Introduction to Public Policy

Week 3

Parsons, 1995: 41-54.

Philosophical Frameworks of PP

- The philosophical contributions to PP
  - Ethical
  - Normative
  - Methodological
- Concern with policy and problems is a central aspect of political philosophy

Philosophical Frameworks of PP

- Seven groups of philosophers, whose work influenced the analysis of PP
  - Machiavelli and Bacon
  - Bentham and Mill (Utilitarianism)
  - James and Dewey (Pragmatism)
  - Rawls and Nozick (Two theories of justice)
  - Popper (Piecemeal engineering model)
  - Hayek (Markets and individual choice)
  - Etzioni (Communitarianism)
  - Habermas (Communicative rationality)

Machiavelli and Bacon

- Machiavelli (1469-1527)
  - Policy as cunning and deception
    - Policy is the strategy by which goals are achieved
    - Right or wrong policy does not matter, successful outcome is the real source of legitimacy
  - Interested in the relationship between ends and means
    - Criteria to judge those who govern:
      - Success, performance, getting results

Machiavelli

- Those in power need to understand how power works
  - Good-quality information and its interpretation are crucial
- General conclusions on the nature of human behavior and institutions' influence can be drawn
  - Governing is a craft (statecraft) and its study is a science
  - Through knowledge of politics and power, better government is possible

Machiavelli and Bacon

- Bacon (1561-1656)
  - Examined policy in its modern sense
    - Rational course of action based on knowledge
      - "Knowledge is power"
  - The exercise of power required sustaining balance, authority and legitimacy
  - An elevated & powerful role for policy experts
    - The "New Atlantis" book

Machiavelli & Bacon: Similarities

- First-hand experience of politics
- Self-gain motive of policy intellectuals
  - Unemployed after many years of government service & trying to get a job in government again
- Positivism
  - Sought to discover the fundamental forces/laws that govern politics and policy
  - It is possible to acquire scientific knowledge in order to make better policy
- Inductive reasoning
  - From individual cases to rules/laws

Machiavelli & Bacon: Differences

- Policy as
  - Sustaining power by cunning and deception (M)
  - Building support and agreement (B)
- Historical context
  - A time of struggle between princes in and around Italy (M)
  - A time of building consent and agreement in England (B)

Bentham & Mill (Utilitarianism)

- Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)
- James Mill (1773-1836)
  - "The greatest happiness for the greatest number" principle as the foundation of individual and governmental actions
    - How to calculate pleasures and pains?
      - The source of cost-benefit analysis
    - Search for quantifying and modeling human welfare

Bentham & Mill (Utilitarianism)

- Criticisms againts Utilitarianism in PP
  - Policy reform as the promotion of greater social welfare and individual freedom.
  - Does it ignore moral issues as well as questions of equity and fairness?

James & Dewey (Pragmatism)

- William James (1842-1910)
  - Pragmatism as a call for action for social science to make the world a better place.
    - Ideas help people to modify their environment so as to survive and develop.

James & Dewey (Pragmatism)

- John Dewey (1859-1952)
  - Pragmatism as a method of social experimentation
  - A form of "trial and error learning"
  - Democratic decision-making as a model of communication and experimentation

Rawls & Nozick (Two Theories of Justice)

- John Rawls
  - His book, "A Theory of Justice" (1971)
  - A model of justice, which involved fairness
    - Fairness in outcomes
    - Equality of opportunity

Rawls & Nozick (Two Theories of Justice)

- Social & economic inequalities are acceptable only when they are maximizing the benefits of the least advantaged.
  - Similar abilities- similar life chances
  - Recommends state intervention

Rawls & Nozick (Two Theories of Justice)

- Robert Nozick, "Anarchy, State and Utopia" (1974)
  - A powerful critique for the Rawlsian policy-making
    - Distributive justice is not realistic
  - Attacked on `entitlement` and `individual rights`
    - Individuals and markets are the better ways of organizing
  - Less public policy (government intervention) and more individual freedom of choice

Karl Popper
(Peacemeal engineering model)

- Two contributions to PP
  - Methodological contribution
    - Challenged the validity of the Baconian idea of science as induction
    - The observation of facts from which theories and general laws may be deduced

Karl Popper (Peacemeal engineering model)

- Advocated making political decision-making approximate scientific problem-solving
  - Falsification
    - The setting out of conditions in which theories could be falsified
  - Facts/problems do not exist independent of theories (unlike positivists claim)

Karl Popper
(Peacemeal engineering model)

- Implications for empirical social science (and the natural sciences) were immense
  - Scientific theories were those which could be disproved
    - This left social science with a questionable kind of scientific status
  - "General theories that claim to have reached a final truth or knowledge are dangerous to an open society"

Karl Popper
(Peacemeal engineering model)

- **All theories are tentative, and it is of the nature of knowledge to be conjectural.**
  - Knowledge progresses by a process which give rise to tentative theories, subjected to tests of falsifiability, out of which new problems emerge.
  - Social progress takes place as a result of cycles of trial and error experimentation (Peacemeal engineering model)
    - Policy making with a critical, open, experimenting spirit (incrementalism)
    - Limitations of knowledge and human institutions

Hayek (Markets and Individual Choice)

- Books: "Road to Serfdom (1944), "The Constitution of Liberty" (1960)
  - His ideas became influential in late 1970s, at the end of the Keynesian Era
    - One of the leading source of ideas for the emergent "new right"
  - Critical of empirical objective knowledge
    - Human knowledge is very limited and fragmanted
  - Society is not a product of human design, it is a spontaneous order

Hayek (Markets and Individual Choice)

- The ability of government to aggregate and coordinate information to make decisions that interfered with individual choice and markets is limited
  - Such actions are both erroneous and dangerous, leading in its extreme to the evils and inefficiency of authoritarian/ totalitarian regimes
  - Advocated limited government
  - Emphasis on individual choice, markets and rule of law

Hayek (Markets and Individual Choice)

- Appreciation of the politics of ideas
  - Importance of promoting ideas through organizations
  - Founded one of the first think-tanks
    - The Mont Pelerin Society, 1947
  - Inspired the establishment of many others

Etzioni (Communitarianism)

- Amitai Etzioni

- Historical Developments in PP
  - 1960s and 1970s
    - Rawlsian "fairness of outcomes"
  - 1980s
    - Hayekian individualism and markets
  - 1990s
    - Rise of communitarianism

Etzioni (Communitarianism)

- Renewal of the idea of community
  - As an alternative to the state centralism of 60s and 70s and the individualism of 1980s
- Arguments
  - Modern atomised societies have lost their sense of community and social solidarity
  - The social fabric between the state and the individual has withered under market individualism. It must be protected and rebuilt.
    - Schools, families, churches, trade unions…
  - Too much emphasis on rights, not much on duties
    - A new emphasis on individual and mutual responsibility

Etzioni (Communitarianism)

- Communitarianism as a framework of PP making
  - Pointing to the middle way between the excesses of state regulation and the reliance on pure market forces
  - A scaled-back but strong welfare state should be maintained
    - Other tasks should be turned over to individuals, families and communities
  - Principle of subsidiarity
    - The unit that is nearest to the problem needs to solve it.

Habermas (Communicative Rationality)

- ## Jurgen Habermas & Michel Foucault
  - ### The role of reason in human affairs
    - Criticism of the use of rationality as forms of control and oppression
  - ### Critical approaches to PP analysis
    - Instead of rational analytical techniques, Habermas proposes an alternative model of "communicative rationality"

Habermas (Communicative Rationality)

- Reason is reaching understanding in social context
  - Not concerned with objective proof or falsability
- Living together but differently in shared space and time
  - Finding agreement on how to address our collective concerns
  - Construction of mutual understanding

Habermas (Communicative Rationality)

- Implications for PP Analysis
  - The need for a greater attention to language, discourse and argument
  - Search for new analytical methods & institutional processes to promote the communication of societal actors during PP making