

POLICY PARADOX:
THE ART OF POLITICAL
DECISION MAKING



Third Edition

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The Market and the Polis

A theory of policy politics must start with a simple model of political society, just as economics starts with a simple model of economic society. *Polis*, the Greek word for city-state, seems a fitting name for a model of political society because it conjures up an entity small enough to have very simple forms of organization yet large enough to embody the essential elements of politics. In building a model of political society, 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 society and market society will illuminate some ways the market model 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 sea 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. (Economics textbooks usually neglect to mention that the "real" Crusoe was able to salvage a veritable microcosm of industrial society from his shipwrecked vessel—everything from gunpowder and muskets to cables and nails.) Participants in a market compete 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 to sell at the highest possible price.

In the market model, individuals act only to maximize their own self-interest. "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, but most market models give short shrift to anything but individual

self-interest. The competitive drive to maximize one's own welfare stimulates people to be very resourceful, creative, clever, and productive, and ultimately, competition 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

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 who its members are and what its goals should be, 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 and intentions other than those held by individuals, a model of the polis must assume *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 . . ."; "Environmentalists 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 some 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 members and some way of defining who is a member 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. Religious groups 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 racial discrimination in selling

and renting homes, mortgage lending, and sheer harassment can accomplish exclusion without formal rules.

In many places, growing anti-immigrant sentiment has stimulated a wave of new membership policies—policies about who gets to become a resident or a citizen of any political jurisdiction, and what social and civic rights will be accorded them. Some states and cities have passed laws that restrict undocumented aliens' access to health and social services, rental housing, and driving. In 2010, Arizona, the state with the highest rate of illegal immigration, passed a controversial law requiring police officers to investigate the immigration status of anybody they stop for any purpose, if the officer suspects the person might be an illegal immigrant. The Arizona law raises fears of prejudice, because police might use looks and accents to decide whether they "suspect" someone is an illegal immigrant. The law also creates tension between the state and the federal government over which one has legal authority to enforce U.S. membership policies.¹

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. A cultural community is a group of people who share a culture and draw their identities from shared language, history, and traditions. In most nations, the political community includes diverse cultural communities. Cultural diversity creates a profound dilemma for policy politics: how to integrate several cultural communities into a single political community without destroying their identity and integrity. (This was exactly the dilemma in the "multiculturalism" paradox in the Introduction.) Issues such as criminal standards, bilingual education, and interracial and international adoption are about defending communities against death by assimilation, and about pitting community interests against individual interests. These issues can't be adequately understood in terms of individuals pursuing their self-interests. In Europe, discussions of cultural and political membership have been more salient than in the U.S. and proceed under the rubric of "integration policy." Integration focuses on what values and behaviors immigrants must espouse in order to become citizens. For example, an immigrant applying for citizenship in Denmark

¹Darnell Weeden, "Local Laws Restricting the Freedom of Undocumented Immigrants as Violations of Equal Protection and Principles of Federal Preemption," *St. Louis University Law Journal*, 52, no. 4 (2008), pp. 479–500; Randal C. Archibold, "U.S.'s Toughest Immigration Law Is Signed in Arizona," *New York Times*, Apr. 24, 2010.

must pass a Danish-language test that many Danes might not be able to pass, and must declare support for gender equality.²

Membership in a community defines social and economic rights as well as political rights. Even more than legal definitions of who's in and who's out, mutual aid among members transforms a collection of individuals into a community. Sharing burdens and bounty binds people together as a group. Immigrants in their new homelands tend to stick together in ethnic neighborhoods, and one of the first things they do is establish mutual aid societies to pool their resources in order to provide each other with money for culturally acceptable funerals, for sickness and life insurance, and for credit to establish new businesses. Members of a community help each other in all kinds of non-monetary ways, too, such as sharing child care or helping each other maintain homes and neighborhoods. Mutual aid is a kind of social insurance.

In the market model, insurance is a financial product that firms sell in order to make a profit and buyers buy in order to create economic security for themselves. In the polis, mutual aid is a good that people create collectively in order to protect each other and their community. Mutual aid might be the strongest bond that holds individuals 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 autonomy, competition, and promotion of one's separate self-interests.

ALTRUISM

Humans are social creatures and care about others as well as themselves. A model of political community must recognize altruism as a powerful human motive.³ "Altruism" means acting in order to benefit others rather than oneself. Taking care of children, treating the sick, helping coworkers, volunteering as a tutor or a fix-it person—these are forms of everyday altruism.

Altruism is so much a part of our existence that we take it for granted. But the rationality paradigm, with its picture of humans as fundamen-

²Cultural pluralism within political communities is richly explored by Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³Kristen Renwick Monroe, *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Deborah Stone *The Samaritan's Dilemma: Should Government Help Your Neighbor?* (New York: Nation Books, 2008).

tally self-interested, makes altruism almost invisible. In fact, according to many social scientists, altruism doesn't exist. As Thomas Hobbes, one of the first modern democratic theorists, put it, "No man giveth but with intention of good to himself."⁴ Behind every apparently altruistic behavior lurks an ulterior, self-interested motive. Perhaps when you help an injured child, for example, you're really doing it to relieve your own distress from seeing a child in pain.

According to many modern social scientists, people's actions don't count as altruistic unless they receive absolutely no benefit themselves, or, to be even more stringent, unless they make some sacrifice or incur a loss when they act to help somebody else. As it happens, people who help other people almost always say they get psychic rewards: "When you help other people, you get more than you give." Here is the paradox of altruism: when people act to benefit others, they feel satisfaction, fulfillment, and a sense that helping others gives their lives meaning. The strict self-interest paradigm, therefore, makes altruism impossible by definition.

This is not to say that humans aren't also self-interested. We have both kinds of motives. But trying to measure the exact proportions of self-interest and altruism in any human behavior is as difficult as measuring whether a high-tech prosthetic foot gives a runner greater capabilities than he would have had with his own two feet. Here, it's enough to say that in the polis, people have both self-interested and altruistic motivations, and policy analysis must account for both of them.

In the polis, altruism can be just as fierce as self-interest. A manager of a fast-food franchise keeps two sets of time sheets—one to show her boss that she follows the chain's rules, the other to allow her employees time off and flexibility to deal with their family issues. The supervisor risks her job and her reputation (definitely not in her self-interest) in order to help her employees manage their jobs and personal lives. In schools, hospitals, retail stores, and government agencies, people sometimes fudge the records, bend the eligibility rules, take food and goods to pass on to desperate and suffering people—in other words, lie, cheat, and steal—when they believe the rules are unjust and there is a higher moral duty than obeying rules. Without an appreciation of altruism, we can't fully understand how policy gets implemented at the street level, nor can we understand the currents of resistance and civil disobedience that make up the "moral underground."⁵

⁴Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (orig. ed. 1651), chap. 15.

⁵Lisa Dodson, *The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy* (New York: New Press, 2009).

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, things everyone wants for themselves, such as a high standard of living. It could mean individuals' goals for their 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 drive SUVs. 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 the public-spirited side desires.

Public interest could also mean 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 a 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 self-defense. This question of community survival animates the debate over fighting terrorism. One side argues that terrorism is such a threat to our existence that fighting it justifies virtually any tactic, including torturing suspects and restricting our own constitutional rights to privacy and freedom. The other side argues that our nation is defined by its civil rights and the rule of law, so that to sacrifice them is to destroy our community. 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 entails 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 allowed to do that blatantly and exclusively. 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 in a polis. In market theory, the public interest is the net result of all individuals pursuing their self-interest. If a community starts with a fair income distribution and has a well-functioning market, then whatever happens afterward is by definition the best result for society as a whole. In a market, in short, the empty box of public interest gets 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.

COMMONS PROBLEMS

Because people often pursue a conception of public interest that differs 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. A factory owner gains a private benefit by discharging industrial waste into a river because it is a cheap and profitable disposal method; but this method ruins the water for everyone else, and so creates a social cost. A high-quality school system is a collective benefit but requires individual tax payments, and so creates private costs. 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, or that they are limited to immediate and direct effects. Actions have 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. One major dilemma in the polis is how to get people to give weight 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, in the polis, the vast gap between self-interest and public interest is bridged by some potent forces: influence, cooperation, and loyalty. Influence is inherent in communities, even communities of two. Humans aren't 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 socialization. From Kalamazoo to Kathmandu, young people covet expensive brand-name sneakers and the latest electronic gear, not because these things are inherently attractive to human beings but because global consumer culture heavily promotes them as desirable.

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 bother to 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 kinds 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 body piercing or backward baseball caps are frivolous examples of col-

lective 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), or do something *because* others are doing it.

Influence sometimes spills over into coercion, and the line between them is fuzzy. In fact, one big difference between traditional conservatives and liberals is where they place that line. Liberals tend to see poverty as a kind of coercion, and the far Left is wont to see coercion 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 libertarians are wont to see it in any government rule or regulation. There is no correct place to draw the line, because coercion is an *idea* about what motivates behavior, a label and an interpretation, rather than the behavior itself. No matter that we can't draw a clear line between influence and coercion—influence in all its fuzziness, varieties, and degrees of strength is one of the central elements of politics, and we'll see it at the heart of many policy dilemmas.

COOPERATION

In the polis, cooperation is every bit as important as competition. This is true for two reasons. First, politics involves seeking allies and cooperating with them in order to compete with opponents. Whenever there are two sides to an issue, there must be alliances among the people on one side. Children 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 fight.⁶ For this reason, the two-person models so prominent in economics and game theory are politically empty. When the only players in a model are "A" and "B," there is no possibility for strategic coalitions and shifting alliances, or for joint effort, leadership, and coordination.

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 the use of force cannot extend very far. Prison guards, with seemingly all the resources stacked on their side, need the cooperation of inmates to

⁶E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1970), chap. 4.

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.⁷ Even commanders of Nazi concentration camps depended on the cooperation and participation of inmates to operate the camps.⁸ American counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan rests on cooperation between American soldiers and Afghan civilians. According to the U.S. Army's counterinsurgency manual, soldiers can be most effective by helping to provide food, water, shelter, education, and medical care, and by showing respect for people of the country they occupy.⁹

In the textbook model of markets, 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 savvy customers, 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, price-fixing, insider trading. In the polis, cooperation is the norm. It is 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, treaty.

LOYALTY

Cooperation means alliances, and alliances are at least somewhat enduring. For that reason, cooperation often goes hand in hand with loyalty. In the ideal market, when a store hikes its prices or lets its products and service deteriorate, a shrewd buyer will switch stores. There is no "glue" in buyer-seller relations. In politics, relationships aren't usually 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 discount store.¹⁰

The differing views of loyalty in the market and polis models are also reflected in language. In the market, people are "buyers" and "sellers." In

⁷Gresham Sykes, *Society of Captives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), chap. 5.

⁸Jean-Francois Steiner, *Treblinka* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), especially pp. 55–75.

⁹U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁰Schattschneider, *Semisovereign People*, op. cit., note 6, p. 66.

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. The idea of a "pure" commercial relationship is one not "tainted" by loyalty or sentiment. In the polis, history counts for a lot; in the market, it counts for nothing.

This is not to say 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 in the polis there is a *presumption of loyalty*. People expect that others will normally stick by their friends and allies, and that it would take a major event—something that triggers a deep fear or offers an irresistible opportunity—to get them to switch their loyalties. Breaking old alliances can be risky, and people don't do it lightly.

GROUPS

Influence, cooperation, and loyalty are powerful forces, and the result is that groups and organizations, rather than individuals, are the building blocks of the polis. Groups are important in three ways. First, people belong to institutions and organizations, even when they aren't formal members. They participate 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 affected by organizations, and they depend on organizations to represent their interests.

Second, policy making isn't 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, *groups* confront each other, using individuals only as their spokespeople. Groups coalesce and divide over policy proposals, depending on how they expect the proposal to affect them. When a state legislature proposes a cut in school funding, parents and teachers in a school district might come together to fight the proposal. But when the school board is negotiating teachers' contracts, many of the same parents might no longer wish to ally with the teachers.

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 legislatures, courts, juries, committees, or agencies. Public decisions are implicitly collective in that even when officials have "sole authority," they are influenced by outside opinion and pressure. Policy decisions aren't made by abstract people but by people in social roles and organizations, addressing audiences of other people in their 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.

I make groups an element of the polis in contrast to the market model, where the actors are conceived either as individuals or as groups acting as if they had one mind. But this model is not a pluralist theory of politics. The pluralist theory holds that all important interests have the capacity to form interest groups and that these interest groups have relatively equal chances to make their voices heard in the political system. I insist on the importance of groups, not to claim that a political system is equally open to all of them but to point out that politics is necessarily a system of alliances.

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, information is ambiguous, incomplete, often strategically shaded, and sometimes deliberately withheld. Of course, it would be silly to say there is no such thing as correct information. Surely, when the newspaper reports that Microsoft's stock closed at \$27.21 per share, or that Senator John McCain voted against an arms limitation treaty with Russia, 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, what matters 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 police officer's use of racial epithets means for the possibility of fair trials for black citizens. In the polis, 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

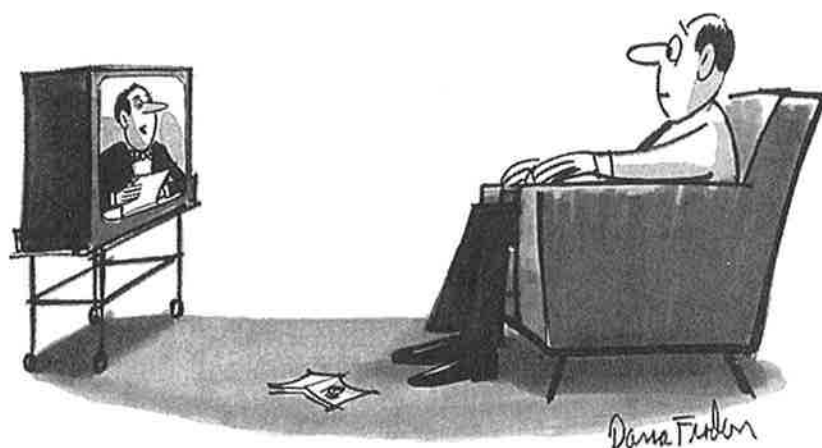
from a friend, whereas others are more likely to believe a friend than a doctor. Some people find blogs more convincing than newspapers, and vice versa. The words, pictures, and imagery of information affect its very message as well as its persuasiveness. Timing matters. A company's announcement about its safety practices will be interpreted differently if issued after an accident rather than before.

Because politics is driven by how people interpret information, political actors strive to control interpretations. Political candidates and their campaign advisers are notorious for their creative presentation of information, or spin. But strategic manipulation of information is by no means the preserve of 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, or your children why you make them go to school.) Information in the polis is different from information in the market model, because it depends so much on interpretation and is subject to strategic manipulation. Much of this book explores how policy information is strategically crafted 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. Whenever people act, they 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 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 market theory.

But even more important for a model of the polis is that political actors very often deliberately keep crucial information secret. The ideas of inventors, the business plans of entrepreneurs, the decision of a government to devalue its currency, whether a putative candidate will in fact run for office, where the town leaders are thinking of locating a sewage treatment plant—every one of these things might be kept secret if someone expects someone else to behave differently were the information 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.



"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. Overall, the status quo remained unchanged."

PASSION

In the market, economic resources are governed by the laws of matter. Resources are finite, scarce, and used up when they are used. Whatever is used for making guns cannot be used for making butter (a textbook example dreamed up 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, another set of laws operates alongside the laws of matter, ones that might be called laws of paradox if the phrase weren't paradoxical itself. Instead, I'll call them "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 stronger the more they are used. The more people work together and help each other, the more committed they become to each other and to their common 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 stronger people's expectations of "doing things the way they have always been done."

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.

The market model ignores this phenomenon of resource expansion through exercise, use, practice, and expression. A distinguished former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers once wrote that marketlike 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.¹¹ 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 market thinking. People aren't born with a limited stockpile of sentiments and passions, to be hoarded through life lest they be spent too quickly. More often than not, fighting in a war increases the feeling of patriotism, just as comforting a frightened child increases one's compassion.

Another law of passion holds 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; repeated denials of credit to blacks in a neighborhood means something more than **a series of unrelated** bankers' decisions. Widgets may get cheaper through mass production—economists call that "economies of scale"—but they are still widgets. By contrast, most human actions change their meaning and impact when done in concert or in quantity.

Finally, the most fun—and the most vexing law of passion: *things can mean and therefore be more than one thing at once*. Convicting white-collar criminals with nominal fines signals both that the government condemns the activity and that it does not. The growth of medical care expenditures

¹¹Charles L. Schultze, *The Public Use of Private Interest* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1977), pp. 17–18 (emphasis added).

bemoaned by employers and taxpayers also means new professional opportunities and job growth, not to mention new treatments that save and transform lives. Ambiguity and symbolic meanings find no home in the market model of society, where everything has its precise value or cost. In the polis, where people not only count but think, wish, dream, and imagine, meanings can run wild, and they matter.

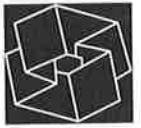
POWER

Up to this point, I have defined the polis by contrasting it with a market model of society. Now it's time to summarize the characteristics, 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. Its members are motivated by both altruism and self-interest.
3. It has a public interest, whose meaning people fight about and act upon.
4. Most of its policy problems are commons problems.
5. Influence is pervasive, and the boundary between influence and coercion is always contested.
6. Cooperation is as important as competition.
7. Loyalty is the norm.
8. Groups and organizations form the building blocks.
9. Information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategic.
10. 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 derives from all the other elements and can't be defined without reference to them. Power 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, and through strategic control of information. And finally, power 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



CONCEPTS OF SOCIETY

	<i>Market Model</i>	<i>Polis Model</i>
1. Unit of analysis	Individual	Community
2. Motivations	Self-interest	Altruism and self-interest
3. Public Interest	Sum of individual interests	Shared interests; what is good for community
4. Chief conflict	Self-interest vs. self-interest	Self-interest vs. public interest (commons problems)
5. Source of ideas and preferences	Self-generation within the individual	Influences from others and society
6. Nature of social interaction	Competition	Cooperation and competition
7. Criteria for individual decision making	Maximize personal gain, minimize cost	Loyalty (to people, places, organizations, products); maximize individual and family interest; promote public interest
8. Building blocks of social action	Individuals	Groups and organizations
9. Nature of information	Accurate, complete, fully available	Ambiguous, interpretive, incomplete, strategically manipulated
10. How things work	Laws of matter (material resources are finite and diminish with use)	Laws of passion (e.g., human resources are renewable and may expand with use)
11. Sources of change	Market exchange; individual quest to maximize own welfare	Ideas, persuasion, and alliances; pursuit of power, own and others' welfare, and public interest

exchange, which is in turn motivated by the individual quest to improve one's own welfare. Through market exchanges, the overall use and distribution of resources changes.

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 material conditions and choices but also over what is legitimate and right. 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, some modern economists have puzzled over 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.¹²

¹²Plutarch, cited in Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1982), p. 109.