The Theology of Values in Policy Making

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Introduction

Perhaps one of the earliest tasks of any new executive or policymaker is to establish decision-making strategies. Payne et al (1993) have outlined a repertoire of strategies for policymakers to employ. Each strategy processes advantages and disadvantages related to different decision tasks. Individual policymakers select from these strategies by trading off their relative advantages and disadvantages. They consider the use of multi decision strategies to be "*an adaptive response of a limited-capacity information processor to the demands of complex decision tasks* (Payne et al., 1993, p. 1).

This paper considers many of the rational activities that control decision-making to involve decisions requiring a choice between altruism and egoism as well as those involving issues of social justice. There are four distinct ambiguities that are faced in these decisions. Our argument is that many policy decisions deal with the first two ambiguities, but do not deal with ambiguities than pertain to leadership and inequality. These cause a tension between values. Aquinas categorized the tension between values as being social and egalitarian (Aquinas, 1955/1929). Likewise, twenty-first century executives are faced with the dilemma of reconciling Christian values with policy decisions of an economic rationalistic nature.

Scientific Management

West (1989) examined Dewey's metaphysics in which the concept of `critical intelligence' is emphasized. Every concept and theory of `decision making' is based on the notion of rationality. Decision makers exercise control over their respective organizations through the pursuit of `rational' goal directed activities (West, 1989). This

practice is applicable to decision and policy makers whether they are members of the Australian cabinet or a private business board. Rational decision makers are expected to be `cool' and dispassionate managers who are not influenced by ideology, self interests and other people's values. In organizational contexts rationality implies "*Adopting a scientific rather than a metaphysical approach to problems*" (Hulme, 2005).

Value Systems

There is general interest among researchers about the link between policies adopted and decision taken and the respective value systems and the ideologies that the policy/decision makers hold. Beach identifies the values in decision making as a "*code of honour, ethics, and ideals as well as one's fundamental standards of equality, justice, solidarity, stewardships, truth, beauty, and goodness, …..* (Beach, 1990, p. 23).

Ambiguities of Justice

Whenever a person endeavours to have `justice' applied to a particular situation and when `justice' is actually applied, ambiguities, or uncertainties, of justice, become evident. For instance, in the criminal justice systems uncertainties or differences sometimes occur between the justice sought by victims and the justice handed down by magistrates. There are differing opinions throughout the world as to whether the secular state should usurp the justice role of God and mete out the ultimate punishment to people convicted of certain crimes. Such ambiguities of justice often cause divisions within various institutions including mainstream churches. Tillich identifies four distinct ambiguities of the actualisation of justice relating to: "*inclusiveness and exclusiveness; competition and equality; leadership; and legal form*" (Tillich, 1968, pp. 84 - 89).

The First Ambiguity of Justice

This ambiguity is concerned with the establishment of membership boundaries around a group and who should be included or excluded. Conflicts between an individual's moral, cultural and other views of his/her self and group expressions of social-political concerns, hinder a social group's acceptance of spiritual concepts. A social group's interpretation and practice of justice amongst its members also contributes to the way the group is structured. Ambiguities also occur if group justice systems depend on internal social-political forces. When people act altruistically, they reach out beyond self-interest boundaries and benefit people who might otherwise be the rejected in the society.

Discontentment with the way that most large social groups function has caused some marginalised people to choose to live on the borders of large social groups. Alternative communities have a strong `*we-consciousness*' within a group choosing to eat, work and live together. Social scientists consider that people, discontented with nuclear family living, have had value added to their lives through living in bourgeois urban communities. Income-sharing communities were amongst the first of the bourgeois communities and these "*aimed to separate the individual from the bonds of ownership: to make a concrete step towards community socialism*" (Cook, 1979, pp. 1-2). Throughout history there have been numerous communes of people who have shared common religious concerns and lived together in order to achieve short or long-term goals.

The Second Ambiguity of Justice

A second ambiguity of justice relates to `*competition and equality'*. Inequality in power struggles requires continuous and impulsive decision making that does not ignore differences or place them in a state of equilibrium. Such a situation arises whenever individuals have contact with each other and with groups. It occurs whenever competition is evident in relationships within families, workplaces including business and educational facilities, intellectual and artistic activities, social activities, and struggles for political ascendancy. A potential to destroy justice will remain whilst uncertainties of the competition process continue to work for inequalities of communications, the polarization of society into class groups and evolutions in the political realm. Problems or ambiguities become evident when the embodied rights of a deserving power are denied and granted to an undeserving power. In economic rationalism, competition through the markets is supreme. Therefore, if global economic entrepreneurial decisions improve the economic welfare in one country whilst increasing the levels of poverty in another, it might be concluded that such economic rationalistic practices are unjust.

The Third Ambiguity of Justice

The third attribute of justice in a social group's self-assessment of reality refers to the `*ambiguity of leadership'*. This process is central to all types of human relations from parent-child to ruler-subject relationships. If a group's leadership is absent, centredness is also absent and the group is devoid of processes that will enable the group to establish and develop its own unique functions. In these groups the leaders not only embody group power and justice but, also, represent their own personal power and unique justice values. Ambiguity occurs when leadership structures are rationalized or reflect their leaders' ideologies. Insouciant behaviour or anarchical situations causing fragmentation of leadership structures do not remove ambiguities, as ineffective democratic systems, or anarchical societies, produce chaos. Such situations often lead to the rise of a powerful individual leader exercising dictatorial powers (Tillich, 1968, pp. 86 - 87).

In defining `leadership' social scientists, such as House, Pigors and Stodgill employ three major meanings viz. positional attributes, personal characteristics, and behaviour category (see House, 2004, Pigors, 1935, and Stogdill, 1950). Social scientists, seeking to establish significantly more than sporadic links between personality traits and leadership, have experienced great difficulties. Leadership selection would be much easier and the possibility of injustices occurring would be greatly reduced if it could be associated with particular personality traits (Owens, 1981, pp. 145 - 146).

There may not be many scientific links that associate leadership and power. Michelson, however, proposes that as, "*leadership is the exercise of power ... leaders must develop appropriate power bases to use effectively their power bases to influence others"* (Michelson, 2006, p. 193). Leaders in contemporary organisations exercise 'power' regularly to accomplish work goals and enhance their positions within their organisations. Despite apparent shortfalls in the scientific development of links between leadership and power some researchers indicate that critical decision-making and tasks are a necessary part of leadership. Merely giving orders is not true leadership so leaders depend on power or charisma to draw support from other group members. Without a leader some psychological power would need to direct individual group members in a

manner reminiscent of mass shock movements. As well as representing the power and justice of a group, the leader represents his/her own personality, or power of being, and the justice that is implicit in it. Uncertainties or ambiguities about rationalisations and ideologies occur in every structure of leadership (Tillich, 1968, p. 87).

Task orientated team members will accept their leaders' decisions as just or unjust dependent upon the efficiency of decision outcomes. Leadership decisions may be considered unjust if they produce outcomes that are exclusive or non-egalitarian. For instance, globalisation and competition policies, inherent in economic rationalism, encourage entrepreneurs to transfer factories from one country to another with lower costs and if these are unfair and unjust it might be concluded that these leadership policies are unfair and unjust. Similarly, if altruistic actions are fair and just, it might be concluded that the leaders are fair and just. Individuals sometimes reject authority if they are uncertain about whether the quality of the leadership function is satisfactory or not. Tillich (1968, p. 88) claims that a "*successful rejection of authority would undercut the social structure of life, whereas a surrender to authority would destroy the basis of authority – the personal self and its claim for justice*".

The Fourth Ambiguity of Justice

This ambiguity of justice is distinct from uncertainties about how `man' should respond to moral laws in regard to his relationship with God. The `a*mbiguity of legal form'* is concerned with uncertainties in criminal and civil laws, designed to bring justice to society. However, instead of justice they bring injustices with ambiguities having both external and internal causes. Instead of being a form of justice it is, in reality, only an expression of a particular individual or social power.

Internal ambiguities of the legal justice system operate outside `l*egalizing, interpreting, and executing powers*' of lawmakers, judiciary and the executive arm of government. Because every tangible situation is unique, injustices can occur. Thus, many legal systems have endeavoured to remedy injustices by establishing safety measures (Tillich, 1968, pp. 88 - 89).These include the use of judicial discretionary sentencing powers even though some claim that their use has caused numerous injustices. Victims and the public consider the denial of these powers to judges will enhance justice. As well as causing ambiguity in the legal form of justice, the denial of discretionary rights to sentencing judges raises problems for standards for `ordinary persons' and uncertainties about issues of inclusion and exclusion, and equality and inequality. These, as well as ambiguities of leadership in justice, are important components of the specific social justice issues of asylum seekers, mandatory sentencing, racial issues and states rights included in a survey conducted in 2000 (Gates, 2006c).

Many church based organizations have evolved as the result of perceived needs to remedy injustices that appeared to deprive certain classes of people of basic human rights and dignity. Some of these have a background of traditional religious and social struggles to overcome ambiguities of justice.

Some Biblical, Historical, Political and Social Perspectives of Justice

The Minor Prophets, such as Micah (6:8) spoke against unjust actions and entreated people to act in a just manner. The Psalmist and the writer of the Book of

Proverbs placed justice right at the hand of God. Proverbs indicated that the Lord is responsible for the provision of honest scales, balances and weights (Proverbs 16:11).

After Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christian leaders sometimes compromised on issues of social justice. They were uncertain about criticizing authorities adopting unjust practices, or were prevented from expressing their criticisms. Religion and morals became part of the private arena. Much of the close church-state relationships of the twentieth century resulted from attempts to redefine these boundary lines (Bosch, 1991, pp. 401 - 402).

At a later period numerous unjust practices were adopted, for instance, in the eighteenth century animal torture and human slave trafficking were practised. However there arose a number of aristocrats, for example the Clapham Sect, who assisted with generous philanthropy and strong political action and evangelicals such as John and Charles Wesley, who combined evangelical leadership with social activism. There is a close link between issues of social justice and the issues that motivate men and women to engage in altruistic acts.

Until the publication of Booth's 1890 epic, officers and soldiers of lower rank than General William Booth and his executive, initiated many of the expressions of social justice. Social justice fighters throughout history have had to struggle to accomplish any advances that they have been able to make. For instance, William Booth on observing a group of homeless men sleeping under a London Bridge one night questioned his son, Bramwell, about their plight and demanded his urgent remedial action.

The apparent conflict of values facing individual policymakers can be identified as a battle between altruism and egoism or between selflessness and selfishness. In Australian politics, it has been claimed that a cultural war has arisen and this conflict has been likened to "*the battle between free-market fundamentalism and the social democratic belief that individual reward can be balanced with social responsibility*" (Rudd, 2006b).

In some countries, such as Latin America, some theologians adopt a liberation theological approach to injustice. In line with the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas on justice as being social and egalitarian (see Aquinas, 1955/1929), the major forms of liberation theology transcend sacralism and secularism. These encompass a number of forms of the misuse of power including injustices resulting from the violent use of power as expressed in militarism (Lamb, 1985). Thus, if Lamb's concepts are accepted, executives formulating a liberation theological approach to policies should seek solutions that more than immunise the target social group against the affect of secularisation (see Mol, 1976, p. 5).

Individualism

Liberal political theorists have tended to justify liberal practices by appealing to pluralistic ideals to justify individual rights and subsequent absence from state interference in their personal choices (Anderson, 1993, p. 141). This concept of individualism was outlined in Max Weber's analysis of *The Protestant Work Ethic* (see Weber, 1976).

To Hayek, socialism's concept and goal of distributive justice cannot be reconciled with the rule of law or with freedom under the law, the security of which is a purpose of that law (see Hayek, 1976, p. 86). Hayek also held neoliberal concepts of moral values in which morality is market generated and involves *"rules about private property, honesty, contract, exchange, trade, competition, gain and privacy"* (see McKnight, 2005, and Rudd, 2006b, p. 48)

Adam Smith's Concepts of Justice

In the eighteenth century, Adam Smith spoke of an `*Invisible Hand*' by which myriads of decisions by people pursuing their own self interests worked for the benefit of society as a whole (see Smith, 1976 [1776], and Braham, 2006, p. 1). Although Smith excluded distributive justice from his concepts of justice, despite oppressive inequality, he advocated that the needs of the poor should be accommodated in an adequate manner (Verburg, 2000, p. 23). The application of the social justice concepts, of `charity and generosity, was assessed on individual and/or `merit' based criteria (Braham, 2006).

Egalitarianism, Equality and Complex Equality!

Theoretically individualism, as espoused in market fundamentalism or economic rationalism and by the religious right, should provide a framework for individual altruistic acts towards the disadvantaged of society. Whereas a number of wealthy people do make some significant contributions to charity these fall far short of what is needed in a troubled world. Egalitarians advocating a notion of simple equality would envisage a society in which all its members are equal. However, as this is not real, Walzer proposes that equality would occur if dominance in one sphere of justice does not extend across into another sphere (Walzer, 1983, pp. 17 - 18).

A Theological Response to Poverty, Dominance and Inequalities

Policymakers endeavouring to provide solutions to poverty in third world countries are faced with numerous moral demands. Tillich claims that the *"religious source of the moral demands is love under the domination of the agape quality"* (Tillich, 1964, p. 41). However this is not always evident in the actions of powerful multi-national organizations and governments. For instance, market power increases when domestic markets in the industrialized world are protected by high tariffs so that many consumer goods produced in the poorest countries are unable to compete.

There have been efforts to address chronic poverty amongst small agricultural producers in developing countries and these have resulted in new markets for organic and `fairly traded' products. An effort by the Roman Catholic Church has seen the institution of twenty-eight Christian Jubilees from 1300 to 2000.

Conclusion

Scientific management is employed by policymakers utilizing `rational' goal directed activities to exercise control over their organizations. Many and differing values and ideologies affect their decision making processes. This paper identified four distinct ambiguities of justice relating to: `*inclusiveness and exclusiveness; competition and equality; leadership; and legal form'* that are being faced by policymakers.

Government and non-government organizations endeavouring to promote development and combat poverty in third world countries could do well to adopt the following sets of fundamental values proposed by a former Prime Minister of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik. He advocates respect for life and human dignity, ecological stewardship and "*compassion and solidarity, which must underpin our efforts to promote justice, social and economic development, both nationally and internationally*" (Bondevik, 2003)

Adherence to such teaching reinforces the value of altruism over egoism. The tension between these values is evident as ambiguities and is persistently identified in scripture and theological teachings in church history. Resolving the tension between these values remains a challenge for policy makers today.

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