

Public Policy Making – Both of the Main Traditions of the Social Sciences Should be Employed

Except in cases of totalitarian regimes, government can be thought of as a process agreed upon by the members of a society to provide goods and services better than individuals can provide for themselves. A policy can be thought of as a statement of just what good or service is to be provided and how. “Better” provision would usually be considered to imply provision where none was possible without government or provision which involved less wastage of resources or greater efficiency.

The morality of the society might well be such that “better” provision would also mean fairer or more equitable provision. Such morality might well see other things as better also.

Government is an institution that is older than the species itself. Forms of government are observable in other species. It therefore makes no sense to suggest that either an individualistically based production and exchange system or a collective production and exchange system is in some sense the basic system. Or alternatively that there is some sense in which a system based on competition is to be preferred over a system based on co-operation.

In very broad terms the social sciences can be divided into:

- A- those that have grown out of a view that social life can be explained with sufficient understanding of the behaviour of individuals, and
- B- those that have grown out of the view that society is a phenomenon *sui generis*, or one that is qualitatively different from the phenomenon of individual human being.

The great pity is that these two traditions have not enjoyed optimal dialogue.

When it comes to understanding a policy issue and resolving a policy problem, wisdom would seem to suggest that drawing on the contributions of both traditions is likely to be more profitable than relying on only one. In other words, it seems to be folly to analyse a policy issue only in terms of the dynamics of society or subsets thereof and equally only in terms of the behaviour (aggregated or disaggregated) of individuals.