



Budgeting and Governing

Aaron Wildavsky

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Aaron Wildavsky's greatest concern, as expressed in his writings, is how people manage to live together. This concern may at first appear to have little to do with the study of budgeting, but for Wildavsky budgeting made living together possible. Indeed, as he argues here, if you cannot budget, you cannot govern.

Budgeting and Governing gathers in one place a mass of material that otherwise would be lost in a wilderness of journals and edited volumes. With few exceptions, Wildavsky chose the articles in this collection. They are organized largely chronologically so that the reader can trace the progression of his thought which moved from studies of the American federal government, through comparative work, and on to placing budgeting within a broader theory of political culture. Wildavsky wrote about budgeting because in his words, "when a process involves power, authority, culture, consensus, and conflict, it captures a great deal of national political life." Wildavsky was interested in budgeting because of what it could tell us about the classic questions of politics: who gets what, how, and why? His earlier analyses focus narrowly on budgeting personnel and agency actors in answering these questions, while in his later work the contending actors become sub-cultural types.

To Wildavsky politics was about finding terms for living together in spite of ideological differences. Budgetary incrementalism helped to manage this otherwise unmanageable task. He thought synoptic budgeting and all related reforms would increase disagreement and raise the stakes, and so were unwise. Analysis had to serve politics, not try to displace it.

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