



Human Judgment and Social Policy: Irreducible Uncertainty, Inevitable Error, Unavoidable Injustice

Kenneth R. Hammond

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From the O.J. Simpson verdict to peace-making in the Balkans, the critical role of human judgement--complete with its failures, flaws, and successes--has never been more hotly debated and analyzed than it is today. This landmark work examines the dynamics of judgement and its impact on events that take place in human society, which require the direction and control of social policy. Research on social policy typically focuses on content. This book concentrates instead on the decision-making process itself. Drawing on 50 years of empirical research in decision theory, Hammond examines the possibilities for wisdom and cognitive competence in the formation of social policies, and applies these lessons to specific examples, such as the space shuttle Challenger disaster and the health care debate. Uncertainty, he tells us, can seldom be fully eliminated; thus error is inevitable, and injustice for some unavoidable. But the capacity for make wise judgments increases to the extent that we understand the potential pitfalls and their origin. The judgment process for example involves an ongoing rivalry between intuition and analysis, accuracy and rationality. The source of this tension requires an examination of the evolutionary roots of human judgement and how these fundamental features may be changing as our civilization increasingly becomes an information and knowledge-based society. With numerous examples from law, medicine, engineering, and economics, the author dramatizes the importance of judgment and its role in the formation of social policies which affect us all, and issues the first comprehensive examination of its underlying dynamics.

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