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PUBLIC POLICY

rights and wrongs of banning smoking in public places had been hotly contested for years; but once the risks of "passive smoking" became known, it ceased being a matter of moral dispute and became a straightforward issue of preventing public assaults (Goodin 1989).

Issues cease being issues for all sorts of reasons: some good, some bad. "Benign neglect" might have been the best way of treating all sorts of issues, ranging from race to abortion (Luker 1984). Making public policy can often be a mistake. But making an issue of child abuse and neglect was almost certainly not a mistake (Nelson 1984). The difference between those cases is that in the former there was a real risk of countermobilization undoing any good done by making de facto policies more public, whereas in the latter there seems little risk of countermobilization by or even on behalf of child abusers.

Thinking about the way issues become, or fail to become, policy "problems" takes us right back to the heart of the argument about the persuasive vocation of policy studies. We have argued that the grounds for this persuasive conception are formidable. They include the limits of instrumental rationality; the importance of deliberation in policy formation; the overwhelming evidence of the way modern governing conditions demand a style of policy making that maximizes consultation and voluntary coordination.

"High modernism" is an anachronism. Running modern government by its dictates is like trying to assemble motor cars on a replica of one of Ford's 1920s assembly lines—a recipe for defective production, when interacting components are not fully decomposable (Simon 1981).

But the pursuit of this persuasive vocation is a hard road to follow. It demands a unique combination of skills: the skills of "normal" social science allied to the skills of "rhetoric" in the best sense of that much misused word. And the persuasive vocation must be practised in a hostile world. There is hostility from pressed decision makers who feel impelled to make rapid decisions in the face of urgency or even crisis; hostility from the still powerful administrative doctrines associated with the high modernist project; and hostility from entrenched powers and interests threatened by more reflective and inclusive modes of decision. Intellectually anachronistic doctrines continue to flourish in the world of policy practice for a whole range of reasons, and all are applicable to the case of high modernism. Within bureaucracies and in the vastly rewarding consulting industries that have grown up around the New Public Management there is a huge investment—intellectual and financial—in the modernistic drive for measurement and hierarchical control (Power 1997). Individual crazes still sweep across policy worlds because they offer possibilities of evading democratic control: the enthusiasm for evidence-based policy making in arenas like health care is a case in point (Harrison, Moran, and Wood 2002). And in the promotion of one key variant of high modernism—globalization—key global management institutions like the World Bank and the IMF continue to promote standardized reform packages (Rodrik 1997; Stiglitz 2002; Cammack 2002).

So, in the end, the persuasive appeal comes back to power and interests. Which is to say, politics. Just as the founders of the policy sciences told us from the start.

Policy analysts use the imperfect tools of their trade not only to assist legitimately elected officials in implementing their democratic mandates, but also to empower some groups rather than others. Furthermore, policy is never permanent, made once and for all time. Puzzles get transformed into actionable problems, and policies get made on that basis. But that gives rise to further puzzlement, and the quest for ways of acting on those new problems. The persuasive task of policy making and analysis alike lodges in these dynamics of deciding which puzzle to solve, what counts as a solution, and whose interests to serve.

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PART II

INSTITUTIONAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND