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**Boekbespreking van: The public choice approach to politics**  
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Het is hiervoor al enkele malen gezegd: Andeweg en Irwin kunnen boeiend schrijven, en in de paragrafen waarin zij andere meningen aan bod laten komen, dwingen zij de lezer tot meedenken. Het is dan ook een boek dat zonder meer kan worden aangeraden als een boeiende, politicologische inleiding in de Nederlandse politiek.

P. Schuszler

Dennis C. Mueller, **The Public Choice Approach to Politics**, Edward Elgar, Aldershot 1993.

*The Public Choice Approach to Politics* is a collection of papers on public choice, previously published by Dennis Mueller. The book contains early contributions to this literature, which are focused on the extent to which vote-trading or logrolling may increase social welfare, and recent work on the future of public choice, which has been published in the 1993 volume of the journal *Public Choice*. The book starts with an autobiographical essay in which Mueller describes his career in public choice, which he combined with work in the field of industrial organization. He attributes his presence in both fields 'entirely to chance', although, looking back, he notes some similarities between these different and separate interests. In his view, public choice focuses on government as an organization 'for economizing on decision-making costs in joint consumption activities', while industrial organization, in the Coase-Williamson tradition, analyses firms as 'teams of factor owners brought together to achieve gains from cooperation in production'. Still, these similarities are hardly convincing reasons for someone to become involved in both these fields, so Mueller's contributions to public choice must indeed be conceived as a matter of luck.

In the last chapter of the book public choice is defined as 'all works that assume rational, self-interested behaviour on the part of all political actors ... regardless of how formal the analysis may be in terms of mathematical modelling, or whether it appears in an economics, political science, sociology or other journal' (p. 510). It is an 'inherently interdisciplinary' field, as Mueller notes, which covers most of the topics in political science, such as voting rules, party behaviour, coalition formation, voting theory, and bureaucracy. Mueller also typifies this literature as 'the economics of politics' (p. 431), which contains positive as well as normative models of collective decision-making based on the postulate of man as a self-interested utility maximizer. He does not make a distinction between 'public choice' and 'social choice', but uses these terms interchangeably to refer to a single body of literature spanning the works of Arrow and Buchanan, Sen and Downs, and all the other analyses of government and political behaviour that uses the methodology of economics, broadly defined, that assumes that individuals rationally seek to advance their self interest' (p. 424). Given the large number of topics in this literature, it is not surprising that Mueller's work only covers a limited number. In the book his contributions are classified under six headings.

*Part I* contains Mueller's work on the contractarian approach to public choice, which includes contributions on Rawls' theory of justice, the nature of constitutional rights, and the ethical implications of both individualism and contractarianism as ethical postulates. *Part II* deals with electoral and voting rules, and pays attention to probabilistic voting and voting by veto. *Part III* addresses the composition and size of government. Two contributions go into the effect interest groups may have on the size of government. The last contribution in this part is a survey of public choice literature on the growth of government, which later appeared as chapter 17 in Mueller's monograph *Public Choice II*.

*Part IV* contains two contributions on the Virginia School of public choice, and in particular the work of one of its members, James M. Buchanan. In his essay on Buchanan, Mueller reviews Buchanan's contractarian approach. *Part V* contains Mueller's famous survey of the public choice literature, which appeared in the *Journal of Economic Literature* and formed the basis of his 1979 monograph on *Public Choice*. This monograph was subsequently thoroughly revised and extended, and appeared as *Public Choice II* in 1989. *Part VI* concludes the book and goes into what are perhaps the most interesting issues, namely the methodology and future of public choice.

Mueller's concern with the public choice methodology and in particular the *homo economicus* postulate, is apparent in several contributions. This postulate simply states that individuals seek to advance their own interest rationally. Using this 'unromantic view of man's nature' (p. 419), the public choice literature contains a large number of rather cynical and pessimistic conclusions about the functioning of democratic governmental institutions. The best-known example of this pessimism is perhaps Arrow's paradox. In his essay on 'James M. Buchanan: Economist cum Contractarian' (chapter 22), Mueller claims that this pessimism is not 'some form of ideological bias', but a result of the subject matter itself and the view of man as captured by the *homo economicus* postulate.

Pessimistic results are perhaps disturbing, but not problematic if they are supported by empirical evidence. At this point, the public choice literature still faces some important anomalies, which ought to be problematic for the authors of these elegant analytical models. One example is the voting paradox, another is the large voluntary contributions to the provision of public goods. In his Presidential Address to the Public Choice Society in 1986 (chapter 25), Mueller pays attention to these phenomena and proposes to replace the 'rational egoism' postulate with what he calls 'adaptive egoism'. Building on behavioural psychology he stresses the importance of past experience for human behaviour. Behaviour is affected not only by what may happen in the future, but also by what happened in the past, since, as a result of learning, individuals can be conditioned to act in a specific way in recurrent situations by rewarding some and punishing other kinds of behaviour. Mueller correctly stresses the importance of a deontological or backward-looking perspective for the future development of public choice instead of the teleological or forward-looking perspective that the rationality postulate implies.

However, it is questionable whether adaptive or learning behaviour can be modelled 'as if' an individual maximizes a 'socially conditioned or an evolutionary moulded objective function' (p. 505). In Mueller's view the individual's objective function

only needs to be changed in such a way that expectations about future outcomes of actions also have to be based on experience. Behaviour is therefore still some optimization problem on a case-by-case basis, where learning is reduced to knowing some 'tricks' to solve specific social dilemmas. But how do individuals know when to employ a specific 'trick' in a specific situation, which is, in their perception, at least to some extent, unique or unrelated to previous situations? A way to solve this problem is to assume that individuals follow specific 'rules', which restrict their behaviour to a limited repertoire of actions. In that case, an individual will choose some action, say  $a^*$ , if a situation is identified as being an element of a specific class for which  $a^*$  is regarded as the most appropriate response. This also implies that a rule-following individual will select action  $a^*$  even if this action is 'non-optimal' from the perspective of optimization on a case-by-case basis. The individual uses generic rules and does not approach a specific choice as a separate and isolated problem. Consequently, learning, and, accordingly, behavioural changes, are concentrated at the level of rules and not at the level of individual choice problems, in contradiction to what Mueller suggests.

With regard to the future of public choice, Mueller is confident that public choice will be a field within economics, which 'will encompass all of political science' (p. 511) in one of his scenarios. On the other hand, he predicts that, '[i]f a large enough group of departments were to resist the swing to more formal modelling and were to retain control of several journals, political science could possibly divide into two disciplines essentially along methodological lines' (p. 512). Despite his optimism, Mueller is also rather sceptical about the future development of this literature. 'The journals today are filled with ingenious answers to unimportant questions. Public choice today stands in danger of following down this well-worn path' (p. 441). To Mueller, research in public choice should address '...the basic issues of how self-interested individuals interact within political institutions, and how individuals could design institutions that would better achieve their ends' (p. 442). With respect to changes of the basic postulates of public choice he predicts 'that most will continue to mine the intensive margin of ever-more refined model-building on a narrow behavioural foundation, rather than shift out to the extensive margin where economics, rational politics, sociology and psychology come together' (p. 514). A rather pessimistic and thus 'conservative' view, using Mueller's own definition (p. 424), on an important and exciting literature that has been developed in the last three decades.

As with most publications of collected work, this book suffers from a lack of coherence. It is neither an introduction to the public choice approach to politics, nor a systematic analysis and discussion of this approach. The only two common elements in most contributions are that they are on public choice and written by the same author. Nevertheless, I enjoyed reading most of the papers, since Dennis Mueller is a gifted writer. But I doubt whether the book will appeal to many scholars in the social sciences. In my view, this book is only to be recommended to those who are interested in Mueller's work, in particular on constitutional issues and voting rules, but who have not yet read his papers.

B. Steunenberg

## Summaries

### The rise and establishment of Agalev and Vlaams Blok in the 1980s and 1990s

by Marc Swyngedouw

Analyses of the Flemish-Belgian political system in the post-war period have always emphasized the role of three main political cleavages or value orientations, based on, respectively, economic, religious and language-community divisions. Theoretical analyses of the growth of new (environmental or extreme right-wing) parties, and of the increased mobility of voters, have implied that the post-war cleavage model is undergoing fundamental changes. In the first part of this article the social-structural elements leading to the development of these new parties in Flanders is described. In the second part the changing value orientations of the Flemish electorate are analysed on the basis of a large-scale representative survey of Flemish voters (N=2488), held immediately after the national elections of 1991. The value orientations that were discovered in the Flemish electorate reveal that the materialism-post-materialism cleavage, which has been studied by Inglehart, is clearly recognizable in this electorate. Nevertheless, it proves to be impossible to describe the entire Flemish electoral space by using Inglehart's model. Instead, a cleavage is discovered that appears to be based on the opposition of universalist culturally 'open' values versus particularist culturally 'closed' values.

### Charles Taylor on individualism, politics and the inevitability of morality

by Hans Blokland

The Canadian political theorist Charles Taylor can be seen as one of the most influential communitarian critics of contemporary liberalism and individualism. In this article, Taylor's views on the current interpretation of individualism – labeled by Taylor as the 'culture or ethics of authenticity' – and on the growing importance of instrumental rationality in our society are critically assessed, and the political consequences of these views are evaluated. Taylor's ideas about the relation between the individual and the community are illustrated by focusing on the issue of minority rights: what is the importance of belonging to a cultural community and should this community be protected by special rights against