Colander, David, and Roland Kupers. ***Complexity and the Art of Public Policy: Solving Society's Problems from the Bottom Up.*** **Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. viii + 310 pages. Cloth, $29.95.**

Economists Colander and Kupers offer a condensed historical account of traditions of thought that lay at the intersection economics, politics, and public policy. The account is meant to explain how and why relatively simplistic understandings of government and the market dominate approaches to public policy. The new mathematical modeling techniques in complexity science provide the occasion for the review and the book. The new techniques give policy makers the tools they need to understand how complex systems (things as a whole and the parts that make them up) behave or how they work. The way the separate parts of a thing (i.e., the people of society, in the case of this book) interact and result in a separate and distinct whole other thing (i.e., society), with its own internal dynamics, which, in turn, in circular fashion, influences the way its individual parts interact. Societies and their peoples are ultimately the things the authors seek to explain in the book. The math in complexity science is less a subject of the book than the understanding of society that the math makes possible.

The authors show how the deep understanding of society from classical economics—as an evolving, complex, interactive, functional whole structure or system with a culture all its own that includes government—was lost over time without the math to translate such a vision into formal models. With the new techniques, however, a new research, analytical, or theoretical framework opens the door to an older and broader classical cultural understanding of society and consequently the role of government in it, ideas about what government and public policy can and should do, and how they should do it, than is currently the norm. This revisited understanding of society and the role of government that was lost until now points to culture as a social space that policy makers often ignore. Culture comes more clearly into focus with the new techniques and the new understanding than with the old as important terrain upon which government power acts in manifold ways. Culture, then, is something policy makers should think more carefully about than they do and also consider putting to better use in a variety of ways.

What is the best way for government to act to influence human behavior, to promote cooperation or coordinated collective action to benefit society, and to develop solutions to address public problems? The choice of approach involved in the exercise of government power is ultimately what the authors want policy makers to think about. There is top-down administrative command and control, the approach associated with the traditional understanding of government, as something separate from society. And then there are the new alternative cultural norms policies designed to promote capacity in society for bottom-up solutions. The new approach is based on the idea of society as an evolving complex structured whole thing that includes government. The authors point out that there is not necessarily a single right answer except in extreme cases where the very survival of society is in question and authorities cannot wait for the slower bottom-up solutions to take hold. For all other cases, there is really only the question of what type of society that government action helps to produce. What is the best way for government to encourage society to things get done? There is the approach based on top-down hard power command dictates and the approach based on bottom-up popular empowerment of society—of people organized either as groups or as individuals.

The book expands policy debates in exciting ways. The introduction the authors provide to complexity science and the contributions it makes is invaluable in this sense. I highly recommend the book to readers interested in complexity science, the role of culture in politics, identity, and public policy in a variety of disciplines for this reason. It is worth noting, however, that the book is silent on cultural politics in classical economics, a politics that has nothing to do with limited math but with subtle commitments to a particular tradition of political theory (that of modern liberal individualism) among classical writers. Colander and Kupers seem unaware of their bias, but it shows up in the way they describe bottom-up solutions, as market coordination, laissez-faire activism, individual initiative, or self-reliance. Here the authors effectively ascribe a substantive vision of the good life (one based on liberal values, the market, and the individual) to something that elsewhere they treat merely as a procedural outcome or possibility for public policy—bottom-up solutions. By no means does market coordination or the other similar monikers the authors use to describe bottom-up solutions exhaust the range of cultural values and commitments such an approach to policy conveys. Instead of market coordination, or laissez-faire activism, how about something like democratic society, participation in self-government, community, trust, voluntary cooperation, or mediating institutions as the name for bottom up solutions? These conjure up the image of a whole different kind of society altogether, one based not on liberal values, the market, or the individual, per say, but popular political participation and community life consonant with traditions of republican political theory. There are other, less edifying, possibilities as well that might arise from bottom-up solutions than either laissez-faire or mediating institutions such as domination, for example. Why pick one or another substantive vision for society except to socialize the reader into one of the values traditions or another? For a book with the power of ideas as its underlying analytical focus, I would expect the authors to have ferreted-out and avoided such conceptual bias. The oversight is a glaring one. In the end the book cannot sustain the qualitative conceptual differences (top-down solutions associated with government and bottom-up solutions associated with the market) that are the basis of the analysis in the first place. In some communities, bottom-up solutions that involve society in fixing things might well result in a kind of hard power approach similar to top-down solutions that empower government in others. Knowing that culture is fair game is important for policy makers, to be sure, but so too is the kind of culture policy helps to create.

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