

Questions for week 9, Bryan Jones, *Reconceiving Decision-Making...*

Answer ONE of the following questions. Come to class prepared to discuss ALL of them. Essays should be limited to one page single spaced and should have perhaps one-third of the essay describing the issue and the rest analyzing it. It is preferable to go into detail on a small part of the issue, giving examples or illustrations, than to remain at a general level. The devil is always in the details.

1. What is a preference? What are the problems with that concept, according to Jones?
2. Is Jones' attention to "the decision to attend" (ch 3) similar to other concepts in the literature, such as threat in the motivated reasoning literature? Explain. How important is that idea?
3. Does the problem with preferences, for Jones, essentially boil down to the fact that issues are multi-dimensional and that it is hard or impossible to specify how people make trade-offs across different dimensions that may be measured or valued on different scales? Explain.
4. Compare Table 2.1 with Table 3.1 and discuss.
5. What is a 'Stigler-Becker Preference'? Be precise.
6. Review the evidence in the case study in chapter 4, on congressional voting on the superconducting super-collider. How often do such things occur – often enough to matter, or rarely enough to ignore?
7. Consider how these quotes from Justice Souter's 2010 commencement speech at Harvard after he left the bench relate to Jones' arguments:

The explicit terms of the Constitution, in other words, can create a conflict of approved values, and the explicit terms of the Constitution do not resolve that conflict when it arises. The guarantee of the right to publish is unconditional in its terms, and in its terms the power of the government to govern is plenary. A choice may have to be made, not because language is vague but because the Constitution embodies the desire of the American people, like most people, to have things both ways. We want order and security, and we want liberty. And we want not only liberty but equality as well. These paired desires of ours can clash, and when they do a court is forced to choose between them, between one constitutional good and another one. ...

I have to believe that something deeper is involved, and that behind most dreams of a simpler Constitution there lies a basic human hunger for the certainty and control that the fair reading model seems to promise. And who has not felt that same hunger? Is there any one of us who has not lived through moments, or years, of longing for a world without ambiguity, and for the stability of something unchangeable in human institutions?