
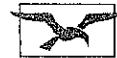


POLICY PARADOX:  
THE ART OF POLITICAL  
DECISION MAKING 

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DEBORAH STONE

Brandeis University



1997

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*For Jim  
somewhere always,  
alone among the noise and policies of summer*

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## The Market and the Polis

A theory of policy politics must start with a model of political society, that is, a model of the simplest version of society that retains the essential elements of politics. *Polis*, the Greek word for city-state, seems a fitting name for the essential political society because it conjures up an entity small enough to have very simple forms of organization yet large enough to embody the elements of politics. In searching for the elements of politics, it is helpful to use the market model as a foil because of its predominance in contemporary policy discussions. The contrast between the models of political and market society will illuminate the ways the market model grossly distorts political life.

A market can be simply defined as a social system in which individuals pursue their own welfare by exchanging things with others whenever trades are mutually beneficial. Economists often begin their discussions of the market by conjuring up the Robinson Crusoe society, where two people on a lush tropical island swap coconuts and small game animals. They trade to make each person better off, but since each person always has the option of producing everything for himself, trading is never an absolute necessity for either one. (Economists usually neglect to mention that the "real" Crusoe was able to salvage a veritable microcosm of industrial society from his shipwrecked vessel—from gunpowder and muskets to cables and nails.) Participants in the market are in competition with each other for scarce resources; each person tries to acquire things at the least possible cost, and to convert raw materials into more valuable things that can be sold at the highest possible price.

In the market model, individuals act only to maximize their own self-interest. Here "self-interest" means their own welfare, however they define that for themselves. It does not mean that they act "selfishly"; their self-interest might include, for example, the well-being of their family and friends. The competitive drive to maximize one's own welfare stimulates people to be very resourceful, creative, clever, and productive, and ultimately raises the level of economic well-being of society as a whole. With this description of the essence of the market model, we can start to build an alternative model of the polis by contrasting more detailed features of the market model and a political community.

## COMMUNITY

*Start* A model purporting to capture the essence of political life would have to be far more complex than the Robinson Crusoe society, with or without its industrial artifacts. Because politics and policy can happen only in communities, community must be the starting point of our polis. Public policy is about communities trying to achieve something as communities. This is true even though there is almost always conflict within a community over what its goals should be and who its members are, and even though every communal goal ultimately must be achieved through the behavior of individuals. Unlike the market, which starts with individuals and assumes no goals, preferences, or intentions other than those held by individuals, a model of the polis must assume both collective will and collective effort.

Untold volumes of political philosophy have tried to define and explain this phenomenon of collective intention. But even without being able to define it, we know intuitively that societies behave as if they had one. We can scarcely speak about societies without using the language of collective will ("Democrats want . . ."; "Farmers seek . . ."; "The administration is trying . . ."). Every child knows the feeling of being in a group and reaching consensus. We can argue about whether consensus implies unanimity or only majority, or whether apparent consensus masks suppressed dissension. But we know that consensus is a feeling of collective will, and we know when it exists and when it does not, just as surely (and sometimes mistakenly) as we know when we are hungry and when we are not.

A community must have a membership, and some way of defining who is a member of the community and who is not. Membership is in

some sense the primary political issue, for membership definitions and rules determine who is allowed to participate in community activities, and who is governed by community rules and authority. Nation-states have rules for citizenship. Private clubs have qualifications for members and procedures by which people can join. Churches have formal rituals for new members to join. Neighborhoods may have no formal rules limiting who may become a member, but informal practices such as restrictive covenants on property deeds, bank redlining in mortgage lending, and sheer harassment may accomplish racial exclusion when formal rules cannot.

The most highly contested and passionate political fights are about membership? Mere physical residence in a place is not always the same thing as political membership. Proposition 187 in California, a provision that prohibits undocumented aliens from using public schools, Medicaid, and other social programs, is one of many immigration backlash movements that differentiates among residents, giving political benefits to some but not others. The distinction between residence and citizenship is only the beginning of conflicts over membership. In the United States, we have had a long tradition of multiple civic statuses among people who were nominally citizens: female and black citizens were not allowed to vote, own property, or serve on juries, for example, and Chinese-American citizens were subject to unique restrictions, such as having to carry proof of citizenship and being subject to deportation.<sup>1</sup>

A model of the polis must also include a distinction between political community and cultural community. A political community is a group of people who live under the same political rules and structure of governance and share status as citizens. A cultural community is a group of people who share a culture and draw their identities from a common language, history, and traditions.<sup>2</sup> In many nations, including the United States, the political community includes diverse cultural communities, and policy politics entails a profound dilemma: how to integrate several cultural communities into a single political community

<sup>1</sup>The concept and practice of multiple civic statuses is developed and documented by Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (Sept. 1993): 549-66. An excellent meditation on membership is Chapter 2 of Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>This distinction, as well as the whole issue of cultural pluralism within political communities, is clearly and richly explored in Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

without destroying or sacrificing their identity and integrity. Issues such as bilingual education or interracial adoption simply cannot be understood in terms of individuals pursuing their self-interests. The arguments for permitting or encouraging bilingual education, or for prohibiting adoption of black and Native American children by parents of a different cultural community, are about defense of communities, and about the pitting of community interests against individual interests.

Membership in a community defines social and economic rights as well as political rights. What makes a collection of individuals a community is not only some definitional principles specifying who's in and who's out, but also mutual aid among members. Sharing burdens and bounty is the glue that holds people together. When immigrant groups have come to the U.S. (or elsewhere), they have tended to stick together in ethnic neighborhoods, and one of the first things they do is establish mutual aid societies to pool their resources. Through these associations, they provide each other with money for culturally acceptable funerals, for sickness and life insurance, and for credit to establish new businesses.<sup>3</sup> Pooling resources for redistribution to the needy is the essence of insurance, and in this sense of sharing and caring for each other, insurance is a characteristic feature of community.

In the market model, insurance is another financial product that firms sell in order to make a profit, and buyers buy in order to protect themselves against economic losses due to various risks, such as the risk of becoming unable to work. In the polis, mutual aid is a good in itself that people create, collectively, in order to foster and protect a community. Mutual aid is one bond among individuals that holds them together as a community. And in a larger sense, sharing, caring, and maintaining relationships is at least as strong a motivator of human behavior as competition, separation, and promotion of one's separate self-interests.

#### PUBLIC INTEREST

In the polis, there is a public interest. "Public interest" might mean any of several things. It could be individual interests held in common,

<sup>3</sup>See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Scott Cummings, ed., *Self-Help in Urban America: Patterns of Minority Business Enterprise* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1980).

things everyone wants for themselves, such as a high standard of living. It could be individual goals for the community. Often people want things for their community that conflict with what they want for themselves. They want good schools and clean air, perhaps, but also lower taxes and the right to burn their trash. Citizens in this view have two sides: a private, rather self-interested side and a more public-spirited side, and we might think of the public interest as those things desired by the public-spirited side of citizens.

Yet another interpretation of public interest is those goals on which there is a consensus. Programs and policies favored by a majority of citizens, for example, would comprise the public interest. In this interpretation, the public interest is not necessarily enduring. It is whatever most people want at the moment, and so it changes over time. And of course, this notion of public interest raises questions of what counts as consensus and how we would know whether true consensus exists.

Finally, the public interest could mean things that are good for a community as a community. Even the most minimally organized community has some stake in preserving its own sense of order and fair play, whatever form that takes. All communities have a general interest in having some governing processes and some means for resolving disputes without violence. The members of a community almost always have an interest in its survival, and therefore in its perpetuation and its defense against outsiders. This question of community survival is at the heart of the debate over nuclear weapons. One side argues that nuclear weapons are essential for survival because only they can provide sufficient national defense. The other side argues that nuclear weapons are antithetical to survival because, if used, they will destroy society and possibly annihilate mankind. Both sides agree that community survival is what is at stake.

There is virtually never full agreement on the public interest, yet we need to make it a defining characteristic of the polis because so much of politics is people fighting over what the public interest is and trying to realize their own definitions of it. Let it be an empty box, but no matter; in the polis, people expend a lot of energy trying to fill up that box. The concept of public interest is to the polis what self-interest is to the market. They are both abstractions whose specific contents we do not need to know in order to use them to explain and predict people's behavior. We simply assume that people behave as if they were trying to realize the public interest or maximize their self-interest.

This is not to deny that politics also includes people pursuing their self-interest. But there is no society on earth in which people are

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allowed to do that blatantly and exclusively, so that even if we only want to understand how people pursue their self-interest, we need to understand how conceptions of the public interest shape and constrain people's strategies for pursuing their own interests.

It would be as much a mistake to think that the market has no concept of public interest as to believe that the polis has no room for self-interest. But there is a world of difference between public interest in a market and a polis. In theory, the public interest or general welfare in a market society is the net result of all individuals pursuing their self-interest. In economic theory, given a well-functioning market and a fair initial income distribution, whatever happens is by definition the best result for society as a whole. In a market, in short, the empty box of public interest is filled as an afterthought with the side effects of other activities. In the polis, by contrast, people fill the box intentionally, with forethought, planning, and conscious effort.

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### COMMONS PROBLEMS

Because people often pursue a conception of public interest that is different from their conception of self-interest, the polis is characterized by a special problem: how to combine self-interest and public interest, or, to put it another way, how to have both private benefits and collective benefits. Situations where self-interest and public interest work against each other are known as commons problems, and in the polis, commons problems are common. There are two types of commons problems. In one, actions with private benefits entail social costs; for example, discharging industrial wastes into a lake is a cheap method of disposal for a factory owner but ruins the water for everyone else. In the other, social benefits necessitate private sacrifices; for example, maintaining a school system requires individual tax payments. But note that any situation can be described both ways: clean lakes are a social benefit entailing the private costs of nonpolluting waste disposal, and a poor school system is the social cost of high private consumption. Whether we label a situation as "social benefits and private costs," or as "social costs and private benefits" is a matter of point of view. Commons problems are also called collective action problems because it is hard to motivate people to undertake private costs or forgo private benefits for the collective good.

In market theory, commons problems are thought to be the exception rather than the rule. Most actions in the market model do not

have social consequences. In the polis, by contrast, commons problems are everything. Not only do they crop up frequently, but most significant policy problems are commons problems. It is rare in the polis that the benefits and costs of an action are entirely self-contained, affecting only one or two individuals. Actions have not only immediate effects, but side effects, unanticipated consequences, second- and third-order effects, long-term effects, and ripple effects. The language of policy is full of such metaphors recognizing the broad social consequences of individual actions. The major dilemma of policy in the polis is how to get people to give primacy to these broader consequences in their private calculus of choices, especially in an era when the dominant culture celebrates private consumption and personal gain.

### INFLUENCE

Fortunately, the vast gap between self-interest and public interest is bridged in the polis by some potent forces: influence, cooperation, and loyalty. Influence is inherent in communities, even communities of two. People are not freewheeling, freethinking atoms whose desires arise from spontaneous generation. Our ideas about what we want and the choices we make are shaped by education, persuasion, and the general process of socialization. (Chapter 3 goes into more detail about how people's desires, or what economists call "preferences," are shaped by influences outside themselves.) Several studies of inner-city youths, for example, have shown how the desire for gold chains, expensive sneakers, and luxury cars is nothing but a reflection of mainstream consumer culture in which these things are heavily promoted as desirable. Yet according to some views, poor kids are supposed to ignore and resist the powerful messages around them, because they don't have enough (legitimately earned) money to afford these items.

Actions, no less than ideas, are influenced by others—by the choices other people have made and the ones we expect them to make, by what they want us to do, and by what we think they expect us to do. More often than not, our choices are conditional. A worker will go out on strike only if she thinks that enough of her fellow workers will join her. A citizen will complain about postal service only if he believes that the post office will take some action in response.

Influence works not simply by putting one individual under a figurative spell of another, but also in ways that lead to curious phenomena

of collective behavior. "Bandwagon effects" in elections happen when a candidate's initial lead causes people to support him or her because they want to be on board with a winner. Panics happen when people fear an economic collapse, rush to cash out their bank accounts, and in so doing bring about the collapse they feared. Mobs often act with a peculiar sense of direction and purpose, as if coordinated by a leader, when in fact there is none. Fads for hula hoops or backward baseball caps are frivolous examples of collective behavior; prison riots and "white flight" from urban neighborhoods are more serious. Such things can happen only because people's choices are conditional. They want to do something only if most people will do it (say, go on strike), or to do something before most people do it (say, get their money out of the bank).

Influence sometimes spills over into coercion, and the line between them is fuzzy at best. In fact, one big difference between traditional conservatives and liberals is where they place that line. Liberals tend to see coercion in economic necessity, and the far Left is wont to see it in any kind of need, even that born of desire to "keep up with the Joneses." Conservatives have a more restricted view of coercion, seeing it only in physical force and commands backed up by the threat of force; but the far Right is wont to see coercion in any government rule or regulation, because all laws are backed by the government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. There is no correct place to draw the line, because coercion is an idea about behavior, a label and an interpretation, rather than the behavior itself. In all its fuzziness, the influence-coercion boundary will be an aspect of many of the dilemmas developed in this book. For now, it is important to state that influence—in all its varieties and degrees of strength—is one of the central elements in politics.

## COOPERATION

In the polis, cooperation is every bit as important as competition. This is true for two reasons. First, politics involves seeking allies and organizing cooperation in order to compete with opponents. Whenever there are two sides to an issue and more than two people involved, there must be alliances among the people on one side. Children usually learn this lesson when they play in threesomes. Every conflict unites some people as it divides others, and politics has as much to do with how alliances are made and held together as with how people are di-

vided.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the two-person models so prominent in the field of economics are politically empty: they have no possibility for strategic coalitions and shifting alliances, nor do they allow for joint effort, leadership, or coordination. For example, in one of the most popular textbooks on policy analysis, the chapter on "Public Choice," which deals with questions of the nature of society, how we should evaluate social welfare, and how we should make social choices, is developed entirely around a two-person model called "Bill-John City."<sup>5</sup>

The second reason cooperation must be central to a model of politics is that it is essential to power. Cooperation is often a more effective form of subordination than coercion. Authority that depends solely on coercion cannot extend very far. Even prison guards, with seemingly all the resources stacked on their side, need the cooperation of inmates to keep order in the prison. Despite bars, locks, and the guards' monopoly on weapons, prisoners outnumber the guards. So guards bargain with prisoners, offering them favors and privileges to gain their cooperation.<sup>6</sup> One of the most chilling aspects of accounts of Nazi concentration camps is how the camp commanders obtained the cooperation and participation of inmates in running the camps. Under threat of imminent death, prisoners were willing to conduct massacres and handle the bodies, while Nazi soldiers had often balked at the same tasks.<sup>7</sup> Accounts of extreme terrorism such as this illustrate another way that cooperation and coercion can become intertwined.

In the ideal market of textbooks, there is nothing but pure competition, which means no cooperation among either buyers or sellers. Sellers compete with each other to obtain raw materials at the lowest prices and to sell their products at the highest profit. They compete with perspicacious buyers, who shop around for the best deals and thereby force the sellers to offer lower prices. Cooperation, when it occurs, is a deviation from the well-functioning market and most words to describe it in the market model are pejorative—collusion, oligarchy, price-fixing, insider trading. In the polis, cooperation is the norm. It is

<sup>4</sup>A wonderful treatise on this aspect of politics is E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1970), especially chap. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Edith Stokey and Richard Zeckhauser, *A Primer of Policy Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1978), chap. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Gresham Sykes, *Society of Captives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), chap. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Jean-Francois Steiner, *Treblinka* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), especially pp. 55–75.

the inseparable other side of competition and a necessary ingredient of power. The words to describe it are decidedly more positive—coalition, alliance, union, party, support.

### LOYALTY

Related to cooperation is loyalty. Cooperation entails alliances, and alliances are at least somewhat enduring. In the ideal market, a buyer will switch suppliers in response to a price or quality change, rather than stick with the previous supplier. There is no “glue” in buyer-seller relations. In politics, relationships are not so fluid. They involve gifts, favors, support, and, most of all, future obligations. Political alliances bind people over time. To paraphrase E. E. Schattschneider, politics is more like choosing a spouse than shopping in a five-and-ten-cent store.<sup>8</sup>

The differing views of loyalty in the market and polis models are evident from our language, also. In the market, people are “buyers” and “sellers.” In politics, they are “enemies” and “friends.” It is characteristic of friendships that we stick with our friends, even when they hurt us or do things not much to our liking. We honor friends more for what we have shared in the past than for what we expect them to do for us now and in the future. Friendships are forgiving in a way that pure commercial relationships are not (or should not be). The idea of a “pure” commercial relationship is precisely one not tainted by loyalty or sentiment. In the polis, history counts for a lot; in the market, it counts for nothing.

This does not mean that political alliances are perfectly stable or that people never abandon friends and join hands with former enemies. Children learn this lesson from their threesomes, too. But it does mean that in the polis there is a presumption of loyalty. The expectation is that people will normally stick by their friends and allies, and that it takes a major event—something that triggers a deep fear or offers a vast opportunity—to get them to switch their loyalties. There is risk to breaking old alliances, and people do not do it lightly.

### GROUPS—building blocks

Influence, cooperation, and loyalty are powerful forces, and the result is that groups and organizations, rather than individuals, are the building

<sup>8</sup>Schattschneider, op. cit. (note 4), p. 66.

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blocks of the polis.<sup>9</sup> Groups are important in three ways. First, people belong to institutions and organizations, even when they are not formal members. They are participants in organizations as citizens, employees, customers, students, taxpayers, voters, and potential recruits, if not as staff, managers, or leaders. Their opinions are shaped by organizations, their interests are profoundly affected by the behavior of organizations, and they depend on organizations to represent their interests.

Second, policy making is not only about solving public problems, but about how groups are formed, split, and re-formed to achieve public purposes. On policy issues of any significance, it is groups that confront each other, using individuals only as their spokesmen. Groups coalesce and divide over policy proposals, depending on how they expect the proposal to affect them. Injured war veterans are glad to have the support of the retarded citizen groups when they are trying to establish a National Institute of Handicapped Research, but eager to dissociate themselves when job rights for the handicapped are at issue.

Third, groups are important because decisions of the polis are collective. They are explicitly collective, through formal procedures such as voting, administrative rule-making, and bargaining, and through public bodies, such as courts, juries, legislatures, committees, or agencies. Beyond this formal sense, public decisions are implicitly collective in that even when officials have “sole authority,” they are influenced by outside opinion and pressure. Policy decisions are not made by abstract people, but by people in social roles and organizations, addressing audiences of people in social roles and organizations, and using procedures that have been collectively approved. The roles, settings, procedures, and audiences exert their own influence, even on the most strong-willed and independent minds.

### INFORMATION

In the ideal market, information is “perfect,” meaning it is accurate, complete, and available to everyone at no cost. In the polis, by contrast,

<sup>9</sup>To make groups the building block of the polis is not to espouse a pluralist theory of politics. Central to pluralist theory is the belief that all important interests become organized in groups and thus are represented in the give-and-take of pressure group politics. Equally important is the belief that no group can consistently dominate politics. I insist on groups not to show that a political system is fair or representative or balanced, but rather to point out that politics is necessarily a system of alliances. If we look at people only as individuals, we will miss facets of their motivation and action essential to an understanding of policy; even worse, we will miss aspects of politics that cannot be captured simply by adding up individual actions.



information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategically withheld. Of course, it would be silly to say there is no such thing as correct information. Surely, when the newspaper reports that a share of IBM stock sold yesterday for \$118, or that Senator Kennedy voted for a gun control bill, or that a police officer used the word "nigger" forty-one times in tape-recorded interviews, we are quite confident that the information is accurate and that it makes sense to think of that kind of information as being correct or incorrect. But in politics, the important thing is what people make of such reports. People act on what they believe to be the financial health of a company, whether they think their senator represents their interests, or what they think a policeman's use of racial epithets means for the possibility of fair trials for black citizens. Interpretations are more powerful than facts.

Much of what we "know" is what we believe to be true. And what we believe about information depends on who tells us (the source) and how it is presented (the medium, the choice of language, the context). Some people are more likely to believe medical information from a doctor than from a friend, whereas others are more likely to believe a friend than a doctor. Some people find print more convincing than television, and vice versa. The words, pictures, and imagery of information affect its very message as well as its persuasiveness. Both the timing of information with respect to related events and the juxtaposition of one set of ideas with another can change the way information is perceived.

Because politics is driven by how people interpret information, much political activity is an effort to control interpretations. Political candidates and their campaign advisors are notorious for their creative presentation of information, or "spin control." But strategic manipulation of information is by no means the preserve of shady politicians. We all do it, have done it, and will continue to do it. (Think about the last time you told your professor why your paper was late, your students why the exams weren't graded yet, your friendly IRS agent what your earnings were, or even yourself about your honesty.) Information in the polis is different from information in the market model, both because it depends so much on interpretation and because it is itself the object of strategic manipulation. Part III of this book is centrally concerned with how information about policy is strategically created in politics.

In the polis, information is never complete. We can never know all the possible means for achieving a goal or all the possible effects of an action, especially since all actions have side effects, unanticipated

consequences, and long-term effects. Nor can we know for sure what other people will do in response to our actions, yet often we choose to act on the basis of what we expect others to do. If people act at all, they must necessarily act on guesses, hunches, expectations, hopes, and faith, as well as on facts.

Information is never fully and equally available to all participants in politics. There is a cost to acquiring information, if only the cost of spending one's own time. To the extent that information is complicated, sophisticated, or technical, it requires education to be understood, and education is not uniformly distributed. These are by now standard critiques of the market model.

But even more important for a model of the polis is that crucial information is very often deliberately kept secret. The ideas of inventors, the business plans of entrepreneurs, the decision of a government to devalue its currency, the number of seats American Airlines reserves for "Super Saver" fares, whether a putative candidate will in fact run for election, where the town fathers are thinking of locating a sewage treatment plant—every one of these things is kept secret because someone expects someone else to behave differently once the information is made public. Secrecy and revelation are tools of political strategy, and we would grossly misunderstand the character of information in politics if we thought of it as neutral facts, readily disclosed.

## PASSION

In the market, economic resources are governed by the laws of matter. Resources are finite, scarce, and consumed upon use. Whatever is used for making guns cannot be used for making butter (a textbook example conceived by someone who surely never made either). People can do only one thing at a time (produce guns or butter) and material can be only one thing at a time (a gun or a stick of butter).

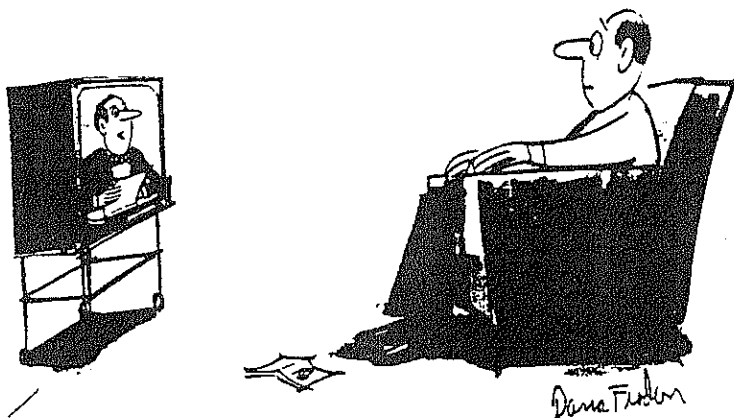
In the polis, there is another set of laws operating alongside the laws of matter that might be called laws of paradox if the phrase weren't paradoxical itself. Instead I'll call them the laws of passion, because they describe phenomena that behave more like emotions than like physical matter. One of these laws is that passion feeds on itself. Like passion, political resources are often enlarged or enhanced through use, rather than diminished. Channels of influence and political connections, for example, grow by being used. The more people work together and help each other, the more committed they become to

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each other and to their nominal goal. The more something is done—say, a regulatory agency consults with industry leaders on its proposals, or a school board negotiates with teachers on salaries—the more valuable the personal connections and organizational ties become, and the more people's expectations of "doing things the way they have always been done" grow.

Political skills and authority also grow with use, and it is no accident that we often use the metaphor of "exercise" when talking about them. That skills should grow with practice is not so surprising, but it is worth exploring why authority should work the same way. Precedent is important in authority. The more one makes certain types of decisions, the easier it is to continue in the same path, in part because repeated decisions require no new thought, and in part because people are less likely to resist or even question orders and requests they have obeyed before. How often have we justified our own begrudging compliance by telling ourselves, "I've never protested all the other times I've been asked to do this, so how can I refuse now?" Or, on the other side, "I've let them get away with it many times before, so it is hardly fair to punish them now." In short, the more often an order is issued and obeyed, the stronger the presumption of compliance.

This phenomenon of resource expansion through exercise, use, practice, and expression is ignored in the market model. A distinguished former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors once



"Closing averages on the human scene were mixed today. Brotherly love was down two points, while enlightened self-interest gained a half. Vanity showed no movement, and guarded optimism slipped a point in sluggish trading. Over all, the status quo remained unchanged."

wrote that market-like arrangements are good because they "reduce the need for compassion, patriotism, brotherly love and cultural solidarity as motivating forces behind social improvement. . . . However vital [these things] may be to a civilized society, [they] are in *too short supply* to serve as substitutes" for the more plentiful motive of self-interest.<sup>10</sup> To make such an analogy between compassion and widgets, to see them both as items with fixed quantities that are diminished by use, is to be blinded by the market model. Who but a die-hard economist would believe that people are born with a limited stockpile of sentiments and passions, to be hoarded through life lest they be spent too quickly? More often than not, waving the flag increases the feeling of patriotism, just as comforting a frightened child increases one's sense of compassion.

Some other laws of passion governing the polis can be mentioned briefly here and will be explored more fully in the rest of the book. One is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A protest march, for example, means something more than a few thousand people walking down a street; the repeated refusal to sell houses to blacks in a neighborhood means something more than a series of unrelated seller decisions. Widgets may simply get cheaper through mass production—economists call that economies of scale—but most human actions change their meaning and impact when done in concert or in quantity.

Another law of passion is that things can mean (and therefore be) more than one thing at once. Conviction of white-collar criminals with nominal fines means both that the government condemns the activity and that it does not. Any expenditure is a debit to the spender, but income to somebody else. Thus, the growth of health care expenditures bemoaned by employers and taxpayers also means new professional opportunities and job growth, especially for women and minorities. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of ambiguity in politics. Here it is enough to note that ambiguity and symbolic meanings find no home in the market model of society, where everything has its precise value or cost.

## POWER

Up to this point I have defined the polis by contrasting it with a market model of society. It is worth summarizing the characteristics here,

<sup>10</sup>Charles L. Schultze, *The Public Use of Private Interest* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1977), pp. 17–18, emphasis added.

Passion vs  
Market

emphasizing what the polis is instead of what it is not:

- ✓ 1. It is a community, or perhaps multiple communities, with ideas, images, will, and effort quite apart from individual goals and behavior.
- ✓ 2. It has a public interest, if only as an idea about which people fight.
- ✓ 3. Most of its policy problems are commons problems.
4. Influence is pervasive, and the boundary between influence and coercion is always contested.
- ✓ 5. Cooperation is as important as competition.
6. Loyalty is the norm.
7. Groups and organizations are the building blocks.
8. Information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategic.
9. It is governed by the laws of passion as well as the laws of matter.

By now, my readers must surely be wondering how a reputable political scientist could build a model of political society without making power a defining characteristic, let alone the primary one. I save power for last because it is derived from all the other elements. Power cannot be defined without reference to them. It is a phenomenon of communities. Its purpose is always to subordinate individual self-interest to other interests—sometimes to other individual or group interests, sometimes to the public interest. It operates through influence, cooperation, and loyalty. It is based also on the strategic control of information. And finally, it is a resource that obeys the laws of passion rather than the laws of matter.

Any model of society must specify its source of energy, the force or forces that drive change. In the market model, change is driven by exchange, which is in turn motivated by the individual quest to improve one's own welfare. Through exchanges, the use and distribution of resources is changed.

In the polis, change occurs through the interaction of mutually defining ideas and alliances. Ideas about politics shape political alliances, and strategic considerations of building and maintaining alliances in turn shape the ideas people espouse and seek to implement. In my model of the polis, I emphasize ideas and portrayals as key forms of power in policy making. This book is not so much about how people collect and deploy the "traditional" resources of power—money, votes, and offices—but how they use ideas to gather political support and diminish the support of opponents, all in order to control policy.

Ideas are the very stuff of politics. People fight about ideas, fight for them, and fight against them. Political conflict is never simply over

Based on...

CONCEPTS OF SOCIETY

	<i>Market Model</i>	<i>Polis Model</i>
1. Unit of analysis	individual	community
2. Motivations	self-interest	public interest (as well as self-interest)
3. Chief conflict	self-interest vs. self-interest	self-interest vs. public interest (commons problems)
4. Source of people's ideas and preferences	self-generation within the individual	influences from outside
5. Nature of collective activity	competition	cooperation and competition
6. Criteria for individual decision-making	maximizing self-interest, minimizing cost	loyalty (to people, places, organizations, products), maximize self-interest, promote public interest
7. Building blocks of social action	individuals	groups and organizations
8. Nature of information	accurate, complete, fully available	ambiguous, interpretive, incomplete, strategically manipulated
9. How things work	laws of matter (eg., material resources are finite and diminish with use)	laws of passion (eg., human resources are renewable and expand with use)
10. Sources of change	material exchange  quest to maximize own welfare	ideas, persuasion, alliances  pursuit of power, pursuit of own welfare, pursuit of public interest

material conditions and choices, but over what is legitimate. The passion in politics comes from conflicting senses of fairness, justice, rightness, and goodness. Moreover, people fight with ideas as well as about them. The different sides in a conflict create different portrayals of the battle—who is affected, how they are affected, and what is at stake. Political fights are conducted with money, with rules, with votes, and with favors, to be sure, but they are conducted above all with words and ideas.

Every idea about policy draws boundaries. It tells what or who is included or excluded in a category. These boundaries are more than intellectual—they define people in and out of a conflict or place them on different sides. In politics, the representation of issues is strategically designed to attract support to one's side, to forge some alliances and break others. Ideas and alliances are intimately connected.

Finally, the interaction between ideas and alliances is ever-changing and never-ending. Problems in the polis are never "solved" in the way that economic needs are met in the market model. It is not as though we can place an order for justice, and once the order is filled, the job is done. (Indeed, modern economists have had to wrestle with the problem of why even material needs seem to grow even as they are fulfilled.) As Plutarch wrote:

They are wrong who think that politics is like an ocean voyage or a military campaign, something to be done with some end in view, or something which levels off as soon as that end is reached. It is not a public chore, to be got over with; it is a way of life.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Plutarch, cited in Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1982), p. 109.

Intro & Chap 1 - Early

## PART II

## GOALS