

## Virginia, Rochester, and Bloomington: Twenty-five years of public choice and political science

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### 1. Introduction

Although the birth of public choice is frequently identified with the publication of Black's 1948 article on the rationale of group decision-making and Arrow's better-known book of 1951, public choice acquired an identity only with the publication of Downs' *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) and assurance of continued existence with the printing of Buchanan and Tullock's *The Calculus of Consent* (1962), and Riker's *Theory of Political Coalitions* (1962) but a few months later. Black's article might have remained but a little-known curiosity and Arrow's book a technical contribution to welfare economics rather than positive political theory if Buchanan and Tullock and Riker had not solidified the great contribution of Downs. It should also be noted that the Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy at the University of Virginia was founded in 1957 the year in which Downs' book was published. In 1966, Tullock began publication of *Papers in Non-Market Decision-Making* a journal destined to become better-known when in 1968, it was renamed *Public Choice*.<sup>1</sup> Founded but a year later at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the Center for the Study of Public Choice functioned in Blacksburg, Virginia until 1983 when it moved to its current location at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

Like all intellectual developments public choice has developed a life of its own, given birth to a new generation of theorists, research institutions, approaches and methods, etc., that the 'founding fathers' neither envisaged nor, one suspects, always approve; in any case, like parents they may well wonder how the 'kids' could have turned out as they have. Aside from the family analogy, it seems that three schools of thought have appeared and that they are sufficiently different to warrant distinctive labels. Mine are taken from their geographical locations: Virginia (Charlottesville; Blacksburg; Fairfax), Rochester, and Bloomington. At each of these institutions one or two dominant figures led and continue to lead in the effort to construct theories of collective choice: Riker at Rochester, Buchanan and Tullock at various Virginia universities, and the Ostrows at Indiana. These highly innovative analysts have also left

their pedagogical marks on a generation of able students who, in turn, have gone on to distinguish themselves as important contributors to the field.

A new generation of centers and departments has been spawned at Cal-Tech, Carnegie-Mellon, Washington University at St. Louis, University of Texas, and the University of Maryland. At the same time, students trained or influenced by the founders are now located in dozens of conventional departments of political science and economics. Among the notables in political science are Peter Aranson of Emory University, Morris Fiorina and Kenneth Shepsle at Harvard, John Ferejohn at Stanford, and Peter Ordeshook at the California Institute of Technology.

I do not wish to suggest that what follows is either a narrative history of places and personnel or a full-blown substantive critique. Furthermore, this is not a bibliographical essay designed to survey the field. I wish, instead, to (a) outline in broad strokes the contributions of a varied set of public choice analysts both to public choice and political science; (b) assess the impact upon or reception accorded public choice by political scientists; and, finally, (c) set forth an informal theory of knowledge to account for the development of schools of thought and their dissemination and reception across interdisciplinary lines. These are demanding tasks and in need of considerably more work than I have put forth in these few pages.

## 2. Rochester positivists

Rochester and its 'progeny' and allies at Carnegie-Mellon, Cal-Tech and, of late, University of Texas, would all have come into being and eventual prominence regardless of efforts in Virginia and at Bloomington. The reasons are fairly clear. Various applications of game theory to politics by Luce and Raiffa (1957), Schelling (1960), and Boulding (1962), for example, presented an opportune moment for Riker (1962) to apply a game theoretic critique to Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). Parenthetically, Riker did not rebel against a then fashionable 'behavioral' school; instead he simply and wisely ignored it and looked outside political science for inspiration and substance.

Since game theory is devoted primarily to situations of conflict, its application to politics seemed natural if not inevitable. Game theory also prepared the way for a positive or formal, i.e., mathematical political science. Statistical testing of formal theory – a necessity for the positivistic-inclined analyst – was the next step in the new science as it had been in economics. Mathematics and statistics are likely to become basic tools whenever one defines politics as 'the mystery of how social choice evolves out of individual preferences' (Riker and Ordeshook, 1973: 6). Much of the 'mystery' is provided by elections, party strategies, agenda manipulation and voting, all conveniently quantitative phe-

nomena containing some reasonable semblance of rational choice. Less apparent influences during the formative years were the conceptual contributions of economics so important in the work of the Virginians. If game theory provided the impetus to reconsider certain aspects of politics, namely, coalition formation and party strategies, the inspiration for the mathematical analysis of elections and voting, whether in committees, legislatures, or general elections came primarily from Duncan Black but also and, perhaps, surprisingly, from welfare economics. Regardless, it is ironic that political scientists borrowed the term 'positive' theory from economics at about the same time that the Virginian economists chose 'public choice' to describe their concerns.

Arrow's concern for social optima was converted into positive political theory by treating social choice as an  $n$ -player strategic game (Plott, 1976; Wilson, 1970). The early efforts of Arrow to construct a positive political theory were paralleled by and partly corrected by Black's work on voting in committees. As is well-known Black had not considered the possibilities of strategy in voting, especially 'sophisticated' strategies (Farquharson, 1969), a topic given considerable emphasis in the early seventies, but he did discover a way out of Arrow's Paradox, i.e., the existence of single-peak preferences.

Many of the same positive theorists who advanced our understanding of voting and elections considered the phenomenon of vote-trading or log-rolling, itself, a kind of strategic coalition or collusion (Coleman, 1966). Interestingly, the work on vote-trading provided an unusual but somewhat unexploited opportunity for Rochesterites to interact with Virginian analysts; it was Buchanan and Tullock who in *The Calculus of Consent* had initially raised the question of the efficiency of log-rolling. Riker and Brams (1973) agreed with Buchanan and Tullock on the majority rule bias toward inefficiency but other analysts have examined log-rolling without firm and general agreement as to its precise effects. Much the same can be said about Riker's principle of the minimal winning size of coalitions (Hardin, 1976).

Positive theory places considerable emphasis upon electoral competition, an emphasis, which, if my suspicion is correct, provides a relatively clear-cut example of some sharp substantive differences between Virginia and Rochester. The empirical and analytic significance accorded the median voter theorem by formal theorists is moderated if not rejected by most Virginians (Rowley, 1986). Additionally, Tullock (1967), for example, has argued that whenever large numbers of voters are involved majority cycling is not an important problem. But, others including Riker (1982), and McKelvey and Ordeshook (1984), especially, maintain that cycling is universal and worse than no purely strategic equilibrium exists, a most pessimistic conclusion. One might hazard the opinion that Virginia analysts 'welcome' these results, if not the explanation, but that would be a simplistic judgment. I should point out, however, that some of the modern work on electoral competition was presaged by Bucha-

nan's early articles on voting and markets (1954a, b), articles that have been largely ignored by Rochester analysts. In any event, comparison of economic and political competition by Buchanan (195a, b; 1968), Becker (1958), and Stigler (1972) has deepened our understanding of each process. We should now know that vote margins count (Stigler, 1972) and that restricted two-party competition is apt to generate better results than emerge from multi-party systems, but that in markets competition is more efficient when large numbers of competitors exist on both sides of the market. Riker (1979) has also found occasion to question the strategic immunity claimed by Tideman and Tullock (1976) for their demand revelation model. I suspect, too, that Virginians are not much moved by Riker's recent efforts (1986) to establish a study of 'heresthetics.' Virginians are less apt to appreciate the innovative efforts of politicians, efforts they believe are directed primarily toward new schemes of redistribution rather than providing public goods and resolving externality problems. One should not overemphasize the divergence since Riker (1982b) is fully aware of the powerful motives to redistribute wealth.

The first twenty years of Rochester positivism was devoted mostly to the mathematical exploration of the above topics with little attention paid other equally critical institutional elements of collective choice. For whatever reasons several younger Rochester analysts are now extending their work to legislative institutions and in the process encountering more Virginian analyses as well as conventional political science. The non-institutional settings of many formal models are being altered so as to better explain both the origins of certain institutions and their policy and other political effects. We now learn from Aranson (1981), Shepsle and Weingast (1987), McKelvey and Ordeshook (1984), and Fiorina (1977, 1981), about the agenda and committee activities of Congress, courts, as well as various electoral and constitutional reforms.<sup>2</sup> Although this formal work has a Rochester inspiration, the work, itself, is often quite empirical and tied to certain classics of political science including seminal works by Gosnell (1937), Schattschneider (1960, 1969), V.O. Key, Jr. (1949), E. Pendleton Herring (1940), and more recently, Fenno (1973), and Mayhew (1974). While this research agenda brings the positivists into greater contact with conventional political scientists and is of interest to Virginians it is distinctive and not at all Virginian in style or tone.

Although much of positive analysis leads to dire conclusions about electoral imperfections and legislative paradoxes and failures, one senses that few of its authors (Aranson & Riker are notable exceptions) are particularly upset by cyclical majorities, inefficient log-rolling, existing fiscal institutions, and inefficient public policies. Clarion calls for change are relatively few (see, however, Brams and Fishburn, 1983) even from those who may share Virginian libertarian values. Virginia theorists remain unmoved by such positive contributions as 'Voting Equilibria in Multidimensional Choice Spaces,' (McKelvey and Wen-

dell, 1976). Yet a passionless, abstract positivism does not necessarily preclude normative concerns; indeed, of recent years we can read of Riker's (1980) support for fiscal reform at the constitutional level. On the other hand, Kenneth Shepsle (1982) has voiced considerable skepticism about constitutional reform, especially of the Virginia variety. And, Fiorina (1983) has complained about 'Flagellating the Federal Bureaucracy.'

One might also observe that positivists are less likely to begin their research by noting inefficient and/or other unappreciated policy results. Unlike Virginian economists positivists begin with institutions – usually real-world – and, deduce or predict likely policy and electoral consequences. I find it difficult to believe, therefore, that any positivist would ever consider writing *A Democracy in Deficit* by Buchanan and Wagner (1977), or Brennan and Buchanan's *The Power to Tax* (1980), books that are characterized by intense constitutional and policy concerns and argued not via mathematics but straightforward, basic micro-economics.

Although several positivists, including Aranson and Ordeshook (1977, 1985), especially, and others, have written about public goods, demand revelation, fiscal illusions, income redistribution, log-rolling, and the growth of government these have not been, at least, until recently, major concerns. And, now that they have been raised, especially by Ordeshook and Aranson (1977), one gains the impression that Virginian explanations are not always regarded as adequate analyses of the political process. Considered deficient as theories of governmental growth are such analytical Virginian staples as fiscal illusions and log-rolling. Aranson and Ordeshook (1977, 1981) see little rigour and less empirical confirmation in support of these well-known explanations of growth. Nonetheless, the authors clearly sympathize with 'conservative' fiscal values.

Although much of the substance of Rochester and Virginia thinking can and has been integrated it is quite clear that the basic frameworks and methods differ and, in some respects, may not be entirely reconcilable. Positive theory and the exchange models of Virginians reflect an ancient philosophical division between those who view politics as basically conflictual and those who emphasize trade and agreement. Like their positive counterparts, Virginians see politics as some combination of conflict and cooperation but unlike their positive brethren tend to emphasize the exchange possibilities found in the contractarian tradition. And so the market provides Virginians with a fundamental benchmark for both analytical and normative analyses, a standard less apparent in positive thought.

Another divergence is more apparent, perhaps, in their basic textbooks. The positivists not only parade more formal analyses but they present politics as a miscellaneous set of games, mostly unrelated to one another except at the conceptual level and using the real world of politics as but illustrations. Far more of the analysis is devoted to the elaboration of the formal tools and mathemati-



cal operations than to their application. Some texts examine formal social choice rules to the exclusion of voters, politicians, and bureaucrats and their interaction. (See Bonner, 1986; Feldman, 1980.)

Positivists have not devised a paradigm of the polity logically equivalent to the economist's 'circular flow' diagram of the economy whereas Virginians conceptualize the polity on the same foundations as the economy. This procedure enables fruitful comparisons between the two institutional settings that are denied positivists.

And, lastly, positivists take science seriously. Earlier writings of, for example, Riker routinely took political science to task for not being scientific. With the exception of Tollison, Virginians tend to view economics and public choice more from the perspective of Austrian economics, i.e., to reject the excessive reliance of neo-classical theorists on mathematics, equilibrium-models, and econometrics. Riker seems to have retreated somewhat on these matters while his students remain divided. Aranson pays occasional tribute to the Austrians while Fiorina and Shepsle (1982) still accord allegiance to the earlier Riker.

### 3. Virginian public choice

With its distinctive roots in the Economics Department of Frank Knight at Chicago the most provocative of the three schools of public choice is that of Buchanan and Tullock or the Virginia School. Just as Rochester would exist without Virginia, the latter has a fierce independence of Rochester in substantive ideas, ideals, and methods. Public Choice is associated by most economists and many political scientists with the work of economists at the Center for Study of Public Choice and, especially, its leaders James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. While gifted public choice analysts many of their sometime associates (Brennan, Tollison, Wagner, Lee, Goetz, Tideman, Crane, Rowley, Mackay, and many others) are not exactly household names in political science.

If Rochester draws its inspiration from the work of Arrow, Black, von Neumann and other mathematically-oriented theorists, the Virginia school traces its inspiration to a combination of sources including Italian and Scandinavian public finance, Chicago economics (a mixed bag), but most importantly from an active opposition to orthodox neo-classical economics. Led by Buchanan and Tullock, the Virginia group has steadfastly viewed itself as an alternative to Keynesian macro-economics, Pigouvian welfare economics, and more recently, Musgrave's liberal public finance. Pigou is considered wrong in his welfare prescriptions and, like Keynes, exceedingly, naive and superficial in his understanding of political processes. Virginians reject governmental intervention because they reject the view that alleged 'failures' of the market originate in

a universal prisoners' dilemma. Utility maximizing individuals seek out exchanges, not conflict. At the base of these rejections is a firm conviction that the private economy is far more robust, efficient, and perhaps, equitable than other economies and much more successful than political processes in efficiently allocating resources. While private economies are in need of well-defined property rights and basic law and order, extensive government is a requirement of neither stability nor progress.

Much of what has been produced by The Center for Study of Public Choice can best be described as contributions to a theory of the failure of political processes. These contributions have been both profound and influential. Essentially the theory is focused on the perverse incentives embedded in rules of collective choice that necessarily enable redistribution to dominate efficiency. The divorce of costs and benefits, the indirectness of collective means, presence of substantial collective externalities, costly information and trading institutions, and high organizational and entry costs that characterize political systems conspire to constrain rational choice. In short, Virginian analyses emphasize properties of the democratic political process that are held to be inherent and universal. Unlike the private economy, the polity lacks an effective invisible hand which converts private selfishness into collective good. Accordingly, inequity, inefficiency, and coercion are the most general results of democratic policy formation. For more than twenty-five years, Virginia economists have developed and related these themes to a variety of institutional and policy settings. This orientation which permeates the work of, say, Dwight Lee and Robert Tollison is little known to political scientists and if it were, would most likely be rejected. Lee's insights into the rationality and peaceful character of markets (1982) and McCormick and Tollison's (1981) jaundiced and definitely economic view of legislatures goes against the intuitive and more sympathetic understandings of virtually all political scientists including some from Rochester and Bloomington. And, perhaps, some fellow Virginians!

Whereas Rochester has been led to investigate electoral politics Virginians focus on the lengthy periods between elections and institutions that exercise most of their influence during these time spans. Accordingly, a great deal of analysis is focused on bureaucracy, courts, regulation, government employment, corruption, rent-seeking by interest groups, and constitutional provisions, analyses leading, in turn, to theories of government growth. And, whereas, Rochester has conducted many of its investigations in a policy-void, Virginian economists offer detailed studies of particular policies (e.g., price controls, military draft, public health, environmental policies, plant closings) and the institutions that produce and select less efficient options. Rochester may discuss social welfare functions in the abstract but Virginia is interested in a demand for publicly-supplied services that seems insatiable. Rochester examines voting rules for paradoxes and cycles while Virginians point to

resource wastage. Virginia theorists are, therefore, vitally concerned with forces that condition and decide public supplies and the growth of the state and its role changes from the productive to the coercive transfer agency. Interestingly, it turns out that the government, itself, becomes a major source of demand for the superfluous goods/services it proposes to offer. Accordingly, political advertising is contrasted with private selling and found wanting (Tullock, 1967; Wagner, 1978). Since both politicians and bureaucrats face perverse incentives publicly-offered goods end up being over-supplied and costly. And, as noted above, fiscal illusion has also been attributed an important role in explaining growth – one it possesses in neither standard economics nor Rochester thinking.

These basic themes in Virginian analyses continue but as the interests of the more permanent members have shifted and Center personnel has changed, so, too, has the research agenda. Recent years have witnessed a return to the original constitutional and contractarian concerns of Buchanan and Tullock but the current focus is on a particular set of constitutional provisions, namely, fiscal rules. And, in a more general sense, public choice is being treated by Buchanan, in particular, as a set of philosophical dilemmas entailing justice, liberty, and equality. At the same time, Center analysts have shifted their demand-oriented perspective of earlier days, i.e., from *The Calculus of Consent* to the more supply-side and Machiavellian view of government as a Leviathan and politics as a rent-seeking or a negative-sum game. Since *The Calculus* tended to treat government and constitutions as non-market exchanges among utility-seeking individuals, government emerged as a 'productive state.' More recent conceptualizations seem somewhat less sanguine in that government becomes an entity in its own right with interests of its own that happen all too often to be in conflict with those of many citizens. At the same time, private citizens are also persuaded of the profitability of political action; not surprisingly, when everyone is engaged in the same uncooperative action zero-sum games become negative-sum. Fearing this possibility, Buchanan and others support various constitutional proposals intended to control Leviathan, its growth and the activities it may supervise or control. Fundamental to these proposals is the belief that voters and politicians are myopic, fiscal powers are all-important and that balanced budgets and rules to govern the monetary base as well as taxation can be effective limitations on state power as well as means of introducing more rational allocations of scarce resources.

A concern for middle-level constitutional issues held sway during the early and mid-seventies when Tideman and Tullock (1976) were leaders in the search for institutions of demand revelation that might better serve to optimize supplies of public goods. Interest in such political institutions has waned of late not only at Fairfax but elsewhere. This is unfortunate, not because such institutions cannot be invented – they have been – but such inquiries and inventions



suggest that Arrow's paradox ought to be demystified and the paradox industry abandoned for more fruitful enterprises. Tideman and Tullock claimed to have invented an electoral system that reveals and aggregates preferences in such a way as to avoid free riders and voter paradoxes. Riker (1979), however, remains unconvinced; the scheme, he says, does not avoid strategic deception. Whatever, the merits of the argument, demand-revelation is not now a top priority issue.

Rent-seeking appears then to have supplanted demand revelation as a major focus of theory and empirical inquiry at Fairfax. At least three volumes, one a collection of papers – mostly by Virginia economists – on the basics of rent-seeking (Buchanan, Tollison, and Tullock, 1980), another on mercantilism (Ekelund and Tollison, 1981), and still another on legislatures (McCormick and Tollison, 1981) have been published. Although Tullock was a major figure in developing the field, Robert Tollison seems to be the current 'point man' in exploiting the initial insights and in the quantitative testing of its propositions. The volume *Mercantilism as a Rent-Seeking Society* (1981), co-authored by Ekelund and Tollison is, indeed, a major reinterpretation of a much explored historical economy. It is, therefore, one of the prime studies in which Center views are applied in historical perspective. Much the same can be said about the McCormick-Tollison volume *Politicians, Legislation and the Economy* (1981). In fact, this highly important volume develops theories that are old-fashioned political science cast in advanced theoretical and empirical garb. The book stands in sharp contrast with the work of Fenno (1973), the influential studies of Mayhew (1974) and Fiorina (1977). To be sure, these authors deal with somewhat different matters but their style, tone, methods, and theories stand in rather startling contrast even though all made explicit use of the self-interest motive. The McCormick-Tollison volume also departs somewhat from the parent Virginian approach in its insistence on being rigorously empirical in the fashion of George Stigler. In something of a companion volume *Congressmen, Constituents, and Contributors* (1982), Kau and Rubin look into the determinants of congressional voting behavior, but unlike McCormick and Tollison disagree with Stigler about the causal role of ideas and self-interests. Interestingly, Kau and Rubin draw some inspiration from and rely upon fundamental theories from one who has not been a hero around the Center – Joseph A. Schumpeter. But, again, the goal of Kau and Rubin is to test not venerate Stigler and/or Schumpeter. More recently, Gary Becker (1983) has challenged the Virginian view of rent-seeking as an inefficient political process. Thus far there has been no official response.

In commenting on Center work, I should note that its economists, like Rochester analysts, have not been particularly active in one of the more fashionable recent inquiries, namely, the political business cycle. Although these models are based on familiar postulates of self-interest and vote maxi-

mizing, the major contributors to the literature are not from the Center nor do they acknowledge any analytical affinity. In fact, most of the work has been done by economists and political scientists who have been only occasional public choice contributors – Nordhaus (1975), Tufte (1978), MacRae (1977), and, one – Douglas Hibbs (1977) who is distinctly unfriendly to public choice. It is safe to assume that the general proposition about governmental intentions in manipulating macro-politics is consistent with Center views. One might also expect that the political business cycle should hold considerable interest for quantitatively-minded Rochester students. One can only speculate about the reasons for the seeming indifference of each school to the political-business cycle. While highly sympathetic to the idea that governments attempt to manipulate policies for electoral success Virginian economists insist, that these governments actually succeed only in *destablizing* the economy. Virginians are probably also impressed, or is it depressed, by the contradictory data emerging from the investigations. Although Richard Wagner (1980), a prominent alumnus, seems to have accepted an amended argument and, indeed, expanded upon it, most Virginians have not chosen to publish their views.

Other new analytical thrusts too new to be judged include Tullock's (1984) attempt to develop the concept of 'public interest' and his current work on autocracies – a much needed foray into comparative politics.

#### 4. Bloomington public choice

These portraits of Rochester and Virginia pose something of a problem when we turn to the Ostroms and Bloomington, for these two remarkable scholars have chosen not only to combine apparently disparate modes of analysis – philosophy and hard-nosed empiricism – but to do so in such a gentle, inconspicuous and unassuming manner that they have done themselves a notable disservice. Even though both Ostroms have served as President of the Public Choice Society and Vincent Ostrom is, himself, a 'founding father' of the Society, few consider Bloomington a center of positive theory or public choice. Bloomington simply does not have the notoriety of the other two places. This is due, partly to the ideas and ideals but also to the roles played by its leaders. Anyone who examines the work emanating from Indiana is impressed not only by its volume but the fact that Vincent Ostrom has chosen, for the most part, to consider public choice as a philosophical problem, while Elinor Ostrom has devoted her career to the empirical testing of propositions from public choice and political science dealing with the provision of public services. Other elements, including a long-enduring interest in federalism, natural resources, and the methodological status of political theory and public choice have served to define the concerns of Indiana. Unlike Rochester and Virginia, Bloomington

ton has its roots in familiar political science and the history of political theory. It is no accident that the Center for this work is known as the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis. These twin concerns are found throughout the writings of not only the Ostroms but their students and associates, including the economists Robert Bish and Charles Tiebout. What is more striking and more difficult to deal with is the juxtaposition of the philosophical and empirical approaches. While one has the feeling that the two concerns are the products of a division of labor and mutually acceptable to their authors, it remains unclear how each informs the other's work.

As suggested above, Bloomington has concentrated upon actual problems involved in the delivery of public services but it has not done so in any conspicuous manner suggesting the prior elaboration of deductive models or even the explicit use of generalizations from Rochester and Virginia. Rochester staples including elections, voting, coalitions, etc., are not much cited nor are the more typical concerns of Fairfax evident in footnotes.<sup>4</sup> One does find copious references in the methodological writings of the Ostroms on the public choice paradigm, public goods, and various polemical articles by Vincent on public administration and public choice. Just as Indiana has tended to 'ignore' its sister institutions so, too, have Virginia and Rochester proceeded without due attention to their midwest colleagues. This seeming indifference is also seen whenever critics of public choice set forth their objections; that Indiana is simply ignored is unfortunate, especially when the critic happens to be a philosopher. Vincent Ostrom's theoretical writings are always informed by a judicious appreciation of the greats in political theory, and especially, Hume, Hobbes, and Locke (1973, 1987). These same writings set forth thoughtful commentaries on the history of political science and particularly, public administration. One should note, too, that V. Ostrom was far ahead of his time in dealing with the politics as well as economics of natural resources (1953). Some of his students in this area, notably, John Baden, have gone on to make considerable contributions in the area of resource policy.

The Bloomington view of action in markets and collective choice seem virtually identical to the basic Virginian perspective (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1971; E. Ostrom, 1986). Action is self-interested and rational or, better, it is worthwhile to so consider them. One asks what choices an individual or a collection of them might make under specified circumstances. Once we know the choices that could be made we can then compare then with what a perfectly informed, rational decision-maker would choose. What is of crucial importance in this framework of inquiry are the institutional variables or rules of the game. Such rules pertain to both constitutional and post-constitutional choices. The latter are constraints on the former. I might note, too, that Riker (1976) has taken sharp exception to V. Ostrom's (1976) views about constitutional constraint with Ostrom arguing that such constraints are, in fact, effective while Riker

concluded they are only if most citizens already agree with the constitution. Riker (1980) appears to have recanted somewhat in his defense of fiscal constitutional restraints on governments. In any event, the Ostroms have made the study of constitutional order a touchstone of their scholarship. They examine what Rochester assumes to be the case; in this respect Virginia and Bloomington have, despite different techniques, shared some common concerns.

It seems fair to say that on normative matters, generally, and policy issues, specifically, Bloomington has taken cues from and is in basic accord with the Virginians. On the efficiencies to be gained from decentralization and on the importance and efficiency of the price mechanism and competitive markets the two schools are in complete accord. The E. Ostrom/G. Whitaker (1974) and Ostrom/Parks (1973) studies of local provision of police services are typical examples not only of their empirical analyses but the contention that many public services including police forces under local community control are more effective than are large, city-wide controlled police departments in meeting citizen demands.

Although the self-conscious use by the Ostroms of the efficiency criterion has provided them with a normative basis for conducting empirical studies, they have yet to convince the political science profession to join their quest. The Ostroms are still far in advance of their brethren on this matter. Although political scientists study policies (indeed, they seem to do little else), it is often pedestrian work. A vast literature has been spawned on public policy, in general, and bureaucratic implementation in particular. While David Easton should be accorded considerable credit for encouraging political scientists to examine the output of government, it remained for the Ostroms to convert the generalized message into more operational language. In spite of the Ostroms' pioneering work, political scientists have failed to perceive the need for a benchmark such as resource efficiency. The result is a basic confusion about purposes of research and valuation. Handbooks setting forth techniques for researching policy are legion but those written by political scientists seem, in the absence of some notion of rational resource allocation, utterly pointless. It is my firm conviction that students are better served by reading an elementary economics text than a political science research manual.

Like Virginia and Rochester analysts the Bloomington school has left its impact on but small segments of the political science profession. Given the short history of public choice and the powerful inertia and active opposition to new ideals and ideas we should hardly be surprised that more has not been accomplished. In any event, the full impact of the Ostrom contribution has yet to be realized.

## 5. Professional success

Somewhere, Alfred North Whitehead wrote that ideas go through a rough cycle of indifference, opposition, begrudging acceptance, and eventual oblivion as they are absorbed into more general analyses. If this be so, Virginia is still for most political science in the first stage with active opposition being shown by a small number of political philosophers and others. Likewise, Rochester is treated with indifference but by many fewer political scientists. A minority view its methods with a mixture of bafflement, fear, and envy, while another minority claims 'we knew it all along.' Except in public administration circles, Bloomington has not aroused the same antagonistic sentiments as its compatriots. Only on rare occasions has Bloomington seen fit to directly attack denigrate or ridicule its detractors. Then, too, its efforts to quantify policy outcomes meet with general approval among students of public policy.

Despite some opposition, Rochester products have done remarkably well in the academic marketplace as have those whose degrees come from elsewhere but whose professional commitments are those of Rochester. Morris Fiorina had Kenneth Shepsle now hold professorships at Harvard; John Ferejohn is at Stanford while Peter Ordeshook and Peter Aranson have become notable political scientists. Rochester publications grace virtually all political science journals of note and their panels are usually important ones at professional meetings. Positive theorists serve as referees and editors as well as consultants particularly at NSF. They hold their own conferences at Pasadena, Pittsburgh, Hilton Head, and various other 'exotic' watering holes. They serve as editors of journals affecting, of course, what is published. And, they are invited to spend a year at Cal-Tech, the Behavioral Center at Stanford or enjoy a post-doctoral fellowship at Carnegie-Mellon. Few seem to have shared that unhappy fate of many young political scientists, i.e., one year appointments on the teaching circuits or driving cabs. Rochester students have been hired by Carnegie-Mellon, Cal-Tech, Duke, Texas, Harvard, Minnesota, Washington University in St. Louis, Stony Brook, Oregon, and, in fact, by most departments of note.

By way of contrast, Virginians have had less professional success in political science. This is hardly unexpected since the Center for Study of Public Choice consists of economists writing primarily for other public choice economists and preparing graduate students for careers in economics. Their record in both respects is nothing short of phenomenal. Plott, Willett, Tollison, Goetz, Wagner, Bush, e.g., are products of the Virginia Department of Economics. Their position in Economics and the acceptance of their ideas, begrudging as it may have been, has been one of the remarkable achievements in social science of the past fifty years. Unfortunately, political science departments rarely see fit to hire economists and so one is hard put to discover a Charlottesville or



Blacksburg product among the ranks of political science departments.

Bloomington's role in all this is somewhat less clear-cut. Because of its low-keyed operation Bloomington has achieved less notoriety but in some respects, perhaps, more lasting influence in political science. The Ostroms have chosen the less dramatic role of testing middle-level ideas, relating them to our philosophical past and, of waging an educational campaign in public administration – a somewhat thankless task. In the process, Bloomington has produced an impressive body of scholarship and list of students and adherents including Gregg, Parks, Whitaker, Warren, Kiser, Baden, Sproule-Jones, and Uslander.

The substantive achievements of public choice and positive theory are not everywhere appreciated nor, worse, even known by those who might profit greatly from such knowledge. Because ideas and information are so highly valued by scholars, one might expect a notable willingness to pay for them; except for a few brave souls such willingness is rarely forthcoming. Ideas are rarely considered on cognitive grounds alone; i.e., few scholars rationally assess and 'adopt' new ideas. Instead, most scholars view ideas in the context of their own professional careers and compatibility with their own largely unexamined ideas and values. And since these ideas are valuable assets obtained at a high price their sunk cost is considered relevant. Learning the unorthodox presents substantial acquisition costs as is clearly the case for the conventional political scientist attempting to learn modern economics and mathematics. If all this be true, we should expect relatively few political scientists over, say 35 years of age to become public choice converts. Nor would one predict that many graduate students in orthodox departments will voluntarily learn about public choice, let alone acquire the tools of the new discipline. Without technically equipped teachers and role models the incipient public choice student faces a nearly insurmountable task.

Relatively few new ideas are generated and still fewer adopted by the existing professions to which they might be relevant. Public choice was generated at a handful of institutions by courageous scholars bucking powerful conformist currents in both political science and economics departments. As these deviant individuals succeeded they attracted graduate students, some of whom accepted the 'revelations' of their masters and were, in turn, prepared to serve as 'apostles' or, perhaps, 'salesmen.' In more familiar terms, intellectual entrepreneurs take risks and some make tremendous gains. As their work attracts 'consumers' and 'investors' other entrepreneurs imitate and in the process manage to popularize the basic ideas. In the world of academia retailers arise to distribute the new theories thru textbooks, 'readers,' and popularized versions that serve less to antagonize than to show how all these once revolutionary views are quite compatible with received doctrines. None of this occurs overnight; indeed, in intellectual circles it may take at least three decades.

## 6. Intellectual impact

Whereas Rochester has enjoyed considerable professional and even scholarly success within Political Science the same cannot be said for the Virginia group. In the first place, many political scientists disdain economics and view the Virginians as arrogant, parochial, right-wing economists with imperialistic designs on their discipline – political science. Unlike Rochester, Virginia suffers from the role and fate of the brusque outsider attempting to impose alien ways and values on the home population. And their alien values and means have been most upsetting to those political scientists who have come to read but selectively in Virginian economics and public choice. The basic economic postulate of methodological individualism and its corollaries of self-interest and rationality have never had widespread appeal among political scientists. If Rochester threatens, it is less its methodological individualism than the mathematical challenge. Behaviorists and political psychologists may proceed from something vaguely familiar to methodological individualism, but both unanimously reject self-interest and rationality as concomitant analytical commitments. Much of political science research on voting, citizenship, parties, interest groups, legislatures, are efforts to show the empirical shortcomings of formal work, or more likely, of familiar Downsian analyses. Aside from those who make a serious effort to confront formal rational models with empirical evidence, the more normal rejection is based on ‘gut feelings’ that formal constraints are far too restrictive and ‘unrealistic.’

Virginia is rejected for another reason: its presumed ‘conservative’ inclinations. That Virginia is radical in a libertarian direction would be a more accurate designation but even so, many political scientists find that equally if not more distasteful. But, again, the conservative or individualistic bias is not perceived by all; indeed, since most political scientists rarely read Virginia publications their images are acquired second-hand. But among those who do consult their writings and, here, I include a number of prominent political philosophers (Brian Barry, Douglas Rae, Robert Goodin, Michael Taylor, Russell Hardin, C.B. MacPherson), the basis of rejection is an ideological one with the philosophers being socialists or at least very sympathetic to communal ends and means. The Virginian emphasis upon self-interest, contract, property rights, profit, Pareto optimality, limited government, constitutional fiscal controls on government, Wicksellian unanimity, efficiency rather than equity (read equality) find little favor among these philosophers. Most political scientists have simply absorbed the ideals of the welfare state, egalitarian ethos, and majority rule, as inevitable and fundamental in a good society. There is no immediate danger that public choice will quickly become the conventional wisdom.

Some elementary but fuzzy public choice finds its way into political science

through the writings of analysts who, ironically, rarely claim to have been influenced by public choice. They might be labelled 'closet' public choice analysts. I have in mind the work of James Q. Wilson, Aaron Wildavsky, Edward Banfield, Robert Dahl, Terry Moe, Robert Salisbury, and Theodore Lowi, to note but the more influential. In fact, several of these political scientists not only eschew public choice but adamantly oppose economic theories of politics and/or formal models. Since much of orthodox American political science is founded on interest group axioms, their rejection sounds a bit forced. Implicit if not rigorous, explicit notions of self-interest, rationality, competition, coalition-building, log-rolling, are as prominent in conventional political science as they are fundamental to public choice. How else can we characterize the pioneering work of Bentley, Gosnell, Key, Schattschneider, and Truman? In fact, an intrepid theorist could rather easily claim them to be precursors of public choice.

As in any endeavor, fame and glory in political science comes less often from steady but undramatic accomplishments than from having discovered or enunciated some fundamental theorem that lends itself, eventually, to easy popularization and even gross misunderstandings and mis-use. Arrow, Black, Buchanan, Downs, Olson, Riker, and Tullock, have set forth precisely such powerful and attractive ideas. One might add certain current clichés derived from the works of Hirschman, Schelling and Tiebout. In any event, some public choice and positive theory tools and conclusions seep into American Government texts, but not many. Among the more prominent are the Downs' theorems of rational ignorance and the median voter and, perhaps, his discussion of the role of ideology in situations of uncertainty. Olson's exposition of the free-rider phenomenon is also well known. Buchanan and Tullock are unquestionably best known for their theory of minimal cost in the choice of decision rules and the theory of over-supply of publicly-provided services under majority rule, but these ideas are not cited let alone given prominence. Although public finance texts as well as elementary economics texts routinely set forth the now obligatory Arrow paradox, American government text writers rarely make mention of this, the most famous of all collective choice theorems. Instead we encounter ubiquitous propositions concerning the influence of interest groups on public policy. Much of what political scientists believe and write about the interests has a faint literary resemblance to public choice but rarely makes reference to formal rent-seeking theory and negative-sum games (Page, 1983). Nevertheless, special and often fervent attention is devoted to the 'iron triangle' while rent-seeking is confined largely to the defense industry.

We see, then, that interdisciplinary exchanges and borrowing proceeds slowly and fitfully, at several levels of complexity and sophistication. Rarely are things presented in their entirety and in a responsible way. At best, positive theory and public choice are genuinely understood by a handful of political scien-

tists. While the number does not exceed, say, 15 percent they are among the brightest and the best. If positive theory and public choice had a Walter Lippmann, perhaps, the number could be enlarged.

## Notes

1. 'Public Choice' was chosen as a title to supplant that of *Papers on Non-Market Decision Making* and as the name of the Society for the Study of Public Choice at its annual meeting in 1967. James S. Coleman and the present author may claim authorship of the term which won by a small plurality over 'social choice,' 'the new political economy,' and the 'economics of politics.'
2. Despite a common concern with legislative matters Virginians and Rochesterites seldom refer to one another's work. Perhaps the time has come for a careful comparative critique of these two bodies of legislative research.
3. The Virginia connection is, however, quite apparent in Vincent Ostrom and Elinor Ostrom (1977), 'Institutional Analysis of Common Pool Problems,' and Elinor Ostrom (1977), 'Collective Action and the Tragedy of the Commons.'

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