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governments and human rights groups to put pressure on authoritarian states, and even to redefine the diplomatic agenda.

4.3 Other Exogenous Influences

As shown by the example of the international protection of human rights, international law and judicial decisions are not the only exogenous influences on national agendas. A good deal of the work of international bodies like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, and specialized agencies of the United Nations like the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization is aimed at influencing the process of agenda setting in the member countries. Sometimes the aim is not simply to raise certain issues to the governmental agenda, but even to change the priorities of the decision agenda—as in the case of the AIDS epidemic, or the urgent need for reform of the pension systems of industrialized countries. A significant influence is exercised also by transnational nongovernmental organizations on issues such as human rights or protection of the global environment (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999).

Policy externalities and the requirements of information exchange are other influences on the formation of national agendas. Globalization has the effect of strengthening the impact of domestic policies on other countries. Exchanges of information among policy makers of different countries are useful for assessing the extent of policy externalities, understanding the mechanisms through which they are transmitted, and planning remedial action. Students of economic policy coordination have come to the conclusion that the major benefit of discussions among national policy makers derives not from explicit coordination, but rather from making governments aware of the consequences of their actions for other countries. Such awareness is often important in shaping the alternatives for governmental action. An example is the "least-restrictive means" principle of international economic law. This is the requirement that policy objectives be achieved in the manner that imposes least costs on a country's trading partners. National health or safety measures, for example, should be so designed as to minimize negative externalities for other countries. Notice, comments, and publication requirements—on which the WTO system, the European Union, and NAFTA extensively rely—are mechanisms for implementing the least-restrictive means principle. The idea is to give advance warnings of new measures which may have significant transboundary externalities, and to delay their implementation briefly while other countries have an opportunity to comment on them.

Recently, the European Union has introduced a rather elaborate method—known as Open Method of Coordination (OMC)—which, if successful, will have a significant impact on the national agenda of the member states. The new method has been pushed by EU leaders in order to favor some convergence of national policies in

areas, such as social policy, employment, and pension reform, that are too politically sensitive to be handled by the traditional, more centralized approach. The OMC is a means of spreading best practice, a learning process that should lead to policy convergence in the long run. Its main elements are: general guidelines for the Union, combined with specific timetables for achieving the short-, medium-, and long-term goals set by the member states themselves; quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks derived from best practice worldwide, but tailored to the needs of individual countries and sectors; policy reform actions of the member states to be integrated periodically into their National Action Plans; periodic monitoring, evaluation, and peer review of the results. The European Council—the highest policy-making institution of the EU—guides and coordinates the entire process. It sets the overall objectives to be achieved, while sector-specific committees of national experts undertake the technical aspects of the work, notably the selection of indicators and benchmarks. The progress made in each area is reviewed annually, during the spring session of the European Council that is devoted to economic and social questions (Scott and Trubek 2002; Borras and Greve 2004).

As was said in the introduction, the aim for this chapter was not to survey the existing literature on agenda setting, but rather to introduce certain themes which that literature has largely neglected. The reasons for the neglect are methodological, conceptual, and substantive. The issue of agenda control, for example, has been investigated mostly by political scientists adopting a rational choice approach to institutional analysis, and the influence of this brand of institutionalism on policy analysis has remained rather limited so far. Yet, the two examples given in Section 1—the control of the legislative agenda by the committees of the US Congress, and the monopoly of legislative and policy initiative by the Commission of the European Union—should suffice to demonstrate the importance of this mode of agenda setting. Another case of neglect due to methodological reasons is the issue of priority setting within a given agenda. As was argued in Section 3, the correct selection of priorities is especially important in areas such as risk regulation, where the opportunity cost of a wrong selection of priorities can be quite high. But risk regulation relies on probabilistic reasoning and on the theory of decision making under uncertainty—methodologies which have not been used even by students of the agenda-setting process who emphasize its random nature. Conceptually, the relevance of agenda setting to the theory and practice of democracy is well understood. Recall that Dahl has made the criterion of full agenda control by the demos a crucial test of full-fledged (rather than merely procedural) democracy. Yet, democratic theory has many other stimulating insights and problems to offer to students of agenda setting. I am thinking in particular of recent discussions about the role of democracy in a world where important decisions are increasingly shifted to the supranational level—what Dahl has called the third transformation of democracy, after the direct democracy of the Greeks and the representative democracy of the modern nation state. In the preceding pages I have argued against the diminished democracy hypothesis—the idea that because of globalization, democratic policy makers are no longer able to provide the public goods the citizens demand. To reject

this pessimistic hypothesis is not to suggest that the institutions and processes of democracy do not have to be adapted to the "third transformation," just as representative democracy was an adaptation of direct democracy to the rise of the nation state. From a substantive point of view, I would argue that the greatest payoffs in the future will come from the study of exogenous influences on the domestic agenda, and of agenda setting at the international level. In the past, policy analysis has been state-centric almost by definition, and most of our ideas and techniques of analysis reflect our own national experiences. However, the idea of governance is much broader than that of government, and it is this broader reality that policy analysis in general, and the study of agenda setting in particular, will have to address in order to remain relevant to new generations of private and public policy makers.

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ORDERING THROUGH DISCOURSE

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1. DEALING WITH AMBIVALENCE

Practitioners face "wicked" problems, complex influences, shifting commitments, and moral complexity in their daily efforts to act on policy goals. In many situations, they will not even be able to agree on what the problem *really* is (Rittel and Webber 1973), and turning to the facts may amplify rather than resolve differences in the face of "contradictory certainties" (Schwarz and Thompson 1990).

Much policy analysis tries to reduce conflict and uncertainty and respond to the need for stability by deriving generalizable knowledge and universal principles that can be applied to achieve policy goals across domains and settings. In this chapter, we address a competing tradition that starts with the conflict, ambiguity, and lure of stability that policy actors experience, treats their action as intelligent, and tries to organize scholarship to understand and support the efforts of these policy practitioners. We focus on a central problem that public officials, policy analysts, researchers, and stakeholders face in these circumstances: "How can I make sense of this complex and politically charged world?" This question often takes the form, "How should I act, given this complexity and uncertainty?"

Scholarship on this problem has a long history that dates back at least to C. S. Peirce's call for reflection on the logic by which we fix beliefs (Peirce 1992), Kenneth Burke's effort to model the search for regularity on a grammar (Burke 1969), and Erving Goffman's enquiry into how individuals respond to the question "What is going on here?" in social behaviour (Goffman 1974). Ambivalence,

ambiguity, and doubt have inspired a rich body of scholarship ever since March and Olsen (1989).

While it is now sociological common sense that policy practitioners seek stability and act in a social world that is a kaleidoscope of potential realities, the approaches to understand their efforts to make sense of the world vary. We use the term "ordering device" here to connote the *conceptual tools that analysts use to capture how policy actors deal with ambiguity and allocate particular significance to specific social or physical events*. These ordering devices explain how policy makers structure reality to gain a handle on practical questions.

2. UNDERSTANDING AMBIVALENCE

Policy makers are supposed to analyse situations and determine how to act. Professionally preoccupied with the quest for order and control (Van Gunsteren 1976), they are likely to be concerned when they experience ambivalence. When a situation is ambiguous, the available tools may not be useful or lead to immediate advice. In *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Zygmunt Bauman (1991) describes the unease that people experience when they cannot "read" a situation and choose readily among alternatives. Bauman defines ambivalence as the "possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category" (Bauman 1991). Ambivalence confounds choice as the organizing metaphor for action. This becomes a policy problem when the sovereignty of the state is based on the "power to define and to make definitions stick" (1991, 1–2). Governing, in his account, is in a large part a matter of defining the situation and this, in turn, is a key feature of policy practice. His analysis only raises the salience of the question, however. How do policy makers manage ambivalence in this endeavour?

This question is complex because ambivalence (or ambiguity, we use the terms interchangeably) lends itself to suppression. This is particularly true in policy work. We all know the joke that a good policy adviser has only one hand (so that she cannot say "on the other hand . . ."): politicians look to their policy advisers for clarity, to help them *overcome* ambivalence. This assumes that ambivalence is always a problem, a deficit, a thing to overcome. Yet we might also see ambivalence and doubt as part of a policy domain and engaging them as a key part of good policy work. The appreciation of ambivalence and the capacity to doubt are arguably essential components of a reflective way of acting in the world. Hence good policy work typically takes place between two poles: one pulling in the direction of clarity and the reduction of complexity, the other illuminating precisely that which we do not fully understand.

Robert McNamara's reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis in *The Fog of War* (Morris 2003) illustrate the kind of struggle that goes on between these poles in policy making. Information was imperfect; conditions were "foggy." The clock was ticking and policy had to be made on the spot (Kennedy 1971). In this fog, McNamara

suggests, the Kennedy administration could have read the Cuban situation in two ways, each implying a radically different course of action.

How did policy makers make sense of this ambiguous situation and choose how to act? We would expect them to employ classification and, as Mary Douglas has observed, that "institutions [would] do the classifying" (Douglas 1986). Classification is an *institutional* device for ordering in which perception is guided by routine. In the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Pentagon classified the situation in its established categories. The test of classification in such circumstances is the ability to define a situation persuasively and provide concrete suggestions for action (in this case including a pre-emptive strike against Cuba). In hindsight, the strength of the policy deliberation in this crisis was the ability of Kennedy's advisers to resist the rush to classification; they *acknowledged ambiguity*, kept doubt alive, and worked to "ferret out" the assumptions embedded in routine ways of classifying the situation. This enabled them to "frame" and "reframe," and thereby explore different ways of understanding the situation.

The ability of the Kennedy administration to engage doubt, in this account, prevented a military conflict and allowed them to find a way out of the conflict: in the end both parties (the USA and Soviet Union) could back down without losing face. This could not have been a simple task. Particularly not given the unease, as Deborah Stone and others have underscored, that policy makers experience when objects or situations do not fit in one particular category or understanding (Stone 1997). If a situation is unclear and imbued with ambivalence, the task is seen to be creating order. But if policy makers have the key task of choosing between alternative trajectories of action, then acknowledging and, subsequently, handling ambivalence is essential for prudent action. In this sense, the strength of institutionally embedded systems of classification may also be their weakness. The force of institutional classifications in the face of ambivalence can interfere with responsible judgement. McNamara shows how this extends to even the strongest of policy decisions. They are imbued with ambiguity, and the ability to manage this relationship is what distinguishes the Kennedy administration's efforts in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In political science the Cuban Missile Crisis is almost automatically associated with Graham Allison's *The Essence of Decision* (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). Allison showed how analysis of the dynamics depends on the analyst's conceptual lens. In so doing, Allison in fact showed how the need to order, and the distinctiveness this imbues analysis with, is not just limited to analysis in the immediate crisis, but extends to the efforts of political scientists to theorize the experience.

3. Interpretive Schemata

McNamara's account highlights the influence of different interpretative schemata in the crisis. He argues that the Pentagon's vigorous interpretation was countered by

Tommy Thompson, the former ambassador to Moscow. Thompson drew on personal knowledge of the Russian leader Khrushchev and argued for a different interpretation. Khrushchev "was not the kind of person" to fit in the story the Pentagon was telling. So what, in the name of policy analysis, was going on in this confrontation? Was it a confrontation between a five-star general with an extraordinary track record and a soft-spoken statesman with personal knowledge of his adversary? Should we understand this as a conflict between two institutionalized ways of making sense of an ambiguous situation? Or should we try to connect bits of both interpretations?

In this tension we can read the outlines of what sociologists have labelled the "actor–structure" problem (Giddens 1979). Should we focus on personality and individual power? Or should we emphasize the (institutional) structures within which individuals operate? It is now widely agreed that this dichotomy is false. Individuals and institutions are both important. The analytic task is to develop concepts that can mediate between actors and structure (March and Olsen 1989). This is what policy academics attempt to do with the three ordering devices we discuss here at some more length: beliefs, frames, and discourses.

We know that what people see is shaped by "interpretative schemata." Cognitive science has shown that people inevitably privilege some attributes over others and influence what is deemed important, exciting, scary, threatening, reassuring, promising, or challenging. Scholarship on interpretative schemata has a long history. An undisputed milestone is the early work of Ludwig Fleck in the 1930s (Fleck 1935). Fleck made the case for a social understanding of cognition suggesting that action is dependent on the way in which "thought collectives" conceive of the world. Each collective has a particular "thought style" that orders the process of cognition, explains new empirical findings ("the facts"), and informs sense making in complex situations. Recognition of Fleck's work grew, particularly when Thomas Kuhn acknowledged his debt to Fleck in his analysis of scientific "paradigms." Kuhn's seminal *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* combines an appreciation of the social embeddedness of interpretative schemata with the *Gestalt* psychology to make it understandable how, even when people look at the same object, they might see different things. This provides a way to relate individual cognition to social ordering devices (in his case "paradigms") that explains widely distributed patterns in conceiving realities (Kuhn 1970/1962).

The range of concepts that have been coined to understand this process of ordering is broad and includes "appreciative systems" (Vickers 1965), "cognitive maps" (Axelrod 1984), "heresthetics" (Riker 1986), and "frames" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Snow and Benford 1992; Schön and Rein 1994). Recent work has investigated the role of "policy narratives," "storylines," or "discourses" in public policy practice (Litfin 1994; Roe 1994; Hajer 1995; Yanow 1996). Rather than spelling out each conceptual approach, we illuminate some key characteristics of this scholarship and where these approaches differ and overlap.

4. Three Conceptual Approaches

For all the differences, the scholarship on these concepts shares a few important characteristics: ordering is related to cognitive commitments; all approaches include an account of how judgement takes place; ordering is seen as involving elements of exchange and coalition building; ordering is tied to action, and the concepts are supposed to help explain dominance, stability, and (limited) policy learning. Accounts of this process overlap in puzzling ways and the supposed variation among these approaches can seem, at times, more like wordplay. We believe, however, that there are important differences among the ordering devices that scholars employ to describe policy practice. We try and make these differences understandable by comparing the approaches in terms of their ontological and epistemological assumptions.

First, we position them on a continuum between an individualist ontology in which ordering is understood in terms of *individual* capacities (e.g. ordering in terms of individual "beliefs") and a *relational* pole that describes ordering in terms of the patterns of social interaction that characterize a particular situation (e.g. some work on frames and some scholarship on discourse). Second, we examine how proponents of different approaches generate and deliver knowledge about the world of public policy. What rules do they, explicitly or implicitly, follow when they try to make sense of the way in which policy makers deal with a complex and ambivalent world? Here we distinguish two empirical orientations: the first directed at creating generalizable knowledge by abstracting from contexts and a second focused on identifying detailed dynamics in policy practice.

5. Beliefs

A prominent example of policy analysis that draws on the concept of belief is the "advocacy coalition framework" (ACF) developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993). Advocacy coalitions consist of "actors from a variety of . . . institutions at all levels of government who share a set of basic beliefs . . . and who seek to manipulate the rules, budgets, and personnel of governmental institutions in order to achieve these goals over time" (1993, 5). The coalition members who come together around the focal point of shared core beliefs coordinate their actions to a "non-trivial degree" (1993, 25).

The ACF approach has inspired and informed a substantial body of policy analysis. Yet precisely how the individual and the interpersonal interrelate and how shifts in belief occur remains opaque. A key feature of the ACF belief system approach is the effort to build a social explanation of policy from an ontology of individuals with

clearly defined and stable value preferences that inform their actions and provide a stable basis for association. The pursuit of core values through individual and collective action (via coalitions) produces the distinctive ordering in a policy field and lends stability to a domain. Yet the research focus on strategic behaviour and cognitive learning does not suggest a way of understanding how policy makers deal with ambiguities and how ambiguity might relate to policy change and learning.

Epistemologically, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith see the ACF as tuned to a Humean search for general laws. They (1993, 231) formulate nine hypotheses designed to test the robustness of the advocacy coalition framework in explaining policy learning and policy change and search for a causal theory, with clearly distinguishable forces of change, that is testable/falsifiable, fertile, and parsimonious (1993, 231). At the same time ACF proponents also speak a dialect of constructivism: they seek to analyse how problems get defined, emphasize the role of perceptions, and underline the inevitable influence of the conceptual lens on analysis (e.g. in the preface to the 1993 book). Yet the individualist ontology, search for general laws, and reliance on hypothesis testing clash with the interpretative elements of the advocacy coalition framework.

6. FRAMES

Over the last fifteen years the frame concept has built a remarkable career as an ordering device in public policy scholarship. This is more due to its usefulness in explaining practice patterns that resist other forms of analysis than to its internal consistency or its verifiability. Most frame analysis draws on the work of ethnomethodologists like Garfinkel and Goffman, but seeks to scale this approach up to deal with social and collective behaviour. All frame analysis takes, *to varying degrees*, language, or more specifically language use as the organizing framework for understanding society.

The popularity of frames is rooted in their intuitive appeal. The concept captures something about the dynamics of policy making that makes sense to practitioners and to those who analyse policy practice. In a similar manner, framing has been employed in economics and psychology (Kahneman and Tversky 2000) and social movement research (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Snow and Benford 1992). Frame analysis highlights the communicative character of ordering devices that connects particular utterances (a speech, a policy text) to individual consciousness and social action (Entman 1993, 51).

What a frame is, is harder to say. Like the play of action they help to explain, frames are recognized, in part, by the way they resist specification. A frame is an account of ordering that makes sense in the domain of policy and that describes the

move from diffuse worries to actionable beliefs. In this way frames navigate the relationship between the "*struggle to attain a state of belief*" and the persistent "*irritation of doubt*" (Peirce 1992). Frames mediate this relationship by parsing the "field of experience" in a distinctive way, linking "facts derived from experience," observations, and accepted sources with values and other commitments in a way that guides action. Framing is the process of drawing these relationships and the frame is the internally coherent constellation of facts, values, and action implications.

Schön and Rein (1996) root their account of this process in the way "frame" is used in everyday speech and are tolerant of the play this leaves in the concept. They describe four ways of looking at frames that they treat as "mutually compatible images rather than competing conceptions" (1996, 88). A frame can be understood as "an underlying structure which is sufficiently strong and stable to support an edifice." Thus a house has a frame even if it is not visible from the outside. The idea of structure implies "a degree of regularity, and hence, a lack of adaptability to events as they unfold over time" (1996, 88). A frame can also be seen as a boundary, in the way a picture frame fixes our attention and tells us what to disregard. This boundary helps us freeze the continuous stream of events and demarcate what is inside, and deserving of our attention, from what is outside (1996, 89). Their third image portrays a frame as "a schemata of interpretation that enables individuals" to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and their world at large "rendering events meaningful and thereby guiding action" (1996, 89). Finally, harkening back to their original formulation, they describe frames as a particular kind of "normative-prescriptive" story that that provides a sense of what the problem is and what should be done about it. These "generic story lines" are important because they "give coherence to the analysis of issues in a policy domain" (1996, 89). In strict terms, a frame is the form of ordering that makes these four views compatible. As a group, they present a picture of framing as an essential act for making sense of a policy field, in which part of making sense is deciding how to act. They also express two representative tensions that distinguish framing as an account of this process. Frames are neither entirely intentional nor tacit and frames conceal as they reveal, in part by the way commitments insulate themselves from reflection.

Snow and Benford define a frame in more or less compatible terms as "an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Snow and Benford 1992, 137). Their account extends the play between intention and tacit action that is part of the concept of frame. Frames enable actors to "articulate and align" (ibid.) events and occurrences and order those in a meaningful fashion. Here there is no distance between belief and frame. Yet, actors also retain sufficient leverage over frames (and the distance this implies) to play an active and intentional role in shaping the process. "[W]hat gives a collective action frame its novelty is not so much its innovative ideational elements as the manner in which *activists articulate or tie*