

transformed into a roar: Frugality is not an option that one might take or leave; frugality is an economic necessity. We either live in accordance with the precepts of frugality, or we perish under a sea of debt and a heap of trash.

—Carmine Gorga
Polis-tics Inc., Gloucester, Massachusetts

Public Values and Public Interest

Barry Bozeman

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007 (214 pages)

Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, ideas about the relationship between the public interest and individual economic decisions changed. People began to talk about incentives and letting markets decide things. Political scientists questioned the idea of the public interest and began to use tools borrowed from economics to evaluate political outcomes. Today, the assumptions of economic individualism have been so absorbed into political science that scholars rarely question them.

In *Public Values and Public Interest*, Barry Bozeman critically examines the foundation of economic individualism and offers an alternative perspective in “managing publicness.” Bozeman, a professor of public policy at the University of Georgia’s School of Public and International Affairs, blends empirical research on public management with political theory, drawing on an older tradition of the public interest found in political science and on more recent work about public values in philosophy, anthropology, and other disciplines.

Public Values begins by cataloging the rise of economic arguments about politics and focuses on the idea of market failure as the primary justification for government intervention. The idea holds that the market is the best provider of goods and services except in cases where market competition is flawed and prices are distorted. Bozeman criticizes the idea for being based on a “shallow utilitarianism” and for not addressing questions of equity (62). Market failure and other concepts borrowed from microeconomics and applied to politics have the advantage of being, in the language of social science, easily operationalized. Microeconomic ideas draw on a general theory about how the world works, and they translate into measurable predictions that can be easily studied and either supported or found to be false.

The prominence of economic metaphors applied to political life is a relatively recent phenomenon of the last thirty years. Before that, it was more common to justify public policy in terms of the public interest. In 1955, the most prominent public intellectual of his day, Walter Lippmann, defined the public interest as “what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, acted disinterestedly and benevolently.” Though an admirable goal, the idea of the public interest proved too slippery for most contemporary social scientists to study.

Bozeman provides a concise criticism of the limits of economic individualism, most of which has been made elsewhere, including in works by political philosopher Michael

Sandel and economist Stephen Marglin. Bozeman's contribution is to provide the first steps toward an alternative concept of how to evaluate public policy and government operations rooted in the public interest and public values. He provides managerial and operational possibilities for how public values might operate in practice and shows where they diverge from approaches rooted in economic individualism.

Microeconomic indicators sometimes miss important social values such as consequences over the long term, the dignity of individual persons, and the intrinsic value of deliberation. In several case studies, Bozeman shows how scholars might evaluate public policy from the perspective of the public interest and public value. The primary weakness of public interest theory has been the difficulty of applying it to particular cases. Bozeman suggests how this might be done, for example in evaluating the government's role in protecting citizens against genetically modified foods and dangerous science.

Bozeman's contribution is certain to inspire future research and inform students of public policy and public management. He has produced a slim volume appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses and accessible to the educated generalist. Nevertheless, many issues remain outside the scope of the book and would usefully be addressed in future work. Bozeman concludes that the public value approach to dangerous science is superior to the considerations of economic individualism, but Richard Posner, a prominent proponent of a strain of economic individualism known as law and economics, wrote a provocative book, *Catastrophe: Risk and Response*, warning of the dangers of science untamed by public oversight. Most proponents of the application of economics to politics do not think that economic logic provides the answer to all political questions, and many economists are critical of the limits of their craft.

Students of public value theory who take Bozeman's book as a point of departure should approach the movement known as new public management (NPM) with an appreciation for its many nuances. New public management is a movement, strongest in the United States and other Anglophone countries, to improve public sector outcomes by emphasizing the use of performance measures and market-based incentives. Bozeman paints NPM as a feature of the landscape of economic individualism. The association may not be as strong as Bozeman suggests. One of new public management's central thinkers, Mark Moore, wrote an influential book titled *Creating Public Value* in which he examined how public managers might operate within the context of given constitutional and political values and institutions to serve ends much like the public interests that Bozeman describes.

All in all, Bozeman makes a significant contribution to the study of public policy and public management at a deep level. His work raises the question of what social science should be about. Should it limit itself to discussing concepts as casual hypotheses that are subject to empirical tests or should it propose normative ideals about the purpose of politics? Bozeman is a redoubtable advocate for the latter position.

—Patrick S. Roberts (e-mail: robertsp@vt.edu)
Center for Public Administration and Policy
Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, Virginia