the “problem” is. This means collecting and analyzing in a systematic way an enormous amount of data, a task for which most ordinary politicians have neither the time, interest, nor training. When

the Rand Corporation carried out such a study for New York City it was discovered that the city "was annually losing more housing units through deterioration and abandonment (38,000 units a year between 1965 and 1967) than it could possibly build." This finding led to a redirection of governmental policies from emphasizing new construction to preserving the existing housing stock. Although some New York City politicians may have intuitively believed that the most effective way to meet the city's housing problem was to prevent the decay of existing units, many others (apparently most) believed that new construction was the most cost-effective solution. Shubert's well taken point is that sound political decision making in areas like housing policy cannot rest on intuition alone, but must be informed by systematic empirical analysis.

Silberman's brief reflections on his service in the department of labor essentially confirm Shubert's claim, although from a different perspective. Silberman is the one defender of policy analysis in the volume who is not himself a policy analyst. As a political executive interested in the effectiveness of labor department programs, he found policy analysis extremely useful as a counterweight to the often exaggerated claims of bureaucrats for the programs to which they were institutionally committed. Something more than intuition or common sense is needed to determine whether a governmental policy is really achieving its objectives. A sound judgment on whether to maintain, expand, reduce, or eliminate existing programs requires some measurement, however imprecise, of their costs, benefits, and consequences. How else are we to know whether Head Start is improving educational performance, whether the Food Stamp program is leading to more nutritious diets, or whether job training efforts are making a dent in the hardcore unemployed?

Many of the most important and interesting political questions and issues, however, are inherently resistant to measurement, especially quantification. A good example (not mentioned in the volume) is whether the widespread dissemination of pornographic materials contributes to moral decay. If the policy analyst is to say anything intelligent about such a question he must transform it into an issue that is amenable to his techniques: for example, does the dissemination of pornography lead to an increase in antisocial behavior. The tendency, as Storing notes, is to focus on "utilities and costs that are measurable over those that are not," even though the immeasurable utilities and costs may be ultimately more important. Moreover, as Banfield points out, the focus on measurable effects of policy innovations necessarily emphasizes short-term over long-term consequences, regardless of the relative importance of these.

With this reservation there can be little doubt that careful empirical analysis is an essential ingredient of sound political decision making in many policy areas. Nonetheless, this is not quite the same as saying that policy analysis, as taught at institutions like the Kennedy School of Government, is essential. As Moore shows, policy analysis involves both the gathering of empirical data and, more distinctively, the organization of that data into "elaborate causal chains,"

often expressed in mathematical form, intended to constitute a “model” of the real world. These models purport to predict, through “rigorous calculations,” the consequences of alternative governmental policies more precisely than is possible through common sense reasoning. It is the analytical technique, and not the data gathering, that is the core of policy analysis and that raises the most serious questions about its contribution to political decision making.

Like a computer that replicates human mathematical calculation, the formal models and causal chains of policy analysis are designed to replicate, in a rigorous and systematic way, the mental processes of a decision maker intent on maximizing the achievement of certain specified goals. Policy analysis does not *determine* goals—this is still a matter of practical judgment—but it does claim to improve upon, and therefore supplant, common sense reasoning about how best to achieve posited goals. The policy analyst asserts that to the extent that we wish to enhance the role of reason in political decision making we must adopt his methods. As Shubert implies, if a politician rejects the conclusions of policy analysis he does so because of “values, particular special interests, and political considerations,” not because there exists an equally legitimate alternative way of reasoning on the merits of public policy.

In his penetrating critique of this view Storing argues that practical reasoning, or prudence, as traditionally understood is not reducible simply to utility-maximizing calculation. He offers the example of the Office of Management and Budget, an indispensable economizing force in contemporary American government. “But is it imaginable,” Storing asks, “that the OMB should govern—would that be reasonable? . . . It is surely important that generals be compelled to face the issue of cost/benefit. . . . But must not generals remain generals? Could the OMB defend the country? Could it conduct foreign relations? Could it protect individual rights?” Rational political decision making requires some attention to the meaning of “an adequate defense,” “the legitimate rights of minorities,” or a decent standard of living for the elderly. Storing maintains that “such end-oriented views” are “independent, indispensable bases of practical rationality.”

Malbin makes a similar point when he shows how the use of various economic analyses during the debate in Congress on natural gas deregulation ill served the deliberative process by deflecting attention away from the crucial underlying assumptions. Some of these were political assumptions about equity or justice that reflected fundamental principled differences between the two political parties. But other assumptions, perhaps more surprisingly, were of a technical economic nature. In this case the key premise was “supply elasticity,” how readily natural gas supplies would respond to increased price. There was no simply objective way to determine in advance supply elasticity: consequently the issue turned simply on whether one had a basically optimistic or pessimistic view about the ability of a free market economy in natural gas to improve supplies to a significant degree. Policy analysis did little to clarify, and much

to obscure, this fundamental issue. Malbin indicates that policy analysts could do a better job of highlighting the technical assumptions crucial to their conclusions. Nonetheless, the problem remains that the artificial precision of quantitative studies may continue to obscure the deeper political issues that are—in principle, if not in practice—at the heart of the decision process.

Whereas these criticisms aim to show that policy analysis does not live up to its claims, others focus on the rather limited nature of the claims themselves and how far they fall short of true statesmanship. Proponents of policy analysis maintain, as Moore argues in this volume, that statesmanship in the contemporary world emerges out of the “day-to-day choices” on “specific substantive issues.” Statesmen need policy analysis because only through policy analysis will the right choices be made on the complex and detailed issues modern governments face. As several contributors to this volume suggest, however, this view misunderstands the task of statesmanship, whether or not policy analysis is essential to choosing particular policies.

For Banfield the “essential tasks of political leadership” are “first, to find the terms on which ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious men will restrain one another, and beyond that, to foster a public opinion that is reasonable about what can and cannot be done to make the society better.” That particular policy decisions are carefully designed to maximize social utility at the least cost will mean little if the interests and passions of men render them unwilling to abide by duly enacted law or if the public expects and demands from government more than it can possibly deliver. Dannhauser reinforces the latter point by calling for Congress and the President to cooperate “in the educating and shaping of a true public opinion,” one that will protect us not only from the dangers of bureaucracy, but, more importantly, from “communism and nihilism.”

Nowhere in this volume is the nature of statesmanship more incisively discussed than in Storing’s analysis of “American Statesmanship: Old and New.” Those familiar with Storing’s writings and teaching during two decades at the University of Chicago will recognize the essay as a masterful integration of a lifetime’s reflections on the American experiment in popular government. It traces the decay of American statesmanship along two parallel paths: the transformation of the framers’ clear-eyed appreciation of the strengths as well as the dangers of popular government into a simple populism; and the rise of the science of decision making as a replacement for the ends-oriented reasoning characteristic of the architects of the American system. The result is that while we still have cases of traditional statesmanship, we “have to a very large extent, lost the understanding of the legitimacy of nonpopulist, nonscientific-management decision making.” Consequently, “these nonpopulist, nonscientific sides of American statesmanship tend to be done poorly and, even when done well, tend to be done under cover.” In the course of describing and explaining these trends, Storing articulates five ingredients of true statesmanship: public instruction, sound practical reasoning (what he calls the “judicial model”

of rationality), moral stature, a grasp of the proper ends of an institution or nation, and decisiveness.

If, as Storing and Dannhauser argue, true statesmanship is in jeopardy in contemporary America, the rise of policy analysis is hardly the cause. Rather, it is more like the effect. The attractiveness of the systematic data gathering and analytical techniques of this new field among its teachers, practitioners, and a growing number of elected officials is testimony both to the role which the desire to serve the public good continues to play in our political life, and to the absence from our public discourse of a clear understanding of traditional conceptions of political leadership. Liberals and conservatives alike would do well to proceed cautiously before attaching high hopes to these new techniques. And there is no better place to begin for thinking through the implications of the new policy science than this fine volume.

Masters of International Thought. By Kenneth Thompson. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980. Pp. xi + 249. \$20.00.)
Morality and Foreign Policy. By Kenneth W. Thompson. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980. Pp. xiii + 197. \$16.95.)

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These books continue Professor Thompson's quest for a viable theory of international politics as the basis for effective and moral foreign policies. In *Masters of International Thought*, he examines the life and writings of eighteen theorists whose principles of international politics transcend particular foreign policy problems. In *Morality and Foreign Policy*, he examines the "relations between morals and politics or between moral principles and the national interests" with emphasis on international politics.

The masters are selected on the basis of their writings, reputations, and influence, as well as on the effect they have had on Thompson's own intellectual development. Each master is the subject of a separate essay, in which that master's personal background and impact on the intellectual and political world is presented and assessed. Leading assumptions, concepts, principles, and overall theory are analyzed and appraised. A bibliography of primary and secondary writings is provided. The essays are organized under four categories. The first, normative thought, includes the Christian realists Herbert Butterfield, Reinhold Niebuhr, Reverend John Courtney Murray, and Martin Wight. The second, European-American concepts of power and politics, includes leading balance of power theorists: E. H. Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau, Nicholas Spykman, Arnold Wolfers, John Herz, and Karl Deutsch. The cold war analysts, the third category, are Walter Lippmann, George F. Kennan, Louis J. Halle, Jr.,