

PUBLIC POLICY VALUES

Jenny Stewart



Public Policy Values

Also by Jenny Stewart

THE DECLINE OF THE TEALADY: Management for Dissidents

THE LIE OF THE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD: Industry Policy and Australia's Future

RENEGOTIATING THE ENVIRONMENT: The Power of Politics

(co-author with Grant Jones)

Public Policy Values

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For Timoshenko

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Jenny Stewart
Canberra

Introduction

The belief that governments should make a positive difference to our lives remains as strong as ever, even if there is a veritable industry of books about how they are getting it wrong. Governments (we are told) are the captives of large corporations; they are enslaved by simplistic ideologies about market forces; they subvert true democracy; they are not to be trusted; their bureaucracies are incompetent. Every day, even (or perhaps especially) in countries that are blessed with relatively stable and competent governments, the media bring out stories of regulators that did not do their jobs properly, of services poorly delivered, of the weak and vulnerable left unprotected.

If citizens did not believe that governments should do better, they would simply accept these shortcomings as inevitable. The fact that the public face of government is about trying to do better suggests that for many, perhaps most of us, governance is a values-based activity. If public policy is, as Thomas Dye defined it, what governments choose to do or not to do (Dye, 2005, p. 1), it is of enormous importance whether they choose to do good things or bad things. For a political scientist, however, to write a book about the place of values in public policy is to argue uphill. Political scientists wonder about what governments actually do, as distinct from what they ought to do, or even what they say they do. While most observers would agree that values – principled goals – come into the picture, the concept has not previously been accorded explicit attention by policy analysts.

The reasons are not far to seek. Values are tricky to capture, changeable and much less robust than the more familiar forces of self-interest. Rather than seeing values as playing an independent or even quasi-independent role, most commentators have preferred to view the language of values as a device for the prosecution of self-interest.

Scratch a protestation of 'security' or 'freedom' or 'family values' and underneath it, according to this view, we find something much grubbier. If politics is about who gets what when and how, and public policy is the delivery mechanism, there would seem to be little to be gained by worrying about a values dimension in public policy.

This book is an attempt to correct that assumption, not by arguing that a values-based approach should supplant others, but by showing how a values perspective helps us understand more fully what public policy does and the way it does it. Interests can (and do) push and pull governments in different directions, but once the decision is made – the dam is built, the road goes through, the troops are despatched to war – a choice between values has also been made. This is the key point to observe. Whatever forces go into the production of public policy, the result is always a compromise between different value positions.

Sometimes the compromise is seen explicitly in values terms, as when the war on terror obliges policymakers to trade off personal freedom against security. But whether they are explicit or implicit, in every policy field, we find conflicts between powerful values that structure the kinds of decisions that can be taken. These values run so deep that we are often not conscious of them – indeed many of our administrative practices and routines are *de facto* devices for avoiding value conflicts that would otherwise paralyse us. This book is an attempt to give these values a cogent reality and to suggest ways that the 'values analysis' of public policy might be taken forward.

My awareness of the importance of policy values developed gradually during the course of my teaching and research, so it will be useful to describe how each influenced the other. When I began to teach students about public policy in the early 1990s, I introduced them, as such courses traditionally do, to the many theories about the nature, purposes and origins of public policy. We discussed the way policies were structured, or biased, by the operations of power in general and of self-interest in particular.

Oddly, though, I found that interest-based theories of policy (such as public choice theory) went over like a lead balloon. It was not that students could not see that self-interest explained a good deal of political behaviour. Australians are all too ready to see politicians as charlatans. But whether they were school leavers or more mature students with public service jobs, there was considerable resistance when we went through the basic theorems of rational choice politics. Indeed most theories of public policy, whether of the rational choice variety or more interpretivist in character, left them cold. Students wanted to engage with the

subject matter of public policy in ways that made sense to them in terms of their own values and interests. They also wanted to know more about the political and policy history of their own country.

As the course developed, I did not give up on the theoretical understanding of public policy, but I emphasised more strongly what public policy was for – what those who discussed, or advocated, about public policy were actually trying to achieve, and what had happened as their hopes were turned into practice. As a former public servant with a good deal of programme administration experience, I paid a good deal of attention to the problems of implementation, that mysterious yet crucial set of activities where the hopes of activists were so often dashed.

Increasingly, I found myself discussing values as a way of connecting public policy with the political process. This was not precisely Fischer and Forester's 'argumentative turn', which stresses the role of language itself in framing problems in political ways (Fischer and Forester, 1993), but a strategy for delivering signposts, for mapping the terrain of action and thought. We can readily see that a particular public policy – for example, giving public support to non-government schools – benefits some group or interest. It would be a rare public policy that did no one any good, although I can certainly think of some (ironically, some of the most idealistic) that have come close.

But (to revert to the education example) 'telling the story' of the financing of education simply as a kind of interest-based vector analysis would tell us very little about educational administration in a country of which we knew little. To understand this policy, we would need to understand the context in which it was applied, the way in which education was socially constructed in that society. We would need to know something of the politics in the sense of the way the interests had lined up, the battles that had been fought and the words that the combatants had used to press their case.

To be sure, the arts of analysis had then to be applied to these understandings. When policy stories were told, it was necessary to draw on many themes to make sense of what had happened. To use one notable definition of public policy, it was necessary to discuss relationships between institutions, values, interests and resources (Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller, 1993). But somewhat to my surprise, I found the values element coming increasingly to the fore. I could see that when governments did their policy choosing, it was overwhelmingly value choices that they made.

If values were as important as I thought they were, it seemed to me that it ought to be possible to use values analytically. I began to use

values as a type of heuristic, as a way of interrogating policy in new ways. As time went on, I came to see how what I initially called policy 'tropes' could be used as a way of structuring policy problems. In most policy fields we could see evidence of these struggles, which could be metaphorised as tensions between values pairs. Some of the pairs I used for teaching in the 1990s included multiculturalism versus integration; globalisation versus autonomy; conservation versus development; obligation versus entitlement; public versus private; centralisation versus devolution; accountability versus responsiveness; secular versus religious values.

These 'deep structures' could be used analytically as a way of illuminating change and identifying significant friction points. But there was also a language of values, an overt use of values to describe favoured directions. President George Bush, for example, was fond of using the word 'freedom' as a way of justifying his policies. When politicians started using the language of values in order to justify a particular course of action, they were almost certainly up to something. But this, in turn, was a good way of describing one of the classic tactics of agenda management – the use of potent symbols to harness attention and entrench support.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard was particularly adept at this form of symbolic politics. In June 2004, for example, his government announced a new educational policy: as a condition (among a number) for the payment of direct Commonwealth funding, all Australian schools would be required to acquire a flagpole and to fly the Australian flag (ABC, 2004). The proposal made sound political sense, as it appealed to Howard's constituency, those who wanted schools to reinforce traditional Australian values. The flag stood for many things, among them an antipathy to the multiculturalism that Howard had successfully opposed since his election in 1996.

Here was a policy about values. But its outcome, a flagpole outside a school, belonged in the realm of symbolism, rather than improved educational practice. In any case, as many commentators pointed out at the time, most schools already had their flag and flagpole. They did not need the Commonwealth government to bully them in this way. In this case, values were being used in the way a public choice theorist would expect them to be used – as a means for defining and harnessing political support.

But it would be difficult to argue that the government invented the values concerned. Rather, Howard was responding to public sentiment, widely held at the time, about the importance of traditional values in

schools (Lewis, 2007). The politics (and undoubtedly his own personal views) made that concern a government concern. From the point of view of the policy-attentive public, it was another salvo in the ongoing culture wars, in Australia less a matter of courting the religious right as of attacking left-leaning practice and opinion. The purely symbolic policy reflected back to the PM's supporters a version of their own patriotism, in contrast to the (supposedly) wishy-washy views of the policy elites. The gesture worked, precisely because it was divisive.

On the other hand, it was undeniable that the pursuit of more idealistic values was no guarantee of success. In Aboriginal affairs, policies intended to promote equality had led to little practical improvement in the lives of many Aboriginal Australians. For example, the 1966 policy of the Australian government to award equal pay to Aboriginal stockmen working in the Northern Territory arguably began a disastrous era of welfare dependency for many remote communities, because employers were not prepared to pay them the new wage. It appeared that new values, inserted into complex and changing societies with their own values and traditions, had little chance of realisation in their own terms.¹

In teaching students about public policy, the question of personal values inevitably came up. Many of my students came from country towns, and their views about most policy issues, once they realised they were allowed to express them, were very conservative. We had to address the question as to whether policies founded on their values would be likely to work. Then there was the question of my own values as an academic policy analyst. What was I trying to achieve? Having worked for many years as a public servant, I was keen to show ways in which policy might be made better. But 'better' was clearly a subjective term, impossible to divorce from one's personal orientation towards policy and habitual ways of making sense of the world.

My introduction to research in the field of policy analysis came through industry (industrial) policy, now a much less important subject for study than it was in the 1980s, when the governments of nation states were attempting to come up with policy responses to the rapid post-war industrial growth of Japan, and subsequently, of other Asian states, such as Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong. Industrial policy encompassed so much – the role of the state in the economy, the nature of the evidence about public support for private business, the pressing concerns of intensifying global competition. For most economists, the verdict was clear-cut – free trade was best. For political scientists, it was a more difficult question. Political scientists study the state – it was only

natural that we should want to prove the effectiveness of states in more areas than simply the redistributive.

My own background was unusual in that my father ran a manufacturing company. Public choice theory had it that he was a 'rent-seeker', a man who lived off the fruits of tariff protection. Indeed, I was astonished to learn that the entire family was sustained in this illicit way. This was a thrilling but also a somewhat unsatisfactory description of the true situation. Far from exhibiting a rent-seeking mentality, my father was passionate about what he did, keen to develop and employ new engineers and always looking for new business opportunities.

It was almost impossible to reconcile the often bitterly competitive world my father described, with the way manufacturing was viewed from Canberra, my home since the mid-1970s and the seat of economic rationalism in Australia. From being national heroes, as they had been seen in the 1960s, manufacturers were now social pariahs. By the 1980s, the tide was running out for Australian manufacturing industry. Production patterns were changing as low-cost competitors emerged in Asia. The dominant values were also changing, away from supporting a manufacturing presence to an embrace of globalisation and international competitiveness.

As industry moved, particularly to the giant manufacturing house of China, interest in industrial policy waned. Tariff battles (except for a few remaining areas) receded into the past. Flexible exchange rates (the dollar was floated in 1984) seemed a more effective answer to the problem and certainly one that involved much less work from governments. In Australia, a late and unusual industrialiser, the structural shift in the economy was rapid. The pull of resource-based industries became relatively even stronger, and a growing population with an avid demand for houses and gadgets to put in them kept services-based employment buoyant.

I came to see that my own interest in Australian-based production, the encouragement of science-based industry and the use of public purchasing to promote industry, were themselves based on my own values. I argued that much had been lost in the pursuit of an abstract efficiency. Bowing to the dictates of something called 'the market' seemed to be to give up our sense of agency to an abstraction. 'The market' seemed to me then (and still does) to be a good servant, but a bad master (see Stewart, 1994). Subsequently, I became interested in public action in many fields – in relation to environmental questions and, later, education. The more I looked at these fields, the more it seemed to me that finding ways of bringing interests together to solve

problems meant talking about values. But there was not much scope to bring this aspect out into the open.

One of the main problems, I found, was the schizophrenic character of policy studies: the split between policy analysis as a form of normative social action and policy analysis as a mode of positivist explanation. From the point of view of those who 'do' policy, public policy is about values (although those same people may well decry the short-termism and expediency of political decision-making). Harold Lasswell, the founder of policy analysis as a distinctive intellectual process, was always clear about the importance of values. In his view, public policy existed to improve the world, so that as a rational and principled activity, it could scarcely avoid the task of values clarification (Lasswell, 1948, p. 122). But policy studies did not follow this lead, preferring to move in more positivist directions. Within this approach, public policy was considered as a dependent variable – the main empirical studies of the 1970s and 1980s considered what were the key factors, in terms of the known categories of political science, that produced particular outcomes – the relative strengths of parties of the left, for example, in determining the salience of welfare policies (see, for example, Castles, 1982, 1989).

In the final decades of the twentieth century, positivism beat something of a retreat. We started to be more wide-ranging in our thinking about the nature of public policy – it was clearly not a thing but a kind of activity or perhaps many different kinds of activity. As Colebatch put it, public policy could be regarded as authoritative choice, as structured interaction or as the construction of meaning (Colebatch, 2002). With these more nuanced approaches, we came to see that the theories that we used were not alternatives that could be proved or disproved, but were perspectives or lenses, which brought some things into focus, while leaving others blurry.

A particularly useful lens focused on public policy as itself being part of a process involved in the creation of meaning. Yanow opened up an interpretivist way of looking at policymaking and policy implementation that understood the policy process as 'a struggle for the determination of meanings' (Yanow, 1996, p. 19) and a policy itself as an expression of the meanings communicated in 'interpretive communities' of policymakers, implementers and their wider (potential) publics (Grin and Loeber, 2007). Values are more obviously involved in this way of seeing policy, because our cognitive maps are themselves predicated in complex ways on what we believe about the state of the world and what we would like it to be. From an interpretivist perspective, values are part of the currency of communication that enables action to be taken.

Institutionalist theory, too, gave a role to values, particularly in relation to organisational cultures. Schneider and Ingram gave prominence to this aspect of policy design, when they described the processes through which institutions perpetuated themselves by recruiting, indoctrinating and rewarding members who will reflect the dominant culture. Public policies themselves ‘construct’ their clients in ways that reflect a certain social framing of the issues (Schneider and Ingram, 1993, p. 76–77). This kind of work raised fresh questions about the nature of policy implementation. For decades, scholars had grappled with this infuriatingly vague, yet vital, activity through which policy plans were carried out in the real world. Yet there was a disconnect between the way public administrationists (and public managers) thought about implementation and the value-laden world that Schneider and Ingram had opened up. Government is not a post-modern activity, and public servants are rational beings who are required to achieve designated outcomes. But at the same time, the choice-making of implementation raises as many value questions as does policy design itself.

Meanwhile, the study of public administration was emerging from a long period of stasis, with interesting consequences for the link with public policy. It had long been known that administration as a form of rational order simply cannot operate on an ad hoc basis. In order to carry out their work, public agencies required operating instructions – public policies had to be turned into regularised decision-making. New techniques in public management enlarged the implementation choices that had to be made. Do we outsource, or do we keep the work in-house? What kinds of criteria do we employ for selecting contractors? Inside its bland and technical camouflage, public administration was values all the way down.

As I grappled with these issues, it became clear that what I was doing was finding a way of joining the ‘inside’ of public policy (the way practitioners saw it) to the ‘outside’ (the way academics saw it), in a way that the more I experimented with it, the more it seemed to offer rich possibilities for discovery. The individual chapters of *Public Policy Values* record this process of discovery across a number of fields. The technique that emerges from this process – values analysis – is less a proposition about the nature of public policy than it is a methodology for understanding it better.

Structure of the book

Using values analytically means choosing values to write about. The potential list is enormous. Identifying dominant societal values at any point in time narrows the field, but societal values are difficult to pin down.

The very act of trying to clarify them seems to cause them to change their contours. At the level of public policy, however, the task of identifying values is a good deal easier because public policies often tell us the values with which they are concerned. The familiar categories of 'adjectival' public policy – environmental policy, health policy, education policy – yield a rich harvest of values, expressed through debates, commentaries and, often, legislation itself.

Choosing which values to write about from among these possibilities is a somewhat arbitrary exercise. Some policy values, such as efficiency or equity are too ubiquitous in the sense that they are too prominent in discussions about policy to leave out. Similarly, the choice of 'greenness' and 'growth' reflects a policy debate too prominent to overlook. The choice in other cases was determined by the 'reach' of the values concerned, that is, the extent to which they illuminated significant areas of policy and/or demonstrated common themes across different areas of policy. I am not, of course, suggesting that the values I have dealt with are in any sense definitive or even representative of the range that might be covered. My hope is that other scholars, working in many different contexts, will identify and utilise values that suit their purposes.

My job was not to evaluate policy, rather, it was to develop and describe a convincing schema for the analytical use of values. They had, in a sense, to be 'inside' the policies, in the sense that they were evident in the actual intent. But to see them I had to be 'outside' the realm of application, which meant taking a comparative perspective. The extent to which the exercise became comparative was something of a surprise. Looking only within the one system seemed to blur the picture because, although I had started with working definitions of the values I was interested in, their contours in practice were not always sharp-edged. The values became clearer when I examined the ways in which other polities had either chosen to effect a different values balance or had achieved a similar values outcome in a different way.

Each of the chapters is self-contained, but it will be necessary for the reader to read Chapters 1 and 2 fully to understand the theoretical approach. Chapter 1 sets out the schema for values, drawing a connection between political and policy values and 'naming' policy values in a straightforward way. It is here that the dichotomous nature of many policy value pairs is first drawn out. Often, a value is only truly identifiable through its opposite. Searching for a strongly contrasting values pair is often a good way for 'seeding' an analysis.

Chapter 2 makes a contribution to the theory of policy change. Just as Berlin had argued for the incommensurability of values

(Berlin, 1998, p. 241), so it seemed that many structures were created for the purpose of avoiding the value conflict that this incommensurability entailed. Public policy is not often given to the grand gesture: it works because the deeper questions with which it deals overall are avoided when it comes to making administrative decisions. The key understanding developed through Chapter 2 is what Rose has called the 'heritage effect' (Rose, 1990). Policymakers, those sitting at the top of the policy tree, think that they are making zero-based policy. In fact, their initiatives are piled into a system that is rigid with the effects of previous decisions. These effects continue to exert significant motivating power.

Using values analytically means coming up with specific, working definitions. Chapter 3 considers 'equity', the principle of justice or non-discrimination and 'fairness', the principle of just deserts or legitimate equivalence. These values are ubiquitous in policymaking, with numerous possible sites for considering them. In this case, I have chosen the conventional context of modern welfare states, where policy is confronted with the task of maintaining an equal society when global competitiveness is demolishing older accommodations. But asking whether welfare states achieve equity or not does not tell us anything new – welfare states have been extensively evaluated from this perspective. Looking at value conflicts, however, yields a different perspective. Chapter 3 highlights the motive power of fairness, an equally powerful value, in stimulating change.

Efficiency (Chapter 4) was another obvious value to choose. Efficiency prioritises the relationship between costs and benefits. In the post-1980s period, the concept of efficiency guided policy-framing and decision-making in an obvious way in every advanced industrial society. But considering efficiency as a value – as a goal that is not self-evidently correct but can be chosen (or sacrificed) in relation to others – provided a useful link between the 'inside' and the 'outside' and between the paradigm of economic analysis and the politics of economic management. Other chapters cover specific policy fields from a values perspective. Chapter 5 extends the approach to the analysis of policy instruments, using the ordering values pair of toughness versus tenderness. 'Toughness' – the insistence on self-reliance – is contrasted with 'tenderness' – the view that help and support are required to overcome disadvantage. This contrast enabled me to bring together discussion of drugs policy, unemployment benefits and (an area often overlooked in policy analysis) criminal justice.

One of the most revealing explorations is in Chapter 6, 'Where policy meets the personal', in which I look specifically at areas of public policy

where human relations are mediated most extensively by the state, such as marriage and the family. It is territory where social and economic change has had a huge impact. Attitudes towards marriage, work and the family have undergone a revolution since the middle of the twentieth century. But the way public policy reflects new ways of thinking and provides rationales and means for new kinds of decisions is often partial, oblique and contested. So many spheres of action have been created that it is almost inevitable that there will be interference effects. Family law, for example, has changed not solely because of the women's movement, but because of intersections between values expressed in one sphere (for example, the provision of benefits for single parents) and the institution of marriage. Helping single parents may mean letting their former partners off the child-support hook. These friction points come to government attention when they affect interests large enough to weigh on public budgets.

Public administration, in contrast to its somewhat dusty image, is a field replete with values. In Chapter 7, I discuss some of the key trade-offs that shape both the trajectories of public organisations and the debates about them. Values such as 'responsiveness' (doing what ministers want) and 'independence' or 'autonomy' (reserving a public interest role to public servants) animate continuing tension and debate. Chapter 8 explores what is undoubtedly the most significant value conflict humanity currently faces: that between 'green-ness' and 'growth'. 'Green-ness' is broadly defined as the embodiment of environmental concern in policy. 'Growth' is the familiar emphasis on expansion (in employment and output). In this chapter, I show both the effects of implementing these two values and use the analysis to explore the likely future of these attempts.

Health and education are similarly values rich. The challenge here is to choose a values pair sufficiently broad to illuminate policy dynamics in a number of states. Two values – those of universality and choice – are significant motivators of policy in both fields. Universality describes the objective of common provision for all and choice the objective of competitive provision. The trade-off between universality and choice structures the kinds of choices that are available and establishes contrasting value positions between different states. Interestingly, this comparative perspective suggests that rigidity in implementing certain kinds of values may work against their achievement.

Writing about public policy in this way may seem somewhat impressionistic. The reality is that an enormous amount of detailed knowledge is required in order to 'get right' the complex values balances that

appear in the policy ledgers of individual countries. Consequently, the reader will find that the country with which I am most familiar – Australia – appears more frequently in my examples than any other. I have leavened this emphasis with a wide range of instances and examples from other countries (principally New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) because understanding values stances must involve comparison across space, as well as across time. But I make no apology for the Australian emphasis.

To do otherwise would have required the assignment of individual authors to specific countries, the usual approach when comparative public policy is attempted. There have been many excellent studies using this approach, but the present exercise required the use of comparison within each chapter. Moreover, the book had to be anchored in a specific way. A good part of the point of the values-based approach is that it requires the practitioner of it to interrogate and develop his/her own sensibility as a tool of analysis. It is my hope that others will be inspired to develop accounts of public policy in their own countries and societies, using the concepts developed here.

As with any methodology, the measure of its worth will be its utility. The concluding chapter reflects on the nature of this utility. After reviewing the nature of the contribution made by each of the chapters, I bring together a number of implications for the understanding of policy process. These relate to the importance of administrative realities and the need to address deeper levels of structure in comparative work. I also argue, more ambitiously, that an appreciation of values allows analysts to find ways of joining the 'inside' to the 'outside' of public policy, that is, to come up with arguments for change based on a deeper understanding of the ways values are allocated.

To see how this works, it must be accepted that *Public Policy Values* is an exploration rather than a journey. The world that the book explores is in many ways a paradoxical one. Values matter profoundly in public policy, but their influence is deep-seated rather than obvious. Despite the many complexities, our attempts to improve a particular circumstance or solve a problem reverberate through a complex world of administration and negotiation to emerge in the production of effects that will invariably disappoint the idealist. In short, 'something happens' to our cherished goals when we attempt to enact them through policy. To understand what this 'something' is we need to step from the inside of public policy to the outside.

Taking this step shows us a world in which valued goals are refracted through multiple administrative realities. But paradoxically, the key to

understanding these realities is found within the original values, rather than in the elaboration of process, or the changing parameters of technical issues. These things are important, but they take their cue from and are structured by different value positions. Public policy values are not the big ideas of truth, freedom and justice. Rather they are a welter of valued orientations – conservation, privacy, equality of access and so on. Nevertheless, their sum total will represent what a society has achieved in these directions.

These value positions are often linked to interests, but to describe them as ideologies puts the cart before the horse. An ideology is a value with hardening of the arteries. Interests can never be separated from values – both motivate our political activity. But the space we allocate to values should be a larger one than is customary in political science. It is almost as if, over time, the original interests wash out, and what we are left with is an elaborate array of settings, instructions and requirements, a kind of moral architecture that is given life by the people who interpret and inhabit the edifice. Exploring the edifice is a rewarding activity. Ultimately, though, the worth of any approach is its usefulness. The technique, further elaborated in the concluding chapter, is a rich and exciting one. Intuit the values from your understanding of a policy field, then trace them onwards and outwards: this is policy analysis for the broad scope and the long term.

1

What Are Policy Values?

Our values, to use Berlin's words, are 'what we think good and bad, important and trivial, right and wrong, noble and contemptible' (Berlin, 1998, p. 127). By extension, policy values are the valued ends embodied in, and implemented through, the collective choices we make through policy processes. Values are also functional. From a psychological perspective, they can be 'thought of as priorities, internal compasses or springboards for action' (Rezsohazy, 2001). A policy value, therefore, can be defined as the informing principle of collective action: it is both motivator and object. A public policy constructs a sense of reality by orientating both observers and participants in a kind of emotional space. The values it represents are the mechanisms of this orientation – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit.

Policy values are related to political values, but they are conceptually distinct from each other. Political values – such as freedom, democracy, equality – underpin the broad design principles of the governments of nation states and change very little over time. Policy values manifest themselves in particular areas of government action – such as in the design of health systems, or in the support given to regions – and change over time, usually slowly, but sometimes quite quickly.

Why worry about policy values? There are a number of important reasons. Firstly, many policy problems are values based in an explicit way, for example, whether to ban the wearing of the hijab, whether to liberalise (or tighten) drug laws, whether to permit the harvesting of foetal stem cells to treat certain diseases, whether to preserve a heritage site against development. Secondly, in a deeper sense, all policy questions are values-based. David Easton called politics 'the authoritative allocation of value' (Easton, 1965). Public policy is the process through which this happens.

Giving values their place

Despite their omnipresence, values tend to be under-acknowledged when public policy is dissected or explained. They are 'leached out' of positive policy analysis in favour of interest-based and institutionalist approaches. This is not to say that values are forgotten, but they are subsumed within accounts of the policy process itself – manifested 'in action' through the activities of interest groups and implicit in the way institutions are designed. This emphasis is understandable, because while values are clearly important, they are difficult to detect and almost impossible to measure. Interests, institutions and even ideologies are much more tangible. Moreover, if we want to explain why a particular policy change has occurred, or how a new policy has come about, our policy 'story', at least in the qualitative traditions of post-behavioural political science, will draw on the tools of agenda analysis, the depiction of political and deliberative action and the responses of interests to events.

Interests are thought of as 'vectors' or carriers of value. But this approach is unsatisfactory for a full understanding of public policy because, in the analytical sense, a value is quite different from an interest. We can negotiate, more or less rationally, about our interests, assuming we can define them sufficiently clearly. On the other hand, because values relate to beliefs about what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable, we find it almost impossible to negotiate about them. If, for example, I have a strongly held belief in individual freedom, I will find it difficult to negotiate about policies requiring the wearing of school uniforms. If I believe that all life is sacred, I will not wish to compromise with those who advocate legalised abortion.

Values trump interests. If I am a farmer who has set aside a piece of uncleared woodland on my property because of the wildlife it protects, I will not clear it, even if it is in my financial interests to do so. If I am a dedicated evangelical Christian, I will not vote for a party that favours gay marriage, even if in every material respect that party offers me more than its conservative competitors. Moreover, policy itself, whether it is public or not, performs a function which is quite clearly values-based. To construct a policy about anything is to try to make sense of the world. 'Every citizen over the age of 65 is eligible to receive an age-pension' may appear to be a purely administrative policy, but it is one of many that constitute the values web of the welfare state, which promotes some version of social equity.

Even policies with an obviously economic focus – 'New businesses receive a start-up grant of \$20,000' – reflect some version of a desired future. So we

have something of a conundrum – public policy in its enacted sense, allocates values. Yet at the same time, we find it difficult to give convincing labels to the values that are so enacted, because we lack the tools, indeed the language, to conceptualise what is going on. In their long journey from politics to policy, values enter a much more ambiguous terrain in which they are refracted, combined, modified or, simply, lost.

Positioning the analysis

I have contrasted the emphasis on values with interest-based and institutional analyses. There is, however, a broad sweep of policy-related writing that focuses explicitly on the ways in which policy is defined by the problems with which it deals and on the activities of interests that are, in turn, shaped by changing understandings of what is at stake. How does the values-based approach differ from these?

Policy as meaning-making is clearly inseparable from values: indeed values are themselves as much the subject of meaning-making as they are its object. The ‘argumentative turn’ uses the methodological tools of discourse analysis to demonstrate the importance of narrative in constructing policy realities (Fischer, 2003). Values are also intimately involved in social constructivist theories of policy (a point I return to in the discussion on policy instruments in Chapter 5).

Other analyses stress forms of issue construction, drawing on Rochefort and Cobb’s insight that ‘policymaking is a struggle over alternative realities’ (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994, p. 9). These analyses, many of them based in America, include studies on the work of Congressional committees in relation to work, gender and the family (see Burstein and Bricher, 1997) and on struggles between different interests to define problems in their favour (see, for example, Cobb and Coughlin’s work on efforts to define elderly drivers as a road hazard: Cobb and Coughlin, 1998).

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) pioneered by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith placed values and beliefs at the core of coalition formation (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Case studies explored by Sabatier and others emphasise social learning, as groups grapple with the job of exercising influence in changing milieux (Sabatier, 1999). Kubler’s excellent study of change in drug policy in Switzerland showed how well the ACF illuminated the ideas component of the activities of contending groups (Kubler, 1999). Contests over the policy agenda, as Cobb and Ross’s work showed, combine strategic factors with choices between competing worldviews (Cobb and Ross, 1997).

While a role for values is explicit (or at least implied) in all these accounts, the research reported here sees values somewhat differently: as broad principles of commonality and difference that operate as a kind of deep structure in public policy. It is the choice-making of enacted policy, rather than the interactions of policy contest, that assume centre stage. We are showing, not how policy comes to be, but how the past of policy structures its future. This may sound like a rather grand claim, but it must be emphasised that the approach is a heuristic or a tool, rather than a framework or a theory.

It is not possible to 'test' the approach developed in this book. My claim is, simply, that there is much in public policy that is not only difficult to track in the discursive realm but is also difficult to ascribe to particular actors, or groups of actors. In particular, patterns of stability and change seem to fall into this category, perhaps because of the recursive elements in public policy (that is, the tendency, over time, for public policy to be a cause of itself). This dimension, oddly enough, comes most vividly to life when we take values seriously.

The values bridge between politics and policy

If politics is the ultimate source of policy values, we can detect three subdisciplines that help us to conceptualise the nature of the bridge between politics and policy. They are political philosophy, political sociology and policy sciences. Political psychology is clearly important in understanding the relationship between individual values and their political expression. I cross this particular bridge later in the chapter.

Political philosophy

In essence, the task of political philosophy, where it has considered questions of public policy, has been to develop tools for understanding the moral agency of the state. Scholars in this tradition may ask questions such as 'What is liberalism?' or 'What is conservatism?', but they are not primarily interested in the ideological function of such positions. Rather, they are concerned with engaging in forms of reasoning that provide ethical justification for particular kinds of collective choices. The literature in this tradition is vast, but some examples will illustrate the approach.

Scholars such as Goodin, Nozick and Dryzek, from different perspectives, describe value parameters for the state, that is, how we might arrive at compelling arguments for what the state ought to be, and ought to do. Thus Goodin has developed a rationale for the welfare state that relies precisely on the basis that collective compassion is not intrinsically