# Chapter 1

# Introduction: About David Braybrooke

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**Abstract**

This chapter introduces the reader to the life and work of David Braybrooke. It identifies key themes in his extensive list of publications and explains the significance of the essays in this collection.[*]

This collection of original essays has been produced by faculty members who have been colleagues or students of David Braybrooke in his years of full-time teaching at Dalhousie University (1963-90).[1] Our intention is to express our collective affection, admiration, and respect for this important philosopher on the occasion of his eightieth birthday by reflecting on aspects of his life and work as they have inspired our own philosophical thinking.

By happy coincidence, the publication of this volume coincides with the momentous publication of his own book, *Analytical Political Philosophy: From Discourse, Edification*, the fourth in a series of books Braybrooke has published with University of Toronto Press since 1998.

[*]Thanks to Richmond Campbell and Steven Burns for editorial advice on this chapter.

[1]He has been a very active Emeritus Professor since 1990, retaining a summer home in Halifax and spending three to four months per year in Nova Scotia, enthusiastically engaged in philosophical activities. Hence, all who are themselves situated in Halifax still count themselves among his current colleagues

The others—*Moral Objectives, Rules, and the Forms of Social Change* (1998), *Natural Law Modernized* (2001), and *Utilitarianism: Restorations; Repairs; Renovations* (2004)—together form an integrated, mutually reinforcing corpus of many of the major ideas he has contributed to the literature of political philosophy and the philosophy of social science throughout his career. So weighty is this four-volume collection, and so absorbing of his philosophical energies over the past decade, Braybrooke has come to think of it, unofficially, as the *Summa Philosophica Latirivuli* (where 'latus' stands for 'bray'—which is dialectical (Northamptonshire) English for 'broad'—and 'rivulus' for 'brook'). This working title is vintage Braybrooke, combining his lifelong love of classics, his offbeat, irreverent sense of humour, and an acknowledgment of the collective and far-reaching significance of his influence on philosophical thought. The designation signifies the interconnected complexity of Braybrooke's philosophical works and makes visible the over-arching program that ties the various pieces together. We fondly share in adoption of this designation and add our own essays to complement the *Summa* by offering reflections on the themes he explores there and in his earlier publications.

To help set the stage for the chapters that follow, I shall review some of Braybrooke's significant intellectual and scholarly writings in order to provide the reader with a sense of how his many publications weave together to form a general theoretical system; I hope also to provide some insight into why this system is so valuable. I shall approach this task by first reviewing his personal journey through political philosophy and then by briefly discussing three key themes that structure his work.[2] Finally, I shall briefly explain the organization of this book and highlight the role of each chapter.

[2]I am very grateful to David for his assistance and patient cooperation in piecing together some of the elements of a rich and complex life in a couple of personal interviews in June 2004.

## 1.1 David Braybrooke, the Personal Story

David[3] was born 18 October 1924 in the United States and came of age during the Second World War. He started his university education at Hobart College, where he majored in classics with the intention of preparing for a career in the United States Foreign Service. His undergraduate study was interrupted, however, by the war. He volunteered for service in the United States Army early in 1943 and found himself stationed in Antwerp several months after D-Day. (He notes that Hitler gave up shortly after he appeared in Europe and suggests that perhaps Hitler calculated that if the United States was prepared to send the likes of Braybrooke into war, it must have been very confident indeed.) For the first month and a half in Antwerp, he experienced frequent bombardments of the city by German buzz bombs and rockets. A rocket landed a mere block away from where he was waiting for a tram one day, causing houses and their inhabitants to completely disappear before his eyes. That experience gave him a rich appreciation for life and gratitude for each day he is alive, an attitude that has served him well in all subsequent years; he truly does embrace each day with obvious joy at the opportunities it affords.

In the end, his time in the army, like the rest of his life, was largely dedicated to intellectual pursuits. While still in Antwerp, he managed to find a tutor to help him study Latin and Greek poetry. The army also sent him to Louisiana State University then to the University of Illinois to study basic engineering, and, since he found himself on a university campus, he managed at LSU to take courses in literary criticism and sociology. He was even able to persuade the army to send him to Cambridge, England, for a term before he was discharged.

After a little more than three years in the army, he returned to complete his BA and prepare for academic work in the area of social and

[3]Readers will notice a shift in style of reference to David Braybrooke in this Introduction. It reflects my own struggle, and that of most of the other contributors to the volume, in deciding how best to refer to a man who is both an influential scholar and a personal friend. We have resolved this problem by using the formal 'Braybrooke' whenever we are discussing his work, as merits respectful discussion of any author's work; when speaking personally about the man, as I do in parts of this Introduction, we shift to the more informal 'David' to capture the warm regard in which we hold him.

political theory. He was torn between studying psychology at Yale or economics at Harvard; his decision to pursue economics at Harvard was heavily influenced by Professor Brooks Otis, his mentor from Hobart College and an early role model for his life as a scholar. Otis was a great classical scholar who later became chair at Stanford and then university professor at Chapel Hill; among his other claims to fame is the fact that he introduced David to the work of John Maynard Keynes. David reckoned that it was necessary to have a firm grounding in economics to work effectively in social and political thought. (As well, David did some personal utility calculations and determined that since he would be unlikely to read much economics purely for pleasure, it was important to approach it in a disciplined way.)

After graduation, and with the continuing support of Professor Otis, David was invited back to Hobart to teach as an instructor in history and literature within an excellent general education program dealing with Western civilization. But he grew restless in this role and soon embarked on graduate work at Cornell University in the department of philosophy. At that time, Cornell required philosophy doctoral students to specialize in two subfields of philosophy and also to study one field outside of philosophy. David chose ethics and epistemology as his philosophy subfields and economics for his 'outside' interest. (Those choices have served him well throughout his career and are well represented within the essays of this collection.) His dissertation was on welfare and happiness, and the economist on his committee directed him to include a chapter dealing with Arrow's work on social choice theory (much to the chagrin of the philosophers on the committee who thought it was 'the hardest thing they ever had to read'—'serves them right!' in David's opinion). This led to his first publication, 'Farewell to the New Welfare Economics,' a very heartfelt farewell at the time, though he has found himself returning to this subject in later years and now sees it as one of the foundations of his work.

He completed his PhD in 1953 and took up an instructorship at the University of Michigan. While this opportunity was considered one of the best jobs in the country for a new philosophy graduate, David thought that the industrial design of the Ann Arbor campus had little

charm: buildings were 'depressing on the outside and graceless on the inside.' He also felt somewhat alienated from his colleagues there since they seemed principally occupied with denigrating the merits of ordinary language philosophy while David's approach was (and is) much more pragmatic: use ordinary language philosophy where it is helpful and employ other methods where it falls short. He soon left Michigan for Bowdoin College, a small liberal arts college in New England which he found to be more to his temperament; indeed, he remembers Bowdoin as being his version of heaven—just the sort of place he had always wanted to teach.

Alas, he was not to stay in this idyllic setting for long. By chance, returning by ship from Oxford in 1953, David had met a professor from Yale who proposed him for a special position that would recognize his distinctive talents, teaching philosophy in an interdisciplinary program and working with Professor Charles E. Lindblom in the honours program in economics and politics for juniors and seniors. This was an offer David found too good to refuse; an ambitious young professor simply did not turn down offers from Yale then (or now). One of the happy consequences of this position was a long-term, fruitful collaboration with Professor Lindblom. Not all of his colleagues at Yale were so pleased with his versatility and tendency to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries, however. It seems that he was judged to be 'too much of a philosopher' for the social scientists and 'too much of a social scientist' for the philosophers. Moreover, the timing of his stay at Yale was most unfortunate: the entire philosophy department was severely divided between analytical and continental theorists at that time. As a result of these struggles over method and philosophical orientation, David was denied tenure at Yale.

Fortunately, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship at the very same time as his tenure decision was being announced, and that honour and opportunity took some of the sting out of the tenure news. (It also helped ease the pain to learn that all of the other analytical philosophers in the department decamped the following year to join the department of philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh; clearly, he was not the only one to find the atmosphere inhospitable to analytically oriented philosophers.)

As a result of having ‘published *and* perished’ at Yale, David decided he would ‘retire early’ by moving to a site where he would be free to teach and live as he liked with little of the pressure to publish that characterized life in an Ivy League institution. His goal now was to enjoy other aspects of his rich, self-directed intellectual life. Fortunately for the contributors to this volume and for thousands of others he has taught and inspired, he selected Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for that retirement from the fray of academic intensity. When he arrived in 1963, he found Dalhousie to be a small, provincial university by the sea that concentrated on undergraduate education and the training of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. The philosophy department had only recently been separated off from psychology, and its few other members had little interest in publishing; they exercised no research demands on him. Moreover, he was able to secure a position that was to be half-time in philosophy and half in the department of political science; in other words, his interdisciplinary interests were acknowledged and valued at his new academic home.

At that time, there were only about a half-dozen serious scholars in the humanities and social sciences at Dalhousie, and it was easy to get to know each of them well. It made for a stimulating, interdisciplinary, intellectual community in which David thrived. And while the Dalhousie library was small compared with what he had become accustomed to at Yale, at least it had the advantage of having the books it owned ready at hand since there was so little competition for the books that interested him. It is worth noting, though, that this calm backwater atmosphere did not last very long. Co-incident with his time at the university, Dalhousie has evolved into a serious research institution with strong departments of philosophy and political science. David played no small part in this transformation, and he is rightly proud of his contribution to a stimulating and supportive environment.

I can speak most authoritatively of his impact on the philosophy department at Dalhousie since it has been my own academic home for the past thirty years. Here, David has shown both intellectual and personal leadership. On the intellectual front, he has always shared his work with colleagues and students and encouraged critical discussion with those

interested in philosophy at every stage of learning. Most of his books have been at least 'tried out' in the classroom if not also initiated there. He believes universities should make more of the opportunity for undergraduates to share in a professor's active research. They have things to contribute partly because they are not already steeped in the literature. He has also been remarkably generous in his willingness to engage with the work of others; no matter how busy he is, he always offers prompt, insightful, and supportive feedback.

Moreover, he has insisted on promoting an atmosphere of true collegiality and has conscientiously role-modelled the behaviours that support it. Probably influenced by his painful time at Yale, where he found himself struggling to launch his own career within a deeply divided department, David has worked hard to foster healthy departmental relations at Dalhousie University. Within the philosophy department, this takes the form of a few institutionalized rituals. Faculty members meet for Wednesday lunches at the University Club, which allow us to share ideas and concerns in an informal atmosphere outside of more structured department meetings. Even more important, however, is our weekly philosophy colloquium series, which meets all year round, stopping only for Christmas and the Labour Day weekend. These sessions are scheduled for Friday afternoons and are routinely followed by beer at the Graduate Students' Club, where students, faculty, and interested others can continue to debate the topic of the weekly paper.

Much to our local benefit, David became so content at Dalhousie that he was able to resist several tempting efforts to recruit him to join his analytical colleagues from Yale at their new home at the University of Pittsburgh, despite the fact that their arrival there helped to make it the strongest philosophy department in North America at the time. Although David sometimes wonders if his work would have received even more attention if he had accepted one of those offers and situated himself in a leading American university, he generously credits Dalhousie for providing a stimulating environment that allowed him to be productive and creative. Moreover, it was a place in which he was, for the most part, happy, a condition he thinks played an important role in his achievements.

Relieved of the pressure to produce that defined life in an Ivy League university, he found himself free to pursue whatever research projects captured his imagination. He soon settled into a very productive publishing pace that seems only to accelerate with age. On reviewing his long and growing list of significant publications, one might easily get the sense that David is a man totally occupied with work. That would be a big mistake. He has always understood that while meaningful work is very important to everyone, it is not the whole of life. It is also important to make room for travel, music, literature, art, romance, and, generally, for fun. (He loves to laugh, and his laughter is infectious. Finding tidbits of absurd news stories to amuse him has become something of a competitive sport among his colleagues and friends. Readers can get a pretty good impression of his mischievous side by reading Appendix A.) Without such activities, he believes, one becomes less rather than more productive, and definitely less creative.

As an academic, he takes seriously all dimensions of a professor's responsibilities: research, teaching, and administrative work. His research accomplishments are readily available to all and form the basis of most articles in this book. His teaching and administrative accomplishments are less visible to the larger world, but they have had a profound impact on the thousands of students and colleagues who have directly benefited from the opportunity to work with him (and on those who have the opportunity of studying/working with others he has inspired). He loves teaching and it shows. (Some recent and cherished evaluations report 'Braybrooke rocks!' and 'Professor Braybrooke is fun to be with.') It is with much ambivalence that he will finally cease offering formal classes in 2005 as he turns eighty-one.

Indeed, it is this love of teaching that eventually took him to Texas. Dalhousie University has long had a rule of mandatory retirement at age 65. David was by no means ready to give up teaching in 1989—it will be difficult enough to do in 2005—so he decided it was finally time to accept one of the many offers he received over the years from the United States and took up the position of Centennial Commission Chair in the Liberal Arts (Professor of Government and Professor of Philosophy) at the University of Texas at Austin. Fortunately for us,

he maintained a home in Nova Scotia and has arranged to spend a few months each summer back at Dalhousie, where he remains an active presence in our summer reading groups and weekly philosophy colloquium sessions. His philosophical engagement with his immediate and distant colleagues shows no signs of slowing, despite the fact that he is now approaching yet another retirement (this time from the University of Texas at Austin).

## 1.2 David Braybrooke, the Scholar

Braybrooke's work centres around the interrelated themes of needs, rights, and rules with particular attention to the appropriate processes for making changes in existing social rules. He argues that proper understanding of these three concepts helps to constitute a meaningful and practical approach to social justice. Hence, he has been concerned with making clear how to interpret and apply these familiar, but often misused, concepts that figure so prominently in political debates about public policies.

While deeply respectful of alternative philosophical schools, Braybrooke situates his own work within the analytic tradition that has dominated English-language philosophy for many decades; it relies on rigour and conceptual analysis as principal tools. His aim is to help guide policy debates by allowing participants to determine appropriate rules for attending to the needs of citizens of nations and of the world in a fair and achievable way. His staunch support of analytic philosophy has meant that throughout his career he has frequently found himself embroiled in what might be dubbed ' 'philosophy wars' (akin to the recent struggles over the nature of science and scientific activities commonly referred to as the 'science wars'). Indeed, his most recent work, the forthcoming *Analytical Political Philosophy*, has been written with the principal intention of responding to charges from pro-Straussian colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin who claim there is no value in analytical approaches to political philosophy.[4] Braybrooke's work clearly demon-

[4]It is ironic that David discovered Leo Strauss long before any of the people who now challenge David's philosophical approach in the name of Strauss: After one year of undergraduate

strates the error of this thesis.

His efforts at clarifying and applying the core concepts of needs, rights, and rules add up to a program for democratic action. It incorporates three basic assumptions: (1) meeting certain needs is the basic purpose of public policy, (2) rules are required to make sure appropriate needs are met, and (3) these rules must include rules governing rights. Braybrooke has long been willing to stare down the challenge of post-modernism; indeed, he is even willing to accept the somewhat unfashionable label of 'grand program' to describe the intent of these efforts to 'render political life more coherent, more just, and even more noble.'[5] His own grand program is particularly valuable by virtue of the fact that it has been developed in tandem with (and, hence, attentive to) other important philosophers offering their own versions of the grand program in political philosophy, principally, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and David Gauthier. Like them, he sets out his understanding of the basic structure available to a politically organized society. Braybrooke differs from these others in an important way, however: he situates these terms in the context of real-world concerns of daily politics in an industrialized Western democracy (and, hence, the title of this collection of essays). Moreover, he is not one to forget his debts to the history of philosophical ideas; he makes great efforts to relate his own program within two important, and usually considered to be widely different, historical traditions: utilitarianism and natural law theory.[6]

Let us look, then, more closely at his work on these three key concepts, beginning with needs.[7] Braybrooke argues that surely the principal question for all social policies is to consider their impact on human welfare. Such a project requires some way of measuring the relevant impact of policies, and that requires us to identify appropriate criteria for our focus. As countless critics have demonstrated, utility as it is

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study, David headed off to the New School to take some graduate classes. There he had the opportunity to take a class from the soon-to-be-famous Leo Strauss on the work of Socrates, Machiavelli, and Hobbes.

[5]This phrase is taken from the Introduction to *Analytical Political Philosophy*, draft manuscript.

[6]These historical connections are made most clearly and fully in his recent books, *Utilitarianism* (2004) and *Natural Law Modernized* (2001).

[7]The first comprehensive discussion of needs appears in his 1987 book, *Meeting Needs*.

generally understood is too problematic a measure for this task, though its principal insight of considering the welfare of everyone is sound. Braybrooke argues that a conception of human needs can better serve the role of evaluating the social worth of public policies. Such a concept must distinguish between mere wants or preferences and the things that are necessary to a life worth living. Thus, public policies should be held accountable for first meeting the latter and, then, for allowing as much room as possible for individuals to pursue their own preferences. Needs may be either course-of-life (what is required for life or health) or adventitious (what is required for meeting particular goals), and it is important to understand the distinction to ensure that policies do not lose track of course-of-life needs in responding to vocal demands for meeting particular adventitious needs.

While some course-of-life needs are clearly universal by virtue of biological requirements for nutrition, hydration, shelter, sleep, and so on, others are not (e.g., medical care), and adventitious needs may be very diverse indeed. Hence, public policy must be evaluated in terms of the needs of a specific reference population; those responsible for determining these needs will belong to a policy-making population, which may not be the same as the reference population.[8] It is, ultimately, a matter of general public debate what shall be deemed needs that must be met for a given population, the minimum standard of provision of those needs, as well as the policies that should be pursued to meet those needs. Clearly, then, the rules for that debate become very important. So, too, is a measure for comparing the effectiveness of different policies at meeting the needs of the population in question. Braybrooke introduced the census notion (described below) to solve that problem.[9]

Braybrooke's work on the concept of rights is intertwined with his work on the concept of rules.[10] He argues that rights attach to individu-

[8]I follow Braybrooke's terminology in his recent work here; it is far more accessible than the alternative form 'Selfgovliset' which he used in the original *Meeting Needs* book.

[9]The census notion requires agreement on minimal standards for provision of a need (e.g. what would constitute adequate nutrition for a 150-pound adult), and then everyone in the population is to be surveyed to see whether they are receiving enough calories and vitamins to meet this minimum; priority is then placed on bringing everyone up to the minimum (for their particular size).

[10]The first substantive discussion of rights appears in his 1968 book, *Three Tests for Democ-*

als, and their administration is largely left to the individual in question. Individuals are not alone in their responsibility for enacting their rights, of course. There is a collective responsibility to ensure that the rights of others are respected. This shared responsibility often requires more than just formal acknowledgment of the rights of others; it may also require us to ensure that the conditions are in place to permit them to exercise their rights. Governments are to be judged according to the respect and protection they provide of individual rights (both our own and those of our fellow citizens). His theory of rights is based on what he has developed as a census notion of welfare. According to the census notion, policies should aim to push as many people as possible into higher categories of welfare, leaving as few as possible behind. In this way, he is able to set measurable tests for democracy that link both rights and welfare (as he has argued since his 1968 book, *Three Tests for Democracy: Personal Rights, Human Welfare, Collective Preference*).

On his account, rights are, ultimately, social: they only make sense within a defined social context. More specifically, they are best understood as a particular type of settled social rule. As such, rights apply and are exercised within particular societies. Things are a bit more complicated yet, since rights actually involve two kinds of rules: those governing what it means to have and exercise a right and those determining who actually has a particular right. Because rights represent a kind of (double) rule, it is useful to understand their formal structure if we wish to make evaluations about governments' ability to respect rights. This interest in getting clear on the nature of social rules has led him into the formalism of deontic logic (in *Logic on the Track of Social Change*). As Peter Schotch demonstrates in chapter 13, the formal work on rules permeates multiple dimensions of Braybrooke's grand program.

## 1.3 The Structure of the Volume: Overview of Essays

The rest of the essays in this book take up several of the major ideas in Braybrooke's work and are divided into two major blocks reflecting

*racy*. His work on rules appears in many places but is most thoroughly discussed in *Logic on the Track of Social Change*.