

Hertog Political Studies Program, Summer 2013
Week Five — July 15-19

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY

Christopher DeMuth

Systematic ideas and organized knowledge have come to play a central role in American politics and government. Of course, ideas about good and bad policy have always been part of the competition for public office, but in earlier times ideas were often less important than loyalties—to party, class, and locality and to ethnic, religious, and occupational groups. Today, ideas have become much more organized, systematic, and influential. Ideologies such as “social conservative” and “progressive liberal” define the attitudes of many citizens toward candidates and officeholders. Academic fields such as economics and psychology supply highly developed frameworks for understanding and debating issues of public policy. Empirical techniques such as statistics and econometrics are used to interpret social and economic problems and to evaluate the results of government programs. Reflecting these developments, academics and intellectuals now figure prominently in politics and government, working out of think tanks, schools of public policy, journals and websites, and policy offices in the White House, Congress, and program agencies.

This course will study the influence of ideas in four areas of policy contention—taxation, regulation, welfare, and abortion. It will also consider the distinctive approach of one important school of political thought—the “neoconservatives” who congregated at the quarterly journal, *The Public Interest*, beginning in the late 1960s. An initial session will examine the tensions between abstract ideas and the practical requirements of politics and government. Then, turning to our four policy issues, we will read essays by leading neoconservatives—Irving Kristol, Edward C. Banfield, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and James Q. Wilson—and consider the fate of their ideas in the world of politics and policymaking.

Monday, July 15 — Knowledge and Politics: General Considerations

Friedrich A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *American Economic Review* (September 1945).

Daniel P. Moynihan, "Liberalism and Knowledge," in Daniel P. Moynihan, *Coping: On the Practice of Government* (1973).

Edward C. Banfield, "Policy Science as Metaphysical Madness," in *Bureaucrats, Policy Analysts, Statesmen: Who Leads?* (R. A. Goldwin, ed., 1980).

Questions for discussion:

1. *What, according to our authors, are the dangers of melding "policy science" and practical policymaking? Do the dangers arise primarily from the limitations of the sciences themselves, or from the different purposes of science and politics, or from the political ineptitude of intellectuals?*
2. *Where do our authors agree and disagree? Would they have different advice on how to avoid the dangers they identify while reaping the benefits of more informed public policies?*

Tuesday, July 16 — Taxation and Supply-Side Economics

Irving Kristol, "'The Stupid Party'" and "The Republican Future," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 1976 and May 14, 1976, reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978).

Irving Kristol, "Ideology & Supply-Side Economics," *Commentary*, April 1981.

Herbert Stein, "Some 'Supply-Side' Propositions," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1980, reprinted in *Washington Bedtime Stories: The Politics of Money and Jobs* (1986).

Bruce Bartlett, "Supply-Side Economics: 'Voodoo Economics' or Lasting Contribution?," Laffer Associates, November 11, 2003 (read pages 1–2, 10–18).

Christopher DeMuth, "The Real Cliff," *The Weekly Standard*, December 24, 2012.

Questions for discussion:

1. *Are the arguments for supply-side tax cuts primarily economic or political?*
2. *Have supply-side tax cuts been a success, a qualified success, or a failure?*
3. *Is the case for (or against) supply-side economics the same today as it was in 1980?*

Wednesday, July 17 — Understanding Regulation

James Q. Wilson, "Introduction" and "The Politics of Regulation," in *The Politics of Regulation* (J.Q. Wilson, ed., 1980).

George J. Stigler, "Trying to Understanding the Regulatory Leviathan," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 1980.

George J. Stigler, "The Process and Progress of Economics," Nobel Memorial Prize Lecture, December 8, 1982 (excerpt).

Christopher DeMuth, "Our Regulatory State," *National Affairs* 12 (Summer 2012).

Questions for discussion:

1. Which is more helpful in understanding the nature of government regulation—Wilson's categorization of different types of regulation and their distinctive politics, or Stigler's unified economic theory?
2. Are the authors' analyses "normative" as well as "positive"—that is, are they useful in designing strategies for improving regulation?
3. Do today's regulatory policy debates reflect either Wilson's or Stigler's ideas from thirty years ago?

Thursday, July 18 — Welfare and Its Reform

Edward C. Banfield, "Welfare: A Crisis Without 'Solutions'," *The Public Interest*, Summer 1969.

Daniel P. Moynihan, *Family and Nation* (1986) (excerpt).

Charles Murray, "No, Welfare Isn't Really the Problem," *The Public Interest*, Summer 1986.

Daniel P. Moynihan, "In Opposition to the Welfare Reform Bill," United States Senate, 104(2) *Congressional Record*, S8074–8076, July 18, 1996.

Douglas J. Besharov, "Two Cheers for American Welfare Reform: Lessons Learned, Questions Raised, Next Steps," in *When Hassle Means Help: The International Lessons of Conditional Welfare* (L. Kay and O.M. Hartwich, ed., 2008).

Questions for discussion:

1. Where does Senator Moynihan differ from Banfield and Murray on the nature of the welfare problem and purposes of welfare reform?
2. Is Moynihan a "neoconservative"? Does his position on welfare policy seem to reflect his occupation as a practicing politician rather than academic?
3. Who seems to have been vindicated by the results of welfare reform to date?

Friday, July 19 — Rights versus Morality in Abortion Policy

James Q. Wilson, "Sympathy" and "Sociability," in *The Moral Sense* (1993).

James Q. Wilson, "On Abortion," *Commentary*, January 1994.

"On Abortion—Letters and Response," *Commentary*, March 1994.

OPTIONAL: Hadley Arkes and James Q. Wilson, "Abortion Facts and Feelings," *First Things*, April-May 1994.

FoxNews.com, "Lawmakers Push Ultrasound Bills as More Americans Say They're Pro-Life," February 18, 2009.

Guttmacher Institute, "State Requirements for Ultrasound," March 1, 2013.

Questions for discussion:

1. *What is the difference between morality and rights?*
2. *Is abortion a matter of morality or of rights? Why have advocates on both sides sometimes framed it as a moral issue and sometimes as a rights issue?*
3. *Was it a help or hindrance to Wilson's proposal that it was attacked by both pro-life and pro-choice advocates?*