

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

## Volume I

*Edited by*  
Mary Hawkesworth  
and  
Maurice Kogan



**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

the institutional definition's focus on the official agencies of government, pluralists emphasize that politics is a process of 'partisan mutual adjustment' (Lindblom 1965), a process of bargaining, negotiating, conciliation and compromise through which individuals seeking markedly different objectives arrive at decisions with which all are willing to live. On this view, politics is a moderating activity, a means of settling differences without recourse to force, a mechanism for deciding policy objectives from a competing array of alternatives (Crick 1962).

The pluralist conception of politics incorporates a number of modernist assumptions about the appropriate relation of the individual to the state. Pervaded by scepticism concerning the power of human reason to operate in the realm of values and the concomitant subjectivist assumption that, in the absence of absolute values, all value judgements must be relative to the individual, pluralists suggest that individuals must be left free to pursue their own subjectively determined ends. The goal of politics must be nothing more than the reconciliation of subjectively defined needs and interests of the individual with the requirements of society as a whole in the most freedom-maximizing fashion. Moreover, presupposing the fundamental equality of individuals, pluralists insist that the state has no business favouring the interests of any individual or group. Thus, in the absence of rational grounds for preferring any individual or value over any other, pluralists identify coalition building as the most freedom-maximizing decision principle. Politics *qua* interest accommodation is fair precisely because the outcome of any negotiating situation is a function of the consensus-garnering skill of the participants. The genius of this procedural conception of politics lies in its identification of solutions capable of winning the assent of a majority of participants in the decision process.

Pluralists have ascribed a number of virtues to their conception of politics. It avoids the excessive rationalism of paternalist conceptions of politics that assume the state knows what is in the best interests of the citizenry. It recognizes the heterogeneity of citizens and protects the rights of all to participate in the political process. It acknowledges the multiple power bases in society (for example, wealth, numbers, monopoly of scarce goods or skills) and accords each a legitimate role in collective decision making. It notes not only that interest groups must be taken into account if politics is to be adequately understood, but also that competing interests exist within the official institutions of state; that those designated to act on behalf of citizens must also be understood to act as factions, whose behaviour may be governed as much by organizational interests, partisanship, and private ambitions as by an enlightened conception of the common good.

Despite such advantages, pluralism, too, has been criticized for failing to provide a comprehensive conception of politics. In defining politics as a

mechanism for decision making which constitutes an alternative to force, the interest-accommodation definition relegates war, revolution and terrorism beyond the sphere of politics. In emphasizing bargaining, conciliation and compromise as the core activities of politics, the pluralist conception assumes that all interests are essentially reconcilable. Thus it sheds little light upon some of the most intractable political issues that admit of no compromise (for example, abortion, apartheid or racism or, more generally, 'holy war'). Moreover, in treating all power bases as equal, pluralists tend to ignore the structural advantages afforded by wealth and political office. The notion of equal rights of participation and influence neglects the formidable powers of state and economy in determining political outcomes. In addition, the interest-accommodation definition of politics has been faulted for ethnocentrism. It mistakes certain characteristics of political activity in Western liberal democracies for the nature of politics in all times and places.

Although the pluralist conception fails to achieve a value-neutral, comprehensive definition of politics, it too has a subtle influence upon the practice of politics in the contemporary world. When accredited by social scientists as the essence of politics, the interest-accommodation conception both legitimizes the activities of competing interest groups as the fairest mechanism of policy determination and delegitimizes revolutionary action and political violence as inherently anti-political. Even in less extreme circumstances, the pluralist definition of politics may function as a self-fulfilling prophecy, severely curtailing the options available to a political community by constricting the parameters within which political questions are considered.

The pluralist conception of politics presupposes the validity of the fact-value dichotomy and the emotivist conception of values. As a version of non-cognitivism, emotivism is a meta-ethical theory which asserts that facts and values are ontologically distinct and that evaluative judgements involve questions concerning subjective emotions, sentiments or feelings rather than questions of knowledge or rational deliberation (Hudson 1970). Applied to the political realm, emotivism suggests that moral and political choices are a matter of subjective preference or irrational whim about which there can be no reasoned debate.

Although emotivism has been discredited as an altogether defective account of morality and has been repudiated by philosophers for decades, emotivism continues to be advanced as unproblematic truth by social scientists (MacIntyre 1981; Warwick 1980). And there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that 'to a large degree, people now think, talk and act as if emotivism were true' (MacIntyre 1981:21). Promulgated in the texts of social science and incorporated in pop culture, emotivist assumptions permeate discussions of the self, freedom and social relations (Bellah *et al.* 1985). Contemporary conceptions

of the self are deeply infused with emotivist and individualist premisses: the 'unsituated self' who chooses an identity in isolation and on the basis of arbitrary preferences has become a cultural ideal. Freedom is conceived in terms of the unrestrained pursuit of idiosyncratic preferences in personal, economic, moral and political realms. Moral issues are understood in terms of maximizing one's preferred idiosyncratic values, and moral dilemmas are treated as strategic or technical problems related to zero-sum conditions under which the satisfaction of one preference may obstruct the satisfaction of another preference. Respect for other individuals is equated with recognition of their rights to choose and to pursue their own preferences without interference. Condemnation of the immoral actions of others is supplanted by the non-judgemental response of 'walking away, if you don't like what others are doing' (Bellah *et al.* 1985:6). Emotivism coupled with individualism encourages people to find meaning exclusively in the private sphere, thereby intensifying the privatization of the self and heightening doubts that individuals have enough in common to sustain a discussion of their interests or anxieties (Connolly 1981:145).

Any widespread acceptance of emotivism has important ramifications for political life. At its best, emotivism engenders a relativism which strives 'to take views, outlooks and beliefs which apparently conflict and treat them in such a way that they do not conflict: each of them turns out to be acceptable in its own place' (Williams 1985:156). The suspension of valuative judgement aims at conflict reduction by conflict avoidance. By walking away from those whose subjective preferences are different, individuals avoid unpleasant confrontations. By accepting that values are ultimately arbitrary and hence altogether beyond rational justification, citizens devise a *modus vivendi* which permits coexistence amidst diversity.

This coexistence is fragile, however, and the promise of conflict avoidance largely illusory. For the underside of emotivism is cynicism, the 'obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations' and the consequent reduction of politics to a contest of wiles and wills ultimately decided by force (MacIntyre 1981:22, 68). Thus when intractable conflicts arise because avoidance strategies fail, they cannot be resolved through reasoned discourse, for on this view, rational discussion is simply a façade which masks arbitrary manipulation. Thus the options for political life are reduced by definition either to the intense competition of conflicting interests depicted in the pluralist paradigm or to the resort to violence.

The political legacy of emotivism is radical privatization, the destruction of the public realm, 'the disintegration of public deliberation and discourse among members of the political community' (Dallmayr 1981:2). For widespread acceptance of the central tenets of emotivism renders public discussion undesirable (for it might provoke violence), unnecessary (for the real outcomes

of decisions will be dictated by force of will), and irrational (for nothing rational can be said in defence of arbitrary preferences). Privatization produces a world in which individuals are free to act on whim and to realize their arbitrary desires, but it is a world in which collective action is prohibited by a constellation of beliefs which render public deliberation impotent, if not impossible. The pluralist conception of politics is not the sole disseminator of emotivism in contemporary societies, but its confident proclamation of interest accommodation as the only viable mode of politics contributes to a form of public life that is markedly impoverished. That it appeals to scientific expertise to confer the 'legitimacy of fact' upon its narrow construal of political possibility should be the cause of some alarm to members of a discipline committed to value-free inquiry.

To escape problems of ethnocentrism and devise a conception of politics that encompasses the political experiences of diverse cultures and ages, in the 1960s behavioural political scientists suggested a new approach that would be both broadly comparative and thoroughly scientific. Extrapolating from organic and cybernetic analogies, both systems analysis and structural-functionalism conceived politics as a self-regulating system existing within a larger social environment and fulfilling necessary tasks for that social environment (Easton 1971; Almond and Coleman 1960; Mitchell 1958, 1967). On this view, politics involves performance of a number of functions without which society could not exist. The task of political science was to identify these critical political functions, show how they are performed in divergent cultural and social contexts, and ascertain how changes in one part of the political system affect other parts and the system as a whole so as to maintain homeostatic equilibrium. Once political inquiry had generated such a comprehensive understanding of political processes, political scientists could then provide meaningful cross-cultural explanations and predictions. The goal of the systematic cross-cultural study of politics, then, was to generate a scientific understanding of the demands made upon political systems (for example, state building, nation building, participation, redistribution), the nature of the systems' adaptive responses, including the conversion processes which operate to minimize change, and the scope of political development in terms of structural differentiation and cultural secularization which emerge when the system confronts challenges that surpass its existing capabilities.

Despite its wide popularity, this functionalist conception of politics encountered difficulties with its effort to identify the core political functions without which societies could not survive. Although scholars committed to the functionalist approach generally concurred with David Easton that the political system involves 'those actions related to the authoritative allocation of values' (Easton 1971:143-4); they disagreed about precisely what those actions entailed. Mitchell (1958, 1967) identified four critical political functions: the authoritative

specification of system goals; the authoritative mobilization of resources to implement goals; the integration of the system (centre and periphery); and the allocation of values and costs. Easton (1971), as well as Almond and Coleman (1960), offered a more expansive list including interest articulation, interest aggregation, rule making, rule application, rule adjudication, political recruitment, political socialization and political communication.

Critics noted that neither enumeration was sufficiently precise to satisfy expectations raised by the model. Neither delineated clearly between the system and its boundaries; neither specified a critical range of operation beyond which the system could be said to have ceased to function; neither explained the requirements of equilibrium maintenance with sufficient precision to sustain a distinction between functional and dysfunctional processes. In short, critics suggested that terminological vagueness and imprecision sustained the suspicion that the putative political functions were arbitrary rather than 'vital' or indispensable (Landau 1968; Gregor 1968; Stephens 1969).

In contrast to the promise of scientific certainty that accompanied the deployment of the functionalist conception of politics, critics also pointed out that the model generated no testable hypotheses, much less identified 'scientific laws' of political life. In marked contrast to the optimistic claims advanced by its proponents, critics argued that the chief virtue of the functionalist conception was heuristic: it provided an elaborate system of classification that allowed divergent political systems to be described in the same terms of reference. A common vocabulary of analysis enabled comparison of similarities and differences cross-culturally (Dowse 1966; Gregor 1968).

Additional limitations were noted by critics of the functionalist conception of politics. The model's emphasis upon system maintenance and persistence rendered it singularly incapable of charting political change. While traditional modes of political analysis classified revolutions and *coups d'état* as fundamental mechanisms of political transformation, functionalist analyses could depict such events as adaptive strategies by which the 'system' persists. Thus the systems approach blurred important issues pertaining to the character of political regimes and the significant dimensions of regime change (Groth 1970; Rothman 1971).

If functionalist analyses tended to mask political change at one level, at another level they tended to impose an inordinate uniformity upon the scope of political development. Within the functionalist literature, the pattern of development characteristic of a few Western liberal democracies such as the United States and Great Britain was taken as paradigmatic of all political development. Succumbing to a form of 'inputism', political scientists proclaimed that certain modes of economic development rendered certain political developments inevitable. The dissemination of capitalist markets would produce strains upon traditional societies, resulting in increasing demands for political

participation, which would eventually culminate in the achievement of liberal democracy. Despite the clear ideological content of this projection and despite critics' cogent repudiation of the scientific pretensions of functionalism, this model of development has been repeatedly hailed by political scientists as a matter of indisputable, empirical fact. What is important to note here is not merely that political scientists operating within this tradition have mistaken the political choices of particular political communities for the universal political destiny of the species or that their beliefs about the value-neutrality of their scientific endeavour have blinded them to the hegemonic aspects of their projections, but also that political scientists have used their leverage as 'experts' to advise developing nations to adopt strategies that produce the world prophesied by political science. However flawed their foundation, scientific assertions have been used to dictate 'rational strategies' for political development, which foreclose options and drastically curtail the freedom of citizens in developing countries.

Where Aristotle advanced a conception of political knowledge that preserved the distinction between the free choices of political agents in particular nations and the truth possessed by political theorists, under the guise of value-free empirical inquiry, contemporary political scientists have used scientifically accredited 'facts' to supplant political choice. Under the rubric of realism, they have recommended action to enhance the stability of regimes by minimizing 'dysfunctional' and 'destabilizing' forces such as citizen participation. Under the precept of scientific prediction, they have promoted capitalist market relations as the substance of an inevitable political development. Although implementation of such policy advice is typically justified as another example of knowledge hastening progress, there are good reasons to challenge such optimism. When the liberation-subversion dynamic surfaces in relation to knowledge accredited by contemporary political science, there is at least as great a likelihood that scientific knowledge will subvert freedom as that it will contribute to undisputed 'progress'.

Behaviourism in political science was committed to the belief that definitions are and must be value-free, that concepts could be operationalized in a thoroughly non-prescriptive manner and that research methodologies are neutral techniques for the collection and organization of data. Behaviourism conceived the political scientist as a passive observer who merely described and explained what exists in the political world. Post-behaviourism challenged the myth of value-neutrality, suggesting that all research is theoretically constituted and value permeated. But, in illuminating the means by which the conviction of value-free research masked the valuative component of political inquiry, post-behaviourism did not question the fundamental separation between events in the political world and their retrospective analysis by political scientists. In recent years, critical theorists and post-modernists have suggested that this notion of critical

distance is yet another myth. Emphasizing that every scientific discourse is productive, generating positive effects within its investigative domain, post-modernists caution that political science must also be understood as a productive force which creates a world in its own image, even as it employs conceptions of passivity, neutrality, detachment and objectivity to disguise and conceal its role (Foucault 1973, 1979). Even a cursory examination of the four allegedly value-neutral definitions of politics that have dominated twentieth-century political science suggests that there are good reasons to treat the post-modernists' cautions seriously. For each definition not only construes the political world differently, but also acts subtly to promote specific modes of political life.

### IMPLICATIONS: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA

If post-empiricist conceptions of knowledge and science, as well as post-modernist cautions concerning the productive effects of disciplinary practices are to be taken seriously, then an encyclopedia produced in the late twentieth century must differ in important respects from its predecessors. The attempt to provide an overview of the main topics investigated within the subfields of the discipline must be matched by a strategy that allows questions concerning the constitutive components of political research to surface. Rather than succumb to myths of value-neutrality, the volume must attempt to illuminate the substantive implications of diverse methodologies. Rather than accredit the notion of an unproblematic scientific objectivity, efforts must be made to explicate and assess the standards that inform disciplinary judgements.

Toward these ends, this encyclopedia has recruited contributors committed to a wide range of methodological approaches. Each author has been asked to provide a concise critical analysis, rather than a descriptive capsule sketch, of the topic under investigation. In particular, authors have been asked to address methodological as well as substantive issues pertaining to the subject, engaging relevant debates concerning the strengths and weaknesses of alternative research strategies and differentiating fruitful from flawed approaches.

This encyclopedia is organized by subfield. Rather than seeking methodological uniformity within each subfield, efforts have been made to recruit scholars who adopt contending approaches to related topics in the hope that the juxtaposition of competing accounts will help illuminate the theoretical presuppositions and the political implications of alternative modes of inquiry. The inclusion of alternative approaches is thus designed to enrich the portrayal of political life, to heighten understanding of the limitations of particular approaches and to increase the analytical sophistication of readers.



Structuring this encyclopedia along these lines involves a number of dangers. In attempting to provide a systematic account of the state of political studies that includes political theory, contemporary ideologies, comparative political institutions, processes and behaviour, political cleavages within the nation-state, theories of policy making, comparative examination of a range of substantive policy areas, as well as international relations and major issues confronting the contemporary world, the encyclopedia faces the formidable danger that it will fail to provide a comprehensive and comprehensible account of such a broad array of topics. In adopting a strategy that challenges the empiricist foundation that sustains the bulk of research in contemporary political science, the volume confronts the possibility of dismissal concomitant to any effort to challenge established traditions and entrenched power, for the behaviourists who continue to dominate the discipline of political science may choose to ignore rather than engage sustained critique. Moreover, in advancing a conception of political science that supplants claims to transcendent truth with recognition of the far more fallible foundations of human cognition, the project risks rejection by those who prefer a more heroic, albeit fictive, depiction of the discipline's authority. Such risks are as unavoidable as they are rife.

The production of this encyclopedia, however, also affords a number of opportunities. It provides an occasion for a systematic stocktaking—for a review of the substantive research findings generated within the discipline, for a reassessment of the role of diverse analytical techniques in shaping those substantive claims, and, more generally, for an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of political inquiry. It invites a re-evaluation of the relations between knowledge and power within disciplinary discourses. It encourages renewed investigation of the extent to which solutions to the problems confronting contemporary politics are constrained by outmoded and unwarranted disciplinary assumptions. In so doing, the encyclopedia will stimulate creative thinking about the world captured in the discourses of political science. The extent to which the encyclopedia contributes to this end will be the ultimate measure of its utility.

## REFERENCES

- Almond, G. and Coleman, J. (eds) (1960) *The Politics of Developing Areas*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Aristotle (1958) *The Politics*, trans. and ed. E. Barker, London: Oxford University Press.
- Ayer, A.J. (ed.) (1959) *Logical Positivism*, New York: Free Press.
- Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A. and Tipton, S. (1985) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitments in American Life*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Bernstein, R. (1978) *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- (1983) *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press .
- Brown, H. (1977) *Perception, Theory and Commitment: The New Philosophy of Science*, Chicago: Precedent Publishing Company.
- Catlin, G. (1964) *The Science and Method of Politics*, New York: Archon Press.
- Connolly, W.E. (1981) *Appearance and Reality in Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, T. (1985) 'Postpositivist critical multiplism', in R.Shotland and M.Marks (eds) *Social Science and Social Policy*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Crick, B. (1962) *In Defence of Politics*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Dallmayr, F. (1981) *Beyond Dogma and Despair*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Diderot, D. et al. (1751–65) *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, 17 vols, Paris: Le Breton, Briasson, David & Durand.
- Dowse, R. (1966) 'A functionalist's logic', *World Politics* (July): 607–22.
- Easton, D. (1971) *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, 2nd edn, New York: Knopf.
- Encyclopédie methodique ou bibliothèque universelle de toutes les connaissances humaines*, Paris: Panckoucke, 1782–94; Agasse, 1794–1820.
- Eulau, H. (1963) *The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics*, New York: Random House.
- Eulau, H. and March J. (eds) (1969) *Political Science*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Finifter, A.W. (ed) (1983) *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- Foucault, M. (1973) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books.
- (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books.
- Goodnow, F. (1904) 'The work of the American Political Science Association', *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association* 1:37.
- Greenstein, F. and Polsby, N. (eds) (1975) *Handbook of Political Science*, vols I–VII, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Gregor, A.J. (1968) 'Political science and the use of functionalist analysis', *American Political Science Review* (June): 425–39.
- Groth, A.J. (1970) 'Structural functionalism and political development: three problems', *Western Political Quarterly* (September): 485–99.
- Gunnell, J. (1986) *Between Philosophy and Politics*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Harding, S. (1986) *The Science Question in Feminism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hawkesworth, M.E. (1988) *Theoretical Issues in Policy Analysis*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hesse, M. (1980) *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science*, Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Hudson, W.D. (1970) *Modern Moral Philosophy*, New York: Anchor Books.
- Hume, D. (1739) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A.Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- (1748) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, e.d. L.A.Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Humphreys, W. (ed.) (1969) *Perception and Discovery*, San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper.
- Hyneman, C. (1959) *The Study of Politics*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Joergenson, J. (1951) *The Development of Logical Empiricism*, vol. II, no. 9 of the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kaplan, A. (1964) *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science*, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing.
- Kraft, V. (1952) *The Vienna Circle*, New York: Philosophical Library.
- Landau, M. (1968) 'On the use of functional analysis in American political science', *Social Research* (Spring): 44–75.
- Lasswell, H. (1950) *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*, New York: P.Smith.
- Lindblom, C. (1965) *The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision-Making Through Mutual Adjustment*, New York: Free Press.
- Lindblom, C. and Cohen, D. (1979) *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Longino, H. (1990) *Science As Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lough, J. (1968) *Essays on the Encyclopedie of Diderot and D'Alembert*, London.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981) *After Virtue*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MacRae, D. (1976) *The Social Function of Social Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Meehan, E. (1965) *The Theory and Method of Political Analysis*, Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press.
- Miller, E. (1979) 'Metaphor and political knowledge', *American Political Science Review* 73 (1):155–70.
- Mitchell, W.C. (1958) 'The polity and society: a structural functional analysis', *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 2:403–40.
- (1967) *Sociological Analysis and Politics*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Moon, D. (1975) 'The logic of political inquiry: a synthesis of opposed perspectives', in F.Greenstein and N.Polsby (eds) *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. I, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Moore, G.E. (1903) *Principia Ethica*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Morgenthau, H. (1967) *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Knopf.
- Mosca, G. (1939) *The Ruling Class*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Murray, T. (1983) 'Partial knowledge', in D.Callahan and B.Jennings (eds) *Ethics, The Social Sciences and Policy Analysis*, New York: Plenum Press.
- Polanyi, M. (1958) *Personal Knowledge*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Popper, K. (1959) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, New York: Basic Books.
- (1972a) *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 4th edn rev., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- (1972b) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ricci, D. (1984) *The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship and Democracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Rothman, S. (1971) 'Functionalism and its critics: an analysis of the writings of Gabriel Almond', *Political Science Reviewer* (Fall): 236–76.
- Seidelman, R. and Harpham, E. (1985) *Disenchanted Realists: Political Science and the American Crisis, 1884–1984*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Sellars, W. (1963) *Science, Perception and Reality*, New York: Humanities Press.
- Stephens, J. (1969) 'The logic of functional and systems analyses in political science', *Midwest Journal of Political Science* (August): 367–94.
- Stockman, N. (1983) *Anti-Positivist Theories of Science: Critical Rationalism, Critical Theory and Scientific Realism*, Dordrecht: D.Reidel.
- Storing, H.J. (ed.) (1962) *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Suppe, F. (ed.) (1977) *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, 2nd edn, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Tanenhaus, J. and Somit, A. (1967) *The Development of Political Science: From Burgess to Behavioralism*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Vivas, E. (1960) 'Science and the studies of man', in H.Schoek and J.Wiggans (eds) *Scientism and Values*, Princeton: D.van Nostrand Company.
- Wade, I. (1977) *The Structure and Form of the French Enlightenment*, 2 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Warwick, D. (1980) *The Teaching of Ethics in the Social Sciences*, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences.
- Welsh, W. (1973) *Studying Politics*, New York: Praeger.
- Wildavsky, A. (1979) *Speaking Truth to Power*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Williams, B. (1985) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Wolin, S. (1981) 'Max Weber: legitimation, method and the politics of theory', *Political Theory* 9 (3):401–24.



PART II

---

**POLITICAL THEORY:  
CENTRAL CONCEPTS**



---

---

# CONCEPTIONS OF THE STATE

ANDREW VINCENT

The state is one of the most difficult concepts in politics. For some scholars the discipline of politics is wholly concerned with the state; for others politics exists in social contexts outside the sphere of the state. One of the most intractable problems in such debates is that there is little agreement on what is being studied. Is the state a body of governing institutions; a structure of legal rules; a subspecies of society; or a body of values and beliefs about civil existence? These and many other questions plague the study of the state. We will first look at the origin of the word; then at the state's problematic relation to other political concepts; the contending views of its history; finally, the variety of theoretical approaches to it.

The word state derives from the Latin *stare* (to stand) and *status* (a standing or condition). Roman writers, such as Cicero and Ulpian, as well as later medieval lawyers, used such terms as *status civitatis* or *status regni*. This use of *status* referred to the condition of the ruler, the fact of possessing stability, or the elements necessary for stability. Standing or status was usually acquired through family, sex, profession and most importantly property. This is where we also find the subtle linkage with the word 'estate'. The English word 'state' is, in fact, a contraction of the word 'estate'. This is similar to the old French word *estat* and modern French *état*, both of which imply a profession or social status. Groups had different status and thus estate. The term 'estates of the realm' is derived from this. Parallels can be found in other European languages, as in the Spanish *estado*. The highest estate, with property, rank and family, was usually the ruling group or person. The highest estate had potentially the greatest authority and power. Such authority was often seen as the guarantee of order and public welfare. It was thus linked to stability, which derived from the same root term. Those in authority—the highest estate—had insignia, crests and so forth showing their stateliness.

Some argue that we find an awareness of the state in the above usage in the twelfth century or even before (Post 1964; Mitteis 1975). A popular line of



interpretation stresses a later, more definite noun usage in which the state is understood as a public power above both ruler and ruled, which constitutes the locus of political and legal authority. It is not simply a matter of standing, stability or stateliness, although this terminology is carried over into the more modern usage, but a definite new form of continuous public power which constitutes a new type of civil existence.

There are two basic positions taken on this latter noun usage of state. Both identify the origin of the state in the sixteenth century; whereas one sees Machiavelli as the prime mover (Cassirer 1946; Meinecke 1957), the other identifies heirs of Italian humanism in France such as Guillaume Budé, Bernard du Haillan and Jean Bodin, as the real formulators of the modern idea (Hexter 1973; Church 1972; Skinner 1978; Dyson 1980).

There appear to be a number of formal characteristics intrinsic to the state. It has a geographically identifiable territory with a body of citizens. It claims authority over all citizens and groups within its boundaries and embodies more comprehensive aims than other associations. The authority of the state is legal in character and is usually seen as the source of law. It is based on procedural rules which have more general recognition in society than other rules. The procedures of states are operated by trained bureaucracies of office holders. The state also embodies the maximal control of resources and force within a territory. Its monopoly is not simply premised on force: most states try to claim legitimacy for such a monopoly, namely, they seek some recognition and acceptance from the population. In consequence, to be a member of a state implies a civil disposition. Further, the state is seen as sovereign, both in an internal sense within its territory, and in an external sense, namely, the state is recognized by other states as an equal member of international society. It should be noted, however, that the idea of the state changes with different senses of sovereignty. Finally, the state is a continuous public power distinct from rulers and ruled.

The state stands in a complex relation to a number of political concepts such as society, community, sovereignty and government. Many of these concepts have senses which coincide with particular views of the state. The state can, for example, be said to create all associations within itself. In this sense nothing is distinct from the state. Society becomes an aspect of the state. On the other hand, if sovereignty is regarded as popular, residing in the people who create the state for limited ends, then the position is reversed and society can be viewed as prior and independent of the state. Similarly, the state can be seen as synonymous with government (many contemporary pluralist writers appear to adopt this view) or separate from government and giving authority to it. These issues present the student of politics with fundamental and intractable problems of interpretation.

Essentially there are three general perspectives on the history of the state. The first argues that the state dates back to the early Greek *polis* (city-state) of around

500 BC. For Aristotle, political science was the study of the *polis*. There were unquestionably conceptions of territory, citizenship, authority, law and so on entailed in the *polis*; however, there was no conception of separate powers of government, no conception of a separate civil society and no very precise idea of a legal constitution. Furthermore, the life of the *polis* was deeply integrated in religious, artistic, and ethical practices. It was also on such a small scale, compared to modern states, that, overall, it is stretching the imagination to call it a state in any contemporary sense. Empires were also too loose and fragmented structures to call states.

The second perspective dates the state from the early Middle Ages. Roman and canon law had established ideas of transcendent public welfare. Public power and law were associated with the office of the monarch, initially identified with Papal sovereignty. There were also concepts of citizenship and the rule of law in medieval political thought. The problems with this view are, first, etymological—can one argue seriously about a term where it does not exist? The word state does not appear in political parlance until approximately the sixteenth century. Second, the feudal structure of the Middle Ages tended to have a fragmenting effect. Feudal life was made up of a massive subsystem of associations. Many of the larger associations, the nobility, church and guilds, had their own laws and courts. Monarchy was not in a pre-eminently sovereign position. It was often regarded as an elective office and not necessarily hereditary. The monarchs also relied heavily on the support of the nobility and other estates to help them rule. Medieval society was criss-crossed with overlapping associations and conflicting loyalties. Monarchs were reliant on the community of the realm and consequently were often regarded as subject to the law, not as its source. Finally, it is difficult to identify clearly defined territorial units with consistently loyal populations in the Middle Ages. The only loyalty that transcended local groups attachments was the Church. All were members of the *respublica christiana*. It was crucial for this vision to break down before the idea of independent political units could grow.

The third perspective dates the emergence of the state from the late Middle Ages and more specifically from the sixteenth century. This view finds support from the etymology. It is a view shared by a number of more recent authorities (as argued above on the origin of the word). However, there is some debate as to which theorists introduced the idea (Machiavelli or Bodin), and when and where the practice of the modern state began. The contending authorities, as discussed earlier (p. 44), focus their attention, respectively, on Renaissance Italy and France under the early absolutist monarchs.

Having examined the main outline of its historical origin we will now turn to the variety of academic approaches to the study of the state and their respective

merits. Essentially there are five approaches and these often overlap, necessarily at times. The five are:

- 1 juristic or legal;
- 2 historical;
- 3 sociological/anthropological;
- 4 political-scientific;
- 5 philosophical/normative.

The legal approach has the oldest pedigree. It dates back to the use of Roman law vocabulary in the earliest descriptions of the state. Words like power, authority and legitimacy, when used in relation to the state from the sixteenth century, had deep roots in Roman law. The early critiques of feudal rule, initially by Papal lawyers, derived from Roman law sources. These formed the background for notions of authority and law focused on centralized rule. However, the temptation to characterize the state as a hierarchical body of legal rules, linked by some sovereign authority, can be found in many theorists this century (for example, Hans Kelsen 1945). In fact, the intellectual tradition of legal positivism shows a marked preference for this interpretation. Others find this approach too limiting. They contend that there are many more factors that enter into the definition and character of the state than simply a hierarchy of legal rules.

Many historians have written detailed studies of the growth of the state (for example, Strayer 1970; Shennan 1974; Anderson 1974). Some lay more emphasis on the factors which are connected to the rise of the state, as in the growth of Renaissance city states, the Reformation, the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire, the growth of centralized salaried bureaucracies, standing armies, centralized taxation, or dynastic and religious wars. Others lay more emphasis on the history of certain ideas accompanying the events in state growth (Skinner 1978). For the pure historian the practice of the state is much more messy and pragmatic than legal or philosophical theories would lead us to believe. Theory alone is too simple and abbreviated to catch all the diverse interests and pressures which accompanied state growth. The weakness of this historical approach is that the state is not just an empirical entity which can be grasped by examining historical events. Statehood involves, from its earliest manifestations in the European political vocabulary, ideas and theories of civil existence. To neglect such a dimension of the state impoverishes our understanding.

Sociologists and anthropologists have tended to view the state as a way of organizing society, one that is found in certain more developed economies. In other words, 'state societies' are a subspecies of the genus of society (see Lowie 1927; Krader 1968). Another way of putting this is that the state is a subspecies of government. State organization is one form in which humans have organized

their social existence. Writers such as Marx, Durkheim, Duguit, Weber and MacIver largely viewed the state in this manner. The state was explained through the broader study of society.

One of the difficulties in summarizing this sociological approach is that it encompasses such a diverse range of views, whether it be Durkheim's positivism, Marxist political economy or Talcott Parsons's functionalism (Poggi 1978; Badie and Birnbaum 1983). On a very general level this approach stresses the economic and social preconditions of states; the types of states and what causes them to appear; and the factors giving rise to the responsiveness and durability of states. Talcott Parsons, for example, saw the state as a unique product of the division of labour in advanced industrial societies (Parsons 1967). Specialized organizations developed in relation to this division of labour and became centred on the state. The state thus implied a level of industrialization. It could therefore be described as a collection of specialized agencies associated with the division of labour in advanced industrialized societies. Its function is to mediate and reduce conflict and tension between the different sectors of society. States come into being when they possess enough resources to be able to dominate the peripheries and reconcile tensions (see Nettl 1968).

Political science has in this century been more inclined to stress the empirical approach, relying on low-level generalizations within explanatory frameworks. The demand of an empirical theory is that it can be rigorously tested. It tends to integrate ideas developed within the disciplines of political sociology, political economy and psychology. It reflects, to some degree, a growing commitment to scientism, specifically with the 1950s behavioural revolution in the work of figures like David Easton (see Easton 1965). Empirical theory was seen as the key to the future advancement of the subject. In comparative politics functionalism and neo-functionalism were imported from sociology. Developmental and modernization theory emerged from the functionalist form of analysis. The state is seen to be a specialized agency which comes about to perform certain functions at an advanced stage of modernization. The history of the state is one of changing economic and social practices which can be measured statistically. Much of the early literature on comparative politics developed along these lines (see Tilly 1975).

Contemporary political science employs a variety of theories to explain the state. The most well known have been: pluralism and neo-pluralism; elite theory; corporatism and neo-corporatism; various forms of Marxism; and forms of political economy, particularly public choice theory. For political scientists, such theories can provide empirical testable insights into the state (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987).

Empirical pluralist and neo-pluralists view society as constituted by groups and the state as virtually synonymous with government, which is a target or location for pressure or interest group activity. Power is about resources that

groups can command in the competitive market. For some, government reflects the dominant coalition on a particular policy (Latham 1965). Other pluralists see government as an impartial umpire or neutral arbiter; this is reflected in Dahl's account of polyarchy (Dahl 1971). Most pluralists incorporate a theory of democracy, viewed as a form of interest articulation and market competition, into their view of the state. Such a notion of democracy is seen as more realistic than the older classical participatory notions of democracy. For pluralists such as Dahl and Schumpeter, democracy is concerned with the competition between groups and the selection of leaders (Schumpeter 1943). The successful group(s), from the electoral process, formulate policy through government functionaries.

If pluralism is society-centred, another approach which has developed during the 1980s contrasts itself to the above in being state-centred (see Nordlinger 1981; Evans *et al.* 1985). The state is seen to be both an important complex actor and relatively autonomous from societal interests. The institutional order and legal structures of the state are taken seriously. State officials and processes are considered independently from societal preferences and choices. In fact, the state is seen as one of the factors which moulds individual choices. Some see this as part of a slow process of bringing the state back into political science. Within political science, however, many would contend that this state-centred approach is in danger of becoming *too* state-centric. The state always acts in some societal interest. From a more traditional normative perspective, it would be argued that the state-centred approach still does not offer a proper account of what the state is or take seriously enough the logic of state autonomy.

Early elite theorists, such as Mosca, Pareto and Michels, argued that all societies are dominated by small minorities, a thesis most cogently encapsulated in Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' (Michels 1959). Regardless of the type of regime, they asserted the continuity of elites in politics, maintaining that this was an empirical, scientifically verifiable fact. This contrasted sharply with the more traditional pluralist vision of government. More recent elite theories have been dominated by the attempt to integrate elitism and pluralism, giving rise to the term 'democratic elitism' (Bachrach 1967). Elite theory still focuses on the role of elite domination in the state. The empirical studies of elite theorists concentrate on the small groups that influence and structure policy, examining the social background, recruitment and attitudes of such groups. States can thus be categorized according to the nature, unity, and diversity of elites.

Corporatist theories are, at the present moment, in considerable flux. Some corporatists use the term state as a synonym for government; for others it represents the fusion of certain important interests into the structure of government (Schmitter 1974). In this sense corporatism is differentiated from pluralism by the more limited number of groups competing, the nature of the groups and their status in relation to government. In Cawson's classification

there are three main forms of corporatism in contemporary political science: (1) a totally new form of economy, different from capitalism and socialism; (2) a form of state within the capitalist society; and (3) a way in which interests are organized and interact with the state (Cawson 1986:22).

In Marxism the state is related historically to certain class interests, the defence of private property and capital accumulation. The state has developed apace with capitalist economies. Two views, however, have tended to dominate Marxist thinking on the state to the present day. The first sees the state as an oppressive or coercive instrument of the dominant bourgeoisie, holding capitalism in place. This class state will either be crushed or wither away after revolution and be replaced either by the dictatorship of the proletariat or by communism. The second view (most dynamically influenced by the writings of the Italian Marxist Gramsci) is that the state is seen to have relative autonomy from the economic base and acts as a site of conflict between competing class interests. Also, in this second account, state dominance is exerted subtly through ideological hegemony (Miliband 1973; Jessop 1983; Carnoy 1984).

Finally, the economic approach to the state embeds it ultimately in individual choice. It is rooted in methodological individualism. The state emerges from the logic of self-interested individual choice, a clear example being public choice theory (Buchanan 1975). Collective action, in terms of minimal objectives such as law, order and defence, helps an individual to minimize costs and maximize benefits. It is therefore in the interests of rational self-interested individuals to create a state to achieve these ends (Buchanan and Tullock 1962).

A similar argument can be found, in a different intellectual format, in the libertarian writings of Robert Nozick (1974) and Anthony de Jasay (1985). However, such a theory cannot allow too active and interventionary a state, since it would confer more costs than benefits on individuals. It needs, therefore, constitutional restraints premised on individual choice. Much of the economic approach to the state tends to be explored by varieties of pro-market liberal and libertarian theory, although many would still claim the roots of their economic arguments in positivistic empirical analysis.

There are two basic weaknesses with such political science approaches. First, they do not deal with normative questions about the state. They explain and describe states, yet do not answer such questions as: 'What is the state or what ought it to be?' Second, all the above approaches are handicapped by the fact that much of the practice of the state is linked intricately with normative values and conceptions of human nature. The scientific and positivistic imperatives of political science implicitly eschew values and demand empirical rigour—which in politics (for some) is a chimera. Further, there are a range of suppressed normative assumptions in the varying 'rigorous' theories which are not

articulated. The larger claims of empiricism in political science are questionable as regards a complete understanding of the state.

The final philosophical/normative conception of the state, together with the legal approach, constitutes the main element of classical political theory, specifically from the sixteenth century. Classical theory has an avowed normative task and has been concerned with reflection on issues such as human nature, morality, the family and forms of constitution. There are two preeminent tasks of classical political theory with regard to the state that have continuing relevance: the first is to reflect on the right, best or most just order; the second is concerned with the identity and nature of the state, which is intricately bound up with values and ideas of civil existence. The problem with many empirical theories of the state is that they take the identity and nature of the state as unproblematic. Classical political theory has never taken the state for granted. However, classical political theory sometimes loses touch with the historical and political reality of the state and consequently gives false impressions of its character.

We are so used to perceiving the state as a form of government or set of institutions that it is difficult to think of it in relation to a broader framework of normative assumptions and values. For many philosophical theorists, the state is partly constitutive of political reality. The state forms, in other words, the presupposition of civilized and intellectual life, in which politics is discussed. It embodies a sense of the right social order within which citizens are integrated. Individuals have a rational disposition towards the state which cannot be investigated on any purely empirical level.

As with political science, there is a diversity of philosophical/normative theories of the state (Dyson 1980; Vincent 1987). There are also a number of different classifications of normative accounts of the state. It is, for example, feasible to classify via various ideological traditions (for example, the liberal and socialist states). This classification misses the point that such ideological traditions do not conceive the state very differently, though there may be differences in the extent of state action. A further problem is that certain of the more empirical conceptions of the state, such as pluralism and corporatism, have been developed separately as normative theories. Fascist writers in the 1920s tried to develop a distinctive, normative corporate state theory. Such an effort is questionable, as there is no highly distinctive normative account of the state present in corporatism. There is a stronger case to be made for a normative account of a pluralist state. Marxists also have developed tentative normative theories of the state, although they have always been handicapped by the negative critiques of the state rooted in the premises of Marxist political economy. The present classification of normative theories will be:

1 absolutist;

- 2 constitutional;
- 3 ethical;
- 4 pluralist.

The first important landmark in normative theory was the attempt to see the state as embodied in the absolute sovereign person. This is an idea developed in the works of Bodin, Hobbes and Boussuet and in the attempted practice of monarchs like Louis XIV. It can be found from early in the sixteenth century onwards, particularly in France. At its height, the sovereign person was seen to be legitimated by divine right and owning the kingdom (Rowen 1980). The sovereign's interests were the state's interests. The embodiment of the state in the sovereign illustrates the continuing importance of sovereignty in the history of the state. The impersonal state of the twentieth century finds its root in the personal state of the sixteenth century. The weakness of the absolutist theory was that it was too focused on the monarch. It was in practice an absurdity. It is also doubtful that it ever existed fully in practice. Limitations on royal power existed throughout the absolutist era. It was also often dependent on the character of the monarch and the economic and political circumstances of the kingdom. However, it provided a lasting vocabulary for the discussion of the state.

The constitutional theory encapsulates the longest, most influential, and yet most tangled state idea. Essentially this theory identifies the state with a complex of institutional structures and values which, through historical, legal, moral and philosophical claims, embodies limitation and diversification of authority and a complex hierarchy of rules and norms, which act to institutionalize power and regulate the relations between citizens, laws and political institutions. The deep roots of this theory lie in Roman law and the ideas and practices of medieval Europe. The limitations of the constitutional theory are not imposed on the state but are constitutive of a particular theory of the state. The priority of certain rules within the constitutional theory is premised on their seriousness. All limitation is self-limitation in terms of statehood. By the nineteenth century, constitutionalism had become most closely associated with liberalism and liberal democracy, although its origins are occasionally dated back to theorists like John Locke. Other ideologies, such as conservatism and parliamentary socialism, have also found a comfortable home within the constitutional theory. The forms of limitations employed within constitutional theories have varied enormously, ranging across legal and historical themes such as the ancient constitution doctrine, fundamental and common law, the rule of law doctrine, conventions, written documents, bills of rights; institutional devices such as the mixed and balanced constitution, the doctrine of checks and balances, the separation of powers, or federalism; complex political and moral devices such as representative democracy, the separation between state and society,



contractualism, natural and human rights doctrines, consent theories and so forth. It would be no exaggeration to say that the agenda of most contemporary political theory now is rooted in the constitutional state framework.

The weakness of the constitutional theory is its success. Everyone is or wants to be a constitutionalist. This has led paradoxically to its trivialization. Constitutionalism can become a series of formal procedural devices without normative significance. First, political scientists have devoted their energy, through such devices as elite or pluralist theory, to tell us what is really going on in such states. This has only promoted cynicism. Second, there has been considerable internal conflict within liberal democratic constitutionalism on the reach of government. Some, for example, have been keen to limit the role of the state in the sphere of the economy, others to deny such limitations and to argue for a strong developmental role for the state. This latter argument has given rise to a debate between minimal state and developmental state theories (Marquand 1988).

A third powerful normative theory has roots in the more total life of the Greek *polis*. It developed in the context of the German idealist tradition against the crucial backdrop of the French revolution (Hegel 1967). The ethical state is seen to be the result of a long historical development from the Greeks. It is not an accidental phenomenon, but rather develops out of the inner nature of humans as rational creatures. The state and citizens are seen to have a common rational substance. The state is the *modus operandi* of citizens and institutions. It is still rooted in the notion of constitutionalism, but with the crucial difference that it is directed at the maximal ethical self-development and positive freedom of its citizens. It is thus the unity of a cognitive disposition with the purposes of institutional structures and rules. The state embodies the rational customs and laws which rule individual behaviour. The state is thus neither simply a system of laws and constitutional order nor a body of particular institutions; rather, it represents a rational ethical order implicit in the consciousness of individual citizens. The weaknesses of this theory are its apparent archaism and inappropriateness to the contemporary world. The idea of an ethical state (with an overarching ethical code or general will) strikes most students of politics as suspect and worryingly autocratic, at least in potential. However it has undeniably had some role to play in reassessments of the state at the beginning of this century (Vincent and Plant 1984).

The normative pluralist theory perceived the state, in the broadest sense, to be a synthesis of living semi-independent groups (see Gierke 1934; Maitland 1911; Figgis 1914; Hsiao 1927; Nicholls 1975). Groups are integrated not absorbed. Narrowly focused, pluralism centres on the government (as in political science pluralism). The state is the summation of group life. It represents all groups in totality. In representing the whole it is distinct from all other groups. The state, as

the representation of the total system of groups, prevents injustices being committed by individuals or groups, secures basic rights and regulates group behaviour. The pluralist state is not sovereign, partly because it is constituted by groups whose independence is recognized within the idea of the state. Groups possess real legal personality and only plural group life can defend liberty. The weakness of such a theory of the state is that pluralists never precisely resolve the relation of the government to groups—namely—which has dominance? There was also a certain naïvety about the groups themselves. Groups can often be oppressive and restrictive on liberty. Also, how can any consensus really be formed in such a society when it is peopled by such diverse interests? Normative pluralists fail to answer these questions satisfactorily.

The manner in which we study the state can vary enormously. A balanced picture can only be acquired if we remember that it is not just a historical and sociological phenomenon but also a tissue of values and normative aspirations about civil existence.

#### REFERENCES

- Anderson, P. (1974) *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: New Left Books.
- Bachrach, P. (1967) *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*, London: University of London Press.
- Badie, B. and Birnbaum, P. (1983) *The Sociology of the State*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Buchanan, J. (1975) *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Buchanan, J. and Tullock, G. (1962) *The Calculus of Consent*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Carnoy, M. (1984) *The State and Political Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cassirer, E. (1946) *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cawson, A. (1986) *Corporatism and Political Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Church, W.F. (1972) *Richelieu and Reasons of State*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dahl, R. (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dunleavy, P. and O'Leary, B. (1987) *Theories of the State: The Politics of Liberal Democracy*, London: Macmillan.
- Dyson, K.H.F. (1980) *The State Tradition in Western Europe: A Study of an Idea and Institution*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Easton, D. (1965) *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York: John Wiley.
- Evans, P.B., Rueschmeyer, D. and Skocpol, T. (eds) (1985) *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Figgis, J.N. (1914) *Churches in the Modern State*, London: Longmans Green & Co.
- Gierke, O.von (1934) *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hegel, G.W.F. (1967) *The Philosophy of Right*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hexter, J.H. (1973) *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli and Seyssel*, London: Allen Lane.
- Hsiao, K.C. (1927) *Political Pluralism: A Study in Contemporary Political Theory*, London: Kegan Paul.
- Jasay, A.de (1985) *The State*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Jessop, B. (1983) *The Capitalist State*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Kelsen, H. (1945) *The General Theory of Law and State*, New York: Russell & Russell.
- Krader, L. (1968) *The Formation of the State*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Latham, E. (1965) *The Group Basis to Politics*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Lowie, R.H. (1927) *The Origins of the State*, New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Maitland, F.W. (1911) 'Moral and legal personality', Appendix C in D.Nicholls *The Pluralist State*, London: Macmillan.
- Marquand, D. (1988) *The Unprincipled Society: New Demands and Old Politics*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Meinecke, F. (1957) *Machiavellianism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and its Place in Modern History*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Michels, R. (1959) *Political Parties*, New York: Dover.
- Miliband, R. (1973) *The State in Capitalist Society*, London: Quartet Books.
- Mitteis, H. (1975) *The State in the Middle Ages: A Comparative Constitutional History of Feudal Europe*, Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Nettl, J.P. (1968) 'The state as a conceptual variable', *World Politics* 20:559-92.
- Nicholls, D. (1975) *The Pluralist State*, London: Macmillan.
- Nordlinger, E.A. (1981) *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Nozick, R. (1974) *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books.
- Parsons, T. (1967) *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*, New York: Free Press.
- Poggi, G. (1978) *The Development of the Modern State*, London: Hutchinson.
- Post, G. (1964) *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State 1100-1322*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rowen, H. (1980) *The King's State: Proprietary Dynasticism in Early Modern France*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Schmitter, P.C. (1974) 'Still the century of corporatism?', *Review of Politics* 36:85-131.
- Schumpeter, J. (1943) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London: Allen & Unwyn.
- Shennan, J.H. (1974) *The Origins of the Modern European State 1450-1725*, London: Hutchinson.
- Skinner, Q. (1978) *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vols 1 and 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strayer, J.R. (1970) *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tilly, C. (ed.) (1975) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vincent, A.W. (1987) *Theories of the State*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Vincent, A.W. and Plant, R. (1984) *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

FURTHER READING

- Badie, B. and Birnbaum, P. (1983) *The Sociology of the State*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Black, A. (1988) *State, Community and Human Desire*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Bosanquet, B. (1899) *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, London: Macmillan.
- Carnoy, M. (1984) *The State and Political Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cheyette, F.L. (1982) 'The invention of the state', in B.K.Lackner and K.R.Philp (eds) *Essays in Medieval Civilization: The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures*, Austin: University of Texas.
- D'Entreves, A.P. (1967) *The Notion of the State*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dyson, K.H.F. (1980) *The State Tradition in Western Europe: A Study of an Idea and Institution*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Evans, P.B., Rueschmeyer, D. and Skocpol, T. (eds) (1985) *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jordon, B. (1985) *The State: Authority and Autonomy*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lubasz, H. (ed.) (1964) *The Development of the Modern State*, New York: Macmillan.
- MacIver, R.M. (1926) *The Modern State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLellan, G., Held, D. and Hall, S. (eds) (1984) *The Idea of the Modern State*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Nicholls, D. (1975) *The Pluralist State*, London: Macmillan.
- O'Connor, J. (1973) *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, New York: St Martin's Press.
- Tilley, C. (ed.) (1975) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tivey, L. (ed.) (1981) *The Nation State: The Formation of Modern Politics*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Vincent, A. (1987) *Theories of the State*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Weber, M. (1948) 'Politics as a vocation', in H.H.Gerth and C.Wright Mills (eds) *From Max Weber*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

---

---

## CONCEPTIONS OF POWER

JEFFREY ISAAC

The concept of power is at the heart of political enquiry. Indeed, it is probably the central concept of both descriptive and normative analysis. When we talk about elections, group conflicts and state policies, we seek to explain events and processes in the political world by fixing responsibility upon institutions and agents. We are thus talking about power. When we ask about the constitution of the good or just society, we are contrasting present conditions with some projected alternative set of arrangements that might better enable people to conduct their lives. Here too we are talking about power. It would seem impossible to engage in political discourse without raising, whether implicitly or explicitly, questions about the distribution of power in society.

It is at least partly for this reason that social and political theorists have spent so much time arguing about the concept of power—what it means, what it denotes, how it might figure in appropriately scientific analysis or how it might be ill-suited to such analysis, and, finally, why scholars and citizens should care about any of the above. Indeed, it is a striking fact that while most political theorists would agree that power is a focal concept, they would probably agree upon little else. This has led to some awkward situations where theorists speak to each other using the same terms but meaning radically different things. Such problems of translation have never reached a point of incommensurability, and it is probably fair to say that most political theorists operate with some basic core conception of power. The core is the notion, articulated in different ways, that the concept of power refers to the abilities of social agents to affect the world in some way or other.

The word ‘power’ derives from the Latin *potere*, meaning ‘to be able’. It is generally used to designate a property, capacity, or wherewithal to effect things. The concept has clear affinities with the concept of domination. The latter means some sort of mastery or control; derived from the Latin *dominium*, it was originally used to designate the mastery of the patriarch over his household or domain (Tuck 1979:5–13). While the concept of power has often been

interpreted as a synonym for domination, the latter connotes an asymmetry about which the former is agnostic. The concept of power also has close connections with the concept of authority. But the latter has a normative dimension, suggesting a kind of consent or authorization, about which the former is similarly agnostic. The grammars of these concepts, and their interrelationships, are interesting and important (Pitkin 1972; Morriss 1980), but I will here concentrate upon the core notion of power as capacity to act, a genus of which the concepts of domination and authority can be seen as species.

Such a core, however, is itself quite nebulous, and it certainly admits of many different interpretations. As a consequence, a good deal of substantive inquiry and debate has been muddled by seemingly interminable and often rarified conceptual argument. A cynical commentator would chalk up much of this disagreement to the endless methodological fixations of political theorists, who sustain subdisciplines, journals and careers by furthering meta-theoretical argument *ad infinitum* (Shapiro 1989). Such cynicism would not be unwarranted, but I think that there is more to it than this. If it is true that it is impossible to carry out political analysis without implicating the concept of power, it is also true that it is impossible to talk about power without implicating a broader set of philosophical, indeed metaphysical, questions about the nature of human agency, the character of social life and the appropriate way to study them. These broader questions are, as the history of modern social science attests, deeply contentious, and it should thus be of no surprise that this controversy has extended to the concept of power as well.

In an essay such as this it would be impossible to provide a detailed and nuanced account of such controversy. I will thus present its rough outlines. There are, I would suggest, four main models of power in modern political analysis:

- 1 a voluntarist model rooted in the traditions of social contract theory and methodological individualism;
- 2 a hermeneutic or communicative model rooted largely in German phenomenology;
- 3 a structuralist model rooted in the work of Marx and Durkheim;
- 4 a post-modernist model, developed in different ways in the writing of Michel Foucault and certain contemporary feminists.

Each of these models offers not only a definition and elaboration of the concept of power, but a conception of humans, social institutions, and methods of analysis as well. Before outlining these models, I should make three things clear. First, I will treat models as no more than rough categories or general 'ideal types'. I in no way intend to suggest a kind of substantive consensus among theorists typical of each model who, despite certain similarities, often share many

differences on all sorts of matters. Second, while each of these models is sufficiently distinct and autonomous to be discussed separately, it is not the case, the views of methodological ideologists notwithstanding, that these models are in all respects mutually exclusive. This is, of course, a complicated question, but I will suggest that each model in fact presents some important insights, and that theorists of power should probably think in more synthetic terms than they are accustomed to. Third, what I will discuss below are different models of the concept of power, not different theories of its distribution in particular forms of society. The discussion, in other words, will be largely meta-theoretical. Many political theorists, including participants in conceptual debates about power, have mistakenly believed that there is a one-to-one correspondence between meta-theory and theory, so that, for instance, a subscriber to Robert Dahl's arguments about the behavioural study of power is necessarily a pluralist, and vice versa. As I have argued elsewhere (Isaac 1987), this is not the case.

### THE VOLUNTARIST MODEL

In referring to this model as a voluntarist one, I wish to call attention to the fact that from this view power is thought of almost exclusively in terms of the intentions and strategies of its subjects. This view is common to all of the participants in the so-called 'three faces of power' debate, and it is shared by most 'rational choice' theorists as well. Such a view is rooted in the tradition of methodological individualism, for which all claims about social life are reducible to claims about individuals (Bhaskar 1979), and it is therefore no coincidence that it can be traced back to the writing of Thomas Hobbes. Such a view, however, is capable of being extended from individual to collective subjects, so long as these are thought of as unitary aggregations of individual wills, and are treated as strategic actors seeking to maximize some kind of utility or value.

The classic statement of the voluntarist model is Robert Dahl's *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* essay (Dahl 1968). For Dahl power is a capacity to get others to do what they would not otherwise do, to set things in motion and 'change the order of events'. As he writes: 'Power terms in modern social science refer to subsets of relations among social units such that the behavior of one or more units (the response units, R) depend in some circumstances on the behavior of other units (the controlling units, C)' (ibid.: 407.) As Dahl's language of stimulus and response suggests, this notion of power rests upon a Newtonian analogy. We are all naturally at rest or at constant velocity, until our movements are altered by an external force. Power is such a force. For Dahl the concept of power is thus a causal concept. But Dahl, a behaviouralist, insists that his conception of causality is strictly Humean. As he writes elsewhere: 'The only

meaning that is strictly causal in the notion of power is one of regular sequence: that is, a regular sequence such that whenever A does something, what follows, or what probably follows, is an action by B' (Dahl 1965:94).

As I have argued elsewhere (Isaac 1987), this view fails to distinguish between the successful exercise and the possession of power, conceiving of power exclusively in terms of the contingent success of agents in securing their purposes. It is also empiricist in its view of causality and scientific explanation, both of which, for Dahl, are conceived in Humean terms. In this sense, appearances to the contrary, it is a view shared by Dahl's most vocal and well-known critics, Bachrach and Baratz (1970) and Lukes (1974). For all these theorists power is a behavioural relation of actual cause and effect, exhausted in the interaction between parties. While these theorists in different ways allow the importance of collective rules and resources, all also insist that these are to be sharply distinguished from, and have no necessary connection to, power. Lukes, frequently taken to be a 'radical' critic of Dahl, attests to this when he avers that all three faces of power 'can be seen as alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power' (Lukes 1974:27). For this concept power is the ability to advance one's interests in conflict with others.

This concept can be traced back to the writings of some of the 'founders' of modern political theory. Thus Thomas Hobbes defines power, in terms of the purposes of individuals, as the 'present means, to obtain some future Good' (Hobbes 1968:63). Both Hobbes and Locke hold that 'Power and Cause are the same thing', conceiving such causation in mechanistic, Newtonian terms (quoted in Ball 1988:83). As Locke writes:

A body at rest affords us no idea of any active power to move; and when it is set in motion itself, that motion is rather a passion than an action in it. For when the ball obeys the motion of the billiard-stick, it is not any action of the ball, but bare passion. Also when by impulse it sets another ball in motion that lay in its way, it only communicates the motion it had received from another, and loses in itself so much as the other received: which gives us [an] idea of an active power of moving.

(Locke 1961:194-5)

It was David Hume who canonized this view, insisting that 'the idea of power is relative as much as that of cause; and both have reference to an effect, or some other event constantly conjoined with the former' (Hume 1962:77). In this view power is nothing more than empirical causation. The formulations of Hobbes and Hume are important because they make explicit what is only implicit in many more contemporary formulations: that such a view of power presupposes an atomistic view of social relations, a Humean conception of causality, and an empiricist or 'covering law' model of scientific explanation. Hume is quite clear