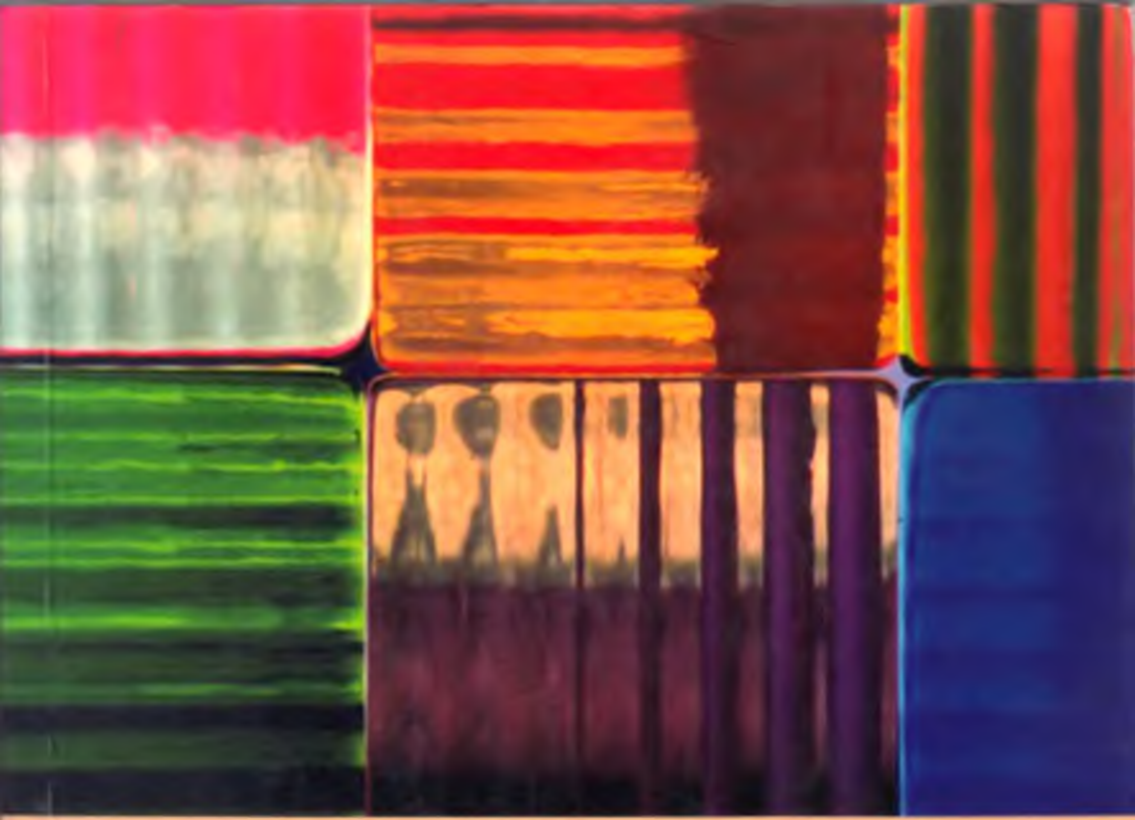

What is Politics?

Edited by Adrian Leftwich

WHAT IS POLITICS?

The Activity and its Study

Edited by
Adrian Leftwich

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Preface

Adrian Leftwich

This book is based on a collection of essays on the different conceptions and understandings of politics which was published twenty years ago (Leftwich, 1984). That edition arose out of a series of discussions in the early 1980s, in the Politics Department at the University of York, in the United Kingdom, about the way in which the undergraduate syllabus at York should be structured so as to introduce students most effectively to the discipline of Politics. It soon emerged in those discussions that one of the key issues which shaped the differences in approach to the content and structure of an undergraduate degree was that many, if not all, of us had very different understandings of what 'politics' is, and what it is not. To new students coming afresh to the discipline, that might seem surprising, but not so to colleagues and older hands, since any experienced academic in this field will know that the conception of politics one adopts directly influences not only the questions one asks but also the framework of analysis one uses and also, to some degree, one's political practices. And so it seemed that it might be fruitful if we could articulate more sharply, and at some length, what these different conceptions of politics were. Our hope was that this would, at least, help to clarify such distinctions while at the same time revealing where they overlapped. But it was also hoped that a book of essays on the subject would serve the important purpose of introducing new students (at both undergraduate and graduate levels) to the range of approaches they would encounter (or should be aware of) in the discipline of Politics, Political Science or, under its now slightly older and perhaps more dignified title, of Government. The 1984 book was the fruit of those endeavours.

The book was widely used in the United Kingdom and elsewhere – in both Australia and South Africa, for instance – and was translated into Spanish for use in Mexico and other countries in Latin America. It went out of print in the early 1990s. Despite many requests for a new edition, there was simply not the opportunity to revise and republish it until recently when David Held and Louise Knight at Polity in Cambridge persuaded me to edit the present book.

As with the 1984 edition, the central aim of this book is to introduce readers coming to the formal study of Politics for the first time to some of the diverse meanings attached to the word 'politics'. It is hoped that this will help them to situate their own understanding, studies and thinking in a wider comparative context of competing conceptions. Throughout, the use of the word 'politics', with a lower-case 'p', refers to the actual activity out there in the world, while the word 'Politics' (or Political Science), with an upper-case 'P', refers to the academic discipline, that is to the study of political life. With a primarily undergraduate readership in mind, all the authors have organized their contributions around one key question which forms the title of the book: what is politics?

A second objective of the book is to use these different conceptions of politics to stimulate debate amongst both students and staff, not only about the nature of politics as an activity, but also about Politics as a discipline. For there can be nothing more important for any discipline than regular and far-reaching self-appraisal of, and argument about, its essential focus and its fundamental concerns and approaches.

Three of the essays from the 1984 edition (by Alex Callinicos on the Marxist approach to politics, by Peter Nicholson on politics as force and by Albert Weale on politics as collective choice) have been retained, but each has been fully revised and updated. My own chapters (on thinking politically and the political approach to human behaviour) take forward some ideas outlined in the 1984 edition, but add new arguments. All the other chapters are new and the focus of each reflects a distinctive contribution to the continuing debate about the nature of politics. Though there was a chapter in the 1984 edition on politics as being about government, the new chapter by B. Guy Peters is about *governing*, which is conceptually wider and incorporates notions derived from the new institutionalism. Bernard Crick's new chapter restates and advances the thesis he originally argued in his classic study *In Defence of Politics* that politics is a distinctive form of rule and that not all forms of rule are expressions of politics. Judith Squires offers a feminist conception of politics and points out why and how this view has helped to broaden our understanding of the scope of politics and its inextricable link with relations of power, whether in or between societies or in the domestic domain. Neil Carter's account of the human–nature interaction as itself a political process amplifies this broad connection of politics even more, reminding us that human societies are an inextricable part of an environment. In another new chapter, Adam Swift shows concisely how important political philosophy is for understanding politics in its contribution to the development of clear thinking about complex issues, while Salwa Ismail offers a very important insight into Islamic conceptions of politics. She argues with great effect that simplistic western notions about a single Islamic understanding of politics (that it is inseparable from religion) are deeply flawed and that there is as much debate and variance in thinking about politics in Islamic discourses as there are in western ones. Finally, we have tended to think of politics as something that occurs within nation states and that international relations concern the relations between states. Tony McGrew shows in his new chapter that the interpenetration of national and international processes makes this distinction quite untenable.

It is possible to read each of these chapters and appreciate the distinctiveness of their individual conceptions of politics and hence the unique contribution which they each make to our definition and understanding of politics. But, equally, it is also possible to see overlapping concerns which converge on some common themes and, in particular, on power: its sources and forms; its uses, abuses and effects; how – if at all – power is distributed and constrained by norms, by competition, by rules, regimes and institutions and by other countervailing sources and centres of power, exercised by and through states and governments, private corporations or international organizations. But, as I shall argue in chapter 1, even while this underlying concern with power can be identified in the different approaches, it is still possible to classify them, broadly, in terms of the boundaries they draw around their definitions of the sites and scope of politics.

My first and major acknowledgement must be to all the contributors to this volume. They have cooperated wonderfully in its production. They were open-minded and uncomplaining in the face of my editorial badgering and suggestions and they directed their efforts whole-heartedly to meeting the central purpose of the book. My special thanks go to them. David Held, Louise Knight and Rachel Kerr at Polity together constitute the most generous, helpful and

efficient publishers one could ever hope for. Without their constant support and encouragement, projects such as these would not see the light of day.

REFERENCE

Leftwich, Adrian (ed.) (1984) *What is Politics? The Activity and its Study* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

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1

Thinking Politically: On the politics of Politics

Adrian Leftwich

1 Introduction: Argument and Issues

What is politics? This apparently simple question is not as straightforward as it may first seem, and it raises many further and difficult questions. For example, is politics a universal feature of *all* human societies, past and present? Or is it confined to some types of society only and, if so, which societies and why? Is it possible that some societies have been, are or will be without politics? Is politics tied to certain sites, that is institutional arenas where it takes place? Is it solely concerned with issues and decisions affecting *public* policy, that is, the whole society? Or may politics be found in all groups and organizations, large or small, formal or informal? And how, if at all, is it to be distinguished from other social and economic activities? For instance, do wars, civil conflicts and revolutions represent extreme forms of politics? Or are they the result of the *failure*, or collapse, of politics? Does bargaining between businesses over prices and terms of contracts, or between managers and workers over pay and conditions, count as politics? Or are they simply expressions of economic processes in the form of market forces? Can they be both? And what of discussions in a family as to whether to redecorate the kitchen or go on holiday? Is that politics?

The issue can be taken further: is politics an activity which is confined to the human species alone? Or is it possible to detect politics (however rudimentary) amongst other species, as Frans de Waal argues in his entertaining book about power and sex amongst the chimpanzees, entitled *Chimpanzee Politics* (1982). In that book he defines and illustrates chimpanzee politics as 'social manipulation to secure and maintain influential positions' (de Waal, 1982: 212). His definition is not significantly different from Harold Lasswell's account of the study of politics as 'the study of influence and the influential', as set out in his classic book *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1958).

While the last question is not one explored in this volume, all the others are addressed in different ways in an attempt to answer the organizing question of the book: What is politics?

But, to start, in this introductory chapter I wish to concentrate on three main issues. First, I provide some reasons why it is important to have an operational definition of politics. Next, I offer a preliminary way of distinguishing key elements in different views about politics, with some suggestions as to how readers might use these to develop their own views. I shall suggest that two broad approaches to the definition and conceptualization of politics dominate the debate. The first – the arena, or site, approach – holds that politics is an activity found only in certain kinds of societies (normally, those with states) and in certain kinds of institutional sites or processes *within* those societies. The second approach is the processual approach, which holds that politics is a much more generalized and universal process which has existed wherever the human species has been found (though it certainly takes many different forms), and hence is a characteristic and *necessary* feature, if not a function, of *all* societies, past and present: it always has been and always will be, and therefore stateless societies have politics, too. Finally, I explore some aspects of the characteristics of a 'discipline' (and the discipline of Politics in particular).

Throughout, my argument will be that because it is such a highly contested subject, debates about its proper definition and the scope of its subject matter are themselves political, and that it is not likely that there will ever be universal agreement on either what politics, as an activity, is or what the appropriate composition of the discipline of Politics should be. Nonetheless, it is possible to see a number of common concerns in all approaches which suggests, in turn, that there may be a little more common ground between them than at first appears to be the case. That common ground, I argue, is fundamentally their collective concern with the analysis of the origins, forms, distribution and control of power. And I suggest that the main differences in approach – though not the only differences – have less to do with disagreements about what politics is and more to do with explanatory differences about how politics happens, how it works, and especially how it is to be analysed, understood and taught.

2 The Need for a Definition

Why should we, as students of politics, need to think about its meaning – even in a preliminary and provisional way – and why should we be self-conscious about it? I think there are three main reasons.

A common discipline? The particular or the general?

First, it is clearly and obviously important for students of any subject to be clear about what they think they are studying. The problem here, however, is that it may often appear that what is being studied as politics in one place seems very different to what is being studied elsewhere. For instance, students of Political Science in the USA are very likely to find themselves studying the American system of federal government; its political parties, interest groups, elections and public opinion; some major public policy issues and the nature, forms and even desirability of democracy. Students of Politics in the United Kingdom, on the other hand, where much of the discipline remains anchored to its two foundations in the study of political philosophy and political institutions, are more likely to be required to study some political philosophy (or normative theory) – perhaps Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill or even John Rawls. But they would also be likely to study United Kingdom political institutions and processes (and maybe the European Union), and rival interpretations of these, plus being able to choose option courses dealing with such areas as political ideologies, comparative politics (which might include the USA) and perhaps the politics of post-colonial states in the developing world. And in a South African university, by contrast, teaching may be more sharply focused on the history and character of South African politics and its institutions, perhaps also traditions in South African political thought, varying interpretations of the rise and fall of the apartheid system and the emergence of a new post-apartheid politics in the context of wider theories and the comparative analysis of democratization.

Even *within* these countries, students at different universities might find that their studies varied significantly. The extent of this variation might depend on whether they were only studying a few courses, or less, in Politics, or whether they were majoring in it. But it would also depend on what the particular academics, the faculty, chose to teach and believed students ought to know about. For instance, some students might have to do foundation courses on the basic concepts and theories in Politics; others might have to study various methodologies for political research. In some departments, the emphasis might be on the scientific and quantitative analysis of politics, on measurement and empirical analysis, whereas elsewhere the approach might be more historical, normative, evaluative and qualitative. On the face of it, there appears to be a wide variation in what is taught under the formal subject called Politics, Government or Political Science. It is thus worth asking what common issues students of Politics from these three countries – and others – would be able to discuss, if they were to meet.

Such a problem would be far less likely to arise if medical students from those three countries were to meet. Though teaching methods might be different, and though attention to the local patterns of diseases and their treatment might vary from country to country, there would probably be a much more common and comparable grounding in the basic terminology, concepts and theories (the constituent sciences, so to speak) of medicine (such as physiology, anatomy, neurology and biochemistry, for example) which would enable such students to talk to each other about medical issues and discuss causes, diagnoses and treatments.

The question that arises, then, is this. In what way can it be said that students of Politics are studying the same thing, politics, and could they have a coherent and mutually intelligible discussion about it, as the medical students might? Or would they be talking past each other because each would have only a limited and partial understanding of the 'politics' and institutions of their own society and perhaps one or two others? Are there common constituent elements in the discipline of Politics which represent the basic explanatory tools for the analysis of politics? If so, what are they? In short, is there a common terminological, conceptual and theoretical apparatus which underpins the discipline? If there were, then it would not matter if American, British and South African students studied different forms and expressions of politics. They would still be able to have a coherent discussion about politics, using their own local or national studies of politics as illustrative material to demonstrate and compare the interesting ways in which deeper and wider patterns, theories and processes of politics are expressed in different ways in their different countries.

So the first question students of politics might want to ask themselves when thinking about the discipline and the activity is this: is my aim to understand the *particular* politics, policies and institutions of a given country or countries? Or do I aim to find deeper and wider *general* principles and processes of politics, if such exist, for which these country studies are particular examples and expressions? In short, am I studying, or hoping to study, some kind of 'science' of politics in which there are general processes to be uncovered and analysed; or am I studying a particular, contingent and locally situated set of processes which is unique, *sui generis*, and illustrative of no wider underlying processes – for there are none? Putting it simply, is the study of politics a scientific endeavour which seeks to identify, on an explanatory and probabilistic basis, some *general* regularities, patterns and processes (if not laws) underlying *all* politics, as economists claim to do for economic activity, or as chemists might do for chemical reactions and interactions? Or is the study of politics a more humanistic, historical, normative and hence non-scientific exercise, concerned with the qualitative understanding and evaluative analysis (and moral judgement) of *particular* processes at particular times and in particular places? Or can it and should it be both, enabling these different forms and levels of analysis to complement each other (Birch, 2002: 22–257)?

Definitions shape interpretations

Second, it is important to recognize that any definition, conception or understanding of politics is likely to carry with it quite far-reaching implications for methodology. That is to say, the way one defines politics will significantly influence what one looks for and how one analyses politics, that is, the methodology of enquiry. And it is important to be self-aware about this, for any one approach is likely to exclude – at least in part – other approaches, other forms of measurement, evidence and explanation. An example will help to illustrate the point.

In the course of the 1960s, and more especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the system of racial domination in South Africa, loosely known as apartheid, came under considerable pressure. Internal resistance, sabotage of public installations, guerrilla incursions, strikes and stay-at-homes had intensified. External pressures, including war in Angola, boycotts of South African goods and sports teams, widespread and intensifying international condemnation, a decline in foreign investment and general cultural isolation, had increased. Yet the National Party government, which had ruled South Africa since 1948 and had deepened and militarized coercive racial domination, showed no sign whatsoever of serious reform or change. A Commonwealth investigation in the mid-1980s saw little prospect of liberalization, let alone democratization.

Then, with very little warning, on 2 February 1990, the new president of South Africa, Mr F. W. de Klerk, stood up in the South

African parliament, the House of Assembly, and effectively did, in Nelson Mandela's words, 'what no other South African head of state had ever done: he truly began to dismantle the apartheid system and lay the groundwork for a democratic South Africa' (Mandela, 1995: 666). Not only were political prisoners released, but banned political organizations (like the African National Congress, the Communist Party and the Pan-Africanist Congress) were legalized. It was made clear that negotiations would commence to create a new constitution for a non-racial and democratic political system. Within a few years, all the apartheid (racially discriminatory) legislation was abolished, new elections took place on the basis of universal suffrage and an African National Congress government assumed power under a new constitution in 1994.

Though there had been prior rumours that Mr Mandela and others might be released and that some minor reforms to the political system might be introduced, almost no one predicted that apartheid would be so fully dismantled. So the question is why did this happen? The answer is of course a political answer. But what kind of political answer? What were the politics that brought this about and how does one explain it? The manner in which one defines politics will strongly shape one's analysis of what happened and why. In considering three rival interpretations for the fall of apartheid, it is first worth bearing in mind some basic differences in approaches to political explanation.

Many explanatory approaches overlap and merge, but one major division is between those approaches which emphasize the role of *structure* and those which emphasize the role of *agents*. Structural explanations will look to broad features in the social, economic and political structures of a society, for instance in the level of industrialization, the growth of cities and the shape of social class structure (for example the size, wealth and interests of a business class, or the organization and power of the working class). A good example of a structural approach to politics comes from a recent paper on corruption: 'The many factors that contribute to corruption tend to be more common in poorer countries and in economies in transition than in rich countries. Thus, at some point in time, economic development reduces the level of corruption in a country' (Tanzi, 1998: 586). Note here the primary explanatory emphasis placed on structure, and the relative absence of mention of agents and institutions.

On the other hand, agency explanations will be more inclined to focus on the role of agents – individuals or even parties – in shaping political change. Certainly the 'great men or women in history' approach is illustrative of the agency approach, giving explanatory weight to the role of particular individuals at particular times in particular places. On this view, the roles of Messrs Mandela and de Klerk were of critical importance, and had there been different leaders at the time, the argument goes, the outcome might have been very different. Such an approach to politics is often found in political histories, but Political Scientists tend to place greater analytical weight on deeper and more theoretical explanations than those confined to the actions of particular agents, although it is often possible and desirable to combine both of these approaches.

Now of course, structures cannot '*do*' things: only individual agents or actors do, singly or more commonly in groups – and normally through existing or new institutions. And therefore all agents nonetheless act within a particular structural context of constraint and opportunity, and it is the relationship between such contexts and agents that is important to grasp (Hay, 2002: 128). But even then, different conceptions of politics will deploy different ways of exploring those relationships, as shown in the following examples of different interpretations of the collapse of apartheid.

(1) The so-called 'rational choice' conception of politics (as explored in this volume in Albert Weale's chapter, 'Politics as Collective Choice') holds that politics (everywhere) is best understood as a kind of market-place in which people pursue their interests in such a way as to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. This theory of politics is complicated and has many strands. But its fundamental assumption is that people – whoever they are and wherever they are – are rational agents, calculating their own interests and advantages, as they perceive them, and choosing between particular courses of action aimed at achieving desired ends under circumstances where their resources are scarce and their wants many. Of course these calculations change over time as the relationship between the costs and benefits of certain actions and policies changes, as context – or structure – changes. Some things, some policies, some practices may become more expensive over time, forcing a re-think about priorities, that is about whether it is worth continuing with them, as well as the costs of change.

In the South African case, such theorists might argue, white South Africa had long maintained a monopoly on political power and had used that power to implement the system of apartheid which had, over time, yielded great benefits to them, and relatively few costs. Their standard of living rose continually, they had prime access to good education and jobs, black labour was cheap and plentiful and investment flowed in as South Africa appeared stable and growth prospects good. Irrespective of any moral considerations, 'rational' calculation appeared to suggest that apartheid generated more benefits than costs (at least in the short term) and this made most of white South Africa support it.

But as the internal resistance began to grow and shift from non-violent to more violent means, as blacks organized internally and externally to promote their cause and their interests, the regime cracked down even harder through more draconian laws of control and, as a consequence, attracted increasingly hostile international attention. As a result, external pressures began to intensify against the regime in the 1980s and white South Africa (and the government in particular) began to recalculate, finding that the *costs* of maintaining apartheid were now beginning to overtake the *benefits*. The economy began to decline, internal defence and security costs soared, wars on the borders brought about many deaths and injuries to their soldiers, cultural and sporting isolation became more and more frustrating, travel constraints made life difficult – and much more. As these *structural* consequences of apartheid generated more and more costs, the 'rational' calculation was that it was time to seek a peaceful and negotiated resolution. The African National Congress (ANC), too, it could be argued, realized that it could never seize state power in an outright revolutionary victory as had happened in China, Cuba or Vietnam, and therefore it also saw the advantages of a pact or a 'deal'. Crudely stated, the collapse of apartheid is best explained by agents (especially the elites on both sides) recognizing through a rational calculation of changing costs and benefits that their respective interests lay in doing a deal. The negotiations about the new constitution, which took almost four years to finalize, were the working out of that deal. So a conception of politics as the complex interplay of different individual and collective interests in the pursuit of their respective self-interests requires that analysts first identify the interests at stake and then seek to measure evidence of the changing balance of costs and benefits to the various parties of different policy options. The political outcomes (in non-revolutionary contexts) represent, at any given point, the accommodations and compromises each interest makes in achieving the best deal it can get under the circumstances.

(2) The Marxist conception of politics (as Alex Callinicos highlights in his chapter) holds that politics is nothing less than class conflict. Where there are no classes, there is no fundamental conflict and no politics. Accordingly, when analysing politics, Marxists look to the analysis of class interests and relative class power in order to explain

what happens. In the case of South Africa, a Marxist approach might well argue that two contradictory processes were working themselves out. On the one hand, the economic growth of South Africa during and after the Second World War had produced a fairly successful diversification of the economy from its earlier reliance on primary resources (agriculture and mining). This process, which stimulated industrialization and urbanization, generated a growing working class, which was almost entirely black, and served thereby to strengthen black political and trade union organizations. These groups increasingly demanded social justice and equality on behalf of the excluded majority and couched their demands in terms of non-racist democratic socialist objectives, as outlined in the Freedom Charter. These and other organizations pitted themselves against both the state and the (almost exclusively white) owners of capital.

Thus, the 'success' of a racist capitalist system in promoting growth (for a while) had produced the very class and the ideology that was to threaten it. As black radicalism deepened, it promoted strikes, demonstrations and disruption. When banned or driven underground, these organizations turned to more violent forms of revolutionary struggle – using sabotage and guerrilla tactics. Instability spread and economic decline followed. If capital in South Africa was to save itself from this downward cycle, whites would need to come to some sort of agreement with blacks. So on this view of politics Marxists will look for explanations less concerned with the individual and collective calculations of self-interest and more to the changing character, organizational capacity and relative power of respective classes to advance their class interests against the interests of other classes. The end of apartheid should therefore be seen as the only way in which South African capitalism could protect itself from the threatening contradictions of unfolding race and class conflict – at least for the time being.

(3) Finally, to complete this illustration of how different conceptions of politics steer explanations in different (though not necessarily exclusive) directions, how would those who hold that politics is about *governing* interpret the demise of apartheid? It is important to note two preliminary points here. First, the notion of 'governing' is wider than that of 'government', because the latter tends to imply *formal* institutions of government, and it is clear that not all societies have them, but all societies have in some respects to 'govern' themselves. In addition, institutions other than those of government are involved in governing, at least in the broadest sense. For instance, organizations of business or labour, schools, voluntary groups – like

consumers' associations – are all involved in one way or another in setting rules or conventions (or seeking to do so) which govern some aspects of behaviour of their members. So the idea of politics as being about *governing* has a wider applicability than politics being about *government*.

Moreover, the concept of '*governance*' is wider still. It refers to the general patterns and interlocking systems of governing across *both* public and private spheres by which the overall social, economic and political life of a society is organized and managed, whether democratically or not, whether there are formal institutions or not and whether done by national, international or transnational agencies and institutions. In short, in its broadest sense – and it is broad – *governance* refers to the web of formal or informal institutions, rules, norms and expectations which govern behaviour in societies and without which the very idea of a human society is impossible.

Second, when politics is understood as being about the practices of governing, it is usually quite closely and self-consciously allied to an *institutional* approach. Simply stated, this approach holds that *institutions* are fundamental in shaping political (and other) behaviour in societies and are therefore vital to our understanding of the forms and features of politics.

But what are institutions? Political institutions (indeed any institutions) have been defined as 'collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate action in terms of relations between roles and situations' (March and Olsen, 1989: 160). In short, institutions are the 'rules of the game of a society' (North, 1995: 23) or, better still, the rules of the *games* of society, since all spheres of behaviour – cultural, social, economic or political – are shaped and constrained by different sets of rules. So, in prescribing (by law or by custom) patterned and predictable ways of behaviour, institutions (sets of rules) reduce uncertainty about how to act in diverse situations. Even in post-revolutionary situations, new regimes, social movements and groups move quickly to establish new institutions – that is, new ways of doing things – to shape and constrain behaviour in new post-revolutionary ways. And to count as an institution, such a set of rules or agreements must endure over time, must constrain or shape the behaviour of its members and normally be sustained by some kind of consensus amongst them.

Now institutions may be formal or they may be informal. *Formal* institutions are recognizable by the rules and regulations constituting and governing the conduct of organizations such as companies, universities, associations and armies or, in the more obviously political sense, legislatures, political parties and bureaucracies – all of which shape and constrain human behaviour and interaction within them (North, 1995: 23; Peters, 1999: 18). *Informal* institutions, on the other hand, may be understood in a much looser way as the customs, norms of behaviour, unwritten rules, or generally agreed ways of doing things within a society and its culture more broadly. They range from forms of greeting, to methods of conducting meetings and canvassing at election times (though some formal rules, as well, govern that), to conventions within the culture covering social interaction, marriage customs and burial ceremonies.

As will be clear from the above, institutions are not confined to the political sphere. Moreover, the way in which 'political' and 'non-political' institutions interact is very important in shaping overall patterns of governance. For example, a market – or *the* market in the broadest sense of the term – is also an institution, shaping how people exchange things (there may be barter, or sale for money, for instance). But markets may also be governed by formal rules and regulations which are not devised by the participants in the market but imposed by legislation, such as laws governing health and hygiene in the food or restaurant trades, or working conditions or minimum wages. In this case, one sees how one set of institutions (political ones) can impact on another set of institutions (markets). Provided there are not significant contradictions between the aims, objectives and procedures of one set of institutions and those of others, there is usually no major problem. More generally, societies are usually more stable when there is consistency and continuity across their institutional spheres, both private or public, such that these institutions mutually support and enhance each other. (Of course, while such stability may seem a good thing, it can also give rise to conservatism and a hostility to change or innovation, which is a separate question.) But where there is tension and inconsistency between the relative power, aims and practices of institutions (for example, between church and state, or market and state, or patronage and meritocracy), problems of governance can become acute because there is, at the very least, uncertainty and, at most, outright conflict about which institutions predominate and which rules apply. The deep and sometimes violent conflicts between workers and bosses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European politics (and elsewhere since then) were about many issues: but they were fundamentally about which rules would govern the distribution not only of power but also of resources in society.

Having explored some aspects of the centrality of institutions to patterns of governing and governance, I can now return to the case of South Africa because it illustrates very well the problems caused when tensions emerge between different institutional spheres and goals, thereby severely affecting the governing of the country. The central point here is that from the perspective of those who see politics as being about *governing*, the system of apartheid needs to be understood as having been a massive *political* interference (by the formal institutions of government through legislation and regulation) in the *economic* institutions of the markets for land, labour and capital. By making rules for these markets which required them to discriminate on the grounds of colour or ethnicity – for example, in determining which colour groups could have access to which jobs, or to land or capital – the political institutions intervened in, and distorted, the economic institutions. While this may have worked at first, sooner or later there was bound to be conflict between these institutional spheres and goals. For the aims and outputs of the political institutions sought to establish and sustain white rule, while the aims and processes of market institutions were to make profits which the political constraints began to damage. On this view, the political restraints on economic and personal freedom (which apartheid so massively entailed) inevitably served to distort or strangle economic growth and sooner or later would have had to be eliminated if capitalist economic growth was to prosper.

It should be clear by now that each of these three different conceptions of politics directs our attention to different levels and spheres of evidence for explanatory purposes, although there are some obvious areas of overlap and common interest amongst them. The same is true for other definitions of politics. Each, that is to say, contains within itself a particular method of enquiry and a distinctive priority of research questions which yield very different explanations to the others, though it is important to see that there are points where they can usefully be made to intersect and complement each other. And this is the second reason why we need to be self-consciously clear or, at least, think about what we mean by politics: the way we define politics can profoundly affect how we 'do' Politics.

Thinking clearly, thinking politically

This brings me to a third reason why facing the question 'What is Politics?' is so important. As Adam Swift emphasizes in his chapter in this book, one of the main contributions of political philosophy to our understanding of politics is its potential for developing consistency and clarity of thought and judgement. In practice, any attempt to spell out meanings, make distinctions or clarify understandings will help this process, whether in the context of political philosophy or not. I hope that I have already shown how different conceptions of politics carry with them far-reaching implications for methods of analysis and usually lead to different conclusions. But this process of clarification is not only about analytical or explanatory activity: it is also about listening. And listening can be a very active thing.[1] It is to be hoped that this book will help that, too, so that next time a reader 'listens' to a political discussion – in the media, club, pub or sitting-room – he or she may be in a better position to recognize the kind of conception of politics which is being employed and whether the argument which follows is consistent, clear or true to its underlying assumptions and meanings. In short, we hope that, when 'listening', readers of this book will be in a better position to recognize the level or sphere of discourse about politics which is being advanced and hence be in a better position both to understand what is being said, really understand, and to engage in argument about it.

3 A Simple Classification of Meanings of Politics

There are three useful preliminary distinctions to make when thinking about how one might classify different types of meaning of politics and where one might situate oneself in relation to them.

Process or arena?

To return to the introductory section of this chapter, it is probably the case that the single most important factor influencing the way theorists conceive of politics is whether they define it primarily in terms of a *process*, or whether they define it in terms of a site or an *arena*, that is, the place or institutional forum where it happens. The latter, or *arena*, approach tends to have a narrower and sharper focus (normally the state and the institutions of government and local government – sometimes, in a more comparative context, including kings, chiefs or emperors and their courts and their relations with the public). What characterizes this *arena* approach is the sometimes implicit but always important contention that only governments define goals, policies and binding decisions for a whole society and that is what politics is about: the debates, conflicts and agreements about what policies are to be implemented, and by whom, and, therefore, what rules apply. Policies for a school, private club or corporation are not binding outside the organization and, even then, may require wider legislation of a political kind to be binding within it. Those who adopt this site or arena approach hold that politics is about the activities which lead up to such binding decisions, and the institutions which make them. They are therefore much less inclined to accept that politics can be defined as a more generalized process in human societies which also occurs beyond these arenas or sites of binding policy-making. But is this too limiting a conception of politics when we can see many of the features of public or site-based politics replicated in private organizations and small-scale interactions between people?

Those who do regard this approach as limited tend to see politics as a much wider phenomenon in human societies, defining it as a general *process* which is not confined to certain institutional arenas or sites. Of course this involves the activities and relations of public institutions such as states, governments, parties and pressure groups – and some may even see this as the most important form of politics. But they go further and identify the activities they call politics as occurring pervasively in a much wider range of institutions, activities and groups – for example, in families or in voluntary associations, beyond or below the state or formal institutions of government, and wherever questions of power, control, decision-making and resource allocation between two or more people occur in any human society, past or present. Moreover, politics on this view is also clearly to be found in non-state (or stateless) societies, within and between all the groups which constitute them, whether they be based on kin or clan, gender or age. Even more broadly than this, as Neil Carter argues in his chapter in this book, politics is embedded in the necessary and pervasive interaction between humans and nature. But does such an encompassing view mean that every human interaction is political in some respect? If so, and if politics is thus so broadly defined, what is left that is distinctive about it?

Extensive or limited?

This initial distinction between the *arena / site* and *process* approaches, while important, is not sufficient. A second distinction needs to be made which acts to refine these two initial categories, and that is whether these approaches are extensive or limited.

To illustrate, some arena or site-based institutional approaches limit their conception of politics to formal and public governmental (national or local) decision-making about, for example, tax policy, welfare provision, law reform, education or local garbage removal. Debates and arguments within private institutions, such as companies or corporations, about investment strategy or organizational restructuring would not be regarded as politics or, at least, as politics proper.

Neither would arguments within and between institutions such as football clubs and television stations about the rights to, and prices for, screening televised games be thought of as politics. Only when governments become involved in such disputes – for instance, in setting the rules by which such arrangements may be made – would such issues become 'political'.

Other institutionalists, however, may take a broader view. Some regard *all* formal institutions as sites of politics, as Christopher Hill (1988) showed in his study of the politics of the institutions governing the sport of horse-racing. On an even wider front, those who prefer to deploy the concept of *governance* (see above) would treat politics as being an intimate part of the totality of interactions within and between both public and private institutions, formal *and* informal, in decision-making *and* implementation. That is, the politics of *governance*, in this overarching sense, refers to the whole web of political relations between all the institutions which together 'govern' social, economic and political life in a society and this would obviously include government, courts, private organizations like banks, chambers of commerce and industry, trade unions, professional associations like doctors' organizations, as well as the prevailing norms, ideologies and cultures within the society. But some go even further than this. In his chapter in this book, for example, Tony McGrew reminds us that politics can no longer be understood or identified with, or 'contained' within, the nation state: what happens locally may be profoundly affected by decisions and actions of both foreign, international and inter-governmental institutions, both public and private. In short, even those who adopt a more institutional or arena-based approach vary greatly in the extent to which they might include non-public and non-national institutions within their definition of the political. But so do *processual* approaches to politics.

By 'processual' approaches, I refer to those theories which emphasize that politics is best understood as a distinctive *process* (within or without formal institutions). For my part (see my other chapter in this volume), I argue that politics consists of *all* the activities of conflict (peaceful or not), negotiation and co-operation over the use and distribution of resources, wherever they may be found, within or beyond formal institutions, on a global level or within a family, involving two or more people. Bernard Crick, on the other hand, in his chapter in this book, also offers a conception of politics as a process. But his approach is more sharply defined for he confines his processual conception of politics (which has no particular institutional anchorage) to a certain kind of reasoned debate between a plurality of interests about *public policy* in which compromise is the likely outcome. War, civil violence and revolutionary practices, in his view, are not politics, but evidence of its failure. As he observed in his classic study *In Defence of Politics*, 'Politics is the way in which free societies are governed. Politics is politics and other forms of rule are something else' (Crick, 1964: 55).

Science or interpretation?

As was pointed out earlier, each definition of politics carries with it a more or less explicit methodology of enquiry. So the final preliminary distinction to be made here between types of conception of politics is between those approaches which are committed to uncovering deeper patterns, regularities, processes or general 'laws' below the surface of politics, on the one hand, and those which stress the unique, the contingent, the unrepeatable and the role of 'accidents' and agents in history, as mentioned earlier, on the other hand.

The roots of the first approach (the search for deeper regularities) lie in the behavioural tradition, starting in the 1930s and before in the USA, but recently strengthened by the adoption of certain mathematical and statistical techniques of measurement developed in Economics, and especially Political Economy, over the years (Ricci, 1984: 133–75; Bates, 1995; Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobatón, 1999). Good recent examples of this type of work can be found, for example, in efforts by political scientists working in development agencies to identify and measure the factors which make for good governance and its opposite, 'state capture', by which is meant the manner and degree to which private interests (usually firms) can 'capture' the state and hence illegitimately and undemocratically influence policy and practice in their direction – what we loosely usually call corruption. Research in this field has been working to identify and separate the forms and methods of 'capture': for example, corruption of the bureaucracy is different to influencing policy-makers to shape certain laws in certain ways; likewise, influencing courts to generate certain types of decision needs to be distinguished and measured differently from attempts to influence party policy by big donations (Tanzi, 1998; Hellman, Jones and Kaufmann, 2000). The notion of 'state capture' is not unfamiliar to the Marxist tradition which holds that the dominant classes have always sought to control state policy. But now, interestingly, we find very conservative institutions (like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) grappling with such problems in developing countries and trying to devise the analytical means for measuring the extent and forms of such influence (with a view to devising policies that will reduce or eliminate them). Underlying these and many other examples is the fundamental assumption that general patterns *are there*, below the surface of events, to be uncovered by comparative quantitative work that will reveal the variables (factors) which shape them as reflected in the patterns of statistical regularities.

Meanwhile, the provenance of the second approach (simply stated, the belief in the uniqueness of political episodes) can be more obviously traced through the lineage of political study which goes back to the study of history, and constitutional history in particular, on the one hand, and political philosophy on the other. Here, historical context, judgement, qualitative evaluation, empathetic understanding – what Max Weber called *Verstehen* (1964) – has been of greater importance and utility than quantitative and statistical work. On this view, deeper general patterns do not exist. What requires special attention and analysis is the particular history, culture and constellation of local and particular happenings, especially including the meanings and intentions of the participants.

Though I have sought to distinguish sharply between the 'scientific' and 'interpretative' approaches, the fact remains that there are many positions in between and many political analyses seek to combine both. Nonetheless, the key question remains one that is worth asking: should the study of politics be undertaken as an essentially scientific and quantitative endeavour or does its very nature, as a complex human process, require a more qualitative approach? Even understanding the distinction is an important step in building one's own understanding of what politics is and how one might go about analysing it.

In summary, any understanding of politics may be mapped with respect to whether its approach and focus are fundamentally concerned with institutional sites or with processes; whether it is confined to either a limited or a wide range of institutions or processes; and whether it presupposes a search for general patterns or particular stories. Moreover, as the earlier exploration of explanations for the collapse of apartheid in South Africa showed, it is not impossible to develop explanations which accommodate and integrate a range of different approaches and levels of analysis. For example, there are interesting overlaps in the way Marxist and rational choice theorists converge on the analysis of the conflict of *interests*. Equally, by placing the unique characteristics of the South African case in a wider comparative context of, say, democratization, it is possible to combine that *particular* story with the development or qualification of wider *general* theories about social and political change, or about the general economic or political conditions for democracy.

4 Disciplines

Given this apparent diversity of approaches, is it at all possible then to talk about a discipline of Politics? To answer the question it is necessary to make some points about disciplines in general before talking about the particular case of Politics as a discipline.

The term 'discipline' means, simply, an organized field of study; more crudely, a 'subject'. And it is important for those coming fresh to the study of Politics (or any other discipline for that matter) to realize that disciplines are *not* God-given, officially defined or authoritative demarcations. Social and material reality does not come to us neatly divided into disciplines and ready for instant analysis. As the anthropologist Marvin Harris observed: 'the world extends across disciplines, continents and centuries' (1977: 8). Nor are disciplines unchanging in their focus of study. Like all other aspects of social life, disciplines evolve and change over time in the course of their interaction with their environment, with each other, and in response to problems occurring within them, and between them and their ultimate point of reference, the 'real' world. For example, rational and collective choice understandings of, and approaches to, politics have their roots in micro-economics and seek to apply the logic and forms of economic analysis to non-market situations and institutions. It is a development in Politics that has occurred mainly since the 1960s with an immense and controversial impact on the discipline in the last quarter of a century. Likewise, until the 1960s, geographers had little interest in 'politics', yet political geography is today an important sub-field of geography and reflects an inventive and penetrating approach to understanding politics and power.

That being said, and despite change, overlaps, mergers and analytical borrowing, disciplines remain distinguished from each other essentially by the typical kinds of problem with which they concern themselves; by the typical kinds of question which they ask about such problems; and by the kinds of theoretical and analytical framework in terms of which they both ask the questions and attempt to answer them. Disciplines, that is to say, are defined by an intimate combination of their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, their empirical and problematic referents and their typical methodologies of enquiry. So, too, are distinctive 'schools' within them, as illustrated above.

Finally, disciplines – or schools or sub-fields within them – are constituted largely by conventions, by the people who practise them. The characteristic features, boundaries, foci of interest, procedures, debates and methods of enquiry of disciplines and their subdisciplines are fashioned by human beings, argued about by them, and sustained or changed by them. But to return to the initial question of this section: if disciplines are defined by the typical problems they address, the types of question they ask and the methods of asking them, can the study of politics be thought of as a discipline of Politics?

Despite the variety of understandings and approaches I have referred to in this chapter and which are more fully explored in the chapters which follow, I think the answer to that question must be yes. There is one overriding concern of those who study politics and that is a concern with *power*, political power – and its effects. Of course, different theorists and schools define and approach the question of power in different ways. Some are interested in the sources of power: for instance, does political power flow from control over economic resources, or electoral resources or even ideological resources? Can political power be contained and organized by a constitution, or a culture? Or does it ultimately depend on military or coercive power – 'power flows from the barrel of a gun', said Mao Tse Tung. Some are interested in the micro-politics of power – in families, between genders, in organizations – while others grapple with tracing and measuring the great macro-politics of private (for example, corporate) and public (state or inter-governmental) power that interact to structure the contemporary and changing political economy of the world. Others focus on the rules and regulations – the institutions and constitutions – which shape the ways in which power and resources are distributed and controlled. This may have a limited focus on certain rules within certain institutions – for example, if shareholders are to have a say over the salaries of directors of companies, how is this to be arranged? Who is to supervise it? Or, to take another example (Haagh, 2002), if the state is to withdraw from the provision of training or welfare services, or pensions, what rules will govern their private provision in the community and to whom will the providers be responsible? Or, the focus may be global – for example, whether and how to reform the distribution of power in the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund or the United Nations. Political philosophers, on the other hand, are interested in asking questions about the moral or other justifications for the distribution and uses of state and other forms of power, as Adam Swift points out in his chapter. These and other instances only skim the surface of the vast range of contexts in which political scientists and philosophers explore the features of power and its uses. And, of course, because power is such a pervasive phenomenon in collective human activities, within and beyond the state, its analysis and understanding is crucial for our understanding of how any society works. It follows that Politics – as the discipline most concerned with the analysis and explanation of the dynamics of power – stands very much at the crossroads where other disciplines in the social sciences intersect.

5 Conclusion: Thinking Politically

Three things should be clear. First, defining politics and specifying the content of the discipline of Politics are themselves, in a manner of speaking, political processes. They arise out of the interplay of the same factors which shape politics more generally in the wider world – different ideas, interests and institutions in the context of (usually) uneven distributions of power. After all, there are no 'official' definitions of politics or, indeed, what the discipline of Politics should contain or teach – though in recent years some efforts have been made in the United Kingdom to do this through the so-called 'benchmark statement' of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education where the discipline of Politics is described as being concerned with:

> developing a knowledge and understanding of government and society. The interaction of people, ideas and institutions provides the focus to understand how values are allocated and resources distributed at many levels, from the local through to the sectoral, national, regional and global. The analyses of who gets what, when, how and why and where are central, and pertain to related questions of power, justice, order, conflict, legitimacy, accountability, obligation, sovereignty and decision-making. Politics encompasses philosophical, theoretical, institutional and issue-based concerns relating to governance. (QAA, 2000: 2)

Even then, and despite its generality, this 'official' view evolved through a complex political process involving a large committee (of eighteen academics in Politics and International Relations), lengthy consultation with other practising academics throughout the United Kingdom and final negotiations and drafting compromises – all very political.

Second, despite the many differences in approach, what *unites* political analysts is a concern with the provenance, forms, distribution, use, control, consequences and analysis of political power. What *separates* them is the differences in their focus and the levels and frameworks of analysis, as the substance of the chapters which follow so clearly shows. So anyone entering the discipline of Politics for the first time should be prepared to encounter a rich and pluralistic enterprise which is, above all things, an *explanatory* enterprise, concerned with understanding the forms and features of political power, especially, and explaining its uses, abuses and both its policy and practical consequences.

Third – and crucially – the alleged 'facts' of politics out there do not speak for themselves. We need concepts and theories, that is, frameworks of analysis, if we are to make any *explanatory* sense of them at all, as the various interpretations of the end of apartheid, given earlier, have shown. And some of the most heated – and best – debates within Politics, the discipline, are rarely about the 'facts', but about which concepts and theories best explain those 'facts'.

So, thinking politically, in the sense I mean here, does not simply mean thinking about political issues in national or international public debate. Nor does it mean judging a particular programme, policy or practice to be right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, fair or unfair in moral terms (provided one has defined what one means by such judgements). In a much more fundamental way, thinking politically means thinking (and listening) with curiosity about how best to explain, *politically*, why things have come to be; how they work as they are and with what consequences; what might happen next, and why; and what might be necessary for them to be made different, should that be thought appropriate. The various approaches outlined in this volume should help that process along. And anyone who can explore, or 'try on', so to speak, or seek to combine these different explanatory approaches to the uses and abuses of power, will have begun to think politically. And that is a pretty good start.

NOTES

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1 I thank Mr Ian Small for this observation.

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2

Politics is About Governing

B. Guy Peters

1 Introduction and Argument

Over half a century ago Harold Lasswell (1936) defined politics as 'Who Gets What, When, How', and that definition should remain central to the study of politics. Politics is often thought of as an entertaining activity, with elections providing a good deal of excitement and endless material for the media. Even parliaments and the activities of political executives have strong elements of drama or perhaps of sport – Nelson Polsby (1975) has argued that most legislatures can be better understood as arenas rather than as serious, 'transformative' law-making institutions. Politics can also be understood as an expressive act, rather than as an instrumental activity, for citizens. The conventional wisdom in many areas of Political Science is now that people act rationally in order to maximize their personal utility. On the other hand, however, a great deal of political behaviour is about making symbolic statements and expressing sentiments, or merely following well-established routines. Voters may, for example, know that their favourite party has no chance of winning an election but will still vote for that party to express a view, or simply because they have always voted that way.

Despite the appeal of politics as blood sport and theatre, or as emotional catharsis, the ultimate and defining purpose of politics is governing and making public policy. Having said that politics is about governing, or in David Easton's terms about 'the authoritative allocation of values for a society' (1953), we need to specify more clearly what is meant by governing, or governance. In particular, we need to think about governing in a manner that is sufficiently general to capture the realities of politics and governance across a wide range of societies.[1] For the social sciences the capacity to make comparisons across social and political systems is crucial for developing theoretical understandings and thinking about human activities in ways that are not bound to any particular culture or political system.

The difficulty, however, is that a concept such as governance that is sufficiently generic to apply in all political settings runs the risk of being so broad that it can say little about governing in any one political system. This is all the more true since governance is now discussed at the level of local governments (LeGales, 2002), national governments (MacIntyre, 2003), the European Union (Wallace, 2000), and the international system (Held and McGrew, 2002).[2] The most fundamental difference in understanding governance may be between democratic and less than fully democratic regimes (March and Olsen, 1995), but other differences among political and social systems – the level of socio-economic development, internal social complexity and levels of trust, for example – may also affect the manner in which governance is conducted and the capacity of political systems to govern effectively and efficiently.

2 Governing and Governance

Governance needs to be understood, fundamentally, as the provision of direction to the economy and society. This can also be called 'steering' (Rose, 1968). Arguing from a more sociological perspective, Jessop (1997: 105) suggests that understanding governance, and to some extent also practising governance, requires:

> First, simplifying models and practices which reduce complexity and increase congruence with the real world; secondly, developing the capacity for dynamic social learning; thirdly, developing methods for coordinating across different social forces; and finally, establishing both a common world view of individual action and a system of meta governance.

Jessop stresses the need to think about governance as a dynamic process through which the means are found to make choices for collective adaptation to the surrounding economy and society.[3] Further, that process must be compatible with the social setting within which it is being conducted, yet find means of reducing the complexity faced in order to provide the steering and control required.

Stated more simply, governance (and therefore politics) involves deciding upon collective goals for the society and then devising the mechanisms through which those goals can be attained. Individuals and groups within society have any number of worthwhile purposes for which they would like to employ the power of the public sector. However, governments and other institutions in society do not have the resources – financial, personnel or authority – to address all those wants and demands at once, and might not want to do so even if they could. Given those constraints on resources and will, some set of institutions or procedures must be developed to pick and choose among those goals and to attach priorities to those goals in terms of money and time. Furthermore, any system of governance must have the means of enforcing accountability for the actions that are taken, especially when those actions are taken by governments in democratic political systems.

In short, 'politics', as I use the term here, refers fundamentally to the relations of power and influence between states and their societies (and a more or less wide range of interests within them), and in particular to that complex set of processes whereby governments come to choose between a variety of collective goals for society and seek to implement them. It follows that 'politics' presupposes, at the very least, the existence of a set of institutions of government which is in principle capable of taking and implementing such decisions for the whole society. Families take decisions like that, as do schools or churches or companies. But they make decisions for themselves, not for whole societies. Thus the defining feature of politics which I wish to emphasize here is that it is inextricably bound up in the relations of states and their citizens or subjects, in making and implementing public policy, and how the two parties in this relationship affect each other in the course of doing so. That's politics.

It is important to note in this context that governance is not identical with government. Governance is a process, or a set of processes, that result in fulfilling the conditions listed below. In these processes the formal institutions of government are generally important players, especially as they are conceived as the locus of legitimate authority in most political systems, and in many situations remain the most important players. These formal institutions are not, however, necessarily the only actors involved in governance. Indeed, a recent tendency for most countries has been to increase the involvement of non-governmental actors, with networks of non-governmental actors playing increasingly important roles both in advocating policy and in implementing public programmes.

In this chapter I will argue that governance requires fulfilling four fundamental conditions. These conditions are:

Goal setting Governance involves the capacity for setting collective goals for the society and reconciling competing wants and demands among segments of that society. As noted below, goal setting is fundamentally a political activity, whether performed in a democratic or non-democratic political system. Other possible sources of governance are capable of articulating goals, or of creating smooth interactions among certain types of actors, but are not capable of reconciling conflicting ideas about what the society should be doing.

Goal setting has a second component, which is attaching resources to the goals that have been selected as worthy of public action. Priority setting, or strategic management, is a way of attaching operational priorities to the range of goals that have been adopted for the political system. All the goals are worthy, but some will be assigned higher priorities and hence given greater resources. As I will point out below, governments have a number of ways of achieving their goals, some of which are less dependent upon financial resources than others, but much of the political process of governing will revolve around the budget and financial resources (Wildavsky, 1986).

Steering Governance also involves creating the capacity for implementation and steering, so that the goals that are established through some political process are then made effective and do produce the intended changes in the economy and society. This aspect of governance typically involves a public bureaucracy of some sort, but also increasingly has the involvement of non-profit organizations and private sector contractors. This stage of governance also involves political choice, given that mechanisms for implementation have their own political costs and benefits (Peters, 2000), but the principal emphasis here will be on administration and efficiency.

Coherence Inevitably there are numerous institutions involved in governance, and it follows therefore that there will be numerous policy priorities and preferences. Even when governments have made difficult decisions about goals, and prioritized what they want to do, there will still be a need to make those programmes work together effectively and smoothly. The need to coordinate can be seen most clearly in the public bureaucracy where the various ministries and agencies created to deliver public programmes all believe that their goals are the most important and therefore other organizations should bow to their wishes (Seidman, 1999).

Therefore, some mechanisms must be developed to create coherence among the programmes in government. These mechanisms may focus on reconciling competing goals, but more often focus on the implementation and 'steering' stage in governance. The need to create coherence tends to be manifested at the centre of government, in central agencies such as ministries of finance and prime ministers' offices. Procedures such as budgeting also tend to focus attention on the need to reconcile competing programmes and the financial priorities they represent.

Accountability and feedback Finally, governance involves developing mechanisms for detecting and assessing the actions of the governance system, and for holding the actors involved in those actions accountable for their policy and administrative choices. The necessity for accountability pervades any governance system. Political leaders must be made accountable for their policy choices, just as bureaucrats and others charged with service delivery are held accountable for their actions. The means and importance of accountability may vary between democratic and non-democratic regimes, but there will always be some means of accountability.

This is a rather short list of requirements, but it is a daunting list as well. Any government, or system for governing, that is capable of fulfilling all those criteria will be doing well: such governments would be doing even better if they could perform all those tasks in a reasonably democratic manner.

3 Institutional Politics and Governing

'Politics' is usually discussed in terms of elections and other aspects of mass politics, but when politics is conceived of as being essentially about *governing*, the analysis of elections and public opinion often diminishes in importance. Politics, understood as the processes of governance, is predominately organizational and institutional politics. The animation and legitimation for that organizational politics may have come from elections, at least within democratic political systems, but the day-to-day conflicts over policies will be primarily at the level of ministries, public bureaucracies and, perhaps, courts. Even the consequence of voting and the expression of preferences by citizens are to some extent contingent upon institutional arrangements. For example, electoral systems will affect the opportunities for minority viewpoints to be represented in the legislature, and the need to create coalition governments. In addition, the capacity of groups to shape policy will in turn be shaped by political institutions, such as the existence of corporatist forms of interest intermediation.

The politics conducted at the level of bureaucracies is even more directly about who gets what than is mass politics. Decisions made at the organizational level are often very directly about how to spend public money, or which individuals should receive benefits, or how best to work with interest groups to include those groups and their ideas within the policy-making process without having governance dominated by 'special interests'. In addition, the image that citizens have of government may be more contingent upon their face-to-face interactions with bureaucrats of all types – tax collectors, social workers, schoolteachers, policemen – than it is by their interaction with elected politicians.[4]

The capacity of a political system to provide governance to a society is therefore very much affected by the structure of institutions, and the manner in which those institutions interact with one another. Political Science has for too long tended to denigrate the role of institutions and to concentrate on individuals and their behaviour. While there is always a danger of anthropomorphizing institutions, the structure of government does have real consequences for the capacity of those institutions to perform the tasks of governing (Weaver and Rockman, 1993) which I will now discuss in greater detail. The nature of the institutions is important not just for delivering services but also, and crucially, for permitting citizens to articulate their views effectively and to be truly heard in a democratic process.

Setting goals for society

Government is arguably the only institution in society that is capable of making the difficult collective decisions about its goals, especially if the society wants to have those decisions made through some form of a democratic mechanism. The market is capable of making allocations among competing actors, but that allocation is not one consciously designed to produce outcomes acceptable to at least a majority of the society. Markets may reach decisions that are efficient in an economic sense, but not ones that are in principle either democratic or equitable. In the market votes are registered through dollars, pounds or some other monetary unit, and that voting rule implies that the more affluent will dominate those decisions.[5] Furthermore, markets find it difficult to take into account non-economic values, so that decisions made through this institution are likely to devalue a range of concerns important to many segments of the society (Self, 1968).

Networks and other mechanisms within civil society also have been proposed as effective alternatives to governments in providing governance. Some scholars, for example, have argued that there can be 'governance without government' in which networks and groups in civil society are capable of controlling particular policy domains (see Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman, 1993). In this view governments are too bureaucratic and too rigid to be able to respond effectively to changes in society. Further, members of the networks are better informed about the needs of their policy areas than are most members of government, and hence the network can make superior decisions for that policy area.

Although networks do have some important influence over policies, their capacity to govern in any meaningful sense of the term is more questionable (see Dowding, 1995). First, networks are generally incapable of coping with conflict and of reconciling collective goals. Indeed some versions of network theory assume homogeneity within the network, thereby effectively defining away competing goals and interests. In addition, even if a network were capable of managing conflict within a single policy area having a common knowledge base – an 'epistemic community' (Haas, 1992) – coping with conflicting priorities *across* policy areas would be more difficult. Unfortunately, most of the interesting issues in public policy are those that cut across conventional policy domains, and therefore require coordination and collaboration among programmes.

Even at this stage of the governance process, where mass politics might be thought to determine outcomes of the process, institutions are also crucial components of governance. First, the institutions of interest articulation – the interest groups and their networks mentioned above – are important for shaping the structure of goals adopted by governance systems.[6] As well as the institutional nature of the groups themselves, the manner in which the official components of the system are designed to accept, accommodate, or perhaps reject the demands of these groups will have a significant impact on the policies adopted. For example, the differences between formalized patterns of state–society interactions as in corporatist arrangements (Wiarda, 1996) and pluralism, in which groups must compete for access and influence, have been demonstrated a number of times. Likewise, the nature of the party system and the degree of aggregation within party systems also will influence outcomes of the governance process.

Creating governance may appear to be a rather easy task but in reality is difficult, especially when the criterion of democracy is imposed on the decision-making process. If there is no need to identify mechanisms for harmonizing conflicting demands, or choosing among them, governance could be achieved easily by imposing decisions by authority or power.[7] When confronted with the need to make democracy function effectively for collective choice, governments typically fall back on the familiar tool of majority voting, although other mechanisms such as referenda and deliberation (Dryzek, 2000) can also be employed to create opportunities for democratic involvement in decisions about governance and about policy.

The principal mechanisms of democratic politics – majority voting or the use of authority – are often blunt instruments but they are able to cope with disagreement. Majority voting is a fundamental value of democracy but it provides little effective guidance for politicians when making policy. When a politician finds that he or she has been elected after an election involving a large number of issues, how is he or she to know why the public chose him or her over the other candidates? Did the public agree on one particularly salient issue or agree on a whole range of issues? Politicians can obtain some sense from polling about public agreement or disagreement on issues, but even with that evidence there are uncertainties and the politician will still have to seek other means for guidance.

Steering and implementation

One central element in governance is making decisions about what the society should do. We could argue that such decisions are the defining features of politics and the fundamental building block of political analysis – as in, for example, the decisions of voters about who to vote for (or whether to vote at all), the decisions of countries to go to war, the decisions of judges about the constitutionality of a law. In the processes of steering and implementation we move from more political decisions into more administrative decisions about how to do what the public sector has decided to do. Governance is about means as well as about the ends being pursued.

We should not, of course, forget that the means chosen for achieving policy goals have political dimensions and may affect the political success of governments. The choice of means has both an effective dimension and a political dimension, and decisions that are successful on one dimension may not be successful on others (Bovens, 't Hart and Peters, 2001). Consider an extreme example: although almost everyone favours reducing drug use among young people, few people would favour locking all teenagers in juvenile detention facilities so that they would have a better chance of being protected. At a less extreme level there is good evidence that, everything else being equal, most citizens in industrialized democracies tend to favour the least intrusive mechanisms possible for delivering public services.

The analysis of the means of putting public programmes into action has been expressed in terms of the instruments, or tools, available to government (Hood, 1976; Salamon, 2002). Governments have a variety of instruments available, ranging from direct provision of the service to using persuasion and information to achieve those goals. One set of scholars has characterized the options as 'carrots, sticks and sermons' (Rist, Bemelmans-Videc and Vedung, 1998). All these options may be able to deliver the programme but each will do so with different degrees of efficiency and with different side-effects. Furthermore, some instruments may be better suited for some types of policies than for others. For example, some programmes, such as those involving the fundamental rights of citizens, may require greater certainty than do programmes that confer more optional benefits on citizens.

The need to deliver services has been discussed in terms of implementation, with an extensive literature pointing to the difficulties that governments encounter when attempting to put laws into effect. Pressman and Wildavsky (1974) made the now familiar point that most programmes have a number of 'clearance points', each of which must be passed successfully if the programme is to be successful. Even a relatively simple programme such as writing pension cheques to retirees requires identification of the appropriate beneficiaries and their addresses, a cheque-writing or bank transfer system that works effectively, and some monitoring to prevent fraud and abuse. If we consider more complex programmes, the number of clearance points increases dramatically, and the chance of success decreases just as rapidly. Thus, if government is to govern effectively it must be able to translate good intentions into effective action.

Interestingly, many of the proposed reforms of government implementation practices may increase the difficulties encountered within the implementation process. In particular, the advocacy of the use of the private sector to implement public sector programmes actually increases the number of clearance points and hence greater probabilities of outcomes not occurring at all, or of those outcomes deviating from the intentions of the legislatures which designed the programme. For the true believers in the efficacy of networks as a governance device this may be good news, as the members of the network are capable of overcoming the rules imposed upon its members by an assumedly incompetent public sector.

Creating coherence in public policy

As already noted, there is no shortage of diverse interests in society and many of those interests are able to influence government sufficiently to have programmes created for their benefit. One characteristic of the contemporary state is that governments provide some benefits to almost all social interests and those benefits are delivered through relatively autonomous programmes. These programmes may all perform valuable services for their clients but they may also involve duplications. The most egregious example is perhaps the simultaneous funding of subsidies for tobacco farmers and anti-smoking advertisements in the United States. Another famous example of the failure to reconcile programmes is the 'poverty trap' in which tax and expenditure policies are not coordinated and individuals who earn small additional amounts of income may actually lose net income because of the way in which tax and benefits function. Although the most obvious, these various examples are but a few of the many that could be mentioned. What this means is that governments are faced with the continuing need to develop the means for reconciling programmes and outcomes.

As well as overlapping, government programmes may also leave some segments of society unserved, or fail to address some important social needs. For example, middle-class families often find themselves in a difficult position vis-à-vis education programmes. They may be too affluent to be eligible for tuition benefits for their children, for instance, but not sufficiently affluent to be able to afford universities when they begin to charge for attendance. Therefore the need to create coherence in government programmes extends to filling the gaps as well as eliminating the duplication and overlaps.

The government leaders charged with governing have attempted for decades, if not centuries, to produce greater coherence among their programmes, but also have faced numerous obstacles. One barrier to coordination is the commitment of organizations and clients to their particular programmes, and the fear that the quality and quantity of services would decline with greater coordination. Likewise, organizations simply want to maintain their own budgets and their own policy latitude in the face of perceived threats from other programmes, or perhaps threats from budget cutters in central agencies.

Again, the shift from government delivery of services toward more indirect forms of service delivery may make the coordination problem more severe. Not only are there more organizations involved in delivering the services, but those organizations are not bound to government through the usual formal, hierarchical instruments. Mechanisms such as contracts and partnership arrangements may be somewhat useful in specifying co-operation (Cooper, 2003) and in setting minimal standards. Specifying the nature of services to be delivered is in itself difficult, but specifying patterns of interaction with other organizations is almost impossible. The complexity of the patterns of service delivery makes managing the network crucial but there are few formal aids in that management (Kickert, Klijn and Koopenjaan, 1999).

Politics as it is played out in coordination and coherence is largely inter-organization rather than personal. Individual citizens know that the services they receive are poorly coordinated or that there are holes in the social safety net meant to protect them, but the interactions are primarily those of the organizations responsible for programmes and those 'central agencies' responsible for budgets. Again, politics in this part of the governing process is clearly not the partisan game that is often the characterization of that human activity. Rather politics at this stage of the process involves organizations attempting to get what they want, and attempting to do what they think they should for their clients. Politics is still competitive, but the fights are less about gaining office and more directly about who gets what.

Coherence is difficult to create in any system of governance, given the strong pressures for independence of programmes and for providing benefits for particular groups of clients. That having been said, many mechanisms have been developed in an attempt to impose greater coordination. Most of these mechanisms depend upon hierarchy, and the power of organizations such as ministries of finance and prime ministers in order to 'encourage' individual agencies to work together better than they might if left to themselves (Bardach, 2000).

Accountability and feedback

The final dimension of governance is feedback and accountability. Although often considered separately, these two activities are in fact components of the same process. This process is one through which the actions of the governance system are assessed and the consequences of prior actions become a component of the inputs used for the next round of policy-making. Governments that are not in touch with the consequences of their own actions encounter the risks of persisting in failed policies and becoming incapable of governing effectively. Despite that need for effective feedback, even democratic regimes often invest too little in evaluation, assessment, and accountability for their own actions.

The difference between these two concepts may lie in the emphasis which they place on different aspects of this final stage of the process. Feedback is more oriented toward learning from past behaviours and improving the policy in subsequent iterations of policy. Few, if any, policies are made once and for all, and most are constantly being 'jiggled and poked' (Hogwood and Peters, 1973) in an attempt to make them perform better. Despite critiques to the contrary, governments (or at least organizations within government) do learn, and reforms are in place attempting to enhance the learning capacity of the public sector (CCMD, 2000). Further, as performance management becomes more central to governing in virtually all political systems (Halachmi and Bouckaert, 1996), governments (as well as private sector actors) emphasize the development of (more or less) objective indicators of their attainment of goals and use these indicators in making decisions about what revisions to make in policies.

4 The World of Governance Becomes More Complex

I have to this point been advancing a relatively linear, hierarchical conception of governance in which government plays a central role, realizing all the while that globalization, the creation of social networks and alternative forms of service delivery and decentralization within the state itself all make governing substantially different from many traditional accounts of the manner in which government functions. There are a number of sources of increasing complexity in contemporary political systems that should be explored so that we have a more complete conception of how contemporary governance functions, and of the complexity that is now built into any attempts to steer the society.

In developing this enhanced understanding, however, we must always remember that the state remains an actor, if not the central actor, in the process. Even with this increasing complexity, however, it does not seem feasible to accept a notion of 'governance without government' (see Rhodes, 1997). Networks and other alternative forms of steering for society do have a place, but they are incapable of meeting all the requirements for governance developed above. The processes of initiation and legitimation remain with governments, so that although implementation, coordination and even some aspects of accountability may be conducted outside formal governmental structures, the legitimate basis for those actions resides within government. That is obviously true for democratic regimes but is also to some extent also true for non-democratic regimes. The source of legitimation for non-democratic regimes may be different to that for democratic ones, but connection to that legitimacy provides the basis for authority for any acts being undertaken in the name of the state, or of 'the people'.

The reservoir of legitimacy and authority which is so important in governance should not overshadow the fundamental point that governance is driven by politics. Further, the shift away from the hierarchical conception of governing alters the nature of the politics that is at play. The hierarchical nature of traditional governance is easy to overstate. Central governments may have had the reservoir of legitimacy but often found it more convenient to negotiate with non-governmental actors, or with lower levels of government, in order to achieve their ends.[8] Further, governments need to refill their reservoir of legitimacy through effective performance. The clever use of a resource such as authority is to use it only when necessary and to compromise and negotiate when the core values of the government are not at stake.

The negotiations used to shape policy and the political system are most readily expressed in inter-governmental bargaining. The changes in governance and the increasing complexity of inter-governmental relationships can be seen most easily in the European Union, and its emerging patterns of 'multi-level governance' (Hooge and Marks, 2001; Peters and Pierre, forthcoming). The basic logic of multi-level governance is that the relationships that exist among the members of the European Union, that is, the constituent nation states, and sub-national government are not clearly defined and must be negotiated around the range of policy issues that involve all three levels of government. The European Union has some elements of a constitution derived from the Treaty of Rome and the various treaties that later altered its internal decision-making structures. However, even more than other political systems, a number of the constitutive elements of the European system are not specified, and subject to discussion and negotiation.

The politics that emerges from multi-level governance is another version of institutional politics, albeit this time manifested in inter-governmental relations (Peters and Pierre, 2003). For many sub-national governments the creation of the European system has been a great opportunity to evade control from central government. Likewise, the creation of multi-level governance arrangements provides more opportunities for interest groups to press their demands and, having possibly won at one level, they may be able to gain what they want from the governance system as a whole. These opportunities are especially important for unitary regimes in which the centre has tended to dominate policy-making.

The political dimension of multi-level governance appears to open up policy-making to influence from a range of political forces, whether those forces are interest groups or sub-national governments.

The appearance of openness is difficult to deny, but the political reality may be quite different. The indeterminacy of the political arrangements that are emerging in multi-level governance, and the multiple points of decision within the systems, mean that actors with clear preferences and the means of effectuating those preferences will be advantaged in such an arrangement for policy-making. This feature, in turn, means that bureaucratic actors, especially those at the Brussels or national level, are likely to dominate. Rather than having to worry about access or about their capacity for influence, these organizations are well funded and have clear preferences derived from their organizational location.

5 Conclusion

Governance is scarce in most societies, and democratic governance is even more scarce. The mechanisms for deciding on collective goals and then devising the means for achieving those goals are difficult to institutionalize, especially if there is also a requirement that the processes by which these tasks are undertaken are open and transparent. This chapter has specified a number of conditions that should be met if there is to be successful governance, all of which require making difficult decisions that will advantage some segments of the society and disadvantage others. That sort of redistributive decision is difficult when the people who will be disadvantaged have equal rights of access and participation.[9]

Making difficult decisions in governance is made even more difficult by the continuing reduction of the role of hierarchy in governance and opening the system to the direct involvement of actors in civil society and to different levels of government. These changing patterns of governance will at once increase the complexity of the decisions, increase the problems of generating coherence and make accountability more difficult. At the same time these changes enhance the apparent democratic potential of the system. That democratic potential may only be apparent, however, given that the loss of hierarchy may in fact make the institutions of representative democracy less effective in making and then controlling policy choices. If all segments of civil society are adequately organized, then enhanced involvement throughout the process of governing may be able to increase the democratic character of governance but at the loss of some capacity to make quick decisions that will actually be put into effect.

Having said that there has been a decline of hierarchy in governance processes, what can replace, or is replacing, this underlying mechanism for governing? The most obvious example is that there is a shift toward complex patterns of negotiation, bargaining and mutual cooptation (Duran, 1999). That shift in the basic mechanisms for making decisions has numerous implications for fulfilling the four fundamental requirements for governance. Most generally the shift toward bargaining will have its greatest emphasis at the levels of steering and accountability. Goal setting may still be dominated by the representative political process, at least in democratic regimes, and creating coherence may well remain the particular concern of central bureaucratic organizations, but steering and implementation will be negotiable. There has always been a certain amount of bargaining and involvement of the private sector at this stage of governing, but there appears to be an increase in the degree of involvement of non-governmental actors, and of governments at different levels, so that the shape of politics is changing.

The idea that accountability may also become less clearly defined is perhaps the most problematic element of the changing nature of governance. If this characterization of the consequences of the transformed patterns of providing public services is correct, then political activity will become more decentralized, and will require rather different involvement of the public in politics. To be effective in controlling those devolved activities of government, especially those organizations that provide them with benefits, citizens will have to become more active participants in the political process, and better informed about the services being delivered to them and their families. This is at once a new opportunity for democracy and a challenge to the conventional ways in which democracy has been practised.

NOTES

1 As Sartori (1971) argued, concepts in comparative politics (and Political Science more generally) must be capable of travelling across cultures and across time if they are to be useful for analytic purposes. The need to govern does indeed appear in all societies, so can be a useful concept for comparative analysis.

2 In addition, the term 'governance' is also used to discuss the management of corporations and not-for-profit organizations.

3 These ideas are not that dissimilar to Parsonian ideas about adaptation and goal attainment as functions of the social system. See Parsons (1964).

4 Most of us see our elected representatives rarely, if ever, while we interact daily with public employees working in bureaucratic institutions. The good news is that most citizens evaluate their interactions with

government positively. The bad news is that this appears to make little difference in their overall evaluation of the system.

5 Money does, of course, have an influence on political choices in democracies (especially elections in the United States) but the unit of account in democracies remains the vote, not money.

6 This is indeed the (once) familiar language of structural functionalism, particularly that used by Almond and Powell (1966) to characterize the manner in which decisions were made in the political system.

7 Buchanan and Tullock (1962) pointed out that the decision-making costs and inclusion costs were inversely related in a constitutional order. As the rules for making decisions moved from imposition by a single actor (a dictator) toward unanimity, transaction costs increased while costs imposed upon individuals whose preferences were excluded from the decision decreased.

8 Of course, in some ethnically or regionally divided societies, for example in Spain, the central government may have less legitimacy than some of the components but politics has continued to be channelled through the centre.

9 To some extent all policy decisions are redistributive, given that they provide benefits to some people and require tax money to fund them, even if they are regulatory decisions that do not involve the direct provision of cash benefits. That having been said, the redistributive consequences of some policy choices are more obvious than they are for others.

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3

Politics and the Exercise of Force

Peter P. Nicholson

1 Introduction and Argument

I am concerned with a single basic question about the study of politics: which human actions constitute 'politics' – what is the subject matter of the academic discipline of Politics? This is a question about the province of Politics, and it asks what is to be counted as 'political' and what is not. It seems a simple question, until one tries to answer it. We normally think, for instance, that art or literature are *different from* politics: but how does one explain what the difference is? Besides, there are occasions when art or literature are political, and fall within the province of Politics – which is why paintings or books are sometimes banned by governments, as in Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and even Britain. In what respect, exactly, might works of art and literature be political? In other cases, moreover, there is always controversy about whether they are political or not. Is economic activity, for example, political? That there are usually separate university departments of Economics and Politics is, of course, inconclusive; as is the fact that Politics used often to be taught as part of Economics.

The question about the boundary of Politics can be distinguished from another question: what is the nature or the characteristic feature of politics? If certain activities are to be grouped together as 'political', how then are they to be described? Is politics the art of the possible, a dirty business, 'who gets what, when, how', the resolution of conflict, or what? This question and my question are closely related. In order to answer my question, one needs to have at least some idea of what kind of activity politics is, or one does not know where to start. It is not necessary, however, to have a comprehensive or fully developed theory. The first step is simply to identify what is political and hence should be the material for the student of Politics: better understanding of its nature and characteristics comes later. In the same way, it is legitimate to say that the subject matter of biology is life before one knows all the life-forms there are or have been, and before one knows everything about their structure and behaviour. At this level, the aim is to set the boundaries to an area for study, not to state the conclusions that emerge from its study.

I ignore totally a further related question, concerning the proper method for studying politics. This is often raised in the form 'Can there be a science of Politics?'. It involves matters I do not need to cover, and I shall not discuss it at all. The other question, about the nature of politics, I shall discuss as little as possible. Nonetheless, both questions are worth mentioning because they show the great importance of my main question about determining the province of Politics. Where we fix the boundaries will be a major factor in how we deal with the other two questions. Both what we construct as the best method for the study of politics and what we conclude about the nature and characteristics of politics depend upon which activities we decide are political. Obviously, we must know what is to be studied before we can sensibly decide which is the best way to study it, or reach any well-grounded conclusions about its characteristics. Therefore I concentrate on the question about boundaries because logically it comes first, and must be answered first.

I begin by stating my dissatisfaction with some of the ways in which it has been suggested that the boundary of politics can be fixed. Then I offer an alternative, explaining why I think it is better. I present a stark outline of my position, and assert it polemically against other views. Qualifications are kept to a minimum, so that the crucial differences of opinion are sketched as sharply as possible, and the reader is offered a clear position to set alongside other views. Finally, I reflect on how we should react to the fact that different answers are given to the question 'what is politics?'

2 Some Unsatisfactory Answers

Human activity does not come labelled 'political' or 'non-political'. Students of politics must themselves choose what is to count as political, thereby setting the limits to the discipline of Politics. The subject is not unique or unusual in this respect: every discipline has to determine its own boundaries, for example, History, Chemistry or

English. Some disciplines, notably in the natural sciences, have sharp and distinct edges, agreed upon by all or almost all of their practitioners. Politics, however, like many of the humanities and social studies, does not. Many different and even divergent ways of delimiting the discipline have been suggested, and there is no consensus upon where its boundary runs. Consider these instances: the House of Commons debating a Bill, an American ambassador mediating between warring states in the Middle East, elders fixing the day a nomadic tribe should move on to the next pasture, salesmen wondering how to counter a rival's advertising campaign, members of a trade union voting for a new general secretary, Britain's National Trust leasing land to the Ministry of Defence, a man beating his slave, a priest giving a sermon, a family deciding whether to have a holiday abroad this year, and a small boy pleading with his older sister to buy him an ice-cream. Which of these are, or in certain circumstances might be, instances of politics? It would be an exaggeration to say that no two professional students of politics would agree on the answer, but one could easily find two or more who did not. Some people would accept everything on this list as being political, while others would exclude some, and which were excluded would vary considerably from one person to another.

No student of Politics, therefore, can avoid making his or her own choice of a definition of politics – and it is better that it is done consciously and explicitly. Some of the answers which have been offered are clearly unsatisfactory. We want a criterion of the political which is comprehensive, distinctive and fruitful. That is, it must include all politics, exclude everything else, and suggest areas for research. Some definitions fail because they include too little and exclude too much, while others fail because they include too much and exclude too little; in either case, they conceal, block or render unmanageable lines of enquiry which Politics students ought to pursue. It is helpful to examine some inadequate definitions because it illustrates the difficulties and pitfalls and teaches the requirements which a more satisfactory definition must meet.

It is, for example, too narrow to define politics in terms of conflict between social classes. If the student of politics takes class struggle as the criterion of the subject, then no society which does not contain classes will be looked at, thus cutting out material from so-called 'simple' societies which might be very informative. Again, it will be assumed that if there are classes then there must be conflict between them, and that a society which abolishes classes will be free of conflict. These assumptions are contestable and, more important, they rule out certain lines of investigation. For instance, anyone who takes for granted that a classless society cannot have politics may miss signs indicating that, nonetheless, it persists. To put it another way, our guiding assumption should be that politics is universal and occurs in all societies. This can be abandoned if we find a society without politics. But a definition which confines politics to a limited range of societies is suspect because it excludes from consideration the very cases which might overthrow it.

Sometimes politics is described as a particular and commendable way of settling issues. It is reaching decisions through rational discussion and argument leading to persuasion and assent, rather than through violence and compulsion. Some think that people can be free only where there is politics of that kind, and that it occurs only in truly representative democracy. This view of politics has great merit as a political ideal. But it could never serve to set the limits to the study of Politics, because once again too much is excluded. We must take account of the workings of all cases of politics, not simply of those which we approve as morally good. Dictatorship, imperialism and repression all fall within the province of Politics, as well as democracy and free government. One will never understand a subject properly by looking at a biased sample of its material.

Some other approaches are inadequate because they are too wide. Suppose we say that politics is about disagreement, conflict and their resolution (by whatever means, peaceable or violent, autocratic or democratic). Against this, it might be argued that politics is indeed about resolving conflict, but that it is also about much else besides, since there can be politics even when there is no conflict. Surely an act of the legislature is political even if it settles no dispute but is passed unanimously and is desired by the whole population: indeed, sense can be made of conflict and its resolution only if due account is taken too of consensus and agreement. The view centring the study of Politics on conflict can also be faulted, more fundamentally, for including too much. There are many cases of conflict which are nothing to do with politics: for instance, if mathematicians contest a proof, or if lovers quarrel. Students of politics are interested in that sub-class of conflict and conflict-resolution which occurs within a political context. To define politics in terms of conflict is not enough, because we need a further criterion to tell us *which* conflicts count as political. Several other definitions are vulnerable to the same charge of being too wide. Thus it is insufficient to say that politics is government or governance – schools and banks have government and governance too. It is also insufficient to argue that politics is the making of decisions, for there are non-political decisions made by groups and individuals. Nor is it sufficient to say that it is the allocation of resources, for resources are allocated outside politics too, for example in businesses and in families. All these definitions fail to mark the distinction between what is politics and what is not, and hence present the student with such a vast field that it is hard to know where to begin.

3 A Better Answer: Politics and Force

What we need, then, is a criterion for picking out what is distinctive about politics and occurs in all cases of politics. I believe that 'force', that is, the use or potential use of force by the government, is the best criterion. To explain what I mean, I begin with modern states, which are of course only one type of political organization, and then extend my treatment to international politics and to societies which are not states.

In a modern state, a particular body of people, the government, makes decisions, puts them into practice, adjudicates disputes, and generally runs and organizes the society. What makes the government's actions political, however, is not that they are general and public and may or do affect everyone in the society; after all, so are a manufacturer's decisions when he fixes the prices of his products. The distinctive mark of a political action is that it can be enforced, because the government can coerce people into obedience by the threat of physical force, and ultimately by using it. There are some very obvious instances of this. Governments make laws which tell their citizens to act, or not to act, in particular ways. These laws incorporate orders to specific officials to apprehend and punish those who disobey. That is, laws are sanctioned by force. This is true not only of criminal law, which lays down rules everyone must follow (e.g. do not injure others, do not steal), but also of civil law, which offers us facilities to use or not as we wish (e.g. to get married or to make a will). In the latter case, we need not avail ourselves of the law's services: but as soon as we do, we subject ourselves and others to the law and take on legal obligations which we can be forced to meet. For example, the person who marries can later be divorced, even against his or her will, and may become liable to maintenance payments which can be extracted by force. It is not only criminals but also those who flout the judgments of civil courts who may feel the force of the law, having their property confiscated, or being imprisoned. Furthermore, there is a key class of laws, which varies in extent and content from state to state, solely concerned with securing the position of the state and of the government: laws covering treason, subversion, opposition, the expression of criticism, loyalty, official secrets, and so on. Every kind of law, administrative, constitutional or whatever, can be seen in the end, directly or indirectly, potentially to involve the exercise of force.

It is true that making those sorts of law is only one of the functions which the government of a modern state performs. It also provides all kinds of services for the members of its society, to do with health, housing, employment, transport, energy, education and so on, and undertakes to defend them from internal disorder and external aggression. But in many cases the citizens are compelled to use these services, for instance, to send their children to school, to live only in housing which satisfies a certain standard, to be vaccinated, or to be defended against another state, or an internal enemy, with whom they may in fact sympathize. Once again the government may end up forcing people to do what they do not want to do. Furthermore, the government and all its activities have to be paid for, and this has to be done by the government taking for its own use resources which individuals would otherwise have possessed, for example by taxation. Taxation, one of the ancient and most basic features of government, is the forcible appropriation of individuals' property: some still regard as forced labour the effort spent in earning the money to pay taxes.

In the modern state the hands of the government are everywhere, and even when helping are still ready to clench into iron fists and coerce people. This is why politics is so important. We cannot avoid it: and it involves our being forced to do things, or to pay for things, which we may not wish to. Politics is about such matters as censoring entertainment, allowing women to have abortions, controlling the use of drugs and alcohol, overseeing the adoption of children, regulating scientific experiments, permitting the practice of religions, building a certain type of power station, financing a particular kind of defence armament, giving overseas aid, joining international organizations, or going to war with another state. In every case what the government decides is what everyone is required and may be forced to do or to have, like it or not.

Of course, governments do not always actually resort to force. Their laws and policies may meet with widespread approval and support. Moreover, it is very expensive and sometimes risky to force people, and governments usually prefer as far as possible to get their way by other means, for instance by persuasion or by deceit, so that their orders are routinely accepted and their bureaucrats outnumber their police and soldiers. Often governments can rely upon goodwill built up over a long period, or can take advantage of passive acquiescence or inertia on most people's part. Governments take care to present themselves as legitimate, and nurse the general habit of obedience to authority which is so significant in politics, and yet so fragile. At the same time, every state contains its criminals, tax evaders, dissidents and traitors, its nonconformists and perhaps active rebels, and every government is using force against some of its subjects – usually a minority but sometimes a majority. Even when force is not used, it could be: its possible exercise is always there, and that is what is *distinctive* about politics.

Someone might counter that, in fact, other groups and individuals use force, as well as governments and their officials. What about rebels, armed robbers, or even a parent chastising – or battering – a child? This is a very important objection, because if it can be shown that there is private force as well as public force then 'force' is no more useful to distinguish politics than I have argued 'conflict' is, since we should *still* need a criterion of public, *that is*, political, force. Now it is undeniable that others exercise force besides the government. Some do so illegitimately, against the government's orders, others do it with the government's permission. The two possibilities are covered by the formula devised by Max Weber, one of the most famous exponents of the view that force is the specifically political means of action. The modern state, according to Weber's influential formulation, successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within its territory (Gerth and Mills, 1946: 77–8; Parsons, 1947: 154–6). The government can be said successfully to claim the monopoly of the use of force because it controls crime and represses rebellion; and it can be said to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force because private individuals may use physical force only with its permission and within specified limits – for instance, parents and boxers. And it should be remembered that even a society which is averse to settling matters by force can only minimize the use of force, it cannot eradicate it. For instance, the government's rules banning individuals from using force are themselves backed by the potential resort to force. Thus if a law prohibits parents from smacking their children, force will be brought to bear on those who disobey.

The degree to which governments are able to make good their claim to monopolize force varies enormously. No government has ever been totally successful in its claim, though every government must meet with some success. Sometimes a particular government has to struggle hard to sustain its claim, and sometimes it loses control, with large numbers of people breaking the law with impunity or taking its enforcement into their own hands, or with rebels holding tracts of territory (in which they are effectively the government). There may be widespread disorder, or even civil war, and no effective government. Sooner or later, however, either the government re-establishes itself, or else it collapses and a new government emerges; or perhaps the territory of the old state is replaced by two states, each with its own government. The possibilities can be readily observed in the contemporary world. Consider the civil strife and turmoil in recent years in Ethiopia (Eritrea), Afghanistan, former Yugoslavia, Indonesia (East Timor) or the Sudan. The crucial point is that in any one political organization and its territory there can be only one body in control, that is, able to use force successfully and beat off any challenges to it. This is where 'force' differs from 'conflict' as a criterion of politics. Ultimately there is not room for two or more exercisers of force, nor for superior and inferior force. By the very nature of force, only one body is able consistently to back its decisions by force; otherwise there is not a viable society, nor a political organization. Hence force is always distinctive of politics, and always identifies the political. There can, on the other hand, be more than one kind of decision-making coexisting in the same society: but only those decisions which are backed by force are political.

Let me continue to compare my criterion of the political with those which I earlier rejected as inadequate. I have deliberately said nothing about the purpose for which force is used. It may be the basis of a tyrant's power, or enable a majority to oppress or exterminate a minority; or it may be the means by which a democratic government, resting on the consent of the governed, secures and protects the human rights of all its citizens. It may be used by capitalist states or by socialist states; by governments which minimize their role in society, or by governments which maximize it. But whether the ends for which force is used are rated evil or good, and what the ideology of the state may be, are irrelevant. This satisfies the requirement, laid down earlier, that no cases of politics be excluded on moral grounds. At the same time, the other requirement, that some social activity be excluded as non-political, is met too. Using force as our criterion enables us to discriminate between some decisions and others, counting as political only those which are about the use of force, involve its use, or are backed by it ultimately. We can discriminate in the same way between political and non-political conflicts, between political and non-political resolutions of conflict and between economic activities which are political and those which are not. We thereby exclude from the discipline of Politics the study of the running of such groups and institutions as businesses, trade unions, schools, universities, banks, churches and families, because in none of them may force play a role except with the permission of the state. If force is employed in such a group or institution without the state's permission, that is illegitimate and the victim can appeal to the state.

Thus the definition of politics in terms of force is neither too narrow nor too wide. In addition, it prompts plenty of significant questions for the research agenda of Politics. It focuses attention on the central feature that politics is always, at some point, a matter of some persons compelling others. It raises interesting questions about the means by which this can be done. For instance, how is force actually exercised? How do people organize themselves for this purpose, and what else is involved? Do those who exert force have to receive some support which is not itself extorted by the threat of force? How do small groups manage to dominate much larger ones? If force is so central, why are not all governments run by the military – how do civil politicians retain control? Are there limits to what can be achieved by force, and in particular by that intensive use of it termed 'terror'? For those concerned to recommend ways of improving political activity, it indicates that the use of force is inevitable and that the main issues are first, how to keep it under control and ensure that it is employed in carefully limited circumstances, and only for necessary and socially beneficial tasks; and second, how to decide which objectives and purposes can properly be assigned to governments and can justify the use of force as a means to their achievement.

Next, I turn to the political relations between states. I think that many people would accept that these provide strong confirmation of the view I have been putting forward. There are agreements made between states, there are international bodies, there is international law, and there are international courts. But in the end each state is its own judge, and its own executor of the law, and disputes between states are still regularly settled by force. The principal check on one state's use of force remains the use or threatened use of force by another state or states. Force, therefore, is the central feature of international as of domestic politics. Indeed, force is even more prominent internationally, since it is used not only to enforce laws and decisions but is also turned to as an alternative in those frequent cases where there are no rules regulating the relations between states. It is possible that in the future force might be used less, especially if the present multiplicity of sovereign states were replaced by a unitary world political organization. But I do not see that force would ever be eliminated. The world government would still need to enforce its decisions, to maintain order and peace, and to deal with dissidents, for example with those who wished to secede and form an independent state (with the danger that the process of wars between states would resume).

The last point I have to consider is whether, on my definition of politics, there is politics in societies which are not states. The societies which pose the largest problem for my account are those popularly called 'simple' societies. They are also known as 'peoples without government', 'stateless societies', 'tribes without rulers' or, more strictly, 'acephalous' (literally, 'headless') societies. As these terms suggest, these societies – now virtually extinct – lacked the formal political institutions found in modern and earlier forms of the state. There was no body of persons which was the government, there was no civil service, no police, no army, and there were no courts. In some of these societies, usually the smaller ones (and they could be as small as 100 persons), there were not even any individuals who could be identified as politicians, policemen or judges: those very social roles seem not to have existed. Nonetheless, even in these extreme cases, I think we can say that there was politics. There were rules which everyone had to observe, and the rules were enforced, with banishment or death as ultimate sanctions. The difference is that enforcement was diffused instead of concentrated; that is, it was left to everyone and anyone to enforce the rules instead of that task being assigned to one individual as his office. Force was not absent, it simply ran along different channels.

To sum up the position I have been constructing, in any society force is used to settle certain conflicts, to sanction certain rules, to back certain decisions and to guarantee that certain policies are pursued. The use and control of force by some members of the society, and the moves by others to influence their use of it, or to gain control of it for themselves, are the distinctively political human activities. On this view, there is politics in a society, and between societies, but nowhere else. The groups of people *within* a society do not in themselves have politics, although they can become involved in politics. For example, when the members of a trade union choose their officials, or when officials negotiate rates of pay and conditions of work with employers, that is not politics: when, on the other hand, the union subscribes to a political party, or lobbies the government on the law relating to picketing, that is politics.

4 Final Reflections

The reader of this book as a whole cannot but be struck by the great differences of opinion which exist as to the correct answer to the question 'what is politics?'. My own view, though I do not think it is universally held, is that one should not treat the question as having a 'correct' answer. Students of Politics disagree over the boundaries of their subject, and there is no way in which we can decide conclusively between their competing definitions. There is no yardstick, independent of the assumptions and approaches of the disputants, by which to adjudicate between the different positions which are adopted, so that we can point to one as the correct answer. 'Politics' is a special kind of technical term, *the kind which is definitive of the whole technique*, that is, of the study of Politics: and technical terms are created by the practitioners of the technique. Different practitioners of Politics work with different definitions of the subject. Toleration of that kind of pluralism should be understood as a mark of the maturity of a discipline in the humanities or social studies. In the case of Politics, there is no evidence that it has hindered the discipline, or that it is anything but a healthy condition which keeps basic issues alive and the road to new developments open. There seems no good reason for trying to avoid this plurality of definitions by replacing it with a single, commonly adopted definition (the selection of which must be arbitrary, and its imposition problematic).

Finally, what are the implications of that last point for my own answer to the question 'which human activities constitute politics?' I have claimed that we should study any society, including stateless societies, on the assumption that it includes arrangements, usually a special set of institutions and social roles, for the regulation and use of force, and that these are the heart of politics. The arrangements can vary considerably from one society to another, and therefore Politics ought to be a comparative study, gathering its material not only from across the contemporary world but also from other historical periods and other cultures. In this way we can begin to locate the unchanging features of politics. I do not suggest that the study of force should constitute the whole of Politics, though I think it has to be central. I offer my own view of politics in the spirit that it is one suggestion among many, and that the reader will be wise to set it alongside others and evaluate them all. Each, no doubt, will have its strengths and weaknesses and some may turn out to complement one another. Consequently one may conclude that it is best to deploy a combination of criteria of the political, either simultaneously or separately, to suit particular circumstances. Moreover, it is clearly sensible to spread oneself across as broad a range of materials and methods as possible, so that one can make an informed choice among the various definitions of politics. It should be recognized that to a large extent the choice of one's own definition (or definitions) of politics cannot be the starting point but must be the product of one's study of Politics. Any initial definition should be adopted tentatively, and be open to revision permanently. It is very salutary that such open-mindedness is required of us. The most important lesson to learn is that it is a strength of Politics as a discipline that it contains many differing conceptions of itself and many frameworks for study, for the very process of coming to terms with the questions and challenges which this poses is itself instructive.

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4

Marxism and Politics

Alex Callinicos

1 Introduction and Argument

What is politics? The answer given to this question by Marxism is so radical as to disqualify it from being merely another 'approach' to the study of politics. Throughout this chapter I shall use the term Marxism as shorthand for what has come to be known as the classical Marxism of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci (Molyneux, 1983). This classical tradition denies that politics is a persisting feature of every form of society. Furthermore, it claims that politics, where it does exist, cannot be studied in isolation from the rest of society. Finally, Marxism, insofar as it is a practical programme as well as a body of theoretical analysis, seeks the *abolition* of politics. These claims are obviously incompatible with the notion of an autonomous discipline of Politics.

2 Conventional Approaches

To appreciate the force of the Marxist view of politics, it may be helpful to consider first more conventional approaches. It is customary to look on politics as arising from and concerned with a set of formal political institutions – in our own society, Parliament, Cabinet, elections and so forth. It is assumed that these institutions are relatively autonomous of the rest of social life. Politics is thus seen as abstracted from the social whole.

The discipline of Politics tends to reflect this view. Thus, Political Theory seeks to settle such questions as the nature of social justice and the rights and duties of the citizen. The methods it uses are those of conceptual analysis and a priori reflection on first principles. The underlying assumption is that there is a set of political problems so universal as to be common to every form of society that Political Theory can resolve without empirical investigation of the specific features of any particular society. Notoriously, this has led political thinkers again and again to treat the peculiar problems of their own time and place as problems for *any* society.

Political Science focuses upon political institutions and processes. It seeks to uncover the distribution of power within actual political systems. But this enquiry proceeds without any coherent attempt to relate the distribution of political power to wider patterns of social and economic inequality. Social forces figure only as they impinge on these institutions from outside, as in the case of pressure groups. Some currently influential approaches, such as the study of policy networks, do try to relate the political and the social, but usually without an explicit analysis of the larger context of the processes under examination.

Marxism challenges the basic assumption behind the discipline of Politics, namely that there is a permanent and autonomous feature of society called politics. In the first place, in the realist tradition of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Marxism insists that politics is not concerned so much with rights as with *power*. 'Starting with Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Bodinus and others of modern times,' Marx wrote approvingly, 'might has been represented as the basis of right ... if power is taken as the basis of right... then right, law, etc., are merely the symptom, the expression of *other* relations upon which state power rests' (Marx and Engels, 1975–, V: 322, 329).

Marx thus declared his lack of sympathy for Political Theory as it is practised today. The task of theory is not to find a moral or juridical justification for the exercise of political power, but to understand the social processes that generate and sustain political institutions and practices. Any sharp distinction between Political *Theory* and Political *Science*, between a priori theorizing and empirical investigation, is rejected. The study of politics proceeds in the manner of other sciences, through the discovery of causal patterns. By the same token, no science simply observes the world, without any assumptions about what it may uncover. The role of theory is to lay down guidelines for empirical enquiry, suggesting the directions in which research is likely to be fruitful (Lakatos, 1978). Thus Marxism denies that politics can be studied in isolation from the rest of society. Its object is what Marx called 'the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx and Engels, 1975–: 4). Society can thus only be understood as a structured whole, a totality. The different forms of social life, including politics, are comprehensible as aspects of this whole. It is its role within the social totality that determines the nature of politics.

As I have already noted, such an approach undermines the very concept of a separate discipline of Politics. Political behaviour, if Marxism is right, can only be studied with the help of a variety of disciplines – Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, History, and so on. Indeed, one could go further and say that, according to Marxism, there is only one social science, which embraces and integrates all these supposedly distinct disciplines. The name Marxists usually give to this unified science is historical materialism, the systematic study of social formations founded by Marx. Such a view of social science does not rule out the possibility of specializing in particular areas, but it does suggest that every limited study should constantly seek to place its researches in the context of the social whole.

The strength of such a holist approach to the study of society is that it challenges the fragmentation of the existing social sciences. The attempt to carve out distinct disciplines leads to the creation of artificial divisions. It is impossible to understand contemporary British politics without a deep acquaintance with the country's economic and social history, but this immediately means crossing the boundaries of Politics into Economics, Sociology and History. The same strictures apply to the other would-be social sciences. The attempt to reduce Economics to a body of mathematical techniques lacking any relation to the study of social and political forces has made its contribution to the disasters wrought by the neo-liberal hegemony over the past generation.

3 The Marxist Approach to Politics and Society

From a Marxist point of view, then, politics must be viewed as merely one aspect of the social whole, to be studied as part of an integrated analysis of that totality. More specifically, in Lenin's words, 'politics is the most concentrated expression of economics' (Lenin, 1965, XXXII: 32). Political institutions and struggles arise from, and can only be understood in the light of, the basic conflicts of the social whole. These conflicts are generated at the level of what Marx called the forces and relations of production.

Marx's view of the social whole was most succinctly expressed in these famous lines written in 1859:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of

> production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx and Engels, 1975–, XXIX: 263)

Production is thus the 'real foundation' of social life. Politics, law and culture all arise upon its basis. But production itself has two aspects, the material and the social. The material aspect is what Marx calls *the forces of production*. These correspond roughly to what we today call technology. The instruments that we use in order to produce things, whether they be the cave-dweller's flint or personal computers, and the physical strength, skill and knowledge used to set these instruments in motion, make up the productive forces of humanity. At its most basic, history is the record of human beings' increasingly sophisticated abilities to produce. This process is what Marx described as the development of the productive forces.

Unfortunately, that is not the end of the story:

> In production, men enter into relation not only with nature. They produce only by cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their relation with nature, does production, take place. (Marx and Engels, 1975–, IX: 211)

These *social relations of production* have given rise in the past few thousand years to the division of society into classes. A minority is able to gain control of the means of production, that is, of the land, and of the instruments of production. They use this control to compel the direct producers, the mass of the population who do the actual work of producing society's wealth, to perform surplus-labour. In other words, the direct producer, whether she be a slave, a peasant, or a modern wage-labourer, is compelled to work, not only to meet her own needs, and those of any dependants she may have, but also to meet the needs (including those for luxuries and the means of waging war) of the owner of the means of production, whether he be a slave-master, a feudal lord or a capitalist. 'What distinguishes the various economic formations of society...is the form in which this surplus-labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker' (Marx, 1976: 325).

Such a view of class society places exploitation, the extraction of surplus-labour, at its heart. 'Class', writes the ancient historian G. E. M. de Ste Croix, 'is essentially the way in which exploitation is reflected in a social structure' (Ste Croix, 1981: 51). Marx's *Capital* is above all a demonstration of the way in which capitalism is founded upon exploitation. The source of the profits on which capitalism as an economic system depends is the surplus-value extracted from workers within production. Capitalism is but the latest form of class society.

4 The Marxist Approach to the Study of Politics

What implications does this analysis of society have for the study of politics? In the first place, politics can only be understood in the context of a process of historical change. Marx's account of the forces and relations of production is a *dynamic* one. The two come into conflict with one another, and, as they do so, social formations are compelled to undergo change. This conflict between the forces and relations of production finds expression in the struggle between classes. The exploitive relations of production that form the basis of every class society compel the exploited class to resist. Exploitation thus gives rise to class struggle, the constant battle between exploiter and exploited. The opening sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* declares: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle' (Marx and Engels, 1975–, VI: 483). This class struggle is 'the immediate motive force of history' (ibid., XXIV: 269).

It is exploitation and the class struggle that provide the key to any genuine understanding of politics:

> The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of the direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers... which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it... the corresponding specific form of the state. (Marx, 1971: 791)

Politics must always be traced back to its 'hidden basis' in the class struggle. Marx observed this injunction himself most successfully in his writings on France, which include such masterpieces of historico-political analysis as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. But more than that, precisely because politics arises from the class struggle, it is a historically transient phenomenon.

To see why the existence of politics is coterminous with that of classes let us consider some of the rival definitions of politics. One such definition, proffered by Albert Weale in chapter 6 of this volume, is that of politics as a process of collective choice, as an activity in which individuals combine to make some decision. But such a definition does not demarcate politics, as it is conventionally understood at any rate, from other processes of collective choice. Weale does not claim otherwise: he simply suggests that conceiving politics as collective choice will illuminate some of its distinctive problems. There are, however, features of politics other than decision-making. One, the existence of conflicts of interest between individuals or groups, can be brought within the scope of Weale's definition. A second, force or coercion, cannot, and Peter Nicholson's chapter in this volume suggests that it is force that distinguishes politics as a social activity. Conceiving politics as coercion starkly highlights a third issue, the inequalities of power between different individuals and groups.

5 Marxism, Politics and the State

These three issues – conflict, force and power – focus upon a fourth, the state. For it is on the institutions of state power that the process of political decision-making centres. Furthermore, the state is, ultimately, a coercive institution, according to Max Weber's classic definition, depending upon the monopoly of legitimate force in a particular territory. And the conflicts between different groups tend to revolve around the objective of seizing state power, or influencing its exercise.

Politics is thus inextricably associated with the existence of states. But if the state is conceived as a specialized apparatus of coercion, involving the existence of what Lenin called 'special bodies of armed men' (standing armies, police forces, etc.), then it is, like classes, a comparatively recent phenomenon in the history of human societies. Indeed, so Marxists argue, and there is much anthropological and historical evidence to support them, the formation of states is part of the same process as that in which society is divided into classes (Harman, 1995). 'The state', Engels wrote in his classic essay *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 'is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is split into irreconcilable opposites which it is powerless to dispel' (Marx and Engels, 1975–, XXVI: 269). The emergence of class exploitation means that it is no longer possible, as was the case in pre-class societies, for all (male) members of society to bear arms. The preservation of class domination requires 'the establishment of a *public authority* which no longer directly coincides with the population organizing itself as an armed force . . . This public authority exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds' (ibid., 269–70). Different states are simply different forms of class domination: 'Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another' (ibid., VI: 505).

Such a view of politics does not involve the naïve and Utopian belief that it is only in class societies that coercion is to be found. There is plenty of evidence of violence within and between 'primitive' pre-class societies. Any society may need to resort to force where individuals will not observe the decisions that have been collectively arrived at. But 'coercion' takes on a different order of meaning where there exist specialized apparatuses separate from the mass of the population and monopolizing the legitimate use of force. The central Marxist thesis with respect to politics is that state societies are also class societies; or rather, they are state societies *because* they are class societies.

It follows that there are no universal 'political' problems. Adrian Leftwich argues in his substantive chapter 7 of this collection that politics exists wherever human beings take decisions concerning the use and distribution of resources. The implication is that politics is to be found in every society, and that it exists at the micro-level of families and communities as well as at the macro-level of state institutions. Such a view of politics is very different from that taken by Marxism.

First, by tracing politics to the decisions every society must take about the use and distribution of resources, Leftwich offers a model of social action rather similar to that provided by neo-classical economics and the forms of rational choice theory based on it. In the latter, human subjects are treated as rational agents guided by the motive of maximizing utility. The objection that Marxism has always made to this model is that people's interests will vary according to their position in the social relations of production. In class societies, their interests are antagonistic, because they are generated by a structure of class exploitation. The course of action that it is rational for an individual to take faced with the eternal problems of the use and distribution of resources will depend upon his or her class-specific interests. It will also depend on the individual's power to achieve his or her wants, and this in turn is, once again, largely conditioned by the class position occupied by that individual. Any study of a society's decision-making processes must start with an appraisal of the structure of the forces and relations of production prevailing in that society.

More specifically, Leftwich's view of politics suggests that it exists in non-state societies in a sense analogous to the manner in which it does in state societies. The danger with such a general definition is that it makes politics an essentially benign process. The decisions taken by hunter-gatherer societies and by families, neither of which are characterized by class antagonism or state coercion, are treated as the same kind of activity as politics in class societies, in which both predominate. The brute facts of inequality, coercion and power that preoccupied the great political theorists from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and Marx are wiped out of the picture.

Moreover, a focus on the 'micro-politics' of families and communities can be equally misleading. As we have already seen, Marxism insists on placing politics in the context of the social whole. Nevertheless, it is the institutions of state power that are the focus of political struggle. Marx wrote of the 'concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state' (Marx, 1973: 108). Nicos Poulantzas expressed the same thought by calling the state 'the *specific materialized condensation* of a relationship of forces among classes' (Poulantzas, 1978: 129). In other words, while the state is not autonomous of wider social forces, it is in its structures that all the antagonisms of class society come to a head and are concentrated. Politics is about the state, because the ultimate guarantee of a particular class's domination lies in its monopoly of force. Any study of politics which detaches the apparatuses of state power from their 'real foundations' in the forces and relations of production can offer only partial and one-sided insights, but any study which ignores these apparatuses simply misses the point.

6 Marxism, Conflict and Capitalism

One implication of this argument is that Marxism has a conflict theory of politics. Politics is the process through which classes with antagonistic interests struggle to obtain, retain or influence state power. Marxism is not alone in thus tracing the roots of politics to social conflict, but it differs from other such accounts in two important respects. First, it is commonplace to see politics as the mechanism through which conflicts of interest are resolved, and social equilibrium thus secured. Such a view is to be found, for example, in the political writings of the great sociologist Talcott Parsons. Marxism denies that politics can resolve the conflicts that generate it. On the contrary, as the product of class antagonism, it is, in words of Engels that I have already quoted, the admission that 'society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself', a contradiction which can be resolved only by the transformation of that society, that is, by social revolution.

Secondly, accounts of politics that locate its origins in social conflicts tend to treat such conflicts as permanent and ineradicable features of human life. Skilful political leadership may be able to manage, and even perhaps to overcome, some particular conflict, but never to eliminate social conflict as such. Conflict, the struggle between rival groups, is endemic to human society, and thus will continue to generate politics however great the transformations undergone by economic and social arrangements.

Once again, such a view of social life (whose greatest exponents are perhaps Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber) runs counter to Marxism. For if politics is a product of class antagonism then it is a historically limited phenomenon – in two respects. Not only does politics have relatively recent origins, in the past few millennia of class-division and state-formation, but it cannot survive the elimination of class antagonisms. Marx himself argued that his greatest originality lay in establishing that class society itself is a transient phenomenon. 'My own contribution was 1) to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with certain historical *phases in the development of production*, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, 3) that the dictatorship itself constitutes no more than the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*' (Marx and Engels, 1975–, XXXIX: 62, 65).

Marx's lifework, *Capital*, is devoted to showing that capitalism is distinguished from other forms of class society in that it creates both the material and the social conditions of a classless, communist society. It does so materially by abolishing scarcity. The existence of classes depends ultimately on the low productivity of labour, which permits a minority to live off the labour of the rest, but condemns the majority to a lifetime of drudgery. Capitalism, whose dynamic and revolutionary character Marx praises to the heavens in the *Communist Manifesto*, so develops the productive forces that the material basis of classes no longer exists.

Today we find that even existing food production is sufficient to support the world's population at an adequate standard of living. The 'scarcity' thanks to which over a billion people live on less than one dollar a day and more than 800 million go hungry is artificial, brought about by capitalist relations of production, which make it unprofitable to provide everyone with a decent standard of life.

7 Marxism, Socialism and the Abolition of Politics

Capitalism also creates the social conditions for communism. It does so by creating the working class, 'a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production' (Marx, 1976: 929). Capitalism exploits workers collectively, bringing them together into large units of production where they are involved in increasingly socialized labour processes. Consequently, when workers resist their exploitation they do so collectively, creating organizations such as trade unions that depend for their power on the strength workers share within production. Marx believed that the class struggle between labour and capital would develop from a purely economic, trade-union conflict, into a political struggle, oriented on the state, and culminating in its overthrow, and the establishment of institutions of workers' power in which the majority would for the first time exercise direct political control. But even this new, radically democratic form of state, which Marx called the dictatorship of the proletariat, would be a temporary phenomenon (the Roman dictators ruled only for six months). In the higher phase of communism, in which the further development of the productive forces would finally eradicate class antagonisms, the social basis for any form of specialized repressive apparatus would no longer exist. The state, in Engels's famous phrase, withers away.

Marxism is thus a theory of the abolition of politics. For it anticipates and seeks to achieve a communist society in which neither classes nor the state exists. Even more paradoxically, it pursues the abolition of politics by political means. For the precondition of the creation of a classless society is the conquest of political power by the working class. This apparent paradox is resolved by the fact that the state created by this revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is, as Lenin put it, 'no longer a state in the proper sense of the word' (Lenin, 1965, XXV: 48). Marx's model for such a state was the Paris Commune in which the 'special bodies of armed men', the army and police, were disbanded, and replaced by the armed people. The state in the sense of 'a public authority which no longer directly coincides with the population organizing itself as an armed force' is destroyed, and replaced by democratically organized institutions of working-class power.

8 Critiques and Responses

It would be the mildest of understatements to say that the Marxist view of politics is a controversial one, and indeed certainly not one widely shared by practitioners of the discipline of Politics. So scandalous, so implausible does this view seem that even many Marxists feel obliged to reject or at least to qualify its main propositions.

The most common reason given for disagreement with the Marxist theory of politics lies in its supposed assimilation of all forms of social conflict and inequality to class antagonism. This central objection lies behind many of the more familiar criticisms of Marxism, of which the following are some examples. What about non-state societies – surely they involved conflict? Did the state wither away in the Soviet Union? Can racial and sexual inequalities be reduced to class exploitation? Is the modern liberal-democratic state merely a coercive class institution? Obviously, it is impossible to respond adequately here to the accusation of 'class reductionism' that lies at the heart of all these objections. I shall restrict myself to two clarifications.

The first is that Marxism is not compelled to assert that no conflict would exist in a classless, stateless society. Trotsky argued that, under communism,

> there will be the struggle for one's opinion, for one's project, for one's taste. In the measure in which political struggles will be eliminated – and in a society where there are no classes, there will be no such struggles – the liberated passions will be channelized into techniques, into construction which also includes art.... People will divide into 'parties' over the question of a new gigantic canal, or the distribution of oases in the Sahara (such a question will exist too), over the regulation of the weather and the climate, over a new theatre, over chemical hypotheses, over two competing tendencies in music, and over a best system in sports. (Trotsky, 1971: 230–1)

So the thought is not that there will be no conflict in a communist society, but rather that such social struggles as do take place will not be generated by antagonistic conflicts of interest arising from relations of class exploitation, and so will not require a specialized apparatus of repression to regulate their outcome. Indeed, some Marxists have gone further and argued that, far from suppressing individuality, a communist society would be the first actually to permit its full expression. Such a society would be, in the words of the philosopher Theodor Adorno, 'one in which people could be different without fear' (Adorno, 1974: 103).

The second point is this. While Marxism does not claim that all conflict is a product of class antagonism, it does seek to explain the deep and pervasive inequalities characteristic of modern society in terms of their place in a system of class exploitation. This includes such inequalities as racial and sexual oppression that on the face of it have nothing to do with class. Many of the long-standing reproaches to Marxism on this score have been given additional force by the emergence in recent years of forms of identity politics that strongly reject any such 'class reductionism'.

Yet it is precisely Marxism's insistence on accounting for social inequalities and political struggles (including those between nation states) in terms of the master-concepts of the forces and relations of production which make it such a bold and challenging scientific theory. It may indeed seem counter-intuitive to say that the oppression of women owes its persistence today to the capitalist mode of production. But it is characteristic of any serious scientific theory that it runs counter to some common-sense intuitions.

A historical analogy may help to make Marxism's very strong claim seem less scandalous. In the seventeenth century a handful of thinkers developed what Bernard Williams has called an 'absolute conception of reality' (Williams, 1978). They argued that many of the properties of a physical object which are most relevant to human beings' everyday experience – for example, its potential uses, location, tactile and visual qualities – were at best secondary to understanding its behaviour. For the purpose of science, what counted was those properties which could be analysed by means of mathematical concepts. The authors of this profoundly unpalatable view, which expelled from the physical universe meaning, quality and purpose, were the founders of modern Physics. Four centuries have borne witness to the correctness of their highly counter-intuitive beliefs.

This analogy does not in itself lend any credibility to the central claim of Marxism. But it reminds us that the test of this claim, as of any scientific hypothesis, lies in the degree of its success in explaining and anticipating events in the world. Marxism is an empirical theory, and must be judged as such. Once the issue is posed in these terms, then what is striking is how formidable a tradition of political analysis Marxism has developed. Marx's writings on France; Luxemburg's discussions of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the German revolution of 1918; the vast body of work in which Lenin undertook the 'concrete analysis of concrete situations'; Trotsky's analyses of the driving forces of the Russian Revolution, of the causes of its subsequent degeneration, and of the rise of German fascism; and Gramsci's studies of the manner in which political power is held and overthrown – all these put in the shade anything that conventional political scientists or theorists have been able to come up with.

9 The Continuing Relevance of Marxism and Political Action

But, of course, traditions live only if they are continued. They have to be continually renewed and refashioned by work that, while building on the achievements of the past, seeks to go beyond them. After the collapse of the Soviet Union supposedly brought history to an end, Marxism was widely proclaimed to be dead (though see Callinicos, 1991, and Bensaïd, 2002). But now, as it becomes clear that the triumph of liberal capitalism has brought with it increased global inequality and financial instability – along with the even greater threats of war and ecological catastrophe – new movements of resistance to global capitalism are emerging. This is a more favourable environment for Marxism to renew itself (Callinicos, 2003).The challenge is to develop the Marxist approach to politics, one that is holist and historical, that is both concerned to study political institutions and processes in their historical specificity, and ready to relate them to the social whole and the contradictions that constitute it.

The matter cannot, however, rest here. The scandal of Marxism for the discipline of Politics does not lie solely in its theoretical claims. Marxism is not merely a scientific research programme, but a practical movement whose goal is socialist revolution as a preliminary to the creation of a classless society. Marxism challenges the separation of theory and practice characteristic of the bourgeois academy. 'The philosophers have *only interpreted* the world in various ways,' Marx wrote in the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, 'the point is to *change* it' (Marx and Engels, 1975–, V: 5). Marxism not only denies the discipline of Politics an epistemological foundation. It seeks to abolish politics itself by eradicating the class antagonisms that generate it. The greatest Marxist students of politics were also practitioners of politics – Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci. As long as politics exists, it cannot be ignored.

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5

Politics as a Form of Rule: Politics, Citizenship and Democracy

Bernard Crick

1 Introduction and Argument

In this chapter I shall defend, qualify and expand the argument originally advanced over forty years ago in my *In Defence of Politics* (Crick, 1962). I shall argue, as I did then, that politics is a distinctive form of rule whereby people act together through institutionalized procedures to resolve differences, to conciliate diverse interests and values and to make public policies in the pursuit of common purposes. As a unique form of rule, politics is distinct from other forms of rule, such as autocracy or totalitarianism; and war and violence represent the breakdown not the extension of politics. Moreover, I shall suggest that, understood in these terms, politics is thus a precondition of modern democracy, both logically and historically prior; and that what I shall later refer to as 'active citizenship' is, in turn, a necessary condition of political democracies. Let me give a vivid example.

There was a conference in Botswana in 1984 on 'Democracy in Africa'. At that time, in Africa, only Botswana could appear an even half-way plausible and hospitable venue. Did the Social Democratic Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Germany pay for it to encourage others or to keep the then government of Botswana up to scratch (their ruling party's treasurer had just departed unexpectedly for Brazil with much of the kitty)? I never got a clear answer. The opposition party mocked them publicly, proving that there was some real politics, public politics, in Botswana – or, at least, politics conducted publicly. And the opposition had just won control in a fair election of the capital city's council which, for their pains, was then dissolved and handed over to the Minister for the Interior. But Mrs Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, had just done the same thing to the Greater London Council in England, as I helpfully pointed out. That was politics, but a somewhat rough politics; perhaps of the kind by which politicians can discredit politics. However, there was one quiet, but notable, incident. A young Soviet diplomat from Zambia handed round an eighty-page speech on world affairs by President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. We asked him politely if there was any particular passage he wanted us to read. He pointed to one sentence: 'There must be a political solution to the South African problem.'

That single sentence meant a lot. It meant that there would be no more Soviet funding for the military wing of the ANC which was still preparing for violent struggle against the regime. It meant that whatever remaining Soviet pressure existed would now be on the South African government to find a compromise between what seemed at the time to be the politically unbridgeable positions of white supremacy and one man one vote (it would be another four years before the ANC began to say 'one person'). Gorbachev had come to see that not all forms of rule are political, even if his advocacy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* showed he had realised that central command economies either did not work (except in wartime or emergency conditions, but even then storing up trouble for the future), or that the price was simply too heavy to pay in moral or (perhaps perceived as) cultural terms. It is unlikely that he had read the East German dissent intellectuals and the Western highbrow Marxists of the time who were busily, if cautiously and laboriously, embarked on 'the rediscovery of the political' (some of us had never lost it). There are circumstances in which available power is not enough or, perhaps, when even the strongest begin to suspect that their monopoly of power cannot continue indefinitely. 'There must be a political solution to the South African problem.'

Perhaps the new breed of Russian diplomats had noticed that the Afrikaner leadership of the white South African regime was beginning to reach the same conclusion at much the same time. In Britain and the United States we failed to see that because our committed and crusading journalists reported every atrocity by the regime but seemed uninterested in making contacts with Afrikanerdom (or were perhaps frightened of catching something, like contradictory information). Some big businessmen tried to tell the journalists of the UK and USA that the new South African President, F. W. de Klerk, and other leaders of the National Party were beginning to say that 'this cannot last'; but they either did not believe them or did not think that their editors and readers wanted to hear talk of political compromise.[1]

Some of the self-righteous journalists sent to Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s acted in very much the same way (not those who were born there, however), almost as if victory for Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had to be believed in and any shoddy political compromise of power-sharing had to be disparaged. They credited the IRA with believing in both the ballot box and the bullet (as the twin paths to victory), but failed to detect their growing pessimism or realism about 'victory'. They also missed the recurrent discussions in the Protestant Ulster Defence Association (UDA) about a 'political solution', as they explicitly called it, then engaged naïvely asking some of us, 'how is it done?' (Crick, 2001). Likewise, the few British journalists in South Africa who distrusted the ANC were not *necessarily* racist or white supremacist. They tended to argue bluntly either that victory for the ANC would be a far worse form of oppression than white rule, or that any compromise would lead to anarchy (which is, after all, the deepest fear – not misrule – of the conservative mind, the breakdown of any form of order). But as we now know, compromise there was:

> In short what happened was one of those rare moments in history when powerful antagonists mutually recognise that their conflict is stalemated and can be continued only at unacceptable cost. The agreement to negotiate did not mean that conflict would be terminated; merely that it would henceforth be played out in a political forum. (Welsh, 1994: 29)

Despite alarms and excursions, the same process may well be under way in Northern Ireland as politics has now slowly, if with great difficulty, begun to replace violence.

2 The Preconditions for Politics

Perhaps it would be better to call this chapter 'In Defence of *In Defence of Politics*'.[2] I argued in that book that although one may find elements of politics even within totalitarian, autocratic, or any other form of government, this does not constitute a *political* form of rule. For, critically, political rule is rule based upon the mutual recognition by all that there are differing interests and values to be conciliated in societies and that *public* procedures for reaching acceptable compromises *can be institutionalized.* Perhaps in the book I did not make clear that it was *forms of government* I was discussing, not subsidiary processes within any form. An epigram might have done the trick: before Locke and J. S. Mill there must be Hobbes, and the mediator is Machiavelli (of the *Discourses*). Certainly we know what we mean when we say that some tribal societies are more political than others, where elders sit in a circle to discuss how the unchanging customs and traditions can be applied in a particular case rather than *the* chief declaring the law; or that there was more politics in the Kremlin of Brezhnev than that of Stalin. But in neither of those cases was politics publicly and *legally institutionalized.* Nor did those processes allow or require the accountability of open publicity to ensure that the compromises reached for others would stick. In short, politics was not institutionalized as *the* form of rule.

More worryingly, perhaps I did not make clear enough in *In Defence of Politics* that the practices of politics depend on an agreed framework of order for enforcing rules and maintaining common and acceptable institutions, and so are far more readily applicable to individual states than to relations between states.

Politics rests on two preconditions, a sociological one and a moral one. The sociological precondition is that societies are all complex and inherently pluralistic. And they will still be, even if and when (hopefully) the injustices of class, ethnic and gender discriminations one day vanish or radically diminish. The moral precondition is that people need to recognize that it is normally better to conciliate differing interests than to coerce and oppress them perpetually. Nonetheless, while much political behaviour is prudential, there is always some moral context and it may be that there are some compromises which we think it would be wrong to make, and some possible ways of coercion or even of defence which we think are too cruel, too disproportionate or simply too uncertain. These thoughts are very much with us at the moment. Hannah Arendt was wiser than Clausewitz or Dr Kissinger (US Secretary of State in the 1970s) when she said that violence is the breakdown of politics not its 'continuance by other means' (Arendt, 1970: 11).

Morality and politics

Political theory and, indeed, the common thoughts of ordinary citizens, used to be split between idealist and utilitarian schools, or between what Kant called the categorical imperative and the ethics of practical reason (or, better, reasoning). But either by itself is a ludicrously incomplete description of actual human society, and actually dangerous if either is pursued as an overriding imperative denying any middle ground, committing, as it were, 'the fallacy of the excluded middle'. Some moral values may be absolute, but their application is always contingent – not merely because circumstances vary but also because rarely can one value or one principle, on its own, determine a just outcome. And, on the other hand, both Keynes and Oakeshott famously mocked, if in somewhat different ways, the man of affairs who claims to be purely practical as one who simply does not understand his own preconceptions. So, yes, although I understand politics to be a pragmatic form of rule, involving compromise and conciliation, there will always be some moral limitations to political action (indeed, even those people who claim existentially, as it were, not to observe any limits, can be observed anthropologically, as it were, to have some); but no, absolute principles too often divorce the holder from political activity and influence.

3 *In Defence of Politics* Reconsidered

Perhaps it was too easy for me to argue in *In Defence of Politics* that it is always better to be governed politically, as I have now defined the term, if there is any choice in the matter. The thesis did not seem banal or simple-minded at a time in the Cold War when there was a sustained contrast, both in the text and in the world, between political rule and totalitarian rule. But with the breakdown of Soviet power, the whole world has become more complicated and previously existing contradictions in the so-called 'free world' have both come to the surface and grown acute. Just as totalitarian rule and ideology could break down internally, so too can political rule. Political prudence can itself prove inadequate. I gave such situations too little serious attention. Walking and talking in Northern Ireland for nearly twenty years has made me more eager to find a secular equivalent to Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism (1954) and the truth is that a sequel to the *In Defence* would be a darker book.

Also, I did not consider the apparent inadequacy of the political method, and of diplomatic negotiation, to resolve international and global problems that genuinely threaten tragedy and even disaster. Was it, indeed, the fear of nuclear war between the USA and the USSR that diverted realists from facing up to such problems, finding it all too easy back then to brand them as pseudo-problems, the obsessions of a few scientists and, paradoxically, of anti-science Greens, DIY ecologists and New Age alternative-lifers?

Portraying politics as the opposite, or negation, of totalitarianism was all too easy. The mundane could be made melodramatic in terms of contrast. The 'defeat' of the USSR and the 'victory' of the West also appeared to imply the rejection and then the demise of ideology. However, political prudence and pragmatism did not take over. Rather, there emerged the rapid, almost wildfire spread of the belief that market forces will resolve all major problems on a global scale, or at any rate cannot be resisted. So it matters little whether regimes are autocratic or democratic so long as they are capitalist in the full-blooded sense of being part of a global economy. Economics itself becomes an ideology.

Hannah Arendt (1950 and 1958) noted that there have only ever been two kinds of comprehensive ideology widely believed to hold the key to history: the belief that all is determined by racial struggle and the belief that all is determined by economic or class struggle; and that both are distinctively modern beliefs. Before the late eighteenth century the world could get by without such enormous secular claims, and not even religions claimed to explain everything. Arendt pointed out that economic ideology took two rival forms, and yet their belief that there must be a general system had a common origin and linked them more than their disciples believe: Marxism (all is class ownership) and *laissez-faire* (all is market forces). The missionaries and advocates of market ideology in the former Soviet bloc now denounce political interventions in the economy almost as fiercely as did the old totalitarians, although fortunately they are still subject to some political restraints and cultural inhibitions. In a broad perspective, the degree of political restraint upon the children of Hayek, the Reagans and the Thatchers, is also remarkable. They have done to us, for good or ill, much less than they know they ought to have done. And that is because of 'irrational' political factors, as they see it, but fortunately for us.

Prices, being relativities of cost, cannot be sensibly determined except by market mechanisms; the final breakdown of Soviet planning proved that – however well it may have served for times of emergency and forced industrialization. And capitalism is an international system whose imperatives can be ignored only at a heavy price – say North Korea and Cuba, or by the luck, while it lasts, of oil in the sand. But it does not then follow that price must determine every human relationship, least of all the civic. The effects of the market can be either limited or mitigated by civic action; some should be. Man is citizen as well as consumer. There is taxation, for instance; there are legal controls as well as absolute ownership; the possession of property is rarely unconditional; there is or was public and family morality, strong cultural restraints on the exercise of both economic and political power. New lines of demarcation and mutual influence between the polity and the economy need examining closely and coolly. If people see themselves purely as consumers they will lose all real control of government and, quite simply, what they consume can become degraded and polluted. Governments will then rule by bread and circuses, even if not by force; and torrents of trivial alternatives will make arbitrary and often meaningless choice pass for effective freedom. For all the absolutist rhetoric, in reality at least a degree of welcome confusion reigns. Only the two extreme positions of All-State or All-Market are untenable. There is a lot of space between them for active and inclusive citizenship in any civilized or 'civicized' society. In that space people can make political choices about all public matters, whether they be economic or cultural. Political and economic factors and principles interact with each, limit each other; but neither can live for long without the other. But how do we 'civilize' ourselves to be citizens, actively engaged in politics? To explore this it is necessary to speak first of citizenship and to show its centrality for politics and its relation to democracy.

4 Citizenship, Politics and Democracy

Aristotle said that as part of the good life, to fulfil our humanity, we must enter into the *polis* as citizens, into political relationships with other citizens. As Arendt (1958: 26–7) summarizes Aristotle:

> To be political, to live in a *polis* meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through violence. . . . in Greek self-understanding to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were pre-political ways . . . characteristic of life outside the *polis*.

So by politics and citizenship I mean what I take Aristotle to have meant. It is an activity among free people living as citizens in a state or *polis* and is concerned with how they govern themselves by public debate. But political rule was not necessarily democratic, certainly not in his time. Nonetheless, it was a unique and never forgotten form of rule. A *polis*, Aristotle said, should have a democratic *element* in it, but he advocated mixed government: the wise and the able rotating and governing in turn with the consent of the many. For Aristotle the 'many' (what the Romans later were to call the *populus*) excluded slaves, foreigners and, of course, women – all of whom were to enter the polity much later, but as an extension, I maintain, not a refutation of his manner of thought. A pure democracy, Aristotle said, would embody the fallacy that because men are equal in some things, they are equal in all. However, the special sense of *polis* or civic state was to him a conditional teleological ideal: both a standard and a goal to which all states would naturally move if not impeded, as well they might be impeded, by folly, unrestrained greed, power-hungry leaders lacking civic sense, or by conquest. Aristotle brings out the intense specificity of the political relationship when, in the second book of *The Politics*, he examines and criticizes schemes for ideal states. He says that his teacher, Plato, made the mistake in *The Republic* of trying to reduce everything in the *polis* to an ideal unity when, rather, it is the case that:

> there is a point at which a *polis*, by advancing in unity, will cease to be a *polis*: there is another point, short of that at which it may still remain a *polis*, but will none the less come near to losing its essence, and will thus be a worse *polis*. It is as if you were to turn harmony into mere unison, or to reduce a theme to a single beat. The truth is that the *polis* is an aggregate of many members. (Barker, 1968: 51)

Politics, according to Aristotle, arises in organized societies that recognize themselves to be an aggregate of many members, not a single tribe, religion, interest or even tradition. That is why in *In Defence of Politics* I defined politics as the activity by which the differing interests and values that exist in any complex society are conciliated. Politics only arises when there is a perception that diversities are natural. But it is important to understand that both historically and logically politics preceded what in the modern world is usually called democracy. Ruling elites in Greece in the fifth century BC, and later in republican Rome, did act politically among themselves (democratically, if you like), even while the majority of inhabitants were shut out of political activity – just like in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and in some sixteenth-century Italian and German city states.

The chapter in my *In Defence* provocatively called ‘A Defence of Politics against Democracy’ might now be strengthened by showing how easily leaders of ‘the great democracies’ can subvert politics as a form of rule by the rhetoric and tactics of populism – all of which Tocqueville had described in his chapter ‘The Unlimited Power of the Majority’ in his *Democracy in America*, although not to forget either the following chapter in that book, ‘Causes which Mitigate the Tyranny of the Majority’.

Consider by way of contrast to even the best democratic practices of today a passage that used to be worrying knowledge to advisers to renaissance autocrats and a source of inspiration to their critics. For once upon a time the Periclean oration would have been read by almost everyone who read books at all.

> Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, every one is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. . . .
>
> Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. (Thucydides, 1954: 117–18)

There is no need to remind me: Pericles was a demagogue, a kind of democratic dictator. Nonetheless the point is to remember the lasting ideal which Pericles invoked, and the quality of a citizenry who, even if they were deceived by him, shared and understood such ideals. There is no need to search further if we want to find the moral and practical origins and basis for an inclusive society: we must take seriously the long understood, but seldom fully practised, ideas of *democratic citizenship*. And we must promote wider engagement in politics in the manner of active citizens. We should teach such commitments to our young, together with the practical skills needed to experience and fulfil them; and we should try to hold our leaders to the real meaning of the words they easily, too easily, utter. In essence, active citizenship, as I shall shortly explain, is the basis for political rule and this, in turn, is the precondition for democratic politics. In order to elaborate this point it is first necessary to discuss some meanings of democracy.

5 Meanings of Democracy

The word 'democracy', alas, has many meanings. Democracy is both a sacred and a promiscuous word. Everyone claims it as their own but no one actually possesses it fully. A moment's thought will remind us why this is so because, historically, there have been four broad usages.

Greek usage

The first meaning is found in the Greeks, in Plato's attack on it and in Aristotle's highly qualified defence: democracy is simply, in the Greek, *demos* (the mob, the many) and *kracy* (rule). Plato attacked this as being the rule of the poor and the ignorant over the educated and the knowledgeable, ideally philosophers. His fundamental distinction was between knowledge and opinion: democracy is rule, or rather the anarchy, of mere opinion. Aristotle modified this view rather than rejecting it utterly: good government was a mixture of elements, the few ruling with the consent of the many. The few should have *aristoi*, or the principle of excellence, from which the idealized concept aristocracy derives. But many more can qualify for citizenship by virtue of some education and some property (both of which he thought necessary conditions for citizenship), and so may be consulted and can, indeed, even occasionally be promoted to office. He did not call his 'best possible' state democracy at all, rather *politea* or polity, a political community of citizens deciding on common action by public debate. But democracy could be the next best thing in practice if it observed the principle of 'ruling and being ruled in turn'. As a system of rule, unchecked by aristocratic experience and knowledge, however, democracy remained based on the fallacy 'that because men are equal in some things, they are equal in all'. Modern political sociology has a different terminology, but research on the role of elites in democracies does not seriously deny the Aristotelian description; rather, it seeks to develop methods for measuring the relative openness or mobility of these elites (Kornhauser, 1959).

Roman and later republican usage

The second usage is found in the Romans, in Machiavelli's great *Discourses*, in the seventeenth-century English and Dutch republicans, and in the early American republic. This view holds that good government is mixed government, just as in Aristotle's theory, but that the democratic popular will could actually give greater power to a state. Good laws to protect all are not good enough unless subjects become active citizens making their own laws collectively. The argument was both moral and military. The moral argument is the more famous: both Roman paganism and later Protestantism had in common a view of man as an active individual, a maker and shaper of things, not just a law-abiding, well-behaved acceptor or subject of a traditional order.

French revolutionary meanings of democracy

The third usage is found in the rhetoric and events of the French Revolution and in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau – that everyone, regardless of education or property, has a right to make his or her will felt in matters of public policy and the state. Indeed, the general will or common good is better understood by well-meaning, simple, unselfish and ordinary people from their own experience and conscience rather than by (to them) the over-educated elite living amid the artificiality of high society and making a god of *reason* (their own reason). Now this view can have a lot to do with the liberation of a class or a nation, whether from oppression, ignorance or superstition, but it is not necessarily connected with individual liberty. (In the European eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, remember, most people who cared for liberty did not call themselves democrats at all; they called themselves constitutionalists or civic republicans, or, in the Anglo-American discourse, 'Whigs'. Thomas Jefferson was a Whig.) The general will could have more to do with popularity than with representative institutions. Napoleon was a genuine heir of the French Revolution when he said that 'the politics of the future will be the art of stirring the masses'. His popularity was such, playing on both revolutionary and nationalist rhetoric, that he was able for the very first time to introduce mass conscription – that is to trust the common people with arms. The autocratic Habsburgs and Romanovs had to be most careful about whom they conscripted to arms, and where.

American democracy and its influence

The fourth usage of democracy is found in the American constitution and in many of the new constitutions in South America and Europe in the nineteenth century, as well as in the new West German and Japanese constitutions following the Second World War. From this comes the democratic notion that everyone must mutually respect the equal rights of fellow citizens within a regulatory legal order that defines, protects and limits those rights – a Whiggish or constitutionalist version of democracy whose limitations populist political leaders often choose to ignore (Crick, 2002).

What is most ordinarily meant today by 'democracy' in the United States, Europe and Japan is, ideally, a fusion (but quite often a confusion) of the idea of power of the people and the idea of legally guaranteed individual rights. The two should, indeed, be combined, but they are distinct ideas, and can prove so in practice. There can be, and have been, for instance, highly intolerant democracies where rights are secondary, but also reasonably tolerant democracies where majorities cannot overturn the rights of individuals or minorities. Personally, I do not find it helpful to call the system of government under which I live 'democratic'. To do so begs the question but, more importantly, it can close the door on discussion of how the actual system could be made *more* democratic, just as others once feared – and some still do so – that the democratic element becomes too powerful. Sociologically and socially England is still in many ways a profoundly undemocratic society (Scotland and Wales somewhat more democratic), certainly when compared to the United States. But even in the United States today there is now too little citizenship or positive participation in politics in the republican tradition of the early American Republic, as pointed out by Putnam (2000). Nonetheless, there are some interesting but very localized experiments in direct democracy, local referenda and 'citizenship panels', and of course people vote (albeit in perpetually disappointing numbers) in formal elections. But, between elections, talk of and active participation in politics rates far, far lower as the most favoured national activity, apart from work, than shopping (Lipset, 1996).

So when considering the present nature and problems of democracy, I want to suggest that what we must also consider are the two things which are both historically and philosophically prior to either the ideal of democracy or the empirically observed practices of democracy itself: these things are politics and the concept of active citizenship. Both politics and active citizenship, we must accept, had their ancient origins among a few not the many. Since I hope that I have already made clear what I mean by politics, perhaps all I need to add here is that it is too important to be left to politicians. But what of citizenship? Why is it so important for both politics and, crucially, democracy?

6 Citizenship, Politics and the Democratic State

Over a number of years I have been involved in developing policies and programmes for citizenship training for young adults in Britain. In doing so, I have encountered a surprising amount of uncertainty among teachers as to what the idea of citizenship means or implies. Many seem to think that citizenship simply means good behaviour.

But there is much more to citizenship than this and it is vital that there be clarity on this issue, for as I have already argued citizenship is central to politics and both are essential for democracy. However, the term 'citizen' does, after all, have two distinct meanings, one passive and one active.

'Passive' citizenship

In this sense, a citizen can simply be someone who, under the laws and practices of a given state, has both rights and duties, irrespective of the character of that state. But in many states duties can far outweigh rights, and those rights may not be political at all. To avoid offence, let me not name any particular autocratic ally of the West; but just say that in many African, South-East and East Asian states or Middle East autocracies most of the inhabitants are citizens (which may often exclude large numbers of foreign workers), and so may properly be called good citizens if they obey the laws and keep their noses clean. This kind of citizenship could well be called passive citizenship.

'Active' citizenship

But the second sense of being a citizen is what we find in specifically democratic states today, where a majority of the inhabitants enjoy the political rights that emerged from a leadership class in the Greek, Roman and early modern city republics: free speech, the election of public officers and the right to combine together to change things, big and small; or to prevent undesired changes. This is 'active citizenship', entailing not simply obedient and good behaviour, as in 'passive' citizenship, but political participation.

It seems to me elementary that there is a difference between being a good (but passive) citizen and being an active citizen. One can be a good citizen in an autocratic state. One can also be only a good citizen in a democratic state, that is, one can obey the law, pay taxes, drive carefully and behave oneself socially (say, minimizing offence to others), but not work with others on any matters that affect public policy, either at all or minimally – minimally may just be voting (and now a large number of people do not even do that). It is this minimalist approach to citizenship that made me, thirty-five years ago, voice scepticism about an old tradition of education for citizenship as Civics which stressed the primacy of 'the rule' of law and learning about the constitution. For citizenship surely involves public discussion about whether laws work badly, or whether they are unjust and how they can be changed. Young people need an education that helps them become, by both knowledge and experience, politically literate, as I have argued at length elsewhere (Crick, 2000).

A professor of education, David Hargreaves, has made the point in this way:

> Civic Education is about the civic virtues and decent behaviour that adults wish to see in young people. But it is also more than this. Since Aristotle it has been accepted as an inherently political concept that raises questions about the sort of society we live in, how it came to take its present form, the strengths and weaknesses of current political structures, and how improvements might be made... Active citizens are as political as they are moral; moral sensibility derives in part from political understanding; political apathy spawns moral apathy. (Hargreaves, 1996: 15)

Most of us accept that economic theory both describes and legitimizes a price mechanism, but we often can forget that there is equally clear political theory that can describe and legitimize democratic societies. Just as economics is concerned with price, that in a world of finite resources everything we want is at the cost of something else (or of others), so political theory is concerned with decision-making and persuasion: an assertion that, except in times of emergency, societies are best governed politically, not autocratically, that is, by public persuasion and publicized compromises among competing values and interests, not by coercion, force or fraud.

Theories of the democratic state

Broadly, there are two theories of the modern democratic state, mirrored in popular understanding or behaviour and not just in academic literature. The first is that the maintenance of free institutions depends on a high level of popular participation in public affairs, both as a practical necessity and as a moral and civic duty ('political power is acting in concert', said Arendt). The second is that competitive elections create governments that can modify and uphold a legal order under which individuals can lead their own lives with as little interference as possible from the state and minimal public obligations (to obey the laws, pay taxes, serve on juries and vote every few years).

Historians and political philosophers describe the first view as that of 'civic republicanism' and the second as 'the liberal theory of the state'. The liberal theorists of the state tend to see liberty as the direct relationship between the individual and the state as defined by legal rights and mediated by the market. The civic republican theorists, on the other hand, see the guarantors of liberty less in such direct and defined relationships and more in the existence of civil society (a term they have revived and popularized) which is constituted by all those semi-autonomous organizations and institutions intermediary and mediating between the individual and the state.

This is no new perception. Benjamin Constant understood this clearly in a once famous essay of 1820, 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to that of the Moderns', where he argued that: 'The aim of the ancients was the sharing of social power among citizens of the same fatherland: this is what they called liberty. The aim of the moderns is the enjoyment of liberty in private pleasures; and they call liberty the guarantees accorded by institutions to these pleasures' (Fontana, 1988: 152).

In ordinary discourse one sees the liberal theory as demanding 'good' (if not passive) citizenship, invoking 'the rule of law', good behaviour, individual rights and, at its best, moral virtues of care and concern for others, beginning with neighbours and hopefully reaching out to strangers. But it may well stop short of demanding 'active citizenship' – combining together effectively to change or resist change. The language of two recent English reports on citizenship education for schools with their stress on 'active citizenship' was that of a revived and robust civic republicanism involving participation and discussion of real issues. Moreover, 'active and good citizenship' was often said to recognize the need for a moral basis for the means and not just the ends of political activity, and was what education (and therefore public policy) should seek to encourage and achieve. The very remit of that group (written by the Labour Government's minister responsible for Education at the time, David Blunkett) was: 'To provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools – to include the nature and practices of participation in democracy; the duties, responsibilities and rights of individuals as citizens; and the values to individuals and society of community activity' (QCA, 1998 and 1999).

The report offered a statement of aims which is now well known among teachers but rarely heard among political scientists who are, after all, concerned in the main with political science rather than what Alfred North Whitehead called in the title of a once famous book, echoing Cardinal Newman, *The Aims of Education.* The report made clear that:

> We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life

> and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting; to build on and to extend radically to young people the best in existing traditions of community involvement and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves. (QCA, 1998: 7)

'Political literacy' was a term invented to mean that someone should have the knowledge, skills and values to be effective in public life. And the report had an implied methodology for teaching and learning: that knowledge of institutions is best gained through discussion of real issues and through becoming aware of what institutions are relevant and needed to influence or resolve an issue or problem. It was a deliberate break from how Civics used to be taught, simply as knowledge of structures and legal powers of institutions (easily examinable, but dead boring). But nor was the Citizenship curriculum seen as an introduction to Political Studies. It was tailored for, in a once famous phrase of Lady Plowden's, 'all our nation's children'.

An education in politics must be a mixture of knowledge and skills, not simply experience. Activities must be chosen of a kind to enhance both those dimensions, as well as having some practical effect. Action must be based on knowledge. Knowledge, even in political science, should surely have at least the deliberate potential to lead to relevant and responsible action. I am not arguing for the politically committed teacher but for the politically relevant teacher. As one moves into the adult population, the argument is that for effective citizenship these two dimensions cannot be neglected (whether gained by training or experience) and that the aims of concerted action must be of some real public importance. In the universities we teach what politics is about but seldom feel any responsibility for teaching the skills to do something about it – those of effective advocacy and cooperation.

The government of the United Kingdom is somewhat two-faced about all this. On the one hand it put into the schools in England a new and radical subject, quite unlike any other subject, with a statutory requirement for participation in both school and community, and its stress on knowledge for problem solving rather than knowledge for its own sake. But on the other hand ministers pursue targets for encouraging youngsters to 'volunteer' to do some public service, through the Millennium Fund and other agencies, in which almost anything counts. Certainly all active citizenship must involve at some stage volunteering, but not all volunteering involves citizenship. Cleaning up a field after an open-air pop concert or cleaning up a local park or young children's playground is admirable, or giving a party for the old and infirm in an 'old-age people's home' is admirable, but it is not real citizenship without a knowledge base (how can such despoliation or neglect be allowed to happen at all?), without a process that enhances skills of discovery and advocacy, or without any attempts to influence local authorities, councillors, the police or whoever may be relevant.[3] Volunteering becomes citizenship when the volunteers are well briefed on the whole context, given responsibility about how to organize their actions, and debriefed afterwards in the classroom or listened to in a formal meeting about whether they think it could have been done better. Volunteers are free citizens acting together; they should never be cannon fodder or cheap labour, however worthy the organization they work for, however time-tested (or rigid) its procedures.

7 Conclusion

If this lurch from a discussion about the primacy of politics over democracy into one about education for citizenship seems self-indulgent, self-defensive or even a lay sermon rather than a usual part of an academic symposium, let me say this. I felt the fortuitous call to the schools work as an intellectual challenge to see whether the tradition of political theory could be applied to secondary and even primary education (Crick, 2000; *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2002). I have a general irony about the development of the social sciences that it is, in fact, more difficult to be simple than complicated, more difficult to define basic, primary concepts and perceptions than (as most of us spend our time) to critique specialized, advanced vocabularies.

The connection between education and politics is close and critical. In a sentence, politics has meant since the time of the Greeks and the Romans people acting together politically and freely to achieve common purposes. But politics requires active citizenship, and both are necessary preconditions for effective democracy. So education for citizenship is education for politics, and education for politics is an education, albeit always a critical education, for democracy.

NOTES

1 Returning from a term teaching and travelling in South Africa in 1989, I persuaded the *Observer* newspaper in London, with some difficulty, against the advice of their South African correspondent, to let me publish an article saying that the 'Release Mandela' cry was becoming irrelevant; that the South African government was desperate to release him, but that

he was refusing until he had negotiated the terms of his release. The constitutional negotiations had begun. 'I cannot tell you what was discussed when I visited Mandela', Govan Mbeki (his former cell-mate) had told me, 'but it stands to reason that they can't just throw an old black gentleman with an old brown suitcase out of the side door of prison.' That was enough. ('South Africans are Learning to Talk', *Observer*, 5 Nov. 1989.)

2 And I would call to my defence a South African scholar writing on the eve of transition: 'both the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary forces will have to become engaged in politics, as defined in Bernard Crick's *In Defence of Politics*. In the terms of this classic essay, politics means that the tendency to make absolute demands should be abandoned in favour of a realistic conception of what can be gained. This means an acceptance of constraints and a willingness to reconcile different interests' (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1989: 211).

3 An actual instance. Some very proud Further Education students did this as a project in a citizenship pilot programme, enjoying themselves and doubtless giving pleasure to some old people; but they asked and learned nothing about why the lovely old people were in a Home at all and not at home with home-helps – nothing, in other words, about the most intractable administrative and financial problem in the remains of the welfare state, the borderline between National Health Service (NHS) and Social Services provision. Citizenship needs skills for action, but action based on knowledge.

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6

Politics as Collective Choice

Albert Weale

1 Introduction and Argument

Most people, most of the time, are rational. Common sense tells us that rational people act so as to protect their interests. They lock up their property against thieves. They take special precautions when they are travelling in strange places. They ask their friends and acquaintances about their experience of builders, plumbers, lawyers and architects whom they are thinking of employing. They visit the schools that they are contemplating sending their children to. In short, whatever else they do, rational people do not consciously set out to make themselves worse off. People in politics, we expect, will be the same. Politicians would get short shrift from their populations if they needlessly taxed, spent money unwisely or engaged in reckless overseas enterprises.

Yet, the common-sense observation that rational people will not act against their self-interest seems to meet some obvious counterexamples. Impartial and uncorrupt government is to the advantage of most people in society, but in many places even honest people feel compelled to pay bribes to officials when they want something done. Global climate change will be very destructive if people continue to use fossil fuels in an inefficient way. Around the world fish stocks are over-fished, leading to the decline of fishing communities. In major cities traffic congestion leads to gridlock as each individual takes his or her own car to work. Public squalor sits alongside private affluence.

In these sorts of example something seems to have gone wrong with our assumption that rational people will act in their self-interest. If everyone could make an individual contribution to the collective effort by using public transport, fishing within agreed quotas or paying a little more for alternative energy supplies, then everyone would be better off, even taking into account the cost of making the contribution. When everyone stands on tiptoe no one sees any better; they just end up with tired legs. If they could all agree to stand, they would see as well and save themselves the tiredness.

Situations such as these, in which individually rational behaviour – like standing on tiptoe – leads people to be worse off than they might otherwise be, should cause us to think. How can rational people behave so irrationally? If people cause environmental damage, can people not stop environmental damage? How, if it is rational for people to act so as to protect their self-interest in everyday private life, can it turn out that acting to protect their interests in some collective situations leads them to be worse off? How is it that what is rational for each is not rational for all?

Politics is by definition the realm of the collective – the body politic, as it used to be known. Problems of politics are therefore problems about whether everyone can be protected from the effects of self-defeating rational behaviour. When laws are passed and public policies implemented, they have effects on all who fall under them. When international treaties are entered into, they are done so in the name of all citizens. Polluted air or rising sea levels do not lend themselves to individual solutions. Resource depletion affects all those dependent on the resource. ‘Stop the world, I want to get off’ is not an option. Politics is not about allowing some individuals to get off the world. It is about whether the world can be made a more tolerable place by altering the self-defeating logic that leads to people being worse off than they need be.

A useful term in this context can be borrowed from economists. It is the notion of a public good. A public good has a rather precise definition in economics. It does not mean a good that is provided by the government, though many public goods are provided by governments. Instead it refers to a good from whose benefits people cannot be excluded, even if they have not contributed towards meeting its costs. Clean air is a public good in this sense. If it is available to anyone in a locality, it is available to everyone in the locality. An honest system of public administration is also a public good in this sense. So are many other things, including the conservation of natural resources, the provision of law and order, protection from external threats or the effects of natural disasters, a well-educated workforce and co-operative social relations. In short, anything is a public good where it supplies spill-over benefits to those who do not have to pay for its production.

The role of government and public policy is in large part about the supply of these public goods, for one very simple reason. It is extremely hard for private commercial or voluntary activity to supply them, because it is hard for them to collect contributions from all those who benefit. Because functioning governments have the power to tax, they are able to levy contributions to finance such activities as policing, a legal system, defence and education, all of which contribute to public goods.

In the rest of this chapter we shall try to understand the logic behind those failures of collective action in which public goods are not provided at all or are under-provided in some way. We shall see that there is no iron logic at work producing failure. Sometimes, under some circumstances people can solve their collective action problems. But they have to be intelligent as well as rational, including being intelligent about the sort of politics they are prepared to take part in. To set the scene I borrow an example from David Hume.

2 An Example: Hume's Farmers

The problem of collective action was illustrated in a simple, but powerful, example by David Hume in a book written when he was in his late twenties and published in 1740. Hume imagines two farmers who are rational but need each other's help in harvesting their crop. Will rational individuals be able to help one another? Common sense says 'yes', but Hume points out that for fully rational individuals the problem is not so simple:

> Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so to-morrow. 'Tis profitable for us both, that I shou'd labour with you to-day, and that you shou'd aid me to-morrow. I have no kindness for you, and know you have as little for me. I will not, therefore, take any pains upon your account; and shou'd I labour with you upon my own account, in expectation of a return, I know I shou'd be disappointed, and that I shou'd in vain depend upon your gratitude. Here then I leave you to labour alone: You treat me in the same manner. The seasons change; and both of us lose our harvests for want of mutual confidence and security. (Hume, 1969: 573)

To see the logic of this example, think of the two farmers as farmer A and farmer B. Farmer A's corn is ripe today. Farmer B's tomorrow. Farmer A wonders whether he can rely on the effort of farmer B. He knows that he can only rely on the effort of farmer B today, if farmer B can rely upon his effort tomorrow. But since by definition A will not act out of gratitude, and he knows that B knows this, farmer A therefore knows that he has no reason to expect farmer B to help him. Purely rational thought leads to a failure to act collectively.

Note the elements of rationality that Hume identifies. Each farmer is strictly forward-looking, undertaking the effort of action only if the promised benefit exceeds the cost. Neither farmer has regard for the interests of the other. Neither will take pains on behalf of the other, nor will either act out of gratitude. They are not malevolent: neither will go out and destroy the crops of the other just for the fun of it. They are simply mutually indifferent: they consult only their self-interest in deciding whether or not to act. The problem is that by relying only on their individual calculation of self-interest, they both end up in a situation in which they are worse off than they otherwise could be. If this is rationality, it seems that it pays to be stupid.

In this two-person situation, we have an example of what has come to be known as the prisoners' dilemma. Two people in a prisoners' dilemma, if they could co-operate to mutual advantage, could each be better off, but it is not rational for either to co-operate when they think about it from their own point of view. Each knows the other is acting on the same rationality, and so they are both locked into a self-defeating situation.

Note that this failure of collective action requires considerable sophistication of rational thinking, but it only involves two people. The likelihood of failure increases, however, when we turn to situations involving many people. Consider the example of climate change. Imagine individuals thinking about whether or not to turn up the central heating or to put on a sweater instead. Each individual will think that he or she will be more comfortable without a sweater, but with the central heating turned up. Someone in this situation may know that the extra fossil fuel that is burnt will add to the problem of global warming, but will reason that the contribution is so small as to make no perceptible difference whatsoever. It is, as we say, a drop in the ocean. Global warming will or will not take place whether or not any one individual's central heating system is turned up. Why make the effort when it literally makes no difference? It is much more sensible to free-ride on the contributions of others.

Note that an individual confronted with whether or not he or she should make a contribution given the need for large numbers of individuals to coordinate will *correctly* reason that any single contribution is worthless. Some people say that individuals in these sorts of situation should be moved by the thought: what if everyone were to act as I act? However, from a strictly rational point of view, it does not make sense to be moved in this way. From the claim that not everyone ought to perform some act, we cannot infer that no one ought to perform that act. Not everyone ought to enter the legal profession (because otherwise no one would do all the other jobs that need to be done), but it does not follow from this truth that no one ought to enter the legal profession.

3 Collective Action in Political Theory

The person who has done most to advance this line of argument in recent social science has been Mancur Olson. Olson (1965) identified the logic of collective action as being a problem for large groups. He thought that even if small groups like Hume's two farmers could solve their collective action problems, the logic of large numbers would prevent many public goods being supplied, unless there were coercion from the state or there were special devices which induced individuals to pay towards the costs of the public goods from which they benefited. The conclusions that Olson drew from this logic of collective action were many and varied. Olson thought that small, concentrated interests would find it easier to solve their collective action problems than large, disaggregated interests (we shall see why this might be so below). Hence, we might expect producer interests to predominate over consumer or citizen interests in the making of public policy. He pointed out that the logic of collective action explained why trade unions fought for the closed shop, to prevent workers deriving the benefits of collective bargaining without paying their dues. And he also pointed out that the reason why voters take an interest in the titillating details of politicians' sex lives rather than the details of the policy choices that politicians were offering was because they had little incentive to invest time and effort in tedious issues when their vote made so little difference to the result.

The obvious way in society in which individuals have to co-operate with large numbers of others is in terms of respecting their property and person. If we try to take others' property whilst hoping that they will respect ours, we are in effect free-riding on their willingness to accept certain constraints on their behaviour. Similarly, if we feel free to assault others but expect them to behave peaceably towards us, then we are also trying to free-ride. But free-riding in this way threatens to infect the whole population. If I am playing fast and loose with others' goods, why should they not play fast and loose with mine? Generalized in this way, the consequences of individual behaviour lead to an anarchic world without government, a situation which

Hobbes, writing nearly a hundred years before Hume, saw as a war of all against all:

> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man: the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes, n.d.: 82)

In other words, according to Hobbes in this influential picture of human society without government, the rational pursuit of advantage by individuals leads to a situation in which all that is valuable in human life is lost. The war of all against all takes over. The only political solution that Hobbes saw was a powerful sovereign who could hold the rational pursuit of self-interest in check to the common, and hence ultimately every individual's, advantage – including those individuals tempted by self-interest.

By now the reader will have been wondering whether rational self-interest can have this logic. Hobbesian sovereigns have existed in many societies, but equally the most prosperous societies have been constitutional governments in which political power has been limited rather than expanded to hold every individual in awe. Indeed, the experience of twentieth-century totalitarian societies has been that they are wealth-destroying rather than wealth-enhancing. To be sure, there are historical examples where a Hobbesian sovereign might have been more welcome than civil war, including what Hobbes called a sovereign 'by acquisition', that is, take-over by a foreign power. For example, in Rwanda in 1994 the minority Tutsis would have welcomed such protection from the Hutus had the international community been able to intervene. But such cases are not the norm; they are an extreme. Similarly, although many pollution and resource problems are difficult to solve, not all of them are. Farmers everywhere manage to co-operate with one another in harvesting their crops. And so on. Are these forms of co-operation saved by the fact that the logic of rational self-interest does not operate, or do we need to be more subtle in the way we think about the way that individuals coordinate their actions with one another?

4 The Farmers Meet Repeatedly

Let us go back to Hume's farmers. Note one thing about the example. The farmers are imagined only to be making a decision on one particular occasion. However, this is untrue to life. Many such decisions have to be made in the context of ongoing relationships. How does the logic of self-interest operate in these repeated interactions?

Remember that our farmers were not motivated by gratitude. They did not look back to the favours done to them and return the favour to restore the moral balance. Instead, they would co-operate only if they thought it would be to their *future* advantage. In the situation Hume envisaged, there was no future advantage beyond the two days of harvesting. Since the farmer harvesting second knew that the farmer whom he might have helped on the first harvest would not reciprocate, he had no reason to help on the first harvest. So both were locked into non-co-operation.

If both farmers can look forward to an indefinite future, however, the logic of the situation is changed (Taylor, 1976). Each can adopt a conditionally co-operative strategy, which takes the form of 'I will help you, if you will help me.' One way of doing this in repeated interaction is for each actor to do in the present round what the other person did in the previous round, a strategy known as 'tit-for-tat' (Axelrod, 1984). I help you with your harvest today if you helped me yesterday, with each doing this in the expectation that the other will reciprocate in the future. If this strategy is played by both players in repeated games, and if they can start to co-operate, then they will continue to co-operate. Instead of always failing to co-operate, they always co-operate. The corn is brought in and both are better off. In prisoners' dilemmas the logic of repeated games is kinder than the logic in one-shot games because repeated games allow for players to play these conditionally co-operative strategies.

The evolution of co-operation in repeated plays of the prisoners' dilemma seems to fit with some observations that we might think applied in the real world. Passing strangers usually find it more difficult to co-operate with one another than long-standing friends. You might lend your friend a lot of money if he or she was in trouble, when you would not lend to a stranger. Soldiers fight for their comrades in a war, not for the impersonal glory of their nation. Stable communities have less litter and environmental damage than inner-city areas where the population is more transient. Long-standing allies lend military and other assistance to one another, in the expectation of reciprocity in the future. In short, the logic of co-operation seems correlated with long-standing relationships.

Does this mean that we have solved the problem of collective action? Not quite. Analyses of the conditions under which co-operation will emerge even in repeated games makes it clear that a number of conditions have to be satisfied. One such condition is that the players have to be long-sighted in the sense that they must weigh future gains relatively highly relative to present gains. If they were short-sighted, they might simply be tempted to take the short-term gain of defection without worrying what would happen in the future. The second condition is that the game has to be imagined to go on indefinitely. There is no last round of the game in which it becomes rational once again not to co-operate. If there were such a last round, then co-operation would not be rational on the next to last round, which in turn would mean that co-operation was not rational on the round before that, and so on back through the game.

This last condition is an interesting one. It implies that players do not die. But individuals do die and even nations, which usually live longer than individuals, do not go on forever. Moreover, dealing with mistakes can cause problems. An individual might intend to co-operate on one round, but fail to do so through error or happenstance. In principle, there are conditionally co-operative strategies that can deal with this problem, but they can get complex to work out. In other words, what we can term the pure logic of rational choice in repeated games will take us so far, but it may not take us far enough.

What is to happen in these circumstances? In practice we find that the strategy of individuals is embedded in circumstances that can reinforce the rationality of co-operation through institutions, social networks or political action. Each of these is worth looking at in turn.

5 Institutions, Networks and Local Democracy

Institutions When we think of institutions, we tend to think of formal organizations like political parties or government departments. The idea of an institution is wider than these examples suggest, however. An institution can be regarded as any routinized practice in which individuals adopt actions in the light of the expectations and conventions that the institution specifies. Shaking hands on meeting someone is an institution in this sense, as is reserving your seat on the train by leaving your coat on it when you go to the buffet car. Such conventions may be highly informal, as these examples suggest, or they may be formal rules of behaviour in certain circumstances, as when in political systems governed by coalition it is a convention that the first party to have a go at forming a coalition is the one with the largest number of seats.

By routinizing behaviour in many circumstances, institutions reduce the need for individuals to calculate how best to behave when they interact with others. The logic of following the norm of the convention takes over from the calculating rationality of seeking for the best strategy in a particular situation of choice. Of course not all institutions are benign in terms of public goods and the collective interest, as in the example of societies in which it is a convention that citizens have to bribe public officials in order to secure needed services. However, the institutionalization of choice in routinized conventions might help us to see how, if we could secure the right institutions, individuals would have less of a temptation to free-ride. What circumstances might help us secure the right institutions?

Social networks Consider the influence of social networks. Suppose our farmers meet one another in a number of different ways. As well as seeking co-operation in harvesting their crops, they also play in the same local football team, send their children to the same school and sing together in the church choir. In other words, they get to know one another in a number of different settings. These encounters can do much to reinforce the tendency to co-operation between them. For example, they will learn about the character of each, so that if genuine mistakes occur (one farmer does not turn up for duty on an allotted day, saying he is ill) they are more likely to interpret the behaviour as bad luck rather than malevolence. They can exchange favours across different realms of social life (perhaps alternating in taking one another's children to school) thus strengthening the tendency to co-operation. And each person can establish a reputation for being trustworthy.

These networks of engagement in civic relations are known as social capital. The notion of social capital lies behind an influential, if controversial, account of politics that was initiated by Robert Putnam (1993). Putnam's work takes its starting point from the analysis of a local government reform in Italy in 1970: the creation of twenty regional governments. These regional governments were given responsibility for a wide range of public services. Putnam and his colleagues were concerned with a number of questions, but one of the most important was how well the different governments performed compared to one another.

In terms of this comparison, Putnam showed that governmental performance varies according to traditions of 'civic community'. What Putnam meant by this was that governments did better in those regions of Italy (mainly in the north) where there was a network of attitudes and values involving civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust, tolerance and a rich associational life. Putnam argued that norms of civicness are important in promoting democratic and economic performance. In regions of Italy where civic associations and the networks to which they give rise were widespread, governmental performance was better.

The most striking feature of this claim is that governmental performance depends not just on the quality of government, but also on the quality of social life, including such superficially non-political associations as sports teams and social clubs. The link, according to Putnam, is that the production of the public goods through politics is made much easier when there are widespread conditions fostering co-operation in society at large. Hume's farmers, if they are in the right part of Italy, will not only harvest together, but they will also pay their taxes, dispose of their waste responsibly and not seek to bribe public officials for their own ends.

As we have seen, Olson pointed out that size was likely to be an important variable in solving the problem of collective action. Social networks in effect transform the problem of achieving social co-operation for large numbers into achieving such co-operation in the context of smaller scale face-to-face interaction. In a small group individuals would find it less plausible to reason that their contribution did not matter. Indeed, in some cases it clearly does matter, and so free-riding is not an option. Moreover, the face-to-face interaction of small groups would bring into play mechanisms of social coercion and embarrassment that would be absent in larger groups.

One obvious application of this line of reasoning is to social movements. Olson's logic of collective action predicts that it will be difficult to mobilize large-scale political movements through voluntary action. Many have pointed out that this prediction was falsified almost as soon as Olson's work was published. In particular the civil rights, anti-war and environment movements in the United States and other developed societies suggested that large-scale action was not only possible but effective. But the refutation of Olson is not quite so obvious as these examples suggest. One important implication of the logic of large numbers is that social movements are likely to be more effective when they are federated through groups that are organized on a smaller scale than through large, impersonal organizations. Consider the freedom rides in the US civil rights movement, in which activists sought to break racial segregation in the southern states by travelling in racially mixed groups. Such activity was dangerous, because racists would often attack, with tacit support from the law-enforcement authorities. Chong (1991) has shown that individuals were fortified in sticking to the freedom rides by networks of personal relationships, which in effect turned the large movement into a series of smaller networks.

Local democracy This brings us to another way of reinforcing co-operative behaviour in the production of public goods, namely local institutions of democratic control. The importance of this can be illustrated with an example borrowed from the work of Elinor Ostrom. Ostrom (1990: 18–21) cites the inshore fishery of Alanya on the southern coast of Turkey. By the early 1970s competition among fishers had led to conflict and over-capitalization in the competitive search for increased yields. Fish catches were declining and the fishers were caught in a potential war of all against all. However, rather than succumb to the logic of collective action failure, the villagers began to organize political institutions. In particular, the local community began to experiment with a system in which fishing sites were allocated to different boats on a rotating basis, restricting the freedom of individual fishers to go where they thought the catch was best on any particular day.

Ostrom argues that the successful development of rules in such cases depends upon certain conditions: the rules are relatively simple to apply; they are seen by those subject to them to be fair; and compliance with them is easily monitored. It is also important that they are capable of modification by members of the local community. In other words, local democratic control reinforces the management of institutions to facilitate co-operative rather than competitive behaviour.

If we take social networks and explicit political agreements together, we can also see how they lead directly to certain policy implications. For example, there is currently a tremendous amount of interest in notions of social capital among policy-makers concerned with political development and urban renewal. The hope is that, by seeking to develop public policies that nurture and sustain social capital, persisting problems of crime and poverty can be overcome. If people can be induced to participate in social networks in which they learn to trust and monitor one another's behaviour, they will be less inclined to crime, and to pollute or otherwise undermine the common goods on which their community depends. Similarly, policy implications can also be drawn about the logic of local democratic communities. If the story that Ostrom and her colleagues tell is true, then the best recipe for economic and political development is local democracy rather than a powerful central state. In other words, we should be wary of Hobbesian solutions to the problem of collective action, in which a centralized state tries to solve problems on behalf of local communities.

However, before we can jump to any policy conclusions, or indeed draw any conclusions at all, from seeing politics as collective choice, we need to note two problems.

6 Some Problems

Some readers will already have noticed that there is a particular focus in the way in which we view politics when we see it as a matter of collective choice by rational actors. That focus is on the production of public goods, which are thought to be of benefit to all members of society or of a certain group. Politics, however, is as much about conflicts of interest as it is about co-operation. Social classes, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups, men and women are often in conflict for scarce resources. Looking at politics as a device for achieving public goods seems to ignore this important dimension (as Alex Callinicos argues in chapter 4 of this volume).

In some ways this is true, but too great a stress upon this aspect of politics can be misleading, because *politics*, as distinct from war or overt physical conflict (which are the other ways in which competition over scarce resources can be pursued), can only work if participants respect the collective institutions within which conflicts are conducted. Consider the case of two competing political parties in elections. Elections will work as institutions only so long as the parties are prepared to accept the result and abide by it. Indeed, politics works even better when political parties not only abide by the result but conduct their campaigns in fair ways, for example by not seeking to bribe election officials. It is usually in the interest of all parties to a political dispute to have a peaceful way of reconciling their differences, to avoid falling into a Hobbesian struggle.

Interestingly, even those political theories most obviously identified with conflict perspectives on society recognize that in social organization there is an element of common interest. Marx and Engels began *The Communist Manifesto* with the ringing claim that the history of hitherto existing society was the history of class struggle, but quickly went on to show that the bourgeoisie 'had been the first to show what man's activity can bring about', accomplishing wonders 'far surpassing the Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals'. In other words, the rule of the bourgeoisie raised the level of productive resources for all in society, so that 'man was at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and relations with his kind'. What greater public good to humanity as a whole could have been given?

The second point to make about conflict is more mundane. To the extent to which there are different groups in society, each group may have an interest that is collective. So far we have largely considered goods that are public in the full sense of that term, that is to say that they benefit all, or nearly all, members of society. But we can apply the notion of a public good to sub-sets of society, so that a good can be public to them, but not to society at large. Honour among thieves is a public good for thieves, but it makes it more difficult for the authorities to catch thieves. If criminals can bribe public officials and get away with it, then that produces a public bad for everyone who is not a criminal. The policy implication in these sorts of case is to come up with measures that reduce co-operation among those sub-groups who are seeking something collectively good for themselves but bad for everyone else.

7 Conclusion

I started by contrasting individual rationality with collective irrationality, the combination which allowed the coexistence of private affluence and public squalor. It is possible to be pessimistic about the ability of human beings to solve their problems of collective action by laying a great deal of stress upon the iron logic of individual rationality in the face of the need to secure contributions to collective goods. I hope I have shown, however, that there is no need for despair, even if there are also no grounds for complacency. Repeated interactions in the right circumstances can begin to erode the iron logic of defection. Securing the right circumstances cannot be guaranteed. There is certainly no solution purely in institutions, since they may simply reinforce conventions of non-co-operation. Instead, there has to be a facilitative social environment and the possibility of democratic control. In short, when understood as the complex processes of collective choice, politics is about the successes and failures in creating policies, rules, institutions and agreements which, in restraining some behaviour by some individuals or groups, serves to promote the welfare of all. Some societies will simply be luckier than others in this regard. But to be unlucky is not to be fated. The task is not only to be rational, but to be intelligent in the creation of those circumstances that will produce collective rational self-interest in which public affluence can match private.

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7

The Political Approach to Human Behaviour: People, Resources and Power

Adrian Leftwich

1 Introduction and Argument

In this chapter I shall advance two linked arguments. The first is that politics, as an activity, is not confined to its usual association with public institutions concerned with the processes and practices of government, governing and the making of public policy. On the contrary, politics is a universal and pervasive aspect of human behaviour and may be found wherever two or more human beings are engaged in some collective activity, whether formal or informal, public or private. Moreover, I shall argue, politics is a fundamental, necessary and functional process of all such activity, however small-scale, however limited in scope and petty in its implications, and that it is therefore a feature of all human groups, institutions and societies, not just some of them: it always has been and always will be.

It follows that only a Robinson Crusoe-like figure (at least until he or she encounters someone like Friday) is evacuated from politics. Of course the forms of politics vary greatly, but are found everywhere – in societies with states and in societies without them. It is expressed in the formal public domains and relations of states, governments and people, as well as in the private domains of friends, family, clan and kin; it is present in public agencies and in private companies; it takes place in clubs or corporations, and in the web of more or less explicit relations of conflict, negotiation or co-operation between them all. What is common to all these contexts, and what makes them all political, is that each case represents a particular pattern of interaction between people, resources – and power. That's politics.

The second argument flows from the first. If politics, thus defined, is an inescapable and intrinsic aspect of all collective human activity, then it follows that if we are to understand human behaviour, we need *also* to understand it politically. And that is why the study of politics in the broadest sense is so important. The conception of politics which I advance here, therefore, forms the basis of what I shall call the political approach to human behaviour. These two central arguments will both organize and weave throughout the account of politics which follows. But first, some context is required.

2 Context and Conventions

The central idea that I have outlined above – that politics is the universal and timeless process which organizes and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power – may take some getting used to. On the face of it, it may seem a bit far-fetched and rather too general to be helpful. But, if so, then I suspect that will largely be because politics, at least in its everyday usage, has such a bad press. And that is mainly because when we think about politics it is still commonly the case that we identify it with a more or less exclusively 'public' realm of generally unpleasant squabbles and struggles for power, position and policy – which may be violent in some circumstances, as in civil or revolutionary war. Politics, on this view, is not really something that we, as ordinary people, do – it is different, alien and even distant from us, even if, now and again, we have to get involved, as in voting – though that is not, normally, compulsory and is becoming less common as voting turn-outs and political party and trade union memberships shrink, especially in the advanced industrial democracies that form the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) (Putnam, 2002: 393–416).

Politics is thus seen conventionally as something that *only* politicians do. Moreover, in popular opinion, in the jokes of stand-up comedians and even in the understandings of apparently serious television interviewers (Paxman, 2002), politics is not very nice and it is also not particularly useful either. This is hardly surprising, given that the way in which the mass media generally treat politics only serves to encourage such a view. The media's personalization of politics – 'President attacks opposition Leader', or 'Special advisers under fire', or 'New chief at the Treasury opposed by legislators' – has the effect of both trivializing the substance of politics and of attaching our conceptions of politics even more firmly to activities and behaviour generally associated with this rather narrow band of usually formal institutions to do with states and governments and their more or less complex relations with their people, whether as voters, citizens or subjects.

The more formal academic study of politics – the discipline of Politics or Political Science or Government – does not, of course, adopt such a superficial view. Unfortunately, students of politics constitute a small proportion of most populations: not many people study or teach it. But it is also the case that if one looks at almost any mainstream textbook on Politics one finds that the primary focus is still conventionally on this kind of 'public politics', as I shall call it for shorthand purposes. It remains largely concerned with constitutions and the nature, forms and activities of political parties and governments; pressure groups; elections, parliaments and congresses; military regimes, public bureaucracies and the multiplicity of processes involved in the making of public policy.

In the terms I used in an earlier chapter, many of both the public and academic approaches to politics are thus clearly located within the 'arena' or 'site' tradition and not the process tradition. Of course, all these 'public' activities are important forms and expressions of the wider processes of politics. Not only do they involve questions of social power and influence, but they also generate decisions and policies that normally affect everyone in the society. So I am not calling into question the importance or relevance of this 'public politics'. It clearly happens; it is clearly important; and it clearly has a direct impact on many aspects of our lives from tax levels to garbage removal, from the provision of nursery education to the quality of life and income for the elderly.

However, precisely because of this focus on formal and conventionally public institutions and public policies, the activity we call politics has become almost inextricably identified with them and what goes in and around them. Everything else beyond these arenas and sites of public politics is therefore defined out, as being non-political, 'social' or private. As a consequence, we have failed to see that politics is a pervasive and generalized *process* found in a very much wider range of contexts. And, by our failure to understand and analyse politics in such wider comparative contexts, we have hindered our capacity to generate more sophisticated understandings of its components and their interaction under different circumstances.

3 A Formal Definition of Politics

Politics comprises all the activities of co-operation, negotiation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby people go about organizing the use, production or distribution of human, natural and other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life. These activities are nowhere isolated from other features of life in society, private or public. They everywhere both influence and reflect the distribution of power, the structure of social organization and the institutions of culture and ideology in a society, or smaller groups within it. And all this may further influence and reflect the relations of a society (or a group or institution within one) with both its natural and social environments, that is, with other societies or groups and institutions within them (Leftwich, 1983). This brief and preliminary definition of politics requires some clarification and elaboration.

The scope of politics thus defined

First, this understanding of politics enables us to incorporate into its study a far wider and richer range of activities, past and present, than is normally the case in most teaching and research. Of course politics is concerned with the conventional matters of state with which we associate it – elections, the rise and fall of governments, coups, revolutions, the kinds of constitutional arrangement that make for regular patterns of political behaviour, policy-making and the myriad relations between states and the personal, social and economic affairs of the members of a community, and much else besides. But, on the view adopted here, it is not necessary for there to be a state for there to be politics: it can be found, for instance, in 'stateless' societies, in so-called 'tribes', in families, groups of kin and in villages, towns and regions well below the level of the nation state. And politics is also found in all non-public institutions, formal and informal – such as churches, factories, bureaucracies, universities, clubs, trade unions, insurance offices, women's groups, chambers of commerce, parents' associations, mafia and armies, and in all the relations which may obtain between them. Politics is, also, a necessary function of more informal or even temporary groupings of people, where there may be no formal institutions. Informal groups might include bus queues, football crowds, people meeting for the first time on a camp site, *ad hoc* pressure groups or voluntary associations; we might find politics among children inventing and playing games; in collaborative working groups (for instance in many agrarian societies in the developing world today where people pool their labour and time to clear fields for cultivation and for harvesting); among the residents of a housing estate; or the new migrants in the slums and shanty towns of the sprawling cities of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Now it is certainly the case that there are significant differences in their contexts, forms and particulars between, say, the politics of a family, school playground or an ethnic association of migrant workers on the one hand, and those of national elections, revolutionary struggles or international disputes on the other hand. It is equally true that there are differences (for instance in respect of scope, scale and complexity) between the politics of a parish council, housing association or local tennis club on the one hand, and those of a modern government, multinational corporation or international agency (like the World Bank) on the other hand. But, despite these differences, in each and every case – whether a family squabble or a policy dispute at the World Bank – one finds present the essential interactive ingredients of politics: *people* (commonly with different interests, preferences and ideas); *resources* (almost always scarce in that there will not be enough of whatever it is – whether land or time or money or opportunity – for everyone to get everything that they want; and *power* (the capacity to get one's way – whether by force, status, age, tradition, gender, wealth, influence or authority). The conception of politics I am advancing here enables (and I think requires) us to see all these situations and activities as political and hence to understand politics as intrinsic to human behaviour.

One brief example of a very micro and simple kind will, I hope, help to clarify the point at this stage. Consider two people on a tandem bicycle reaching a crossroads where they have to decide whether to turn left or right. Consider further that each wants to go in a different direction. Here, in microcosm, is an example of a political situation – all the essential ingredients are there. There are *people* (just two of them in this case) with different ideas and interests; *resources* (especially the tandem, which expresses a very special kind of scarcity, as it can only go in one direction, not both); and probably *power* (depending who is on the tandem). If a man and woman, what is the configuration of power relations between them? If parent and child, does the former decide in virtue of his or her status or authority? Or does he forgo that power in order to please the child, and does that transfer power to the child? Will age be a factor? If one person *owns* the tandem, does that or should that or will that give her greater power over which way to go?

Of course, they may not differ about the direction of travel, but there may nonetheless be some complaints about whether one or the other is pulling his or her weight, or whether to stop for a rest or to push on to the next tea-shop – and so on. My point, however, is that the requirement that two or more people have to make a collective decision, inevitably involving resources and power, is a fundamental and pervasive feature of human behaviour. And politics – as defined above – consists of all the activities of conflict, negotiation or co-operation whereby this happens.

Politics, problems and explanations

But I need to go further than this for I want to suggest that many of the urgent problems facing the societies of the world, both social and otherwise (such as epidemics, unemployment, crime, poverty and famine), are in large part a product of our *politics* (on famine, especially, see Sen, 1981). They are *not* simply the result of 'human nature', natural disasters, acts of God or random and inexplicable eruptions in the open plane of human affairs, now here, now there. Nor can such problems be understood or explained *only* in terms of the usual technical or specialist interpretations offered, for instance, by such disciplines as Medicine or Economics. They also need to be explained *politically*, with respect to how resources have been used and distributed. The vexed contemporary question of development in the so-called 'third world' is a classic example of this. Why are so many countries poor? How did colonial policies shape the underlying characteristics of their economies? How did newly independent states address the question of development? Why are levels of inequality within these often very poor countries so high? How have national and international (that is, aid or investment) resources been deployed? Why is corruption (Tanzi, 1998) in some countries so pervasive? Have the international development institutions – like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – imposed inappropriate policies on developing countries and, if so, to what extent and why? (Stiglitz, 2003). None of the questions can be answered with respect to 'natural' phenomena, like geography or the non-existence of valuable resources (like oil or gold). After all some countries in the tropics, like Singapore, have prospered as have others with no valuable natural resources (like South Korea). Answering these questions about poverty and inequality (on a national or international scale) requires *political* answers because all involve the way decisions have been taken about resource use and that involves understanding the relevant relations of power.

Of course there are some major problems – such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions – which are, depending on your point of view, acts of God or natural geological phenomena. But even then, for other problems, there is plenty of evidence accumulating that the way we as a species (or some of us with the power to do so) have used (or not controlled the use of) resources (such as fossil fuels and other ozone-damaging substances) has contributed directly to climate change and other environmental crises (as Neil Carter illustrates in chapter 12 in this volume).

3 Politics as a Process

Since it is central to the argument here that politics is the process whereby we, as a species, go about the use, production and distribution of resources, it is necessary to say a little more about these constitutive aspects of politics.

Resources

First, what is to be meant by 'resources'? By 'resources' I mean any things, both material and non-material, that people *use* to further their own desired ends, as individuals or collectively in groups. It includes the obvious material ones such as land, animals, people (whether free labour or slaves, for instance), capital and natural resources such as rivers, forests, minerals and seas – or the things extracted or made from them. But the term also denotes things which are non-material and which are not always immediately thought of as 'resources', such as time, education, status, influence, opportunity and knowledge. An example will help to illustrate what is meant by this.

Some years ago, the women's movement in Britain launched a campaign to 'reclaim the night', in order to make the streets safer. Both 'the night' and the streets, in this context, must be understood as resources; and the organization of protest and demonstrations about it represented a particular expression of politics: women wanting legitimately to access safely both streets and the night. They wanted more police patrols, better lighting and so on. In short they sought to use their power (as voters and consumers) to campaign for a particular set of resources to be deployed and distributed differently to achieve their legitimate objectives.

So whether resources are the usual material ones (land, natural endowments, capital or labour; or things created from those resources, like electricity or canned beans) on the one hand, or the less obvious and less tangible ones, on the other hand (such as the streets at night or the opportunity to learn to swim), the human species is everywhere engaged in seeking to use, arrange and distribute these resources in diverse ways. The conflict of interests and ideas about how to use or distribute such resources, in the context of different amounts of power, is what inevitably makes the activities to do with arranging the use or distribution of such resources so political.

Societies and people

Second, a central point to stress is that wherever the human species is (or has been) found, it is found living and working in groups which we can refer to here, simply, as societies. These in turn are everywhere composed of a variety of (usually) smaller groups, formal or informal, which sometimes overlap or coincide with each other in their composition, and sometimes do not. These include familial, residential, educational, peer, religious, gender, recreational, productive, distributive and many other groups. The point here is to emphasize the *social* character of our existence as a species, and also to underline again that the activity of politics is inextricably bound up with it. For without social groupings there is no society and no politics; and without politics there can be no organized collective activities such as those mentioned above. So politics – constituted by those universal interactions of people, resources and power in the pursuit of desired ends – is not simply an unnecessary, temporary or rather distasteful phenomenon of social existence, which we would rather do without. On the contrary, it is an absolutely intrinsic, necessary and functional feature of our social existence as a species. We could not get along without it.

Use, production and distribution

Third, as a species we have grown in numbers enormously. From an estimated 5 million people in about 8000 BC, the human population of the planet grew to about 300 million in 1 AD to something like 6,300 million (6.3 billion) in 2003. Throughout this period, the character of the societies we inhabit has changed, from small, self-sufficient hunting and gathering bands to larger societies based on different forms and combinations of agriculture and trade, to industrial and post-industrial societies of the modern era, spawning a global economy.

Now what is important for the argument here is that, unlike any other species, a central feature of the social life of the human species is that, in making a living, we are *producers*. At the very heart of our social existence has always been a very wide range of conscious and planned activities, involving the purposive use and production of resources for given ends. Of course, over time, we have come to use both old and new resources in different ways and major technological innovations (a very specific form of resource use) have been achieved. These range from stone and then iron tool-kits and (vitally) fire, on the one hand, through to the computerized manufacturing processes and nuclear energy of the modern era, on the other hand.

Once upon a time, prior to the fifteenth century, the organization of production and distribution was largely local or perhaps regional. But the steady march of 'globalization', through trade, imperial conquest and more recent economic and political connections, has meant that this is no longer the case. The resources of the world – such as capital, labour, technology and raw materials – are now combined in global production processes (Held et al., 1999). These productive activities have enabled us not only to survive as a species but to reproduce ourselves both socially and biologically.

Organization and co-operation

These productive and reproductive activities everywhere both involved and increasingly required the organization (either voluntarily or by force) of co-operation (literally, co-work). No other species even remotely does anything like this. Bands of hunter-gatherers, for instance, co-operated in subsistence production. People working in groups could more easily fell trees and place them across gullies or streams; co-operating groups deploying hunting nets could more effectively chase animals into them. Among pastoral peoples, herds of animals could be gathered together and tended in large numbers. Among the so-called 'hydraulic' societies of South, South-East and East Asia, for instance, high levels of organized co-operation enable remarkable irrigation systems to be devised, built and maintained. Today the global character of much modern production has taken this process to a highly complex level, as might be illustrated by considering a typical pair of modern running shoes. The raw materials (like rubber) may come from Malaysia, the finance capital from a consortium of European banks, the technology from a machine designed and built in Japan or America, while the labour may be concentrated in a factory in Vietnam, Costa Rica or China.

In short, all productive activities – from the most local and technologically simple to the global and most complex – have involved various forms of purposive and organized co-operation between human beings living and working in groups. And changes in the way communities have used and produced resources have been at the core of changes in their politics, whether these have had internal or external origins, or whether they have come about through innovation or force. But around and in the course of all this, in every human society, a variety of other political, social and cultural activities and skills has developed – such as rituals, ceremonies, art, music, games and of course language. These, too, either required or enhanced co-operation. Devising and applying rules for rituals, games, ceremonies or for clubs and organizations – not to mention elections, competitive tendering in industry, the criteria for receiving welfare payments, admission to universities or the civil service – are profoundly political activities. All of them, whether directly productive or social, in some way involve activities concerned with organizing the use, production or distribution of resources. That's politics.

Power

Finally, it is important to address the last but critical element which is common in all the complex and multiple interactions involving people and resources and which makes them *all* so necessarily political – power. Although there is much debate in Political Science and Sociology about the concept of power, especially political power, it is probably true to say that most political scientists do not have much difficulty in agreeing broadly as to what power *is*; though they certainly disagree sharply about its origins, sources, basis, forms, distribution, measurement and interpretation (Lukes, 1974; Alford and Friedland, 1985; Birch, 2001; Hay, 2002). 'Power [*Macht*]', wrote Max Weber, 'is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (Weber, 1965: 152). This idea was developed by the distinguished American political scientist Robert A. Dahl, who argued that 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do' (Dahl, 1957: 202–3).

Other theorists (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974) have pointed out that power is not always so overtly expressed in situations of open conflict or difference. Its form and exercise may be more subtle. For instance, by keeping a subject out of discussion (off the agenda), it is possible for some people to maintain a status quo which is favourable to them without any direct confrontation with those who are not favoured. Similarly, the institutional arrangements of a prevailing social structure, backed by culture and an ideology to sustain it, may so comprehensively structure the relations between individuals or groups – as in feudal or caste societies or in societies where the relations of gender are systemically unequal – that those people or groups at the bottom of the pile consider it legitimate and appropriate that they be there and do not challenge it.

But, in short, whether power is exercised openly and forcefully, whether it is mediated through negotiation or whether it is embedded and obscured in a particular institutional structure (culture or formal rules) and legitimated by an associated ideology, it is always present in human affairs. And a concern with power, as I elaborated in chapter 1 – its sources, forms, control, legitimacy, uses and abuses and its implications for all other socio-economic relationships – is the distinctive and defining focus of the discipline of Politics, or Political Science or Government. It follows from this, moreover, that the study of politics, as defined here, and hence of power and how it works, constitutes the integrating focus for the explanatory concerns of the historical and social sciences.

4 People, Resources and Power Illustrated

A moment's thought will enable one to see that in almost any 'social relationship', as Weber referred to it, involving two or more people, there will be a relationship, or dynamic, of power. That dynamic of power may be as much to do with strength as with tradition, age or gender, economic power or military power, votes or formal authority, status or seniority, the possession of an office or expertise or the power of patronage or ideology – and much more. Now this dynamic of power – on whatever it may be based – is critical in the way that the people involved come to decide about the use, production or distribution of resources, whatever they may be and wherever it may be.

To illustrate, the traditional balance of power – whether in Victorian or Indian families – was largely a function of gender (male) and age dominance. And while strong elements of male power remain in familial and other relationships between the genders today (whether matrimonial, social, professional or occupational), the effect of the women's movement in the post-war years has been to shift that balance of power, backed up by legislation and sustained by social change and also by change in the attitudes and expectations of both men and women, even in India. As a consequence, women in general (but, in practice, some women in particular, more than others) have far more equal access to a whole range of resources (some in the form of rights) not only in the family but also in spheres ranging from jobs to educational opportunity.

Jumping from the family level to that of inter-governmental organizations, it is useful to illustrate the argument further by pointing to an institution like the World Bank, an organization made up of member countries. Here, in the decision-making core of the institution, the Executive Board, one dollar buys one vote, so countries which make a large financial contribution to the Bank have more votes and hence more power than those who contribute less. This enables them, when necessary, to determine not only overall policy directives of the Bank but, ultimately, how Bank resources will be used in the promotion of development in poor countries.

The same is true of clubs and corporations, trade unions and tennis clubs, universities and voluntary associations, factories and families and in all those countless situations where two or more people are collectively engaged in taking decisions about resource use, production or distribution for some common purpose. There is always a dynamic of power. It is inextricably implicated in such situations and in the decisions that need to be made; it is embedded in all that we do as a productive species; it shapes outcomes where there is difference or outright conflict. In short, relations of power are an intimate condition of the relations of people.

Power may be used in any such context for good or for bad. That judgement is essentially a normative one, depending on one's values or criteria. It may be used with brutality and force. Equally, it may not be so obviously present where there is an identity of outlook or interest, or enough in common for negotiation to substitute for compulsion. One basis of power – such as gender, age, seniority and status in a traditionally patriarchal context – may be countered or balanced by another (perhaps emerging) basis of power – such as voting strength where new rules and processes for decision-taking have been introduced. Indeed, one of the deeper underlying forms of conflict in recent modern history, throughout both the public and private politics of many societies, has been concerned with which *rules and institutions* should govern the exercise of official power and the making of public policy. The great power struggles between church and state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European history provide one such example: and this is something which is being repeated in some countries in the Islamic world. Another example may be identified in the (as yet) unresolved conflict between the institutions of patronage and meritocracy in many developing societies, something which was widespread in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European history (Neild, 2002). And the many remaining inequalities between men and women with respect to jobs, income and opportunities – privately or in the public sphere – also reflect a conflict of power between the old institutions and rules of patriarchy, on the one hand, and those of egalitarian liberal individualism, and social democracy, at the very least, on the other.

The discussion thus far should have helped to clarify the conception of politics being advanced here and to have provided some indication of its scope and applicability. At the heart of the approach is the claim that wherever we live and work in groups, and whatever we do in our collective productive and social lives, we are always engaged in activities of conflict, negotiation or co-operation in the use, production or distribution of resources, and that relations of power are always central to them. That is, we are constantly engaged in politics.

5 The Political Approach to Human Behaviour

The economic approach to human behaviour

Some years ago the distinguished American economist Gary Becker argued that what he referred to as the 'economic approach to human behaviour' provides a 'valuable unified framework for understanding *all* human behaviour' (Becker, 1986: 119). Becker's approach is anchored in the rational choice school of political economy which, broadly speaking, seeks to apply the principles of neo-classical economics to what are conventionally thought of as non-market or typically 'non-economic' situations.

The economic approach to human behaviour holds that the principles which govern our economic behaviour also govern all other areas of our behaviour, from decisions about marriage and divorce to decisions about embarking on crime. Essentially, it is argued, people everywhere seek to maximize their utility: that is, we act rationally to achieve as many of our desired ends (utility) as possible. In order to do this we make calculations about the respective costs and benefits of particular actions or options open to us in a context where we do not have enough resources to attain all our desired aims (what economists would call scarce means and competing ends). These principles apply to all our behaviour in the same way as they apply to the way we choose between this rather than that car when deciding to buy one, or between buying a car or buying a house, or between different brands of sausage with respect, say, to issues of quality and quantity. Becker and others have applied this method in explaining racially discriminatory behaviour, crime, education and the uses of time, church attendance, capital punishment, the extinction of animals, the incidence of suicide, choosing a mate or the number of children people choose to have (Becker, 1986). For example, he argues that in considering whether to embark on crime, criminals weigh up the possible benefits of a successful robbery against the possible costs if they were to be caught.

In technical terms, the heart of the economic approach to human behaviour consists of the 'unflinching and relentless' application of 'the combined assumptions of maximizing behaviour, market equilibrium, and stable preferences' (Becker, 1986: 110) or, in other words: 'all human behaviour can be viewed as involving participants who maximize their utility from a stable set of preferences and accumulate an optimal amount of information and other inputs in a variety of markets' (ibid. 119). While the crime example, above, gives a flavour of the approach, perhaps the best example is Becker's application of the 'economic approach' to the question of marriage:

> According to the economic approach, a person decides to marry when the utility expected from marriage exceeds that expected from remaining single or from the additional search for a more suitable mate. Similarly, a married person terminates his (or her) marriage when the utility anticipated from becoming single or marrying someone else exceeds the loss in utility from separation, including losses due to physical separation from one's children, division of joint assets, legal fees, and so forth. Since many persons are looking for mates, a *market* in marriages can be said to exist: each person tries to do the best he can, given that everyone else in the market is trying to do the best they can. A sorting of persons into different marriages is said to be an equilibrium sorting if persons not married to each other in this sorting could not marry and make each better off. (Becker, 1986: 115)

In its ambition and its sweep, there is something mischievously imperialistic about the way in which the economic approach invades areas of human behaviour normally regarded as the domain of other disciplines. And although the approach has come under criticism, there is much to be said for it as an analytical and explanatory method, and in many respects it has helped to cut a secular swathe through often moralistic, idealistic and even romantic notions in the explanation of human motivations and behaviour, and in its application to politics (Laver, 1997).

However, from the point of view of the argument which I have developed here, its major limitation is its lack of attention to the question of *power*, whether the basis of this power be gender, age, wealth, voting strength or straightforward coercive (military) capacity. Much, if not most, human behaviour is necessarily undertaken in the course of collective and co-operative activity, in the neutral and descriptive sense of people having, or choosing, to work together – whether building a bridge or an organization, whether tending cattle or working in a shop, school, family, club or farm. It follows and stands to reason that the relations of power within such contexts – and bearing down on them from without – decisively shape the range of options and choices individuals may make. It is hardly an adequate answer to respond, therefore, that people act rationally to achieve desired ends *within* such constraints and to claim simultaneously that the approach offers an effective tool for understanding human behaviour. For it is clear that human behaviour is as much a function of the relations of power of which it is a part, voluntarily or not, as it is a function of the rational calculation of the respective costs and benefits of various options for action. As one distinguished political scientist has observed: 'Coercion and force are as much a part of everyday life as are markets and economic exchange' (Bates, 2001: 50). From an explanatory point of view, therefore, an understanding of the structure and relations of power is as important as an understanding of the calculus of rational action.

The political approach to human behaviour

And it is precisely this which the political approach to human behaviour provides. For not only does it recognize the intrinsically political nature of all collective human behaviour, but it also recognizes that most of it is inexplicable outside its collective context (let alone the meaning which actors themselves attribute to it). In recognizing this, the political approach assumes that contexts in practice constitute the relations of power and are normally sustained and legitimated by associated institutions of social organization, culture and ideology. Marriage, to take Becker's example, in some contemporary societies and at various times in the history of European societies, is a good example. In much of South Asia, for instance, arranged marriages are still common, as indeed they are in many immigrant Asian families in the Asian diaspora. How can it conceivably be thought that a person 'decides to marry' (Becker, 1986: 115) on the basis of an estimation of costs and benefits when he or she is the object in an arranged marriage? The economic approach to human behaviour, with its focus on the calculating propensity of the individual actor, helps us little in understanding marital behaviour in such contexts (except in analysing parental behaviour whose strategic choices for their children's mates may be made to serve wider political or commercial aims), especially where the individual has barely participated in the decision. The political approach, however, provides a far better starting point for explaining this, and much other, behaviour by asking, first, what relations of power govern the relations between, and scope for individual choice of, the people concerned.

However, given the bad press which politics usually has, there may well be resistance to the idea that all collective human behaviour, that is, yours and mine, is best understood politically, in broadly the same way (though with considerably less public exposure) that one might seek to understand the behaviour of politicians, legislatures and governments. Starting with a less contentious example, how can the political approach help to make sense of apparently *non-political* situations, say in a school or factory, bureaucracy or office? The answer is that anyone who works in any such institution will immediately recognize that its co-operative activities and disputes are fundamentally and regularly concerned with how resources should be used, and by whom and for what purposes. That's politics. The issues may have to do with facilities for the employees, maternity or paternity leave, equal opportunities for men and women, wages, or the allocation of offices, desks and even hat-stands, and so on. The ebb and flow of these activities, and the outcome of the disputes, are everywhere and always the outcome of the relations between the interactive elements that constitute politics: people, resources – and power.

But even if that much is granted for such impersonal institutions, people might still feel that they are being demeaned by describing their other activities – personal, social or voluntary – as political, because politics is thought to be such a shabby business. How can one think of a marriage as political, or a small voluntary organization? Or a tennis club? Or a rural co-operative coordinating the sale of members' produce and buying inputs cheaply in bulk? Or the Women's Institute which is avowedly 'non-political' in its self-advertisements? Or a family debate about whether to go on holiday or redecorate the kitchen? Or a small academic department in a school or university? What on earth do they have to do with politics? How can they even remotely be thought of as comparable expressions of the processes found in the 'public politics' of policy-making?

The answer to these questions takes us back to the original definition of politics – all the activities of conflict, negotiation or co-operation in the way we use, produce and distribute resources. For that is what all these groups do. Within them all, there are disputes and debates about what policy to follow and how to achieve its aims. Sometimes there is co-operation, sometimes not. Family arguments can turn ugly and violent; the treasurer of the co-operative may run off with the funds; there may be intense competition and lobbying for promotion in a small business; within a small voluntary organization there might be heated debate about whether to organize a boycott of a local supermarket because of the source of some of its supplies; should the tennis club increase its annual membership fee in order to resurface the courts or try to attract more members to keep the costs down? People will have different views, ideas and interests. And all of these possibilities express and reflect what happens in 'public politics' as well, because the same interacting elements are involved – people, resources and power.

So we should not be reluctant to embrace the political approach to human behaviour, nor shun it because of its negative conventional association with 'public politics'. We are all, all the time, engaged in collective endeavours; we are all, all the time, engaged in the use, production or distribution of resources; we are all, in all our relations with others, situated in more or less explicit, operational and sometimes shifting relations of power whether at home or at work, in the club or in the Cabinet, in a small voluntary organization or the International Monetary Fund. It may be that some decisions about resource use and distribution have a far wider and more emphatic impact than others – compare a government decision about raising or lowering welfare payments or a local authority's decision to close a school with, say, a parent's decision about the level and distribution of pocket money or a student union's decision to organize a city-wide fund-raising campaign for charity. The fact that the latter activities are not binding on as many people as the former activities does not make them any the less political. They may be smaller in scope and scale, but are still political.

So the political approach to human behaviour draws on some of the central insights of rational choice that people do seek to promote their utility, through advancing their interests, preferences and ideas. But it goes further and parts company with the limiting focus on individual rationality by emphasizing, first, that the bulk of our decisions and objectives are unavoidably social in context in that we seldom decide only for ourselves (there are implications and consequences for others) and that our decisions are seldom only our own; that, second, for most of our lives we are participants in more or less stable or transient collaborative institutions of two or more people where we are constantly engaged in the use, production or distribution of resources; and third, that the structure of social organization (whether in factory or family) and, above all, the relations of power, together establish the constitution of the group. Whether those relations of power are of class or caste, wealth or status, race or gender, age or authority, hierarchy or patronage, the political approach to human behaviour takes as a very serious proposition that they are fundamental in shaping not only *how* we decide to behave, but how we actually *do* behave in practice.

6 Conclusions

I hope that this brief account will help readers to think about politics as an activity which is far wider, much richer and certainly more interesting and important than its usual identification with governments and public affairs. My hope, too, is that the political approach to human behaviour suggested in this chapter will enable people to think more systematically about the politics of everyday life, in all groups and institutions with which they may be familiar, locally or in national terms, past or present, at home or abroad. If they do so, it will soon become clear how limiting and confining are the conventional boundaries and substantive concerns of the discipline of Politics, and how necessary it is to open up the disciplinary frontiers to a much fuller and freer interdisciplinary movement of evidence and explanation. It is not easy, to be sure. The whole terrain is an intellectual *and political* minefield, dotted with institutional jealousies and border police, with well-placed and often concealed booby-traps, diversions and dead-ends. Some people who attempt to work in such areas never seem to emerge alive. Those who do, often re-emerge tattered and in such a state of shock that they never seem able to say anything about any concrete politics or problems of the world again. But it has been done and can be done.

No one ever claimed that social science was easy, or that the politics of human societies is simple to understand. They are not. Nonetheless, if more people try to understand, so much the better. For they will help to expand the study and understanding of politics in a way that may help to prevent the discipline of Politics from withering, stagnating or becoming irrelevant. In so doing they may also help to make us all more self-conscious of our politics so that we shall become more able, as communities, *to participate* actively in their management and improvement, wherever we may live or work. And that is highly political.

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8

Politics Beyond Boundaries: A Feminist Perspective

Judith Squires

1 Introduction and Argument

There is no true site of politics. Politics is everywhere. This is so because no realm of life is immune to relations of conflict and power. There is always the possibility that social relations could be ordered differently, which means that there is inevitable dispute as to the most appropriate, or just, way of organizing these relations otherwise.

This broad answer to the question 'what is politics?' issues a challenge to many conventional ways of defining politics, which frequently entail the marking of its boundaries. Politics, it is frequently claimed, concerns government and the institutions of the state. Politics is what takes place within these institutions: other spheres of life are non-political. The association of politics with the institutions of government creates a very particular boundary between the public, as the apparatus of government, and the private, as civil society. This understanding of politics derives from a liberal conviction that there both is and *should* be a private sphere beyond the reach of politics, which is pre- or non-political. This conviction can be traced back to a natural-rights tradition in which the role of the state is to protect the existence of pre-political rights.

Yet natural-rights theories have been subject to increasing scepticism as it becomes ever more evident that – stripped of their theological basis – these 'natural' rights are contingent and contested. When rights themselves come to be seen as political rather than pre-political, the possibility of a non-political sphere of life is curtailed. It then becomes clear that the accepted boundaries of politics are but a product of past political struggles.

This is significant because the narrow association of politics with the institutions of state and government excludes the 'private' sphere of domesticity and sexuality from political sight. Given that women have conventionally been defined in terms of their relation to the domestic, this particular conception of the political has effectively marginalized women as political actors. By contrast, a broader conception of politics, as those processes concerned with the struggle over the control and distribution of power across a whole range of sites, opens up space for considering issues of gender as central to the study of politics. It is for this reason that feminists have largely adopted this broader view, making visible the extent to which relations of power are far more pervasive than the kind of power normally associated with institutions and government.

Moreover, having eroded the boundaries of the political, feminists have then gone on to demand the reconfiguration of these broadly conceived sets of power relations. The relations of power in the personal domain should be understood as political, but traditionally formal domains of politics also require rethinking from a feminist perspective. In this way feminism makes several key contributions to debates about the nature of the political: in eroding the boundaries of the political; in focusing attention on how the old institutional 'arenas' of the political themselves need reform; and in exploring the linkage between the institutions of government and wider social practices, such that they can be reconfigured more profoundly.

In this chapter I will, first, indicate the nature of the narrow institutional conception of politics, and then show why and in what ways feminists have worked to erode the boundaries of this conception of politics, developing a more extensive power-based conception of politics. I will go on to indicate how this project relates to the various feminist critiques of the public / private dichotomy, especially, and consider the impact of this project in terms of feminist engagements in politics. These engagements have encompassed both social movement activism, which focuses on politicizing and transforming relations frequently presumed personal, and hence 'non-political', and also an entry into political parties and the state, often resulting in the transformation of political practices such that they facilitate greater and more equal participation by women.

2 Moving Beyond Institutionalism

The origins of the discipline of politics are commonly located with Aristotle's *The Politics*, in which he evaluates differing constitutions in search of the best method of government. Since this time there has been deep-rooted disagreement as to what constitutes the political. There are those who define politics in terms of governmental institutions and others who define it in terms of relations of power. Within the latter camp there are some who focus on a very narrowly defined range of power relations and others who adopt a very broad range. Feminist theorists have, by and large, promoted the second conception of politics as relations of power, and worked to extend the accepted understanding of the range of relations which might then be deemed political.

For those who have understood politics as the institutions of government the political is equated with the juridical – issues of rights, justice and responsibility. This contrasts with those who have understood politics as being about power relations, and who tend to equate the political with issues of policy and pragmatism. The institutional perspective has been a dominant one within the academic study of politics in contemporary liberal states. During the 1970s the instrumental conception of politics was even deemed to be the true definition, finally releasing Political Science 'from its synthetic past', thereby enabling theoretical consensus (Easton, 1968: 87). The power-based conception of politics that focused on policy and pragmatism was in large part a reaction to the dominance of this institutional approach, but frequently shared its focus on individuals rather than groups, structures or systems (Connolly, 1991: 74).

Feminist political theorists and activists have been at the forefront of a move to adopt a broader definition of politics as the study of power, extending and transforming the early power-based conceptions of politics in their refusal to delimit political power and political decisions from all other types of power and decisions. Many contemporary theorists of politics, not only feminists, exhibit scepticism not only about particular presumed boundaries to the political, but also at the possibility of producing any objective criteria of delineation at all. As Leftwich comments: 'There is, in fact, nothing *more political* than the constant attempts to exclude certain types of issues from politics' (Held and Leftwich, 1984: 144). Far from being neutral clarifications of empirical fact, these delimitations are 'strategies of depoliticization' whereby issues are kept off the political agenda. The achievement of such a delimitation, and the building of particular boundaries around ('official') conceptions of what constitutes the political, is itself a manifestation of power.

If one accepts this challenge, it then becomes necessary to consider whether there can be any convincing boundary to the political at all. Focusing attention on politics as *power*, in all its manifestations, reduces the significance of the precise boundaries of the institutional form of politics (Leftwich, 1984: 10). Indeed it runs the risk of generating a definition of politics that is so wide as to lose its specificity and usefulness. Politics, Held and Leftwich tell us:

> is a phenomenon found in and between all groups, institutions (formal and informal) and societies, cutting across public and private life. It is involved in all the relations, institutions and structures that are implicated in the activities of production and reproduction in the life of societies. It is expressed in all the activities of co-operation, negotiation and struggle over the use, production and distribution of resources which this entails. (Held and Leftwich, 1984: 144)

Though this broad conception of the political has its weaknesses, it is nonetheless the one that has – more than any other – created the disciplinary space for considering issues of gender as central to the study of politics. The narrow institutional conceptions of politics adopted within most dominant renderings of the discipline perhaps account for the fact that the study of politics has been one of the last to take up the challenge of feminist scholarship, and more recently men's studies, and modify the canon. The more extensive power-based conception of the political both emerges from, and makes possible, the feminist challenge to the orthodoxy of politics.

The dominance of the narrow institutional conception of politics foreclosed other areas of power as legitimate areas of political study. This served to de-politicize and thereby naturalize numerous social relations that systematically perpetuated men's power over women. For example, until the end of the 1970s the plight of the women suffering from domestic violence in the UK had been ignored by society and there were very few options available to women seeking alternatives to living with violent men (Hague and Wilson, 2000). Protection under civil or family law was almost impossible to get, domestic violence was not accepted as a reason for homelessness and the police dismissed 'domestics' as a trivial and time-wasting use of their resources. However, in the context of the growth of the second-wave feminist movement, there were by 1977 nearly 200 refuges in the UK for women escaping domestic violence. Women's Aid, the feminist organization that established these refuges, saw domestic violence as a reflection of unequal power relations both in the society and in personal relationships and as a symptom of the more general male violence and domination over women. In other words, for Women's Aid, domestic violence was a serious *political* problem. The emergence of organizations like Women's Aid served to challenge existing boundaries of political discourse. It also established women as political actors who were engaged in the process of changing laws and state practices, but also engaged in empowering other women to determine their own futures.

3 Feminism and Politics

There is an oddly paradoxical relation between politics and feminism. On the one hand, the traditional institutional manifestations of politics located in government have been notoriously resistant to the incorporation of women, their interests or perspectives. Politics has been more exclusively limited to men and more self-consciously masculine than any other social practice (Brown, 1988: 4). On the other hand, feminism has always been explicitly political. Feminism, as Anne Phillips tells us, 'is politics' (Phillips, 1998: 1). Its project, to realize fundamental transformations in gender relations, is overtly political in the sense that it seeks to make more equal the power relations between men and women.

The apparent tension between the claim that 'feminism is politics' and that politics has been exclusively limited to men lies in the different notions of politics employed here. Women have largely been excluded from the political, where politics is defined as the institutional forum of government. But when it is defined primarily as a process of negotiation or struggle over the distribution of power it becomes evident that, far from being excluded from politics, women have both shaped and been shaped by its operation. Feminist theorists would appear to be claiming both that the political is explicitly masculine and excludes women, and also that women are engaged in political struggle to alter existing power relations between the sexes. The paradoxical nature of these two statements subjects the political itself to scrutiny. It also raises questions about the nature of feminist objectives in relation to the political: is the ambition to include women in a political from which they are currently excluded, or to reconfigure a political by which they are currently oppressed, or perhaps both?

Thus, if there is a distinctively feminist answer to the question 'what is politics?' it is, in light of the argument above, an answer that takes two parts. The first part entails an endorsement of the ubiquity of politics, from which there follows a determination to reveal the artificial and unsustainable nature of existing attempts to maintain strong boundaries around a political realm. The second part entails a commitment to exploring and advocating ways in which social relations might be ordered differently, such that they embody a norm of gender justice.

Feminists have tended to accept the broad conception of politics, taking this as a reality from which they go on to address the normative question of how to change the diverse spheres of social relations in pursuit of gender justice. One should not, however, expect to find any great consensus in relation to the second part of the answer to 'what is politics?', for here there is significant normative dispute – as befits politics. Even within the early second-wave women's movement, serious division emerged between socialist and radical feminists, with socialist feminists emphasizing the importance of childcare, family allowance, women organizing in paid work, and women's control over their own fertility and sexuality, and radical feminists emphasizing violence against women as the central issue (Segal, 1987: 46). Such divisions have only increased and become more complex with the increased awareness of 'intersectionality' and the diversity of women's experiences and commitments. So one should resist the temptation to assume that feminists share a common political agenda. If feminists have a distinctive shared contribution to make to the debate about the nature of politics, it is perhaps in assuming a critical function, casting doubt on the presumed immutability of existing social relations, thereby rendering them political.

But why is it that feminists have tended to adopt the broad definition of politics, eschewing attempts to define either the essence or the boundaries of the political? It is, at heart, because a central element of the feminist challenge to mainstream politics consists in exposing the extent to which dominant conceptions of politics have been constituted in ways that simultaneously and systematically exclude women and femininity, on the one hand, and privilege men and masculinity, on the other hand. The central task in any feminist consideration of politics must therefore be to explore why and how politics has come to be associated with men and masculinity; how and why it has excluded women and femininity; and how this state of affairs might be changed. This means that a central element of any feminist engagement with the nature of politics will entail first and foremost an exploration and critique of existing assumptions regarding the boundaries of the political. Only once these presumed boundaries have been unsettled, and their androcentric nature understood, can we begin to develop conceptions of politics that are less gendered.

The long-standing feminist determination to unsettle dominant discourses regarding the boundaries of politics has frequently entailed a critique of the presumed correlation between politics and the public sphere. In particular, it has entailed various critiques of the public / private dichotomy and its association with a political / non-political dichotomy.

In other words, feminists start by making visible the extent to which women have been systematically excluded from the political where politics is about the institutions of government. They then offer an expanded conception of politics, which politicizes previously presumed spheres of life, including spheres that have been conventionally understood to be paradigmatically female such as the domestic. Feminist contributions to debates about politics are not therefore limited to demands for inclusion within a political realm as currently conceived; they also entail varied attempts to reconfigure politics as practices (of power) more generally.

4 Eroding the Boundaries of the Political: The Feminist Critiques

Modern political theorists, whatever their personal commitments, have been able to admit the relevance or significance of feminist questions and criticisms only with great difficulty. This is not because of individual bias, but because 'such matters are systematically excluded from their theorizing by the modern patriarchal construction of the object of their studies, "political" theory itself' (Pateman, 1989: 3). The central mechanism by which this exclusion is realized is the assumption that the political is public and that the private realm of domestic, familial and sexual relations falls outside the proper concern of the study of the political.

The distinctions that are commonly drawn between the public and private have been used, and continue to be used, to sustain women's oppression. Catharine MacKinnon goes so far as to suggest that the very idea of a private realm is 'a means of subordinating women's collective needs to the imperatives of male supremacy' (1989: 188). Whilst not all feminists would endorse MacKinnon's stance, most have embraced some form of critique of the public / private dichotomy. Significantly, the key demands of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s spanned issues conventionally located within both public and private domains: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, and free 24-hour nurseries (Segal, 1987: 57). In asserting these demands as political objectives the women's movement issued a profound challenge to the established assumption that politics pertains to the public sphere alone.

Feminist theorists reinforced this challenge by critiquing the theoretical underpinnings of the public / private dichotomy. These critiques fall into three broad categories.

The critique of individualism

The first critique focuses on assumptions of what it means to be an individual, claiming that the liberal institutionalist conception of politics rests on a discourse of individual autonomy, which is prescriptive rather than descriptive; structuring, rather than simply reflecting, social relations. The liberal theory of the self is a theory of a rational individual engaged in abstract as opposed to contextual moral reasoning (see Squires, 1999: 140–63). The insistence on the value of the mind over the body, and the adoption of a rather narrow conception of rationality, entails a rejection of what is commonly associated with the feminine (see Lloyd, 1984). This, feminists have argued, is not a neutral description of human nature; rather it is part of a discourse that constructs individuals in this image. Recognition of this fact leads to two further insights.

The first is that very particular social structures and institutions are needed to shape individuals into this mould and this insight leads to a concern with the processes of reproduction, nurturance and socialization – those material processes that construct people as autonomous individuals (Lister, 2003). These are processes that have conventionally been located within the family and so hidden by the liberal construction of the public / private distinction as a state / civil society distinction. The second insight is that this conception of subjectivity may not apply equally to everyone and leads to an exploration of the extent to which women have been understood as subordinate, dependent and emotional, and so excluded from the category of 'individuals' within liberal political theorizing (Prokhovnik, 1999). The discourse that privileges autonomous reasoning as distinctly human has generally assumed women to be incapable of such rationality, and so not properly deserving of the rights granted to individuals by the liberal state.

These two issues are linked in women's status as primary carers. Neither the process of caring and nurturing nor the status of carers and nurturers have been of concern in liberal political theory. The concern of feminist theorists is that, as a result of this omission, not only have women been denied the rights and privileges granted to the 'rational individuals' of liberal societies, but also that a crucial aspect of life, associated with the caring performed by women, has been glossed over. This insight has implications not only for the role of caring as a practice, but also for its role as a perspective. The significance of caring, as both practice and perspective, has generated a large feminist literature on the 'ethic of care' (Tronto, 1993; Mackay, 2001).

The limitations of social contract theory

This critique of the public / private distinction is complemented by a second, which focuses on contract. Here the object of concern is not the rational liberal individual, but liberalism's origins in social contract theory. The tradition of social contract theory (manifest in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) conceives of political institutions and arrangements as the outcome of an agreement between individuals who believe that they will be better off under these arrangements than they would be in state of nature (see Heywood, 2003: 39–41). The critique of this tradition places the subjectivity-based critique in historical context. The focus here is the particular social and political forces that created the situation in which women were confined to a private, domestic, care-taking role whilst men were presumed to be able to move freely between the private (domestic) and the public (civil society and state) spheres. Carole Pateman influentially claims that the social contract that generates liberal politics and establishes the political freedom of individuals simultaneously entails the sexual subordination of women in marriage (Pateman, 1988). The social contract that is required to create both civil society and the state requires a sexual contract to accommodate the patriarchy that pre-dates liberalism. The liberal social contract therefore represents the reorganization, but not the abolition, of patriarchy. Patriarchy was relocated into the private domain and reformulated as complementary to civil society. In this way gender is given a highly specific and structuring role within liberal theory at the same time as liberal theory presents itself as gender-neutral.

Liberalism, the state and the family

A third critique of the public / private dichotomy, articulated most clearly by Susan Moller Okin, focuses on the historical practice of liberal political regimes. The charge here is that, notwithstanding the abstract commitment to the importance of a prohibition on state intervention in the private sphere, liberal states have in practice regulated and controlled the family (Okin, 1989). Not only has this practice been contrary to the fundamental principle of liberalism, it has been adopted in pursuit of a profoundly illiberal end: the perpetuation of patriarchy. Whilst the state adopted this directly non-neutral relation to personal and domestic life, it also upheld practices within the market-place, which presumed that those engaged in waged work could rely on the support and care of someone at home. To add to the insult, from the perspective of women, the principle of non-intervention in the private sphere has been used by the state to justify inaction regarding cases of child-abuse, marital rape and domestic violence. As Zillah Eisenstein has pointed out:

> The state is said to be public (by definition) and therefore divorced from the private realm, which is the area of women's lives. The state can appear, through its own ideology, to be unrelated to the family as the private sphere, when in actuality this sphere is both defined and regulated *in relation* to the state realm. (1993: 26)

As invoked by liberal states, the institutional definition of politics has worked to reinforce patriarchal power relations within the family, whilst formally denying their responsibility to intervene in familial disputes on the grounds that it is essential to limit state intervention in civil society and personal relations. This tension, arising from the very formulation of liberalism itself, is the inevitable conclusion of the ambivalent role of the family in relation to the private sphere.

All three critiques have effectively highlighted the tension running through contemporary conceptions of the public / private distinction, a tension that grows out of the simultaneous appeal to the classic notion of the private as a sphere of repetitive, domestic drudgery, and the liberal notion of the private as a sphere of unconstrained individual liberty. The critical contribution of the feminist engagement with this dichotomy has been to focus on the extent to which women have been made to carry the burden of this tension. While men were encouraged to view the domestic as a sphere of personal privacy (a particular combination of the two liberal distinctions – state / civil society and social / personal), women have frequently experienced it as a sphere of constraint and oppression (a manifestation of a classical, or patriarchal, distinction). The two sexes were apparently living different manifestations of the dichotomy simultaneously. Yet, importantly, both were subsumed with a liberal conception of politics that played with the ambiguity to its own benefit. Liberalism, Diana Coole notes:

> tends to hold a schizoid attitude toward the private realm as civil society and domestic sphere, modern and traditional, masculine and

> feminine, individualist and familial, contractual and natural... Although its inconsistencies are theoretically unsatisfying, in the economy of gender power, they permit an entirely functional flexibility. (2000: 343)

Taken together these three feminist critiques of the public / private distinction draw attention to the way in which the liberal notion still incorporates an earlier classic notion of the public / private distinction as a division between the political sphere and a pre-political natural sphere of the home. They differ in that the second feminist critique (advocated by Pateman) views this incorporation as defining of liberalism itself, whilst the third feminist critique (advocated by Okin) views the incorporation as inconsistent with liberalism. They agree, though, in the assessment that, to the extent that women are part of this home world, they constitute the unacknowledged preconditions of the male public world of autonomous individuals. As a result most mainstream political theorists have ignored the domestic sphere. This has worked to marginalize women in relation to the political precisely because they have conventionally been assigned to this domestic sphere. Moreover, the classification of the family as private has frequently worked to hide abuse and domination within familial relations, thereby shielding them and placing them beyond 'political' scrutiny or legal intervention.

It is for these reasons that feminists have largely rejected the narrow institutional conception of politics whose boundaries act to exclude a 'private sphere', and have embraced a broad conception of politics as power. The de-naturalization of the 'private' and deconstruction of the public / private boundary has, in other words, had serious consequences for perceptions of 'politics', where politics was defined negatively in relation to a boundary demarcating the political from a 'private' non-political sphere.

5 In and Against the State

This feminist determination to extend the boundaries of the political to encompass spheres of life previously presumed to be apolitical has lent some credence to the idea that feminists were primarily or exclusively concerned with personal politics – that is, with politics outside the conventional institutions of government. For one consequence of the refusal to accept an institutionalist conception of politics was the association of feminism with informal social movement politics located outside the state. Indeed the feminist suspicion of narrow conceptions of the political was frequently echoed by a hostility to the state. For example, Women's Aid, which campaigns against violence against women, was established as an organization run for women and by women. Its distrust of the state as a patriarchal institution led to the creation of autonomous refuges run by women on non-hierarchical principles.

Perhaps because of this focus on social politics outside the formal institutions of state and government, feminists appeared to under-theorize the nature and role of the state. MacKinnon's claim that feminism has no theory of the state (1989: 157) was a product of this determination to expound a different, broader conception of politics.

But feminist attempts to reconfigure politics have extended more widely than this. The old 'political' institutions of government have increasingly been subject to feminist critique along with other social practices and relations. So, for instance, Women's Aid campaigned throughout the 1970s and 1980s for domestic violence legislation as well as running its refuges, thereby engaging in state transformation as well as civil society activism. Recognition of this fact has meant that, whilst early critiques of the public / private dichotomy led to a focus on establishing the political nature of the 'personal', more recent feminist work has turned its attention to transforming the nature of 'public politics' and re-theorizing the state.

One important issue for second-wave feminists was how, in the context of patriarchal political institutions, to organize for political change. Amongst many UK feminists the answer was to focus energy on feminist social movements beyond the state. Yet, in the context of women's increased levels of political representation and the development of gender machinery within state bureaucracies, feminists have adopted a keener interest in the relationship between institutional politics and broader social movement activism.

At the same time recent articulations of the institutional approach to politics show a marked convergence with broad power-based conceptions of politics. New institutionalists, or neo-institutionalism, now understand 'institutions' as rule-governed practices, both formal and informal. This means that the institutions under consideration in political study encompass not only parliament and parties, but also the rules that govern non-public institutions (including the family, the church, the factory and NGOs). This renders new institutionalism more amenable to feminist perceptions of politics, allowing for a focus on ways in which a whole range of institutions – which together make up the wider political culture – might be reconfigured.

The broad definition of politics demanded by feminists in previous decades allows us to explore the complex linkages between these institutions, from parliament to childcare arrangements, thereby effecting greater change. For example, whilst feminists struggled in the 1970s to establish domestic violence as a legitimate political concern and eschewed contact with a state they deemed patriarchal, more recent feminist campaigners have played a significant role in shaping the 1997 and 2001 Labour Governments' policies in relation to domestic violence (Women's Unit, 1999). Government machinery for women, in the form of the Women and Equality Unit, has domestic violence as one of its key policy concerns, clearly endorsing the feminist claim that domestic violence is a central political issue. This indicates that feminists have not only succeeded in eroding the boundaries of the political such that it is now commonly perceived to include issues such as domestic violence, but also that they are gaining access to the old arenas of politics and shaping government policy on such issues.

Whilst early socialist and radical feminists tended to conceptualize the state as a monolithic entity that institutionalizes the interests of dominant groups, more recent feminist writing, influenced by post-structuralism, offers a much more heterogeneous image of state relations, showing that gendered relations of power are institutionalized by different state arenas in different ways. The state is understood as a process, comprising many sites of struggle, which means that political analysis should focus on the ways in which specific discursive practices construct specific interests (Pringle and Watson, 1992; Waylen 1998).

This feminist insight, as with those that pre-dated it, is grounded in experience and motivated by a commitment to normative change. It is a political discourse that is both framed by practical experiences and constitutive of future feminist practices. The feminist embrace of neo-institutionalism represents an interesting development in relation to the question 'what is politics?'. The institutions under consideration are informal, dynamic and disaggregated rather than formal, static and holistic (Lowndes, 2002: 97). This destabilizes the association of politics with the institutions of government, thereby eroding the critical purchase of the public / private distinction in political analyses. It allows the political to encompass all social relations, including those conventionally labelled 'non-political' because of their domestic location. Politics is, potentially, everywhere. But it does not entail the claim that everything is therefore political. Political analysis is concerned with those aspects of social relations that pertain to the distribution, exercise and consequences of power (Hay, 2002: 3).

There is no essentially political sphere, only heterogeneous political processes.

This insight is not, of course, specifically feminist. It is now held quite widely (see Shapiro, 1999, and Hay, 2002 for good examples). But I would suggest that feminist critiques of the public / private dichotomy, and feminist challenges to the orthodox institutionalist conception of politics as government, have facilitated its development. The theoretical claims of neo-institutionalism and the rhetoric of governance owe a (largely unacknowledged) debt to earlier feminist claims that 'the personal is political', and all that followed from this claim.

6 Conclusion

I have suggested that feminist contributions to the debate about the nature of politics comprise two elements. The first is an endorsement of a broad power-based conception of politics rather than a narrow institution-based conception. The second is the demand for the reform of all the institutions governing relations of power, including the old formalistic and public institutions of politics, but extending beyond these to the traditionally 'non-public' and private domain.

Feminists played a hugely important role in popularizing the broad power-based conception of politics, such that it is now increasingly accepted by many mainstream political scholars, and even underpins the newest disciplinary developments. The second element, however, entails a commitment to exploring and advocating ways in which social relations might be ordered differently, such that they embody gender justice, and this has been notably less influential. For one can agree that politics permeates every facet of human interaction and still disagree quite profoundly about the normative implications of this. Nonetheless, if we proceed from the assumption that politics is concerned with power relations and we accept the empirical claim that gender relations significantly determine the distribution of power, it follows that mainstream political studies ought to be more concerned to analyse the operation of gender relations than it has been to date.

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9

Political Philosophy and Politics

Adam Swift

1 Introduction and Argument

Political philosophers offer no single answer to the question of what politics is. This is not very surprising, since they do not agree about what philosophy is either. Different kinds of philosopher treat issues in quite different ways, seeking different kinds of answer to different kinds of question. Some value analytical precision, absolute clarity of expression, and logical rigour. Others regard such virtues as inappropriately scientific and adopt a more literary or artistic approach. Some put the history of philosophy at the centre of the discipline. Others think that the important questions can be addressed without any historical input. This variety means that any attempt to explain how 'political philosophy' conceptualizes politics is bound to be biased, reflecting the particular views of the person doing the explaining. What follows, then, is not *the* answer to the question of how political philosophy thinks about politics, it is just *an* answer: quite a widely shared answer, to be sure, and an answer that has come to exert considerable influence over the way political philosophy is done in many parts of the world. But, still, there are many who would take a very different line.

Here, in summary, is the view: politics is concerned specifically with the state. And political philosophy asks whether there should be a state, how it should act, what moral principles should govern the way it treats its citizens and what kind of social order it should seek to create. As those 'shoulds' suggest, it is a branch of moral philosophy, interested in justification, in what the state ought (and ought not) to do. But the state, as political philosophers think about it, is not – or should not be – something separate from and in charge of those who are subject to its laws. Rather it ought to be the collective agent of the citizens, who decide what its laws are. So the question of how the state should treat its citizens is that of how we, as citizens, should treat one another. The state is a coercive instrument. It has various means – police, courts, prisons – of getting people to do what it says, whether they like it or not, whether they approve or disapprove of its decisions. Political philosophy, then, is a very specific sub-set of moral philosophy, and one where the stakes are particularly high. It is not just about what people ought to do, it is about what people are morally permitted, and sometimes morally required, to make each other do.

This can seem a rather narrow and modern way of thinking about politics. It suggests that political philosophy is relevant only to those societies that have states. What about communities that manage their collective affairs without resort to any coercive apparatus? And it assumes that, where there is a state, it must be democratic if it is to be legitimate. What about all those states throughout history that have clearly not been collective agents of those subject to their laws?

Good questions. My answer to the first is that one of the fundamental issues political philosophers raise is precisely whether states are indeed legitimate. It is open to the anarchist to argue that we can get along perfectly well without them, and her case may well appeal to examples of societies that have done so. And political philosophy, even in my narrow sense, is relevant to such societies. Anyone who argued, in a stateless society, that certain desirable goals might better be achieved by means of a state, and that this would justify establishing one, would be doing political philosophy. And anyone who disputed that claim would be doing it too. But if there is no state, or no discussion about whether there should be a state or what it should or could legitimately do, then there is no politics, at least not on the conception of politics I advance here.

The second question accuses me of simply assuming that states should be democratic. (That is the bit about states being the collective agent of the citizens who decide what its laws are.) It is true that my kind of political philosopher works with that conception of the state, but it is a bit misleading to say that we simply assume it. We work on that basis because we think there are good reasons *why* the state should be that way. It is, of course, a legitimate question to ask what form the state should take. Plato famously thought that rule by wise guardians was best. So when I describe my way of thinking about what the state is – or should be – I am, in effect, taking a view *within* political philosophy. That still leaves plenty of questions up for grabs. What is the proper scope of state authority? Is majority rule always the best way to make political decisions? Is there any room for the idea of political expertise? What kind of reasons can citizens invoke when they vote? These are the questions that my kind of political philosopher tries to answer. So even within our narrow approach to politics, we find more than enough to keep us busy.

2 Morality v. Politics?

Our way of thinking about politics may seem odd. The emphasis is on morality, on what principles should regulate citizens' dealings with one another, and what kinds of state action it would be right or wrong for them to support. The central categories, on this approach, are moral values or ideals, such as rights, justice, liberty, equality, community, democracy. The oddity comes from the feeling that politics is fundamentally different from morality. Politics, it may seem, is the art of the possible. It is about finding the middle ground, about negotiating a solution that is acceptable to people with different interests, about keeping people happy – and getting them to vote for you – rather than giving them, or telling them, what they ought to want. The BBC has a radio programme called *The Moral Maze* which discusses the moral issues that lie behind topical political debates. As soon as contributors start to talk about anything vaguely practical, to worry about the feasibility of a particular proposal, or to factor in electoral considerations, the chairman urges them to stick to the moral questions, putting aside the merely 'political' ones.

Sometimes, indeed, politics is regarded as something like the *opposite* of morality. 'Was that decision principled, taken on the basis of moral values, by reference to an ideology or set of core ethical beliefs?' 'No, it was political' – for which read opportunistic, unprincipled, strategic, and perhaps even dishonest. Often, it seems, the moral course of action lies in one direction, while the 'politics' of the situation requires one to take another. If politics is the art of the possible, then the art of politics is that of compromise, of wheeling and dealing, fudging, and, if you are a politician today, managing the media. The Italian Machiavelli (1469–1527) believed that political leaders should not feel themselves bound by traditional morality but rather could engage in all kinds of cunning and duplicity in order to hold onto power.

This conventional contrast between politics and morality might suggest that I have set off on the wrong track. I am supposed to be writing about what politics is, not about what politics should be. Yes, someone might say, there are interesting questions about what politics *ought to be* like. But surely it is going too far to claim that my perspective provides a plausible account of what politics is *actually* like. Does my account not illustrate precisely what is most irrelevant and frustrating about philosophy in general, and political philosophy in particular: that it is too far removed from the real world to be useful, and too abstract and idealistic to have a proper understanding of the phenomena that it is supposed to illuminate?

It is true that, defined my way, political philosophy aims to tell us how political institutions ought to be designed, what policies should be enacted, why individual citizens are justified in voting for one law rather than another. And it is true that much that the state does, and much that individual citizens do to try to get the state to do things, is not usually thought of in such moral terms. But it is not true that my approach simply misunderstands the nature of politics. On the contrary, it claims to identify what is really happening when the state makes and enforces laws. 'Think about what is actually going on when we do politics', it says. 'You may see politics as a struggle for power between elites, or as a means by which one class maintains its domination over another, or as a beauty contest between more or less charismatic leaders. Doubtless it can, and often does, take those forms. But what politics really is, beneath all that, is a process by which some people get the state to back up, with its coercive apparatus, their preferred ways of doing things – to compel obedience from those who might not want to do things that way.'

The philosophical issues, then, concern what principles should govern the state's activities *given this analysis of what the state – and hence politics – actually is*. Should all those coerced into complying with the state's directives have a say in determining all those directives, or is there a place for non-democratic decision-making? Within democracies, can the majority of citizens simply gang up on the rest and, through sheer force of numbers, vote through legislation that compels the minority to comply with its will? Do laws, to be legitimate and not the mere exercise of force, have to be justifiable to all those who are subject to them? Do individuals have rights – such as freedom of religion or of sexuality – that should take certain issues off the political agenda, beyond the reach of state action? These are moral questions, and very difficult ones, but they are derived from an understanding of what politics is, not simply what it ought to be.

Is my view the *right* view of what politics is? I do not think that matters very much. Any definition of 'politics' is going to be controversial, and the variety of answers given in the various chapters of this book gives a good sense of the different ways in which people use the concept. What matters is not what words we use to describe or categorize the things we are talking about but whether the things we say about them are true or false. Concepts – like the concept of 'politics' – are tools. They are ways of cutting up the world that can be more or less useful. But it makes no sense to worry whether they are 'true' or 'right'. What we say *using* them, propositions that are framed in terms of concepts, *those* can be true or right. And it matters hugely that we make those judgements well. But the words we use, what we call things, is neither here nor there. Shakespeare's Juliet says that 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' Whatever our words, the issue of how citizens ought to treat one another, and how they may legitimately employ the coercive power of the state, is an important one. And that is the issue which my kind of political philosophy tries to address.

3 Political Philosophy v. Political Science

The fact that it asks – and answers – moral questions makes political philosophy a different kind of enterprise from political science. Political scientists tell us what happens and why it does. Political philosophers tell us what ought to happen and why it should.

Much of what gets studied as 'politics' in schools or universities is descriptive and explanatory. The aim is, first, to describe what actually happens – or happened – and then to explain it. Sometimes the describing is much easier than the explaining. It is not difficult to say that Party A got *x* per cent of the vote while Party B got *y* per cent, but try explaining that fact. Sometimes even describing a political phenomenon is a difficult and complicated business: what exactly was the sequence of events that preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall? Sometimes things that look like mere descriptions turn out to be controversial: was the Cold War really a 'war'? Explanation is nearly always difficult. Explaining why things happen involves fitting them into some kind of theoretical framework, identifying the important causal processes that generate them, and people disagree about which theories are most accurate or useful. That said, and despite these complications, the aim of political science is clear. Just as natural science aims to describe and explain what goes on in nature, so political science aims to describe and explain what goes on in politics.

Political philosophy has a different agenda. It seeks to evaluate what happens, to pass moral judgement on events. How the Conservative government in the United Kingdom came to enact the poll tax, and how its doing so led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, are matters for political scientists. Political philosophers want to know whether the poll tax was a good thing. Not whether it was good for Mrs Thatcher. We know the answer to that. The philosophical issue is whether it was good morally speaking. Is it fair to charge people a flat-rate tax for local services or should their contribution depend on their ability to pay? Even if we think that overall levels of taxation should reflect people's means, does that imply that each and every individual tax should do so? Could the poll tax be justified on the ground that it helps to keep local government expenditure responsive to the democratic will?

These are challenging questions. Political philosophers think that they are exciting ones too. And some of the excitement comes from the feeling that the answers to these philosophical questions can make a difference to what happens. What people do depends, in part, on what they think is the right thing to do. To be sure, it is far from clear to what extent people's political activity is guided by moral motivations rather than narrow self-interest. Do people vote for the party they think will be best for them, or the one that they think will be morally best, best for the society as a whole? Are political revolutions best explained by looking at the economic interests of those involved, or are revolutionaries motivated by moral ideals? Those are empirical questions, to be answered by political scientists. But even those sceptical about the explanatory significance of moral answers for what people do would be hard pressed to deny them *any* role in guiding people's behaviour. And in that case changing people's minds, morally speaking, can change what happens.

4 What Political Philosophers Do

I think of political philosophy as proceeding in two stages. First, a lot of time and effort are spent making sure it is absolutely clear what claims are being made, what propositions are being asserted. Sometimes this is called 'conceptual analysis', which makes it look scary and tedious. Don't be put off. This is just a fancy name for the obviously important job of working out exactly what people mean when they say things. (Asked at a New York cocktail party what philosophers actually do, one replied: 'You clarify a few concepts. You make a few distinctions. It's a living'.) Suppose a friend tells you that she believes in equality of opportunity. Do you know what she believes in? I don't. All kinds of different views get called that – all the way from the innocuous position which holds that universities and employers should not be biased on grounds of gender or race to the radical view that all people, however talented or untalented, should have the same resources to devote to their life-plans. Something similar applies to all the other concepts that political philosophers are interested in. You never hear anybody saying she does not care about justice, or liberty, but that does not mean that everybody agrees on anything definite. Before we know whether we agree with someone, whether what she says is true, we have to know what it is she is saying. So we explore the different ways that people use words, investigate differing conceptions of the same concept, track how concepts have changed meaning over time or have different connotations in different cultures, and so on.

But this is just the first step, getting rid of confusion or misunderstanding so that we know exactly what it is that we are talking about. The second step is to decide what is the right thing to say about it. My kind of philosopher wants to know what statements mean in order to decide whether they are true. I cannot assess the validity of your views about the injustice of the poll tax, or the moral significance of equality of opportunity, or why socialism would be better than capitalism, until I know precisely what those views are. So, having clarified what we are talking about, we make arguments in support of particular conclusions, trying to explain where those who disagree with us have gone wrong. We explore each other's claims, seeing whether they stand up to scrutiny. Does the conclusion really follow from the premises? Are the premises true? Is your way of thinking about justice coherent or can I show that you seem to hold two inconsistent views? If so, both views *cannot* be right, so which, if either, are you going to defend?

This second step distinguishes my kind of political philosopher from a different kind, the postmodern kind who regards our interest in truth and reason as terribly old-fashioned. Postmodernism comes in a variety of (dis)guises but, applied to politics, it tends to involve scepticism about the idea that there is such a thing as 'truth' and a mistrust of 'reason' as itself 'socially constructed' rather than a genuinely independent or objective basis for assessing and criticizing society. Since some postmodernists are doubtful about the idea of truth in sciences like physics and biology, it is hardly surprising that they should be wary of the suggestion that one can apply that category to claims of the kind made in politics.

Many of my students, though prepared to accept that the natural sciences – and even political science – can lead us in the direction of true facts, and perhaps even true explanatory theories, share this suspicion about the kind of moral judgement that political philosophy (like all moral philosophy) is about. According to them, views about what is good and bad, what is right and what is wrong, are subjective judgements, a matter of personal taste or preference. Although I remember once believing something similar, I now find it hard to take this kind of scepticism seriously. Here is a moral judgement: 'It is wrong to torture innocent children for pleasure and we do right when we instruct our state to do what it can to prevent people engaging in that activity.' Can we really think that this is just a subjective judgement? Is my view that the statement is true really no more than a preference or expression of my personal taste? Does somebody who disagrees with me simply see things differently, with no basis for deciding who is right, as if she and I simply like different flavours of ice-cream?

Of course, the issues addressed by political philosophy are less clear-cut than that. There is often room for reasonable disagreement. Intelligent and morally serious people can take different views about a whole range of questions that arise when we think about how we may legitimately direct the state to act on our behalf. We can disagree about whether there should be a state at all. (Anarchists think not.) We can disagree about whether the state should serve merely as a night watchman, enforcing respect for property rights and perhaps providing basic public goods such as defence and traffic lights. (Libertarians think it should do no more.) We can disagree about social justice: does the realization of that ideal require distribution according to need or desert (or a bit of both)? Is it unfair for people to be better or worse off than one another merely because they happen to have been lucky or unlucky? If it is unfair, is it the state's job to rectify the unfairness? I could fill this chapter with similar examples, and to do that would be to give a list of the issues that preoccupy political philosophers.

But the crucial point is this. When they disagree about these matters, philosophers are disagreeing about what is the *right* thing to think about them, about which beliefs about them are true and which false or mistaken. Perhaps the anarchists are right. Perhaps we should not have a state at all. Perhaps the libertarian claim that only a minimal state can be justified is true. Perhaps liberal egalitarians are correct when they suggest that the state may legitimately tax high earners to compensate those who, through no fault of their own, are worst off. Working out which beliefs on these matters are true and which false requires careful thought and rigorous argument. Careful thinking and rigorous arguing are what political philosophers spend their time trying to do. But, whoever is right or wrong on these issues, it must be the case that the dispute is about who is right or wrong, not simply about who prefers what. If it is wrong to deny individuals the freedom to worship their own god, then that is wrong not because we think it so, but for reasons independent of our thinking it so. If those (like rich film stars or sportsmen) lucky enough to possess highly marketable productive assets have a duty to share their good fortune with less fortunate others, a duty enforceable by the state, then such a claim is true. If not, it is false. We track truth when we make such judgements, and we can track it more or less well. When we criticize each other for making mistakes, some of us are right, correctly identifying the truth, and some of us are wrong, failing to do so. This is the, I hope innocuous, sense in which political philosophy pursues truth.

5 Political Procedures and Political Philosophy

Some people dislike the philosophical approach to politics because they think it is basically irrelevant. A scientific understanding of how politics works would reveal that moral considerations play no role in explaining political behaviour. Philosophers are wasting their time working out what justice requires, or what rights individuals have, since, in the real world, the answers to that kind of question simply cut no ice. Others dislike it because it aims to identify the truth, the right way to think about whatever political issue is in the spotlight. They fear that this perspective somehow fails to respect the nature of politics, which should properly be understood rather as a process of negotiation or compromise between different views, or of citizens coming together collectively to decide what *they* think about how their public affairs should be organized, and, presumably, what they think about which of their affairs are indeed properly public (to be decided politically) rather than private (to be left to the discretion of the individual citizen without state interference). Political philosophy, with its pretensions to truth and right answers, seems implicitly to involve a will to dominate, to impose its truths upon a polity in a dictatorial way. This fear is misplaced and seeing where it goes wrong should help to explain how my kind of political philosophy sees politics.

To put it simply, political philosophers do not only have views about *what* political decisions should be made, they also have views about *how* decisions should be made. They make claims about which *procedures* or *processes* are the right ones to use when making political decisions. Sometimes they do not take a view about which decision would be right, and sometimes that is because they do not think there is a right answer to be found, independent of the procedure used to reach it. Consider a community deciding whether to build a swimming pool or an ice rink. We can argue that its members should discuss the merits and demerits of both options, that they should deliberate collectively and try to form a view about which would be better, that it would be appropriate for them to take into account how many people prefer which facility, and perhaps how strongly they prefer it, that in the end it may come down to a vote. But it does not necessarily make sense to say that, independently of that kind of procedure, the philosopher – or anybody else – is in a position to judge which decision would be best.

On other issues, philosophers may indeed take a more substantive, less procedural, view. Suppose a politician stands for office on an anti-welfare platform. He seeks to slash welfare provision for those in need, and to reduce state expenditure on health and education. A philosopher can argue *both* that he should be allowed to do so – that proper procedures require his views to be debated and voted on along with everybody else's – *and* that his views about what citizens owe to one another is fundamentally mistaken. In that kind of case, the philosopher has a view about how the decision should be made but she also has a view about what the decision should be.

Political philosophers are perfectly well aware that the truth of a philosophical claim is not sufficient reason to justify imposing it on anybody. The aim is not to come up with right answers and then, by some kind of philosophical coup d'etat, get the state to coerce people into complying with them. On the contrary. Much political philosophy is concerned precisely to identify the conditions under which the state may legitimately be used to enforce compliance with particular views about how things should be. No serious philosopher today argues that the mere fact that those views are true counts as a valid reason. Philosophers have developed rich and complex theories of political *legitimacy*, all of which make claims about when citizens may properly use their collective agent, the state, to command compliance.

Now those theories – theories about legitimacy – are themselves understood as being either true or false. But that can hardly be an objection. After all, that kind of truth claim is also asserted by the critic who fears philosophical dictatorship. Someone who thinks that it is for citizens democratically to decide what their laws should be presumably thinks it is *true* that that is how their laws should be made. They may be right about that, they may be wrong, and political philosophers can help them see which it is. But, either way, it is surely not simply a matter of opinion.

The truth about the conditions that must be met for a state to be legitimate provides reasons for us not simply to impose other kinds of truth on our fellow citizens. So far I have spelled out legitimacy in terms of democracy: it matters that citizens participate in the making of the laws under which they are to live, and although there is likely to be disagreement about what those laws should be, so not everybody will be living under laws they have themselves chosen, we can think of democratic procedures as providing a legitimate mechanism for resolving those disagreements. Here is another way of thinking about it, one that has come to prominence recently, and one that takes us back to the fundamental issue about what the state is.

On this view, legitimacy requires that the state's decisions be justifiable, to those who are compelled to obey it, in terms that it would be unreasonable for them to reject. Suppose, for example, that I am absolutely convinced that my religion is true. I regard all those who fail to acknowledge its truth as headed to everlasting damnation. Am I therefore justified in using the state to back up my religious view, forcing people to follow the one true faith? Not if I adopt this approach to legitimacy and accept that I cannot show others the truth of my religion without appealing to reasons that they could reasonably reject. The nature of politics itself – the fact that the state is the joint power of free and equal citizens – rules out some kinds of reason as morally inappropriate grounds for state action. The mere fact that my religious doctrine is true is beside the point. It would be illegitimate for me to ground my political view, a view about how the state should act, in a doctrine that my fellow citizens could reasonably reject. After all, the state is not mine, it is ours.

6 Conclusion

Contemporary politics is a confusing business. It is hard to tell who believes in what. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether anybody believes in anything. Politicians converge on the middle ground, worrying about focus groups, scared to say things that might be spun into ammunition by their opponents. There is some serious debate about policies, but little about the moral values that underlie them. When it comes to principles we have to make do with rhetoric, the fuzzy invocation of feel-good concepts. Who is against community, democracy, justice or liberty? This makes it look as if values are uncontroversial. Politics comes to seem a merely technical matter: politicians disagree about how best to achieve agreed goals and voters try to decide which of them has got it right.

The reality is different. Beneath the surface, concealed by the vagueness of these grand ideals, lurk crucial disagreements. Politicians who share the view that liberty matters, or that community is important, may have very different ideas about what they involve. Even where they agree about what values mean, they may weight them differently. These disagreements feed through into policy. What we ought to do about tax rates, welfare, education, abortion, pornography, drugs, and everything else depends, in part, on how and what we think about values. Some politicians may be clear about which interpretations of which ideals guide their policy preferences, and how important each is compared to the others. Many are not. And even where they are, that does not necessarily help those whose job it is to choose between them. To do that, we need to be aware of the different interpretations of these ideals. We need to see where claims presented in their terms conflict and, when they conflict, we need to decide which is right. We need political philosophy.

Good political philosophy makes for good politics. It clarifies what is at stake in political debate, helping us to understand who is saying what, what exactly it is that they are saying, and what we think about it. And it raises deep questions about the nature of politics, forcing us to keep in mind quite what politics involves – the coercive imposition of some people's views about how our collective affairs should be managed on others who may disagree with them profoundly (and who may even disagree about what should count as 'our collective affairs'). By sharpening understanding of the matters debated within day-to-day politics, by giving us the equipment we need to decide who is right, and by reminding us of the fundamental moral issues that underpin the whole enterprise of politics in the first place, political philosophy has a vital role to play in making politics what it can and should be.

NOTE

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10

Is there an Islamic Conception of Politics?

Salwa Ismail

1 *Introduction and Argument*

What is politics in Islam? This question may be addressed in a number of ways which ultimately rest on what we mean by 'Islam' and how we define 'politics'. In this chapter, my exploration of how politics is conceptualized in Islamic traditions proceeds on the basis of a broad definition of politics. Along with others in this volume, I understand politics to be concerned with the sites, forms and uses of power in all societal domains, both public and private, and with the rules governing social, political and economic relations. I use 'Islam' in the sense of a discursive tradition in which varied and competing articulations of rules governing correct and true practices are historically and socially shaped and not textually predetermined (Asad, 1985).

The central argument here is that there is no single Islamic conception of politics. Rather, there are diverse traditions and articulations of the relationship between Islam and politics. This argument runs contrary to the view, found widely in western writing and commentary on Islam and Muslim politics, that, in Islamic political thought and in much of Islamic political practice, there is no separation between religion and politics. In its most caricatured form, this view holds that, in Islam, politics is a direct extension of religion, that there is no secular private domain and that the state is and should be guided by the principles of the *shari'a* (law based on scripture). This view is simplistic and flawed for, as I will demonstrate, the historical and contemporary experiences of Muslim-majority countries attest to the development of varied conceptions and forms of politics. Further, the mobilization of Islamic traditions in politics pertains largely to particular spheres such as morality and the regulation of certain matters such as sexuality, seen, in western thought, as belonging to the private domain. Here, the politics of the *shari'a* and of morality fall within the wider conception of politics – that is, politics as being about wider social relations of power and domination, such as between genders, and activities of resistance and contestation, and not just about the institutions of government.

In sections 2 and 3 I start by exploring the claim, often enunciated in western writings and mirrored in some contemporary Islamist discourses,[1] that there is or should be no separation between religion and politics in Islam, and I examine briefly the historical evolution of Islamic thought and practice where matters of government and governing are concerned. I go on, in section 4, to explore the following questions: Who is to govern? Is there a specific form of government outlined in the tradition? What is an Islamic government? Following this, in the subsequent two sections, I look at two areas of politics – legislation and morality – where Islamic traditions are used by Islamist activists. The last section questions the possibility that there exists an essential and singular Islamic polity given the diversity of Muslim societies. Here, I propose that what is labelled 'Muslim politics' or 'Islamic politics' may, at times, be better understood as urban politics, nationalism or populism.

2 The Inseparability Thesis: A Critical View

The assertion made by many western scholars and commentators that there is no separation of religion and politics in Islam is often validated by reference to the founding period of the religion, when the Prophet Muhammad not only brought a divine message to the people of Arabia, but also established a political community with a covenant and rules governing relations with minority groups, among other things (Lewis, 1993).[2] This argument holds that the two roles (God's messenger and founder of a political community) were inseparable. Further, the society and polity formed in that period became the model to be followed by all Muslims. Modern Islamist thinkers and activists associated with moderate groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood Organization and with militant groups such as the Jihad, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria also put forward the view that Islam is both religion and state (*din wa dawla*). They too call on the founding period as proof of their claims. However, the nature of Muhammad's political role is subject to debate. For some, Muhammad's role is seen as both divinely sanctioned and also as confirmation that rule is devised by God; for others, this role was secular, dictated by temporal needs and not by transcendental design. Both sides of this dispute highlight certain features of the early period of Islam.

There is no doubt that Muhammad assumed political leadership of the nascent polity he founded. For instance, he led military campaigns against his opponents, set up a system for distributing booty and implemented religious ordinances regarding civil and criminal offences. Muhammad's implication in politics is often contrasted with Jesus' declaration 'render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22: 21 quoted in Lewis, 1993: 179). Thus, it is argued that the realms of politics and religion were separated in Christianity from its inception, but intertwined in Islam from its founding period. Extrapolating from the experience of the founding period, some scholars of the contemporary Middle East have gone so far as to argue that the style of leadership established by Muhammad continues to inspire the leaders of Muslim countries in the present (Bill and Springborg, 1990).

Objections to the 'lack of separation' view assert that Muhammad's political rule was, in fact, separate from his religious message. According to this argument, Muhammad's political authority was separate from the religious message. Further, it is pointed out that the Qur'an contains no instructions on the form of government and type of political rule to be adopted by the Muslim community. This is also supported by sayings of the Prophet to the effect that Muslims were better versed than he was in their worldly matters (Al-Ashmawi, 1987). More importantly, a number of scholars have argued that imputing essences to Islam denies its historicity. The founding period should not be made to stand for the entirety of Islamic history. Scrutinizing the historical record, they point out that the logic of politics from the founding period and throughout subsequent epochs was that of power and domination. Indeed, religion was made to serve politics and in this sense was subordinated to it.

Islamists, however, invoke Qur'anic verses to argue that government should be mandated by God. They interpret the verse of 'those who do not govern according to what God has revealed are the unbelievers' (Qur'an, chapter 5, verse 44) as showing the necessity of establishing Islamic government. The verse is subject to various interpretations, not all of them lending credence to the Islamist reading. Further, even within the Islamist camp, as we will see below, conceptions of 'Islamic government' in the modern period have been influenced by historical developments and intellectual trends including those emerging in western political thought. Despite the contention surrounding such questions as what an Islamic government is and whether its form has terms of reference in the Qur'an and Tradition, there is agreement among its advocates that an Islamic government is the government of the *shari'a*. This said, there is no agreement on what the application of the *shari'a* means in substantive terms. Before addressing the matter of how the question of the *shari'a* delineates certain areas of politics as Islamic or subject to Islamic regulations, we should look briefly at the evolution of Islamic thought and practice with regard to government.

3 Classical Islamic Conceptions of Politics

The historical record shows that, following the Prophet's death, political leadership of the community emerged as a central issue. From early on, leadership was seen as constituting a necessary condition for the preservation of the community of believers as a Muslim community. Thus, the Prophet's immediate successors, or the Caliphs, strove to maintain the coherence of the community of believers at a time of expansion and encounters with other cultures and traditions. In this early period, the Caliph emerged as the chosen ruler who was confirmed through an oath of allegiance and entrusted with governing in accordance with the rules revealed in the Qur'an and with the tradition of the Prophet. As the leader of the community, the Caliph was to hold all powers, in the sense that all offices and office holders were to be subsumed under his leadership. However, the question of leadership, and, in particular, of who is qualified to occupy the position of successor, was the subject of contention and was at the heart of the division of the community into the Sunni and Shi'i camps. The Sunni position on succession was constructed in terms of a choice of the successor agreed to by an elite group and confirmed in the oath of allegiance from the community. The Shi'i's position argued that succession should be limited to those most qualified to lead the community. By nature, they issued from the house of the Prophet, namely the Prophet's cousin Ali, and Ali's descendants. Only members of the house of Ali possess the required quality of infallibility (*'isma*) needed to assume the post of the *Imam* and to establish justice (Enayat, 1982: 5). The Sunni view prevailed in the approach to succession and the idea of *Khalifa* or Caliph prevailed over the concept of *Imam* as an infallible leader.

Matters of political governance were articulated with religious authority and duties. For example, the wars of apostasy which Abu Bakr, the Prophet's immediate successor, carried out against Muslims who refused to pay the taxes are seen by some critics as a political act that had no religious justification (in the sense of having no textual justification in the Qur'an), but was nonetheless associated with the preservation of the community. In developing their political arrangements, the leaders of the community drew on Qur'anic stipulations and the example of the Prophet. They also had to take tribal traditions into account. With the expansion of the community over a wider territory, the local customs of the people of the conquered lands were integrated into systems of rule and government.

The early successors to the Prophet assumed a dual role, as spiritual leaders and as political rulers who were owed allegiance by Muslim members of the community and by their representatives. This role would, in due course, become symbolic for a number of reasons. First, the Caliph was not a religious authority and was not necessarily the most learned in religious sciences. Second, with the expansion of territories under Muslim rule, local independent dynasties emerged. The idea that a single and central seat of power was embodied in the Caliphate was undermined by the rise of local emirs and sultans who established dynastic rule and maintained supreme authority over the territories they ruled – territories which were part of the Muslim empire. Rule became a matter of military power, though local emirs and sultans paid lip service to the Caliph. Such sultans rose to positions that superseded the Caliphs in power and authority, and they came to exercise executive and legislative powers in their own domains. In other words, emirs and sultans usurped the powers of the Caliphs. Finally, sectarian and ethnic factors played a role in the separation of spiritual authority from political rule.

Medieval Islamic jurists addressed questions of government and the ruler's conduct. Their theory of politics here appears as a classification of types of rulers (Ayubi, 1991: 8). The classification is derived from the means through which office is established. The theory was primarily concerned with the qualifications of the Caliph and with the sources of his authority. In principle, this authority was absolute, with the single condition that it did not result in disobeying God. The emphasis on leadership was linked to the goal of the preservation of the unity of the community. In this respect, politics, as a category in Islamic thought, was conceived to be the means through which the community was kept united and shielded from the divisions that arise out of the competition for power. To this end, the jurists justified obedience to rulers who had the means to prevail over other contenders. Procedures and conventions were secondary to might. In its original sense, politics (*siyasa*) referred to husbandry or the management of livestock (Ayubi, 1991; Al-Azmeh, 1993). With reference to rule, it denotes management of human beings, that is, the ruled. This kind of politics is predicated on power understood as the ability to overcome contenders and rivals (the term used here is *ghalaba*), and to maintain possession and supreme control (*mulk* and *sultan*). This conception of politics should be situated in the context in which it was articulated – a context in which religion served as a justification for the political reality of absolutist government. There was also the ideological imperative of the necessity of maintaining order in the face of rising divisions among various sects and social groups (Talib, 1997: 303–5).

As the powers of the Caliphate declined, the juridic theory of the Caliphate came to deal with the *de facto* separation between spiritual authority and temporal authority. Juristic thinkers conceived the functions of the Caliphate as separate from that of government undertaken by the sultans. At the same time, classical Islamic political thought upheld the notion that the Caliphate was obligatory as it was the Caliph who oversaw the application of the *shariʿa.* This constituted another ideological imperative that was to provide for coherence of the community despite territorial, administrative and legal divisions. This juridic theory of the Caliphate, however, could not withstand the reality of the existence of competing Caliphal seats (in Cairo and Andalus) and contending sultans. Thus, one noted jurist, al-Mawardi (d. 1058), allowed for principles of expediency and necessity in the workings of the Caliphate. The symbolic authority of the Caliphate as the institution that provided the unity of the community came to an end with the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258. Following this, leadership came to be acknowledged as the expression of sheer force. As such another jurist, Ibn Jamaʿa (d. 1332), moved Sunni jurisprudence further along in its pragmatism and allowed that the *Imam* or leader was the one who had the means to overpower his rivals (Gibb, 1982: 143; Enayat, 1982: 11). In the writings of Muslim historians from the twelfth century on, the concept of *siyasa* was clearly distinguished from the concept of *shariʿa. Siyasa* (politics) came to refer to state policies that were outside the *shariʿa* and that were subsumed under the act of government. In its subtle sense, *siyasa* was the art of government (Khalidi, 1996: 197).

4 Who is to Govern? What form of Government? What is an Islamic Government?

Using a narrow definition of politics, one that is focused on institutions of government, it can be argued that there is no specific form of government found in Islam as a religion. Furthermore, as noted above, political authority does not depend on religious authority. As such, the *ulama* (learned men of religion), as a loose religious body, do not occupy a privileged position in terms of access to political office. Indeed, historically, the *ulama* played an advisory role and were appointed to their offices by the rulers. Their engagement in politics and power struggles was shaped by their position in the social and political hierarchy at a given time. Nonetheless, the *ulama* contributed to the definition of the public sphere through pronouncements on issues of public interest, provision of legal opinion (*fatwa*) and through preaching and exhortations to both rulers and ruled. Most Islamist views in the modern period on the role of the *ulama* place them as advisers to government. Only in Imam Khomeini's theory of the Guardianship of the Jurist (*Wilayat al-Faqih*) do we find the *ulama* acquiring the right to leadership. Khomeini conceived religious knowledge as the foundation of rule. This constituted a novel idea in Shiʿi political thought. In a departure from the view that all government in the absence of the hidden Imam was illegitimate, Khomeini proposed that the Imam's position be filled by the most learned jurist.[3] It is interesting to note that this stipulation was dropped from the 1989 Iranian constitution.

Classical Sunni Islamic political theory recognized that power was the basis of rule. In dealing with this fact, it also recognized usurpation of rule. The only condition juristic thinkers set on the duty of obedience to the ruler was the preservation of the faith. This condition amounted to a minimal expectation of a negative intervention on the part of the ruler. That is, the ruler should not engage in promoting practices which would undermine religious faith – such as opposing the holding of public prayers, for instance. What form rule should take, however, was left open. The historical record shows that the forms were multiple and diverse, ranging from delegation in a manner equivalent to today's electoral college, to nomination by a select group, to dynastic succession or mere usurpation. The problems of election, of placing limitations on the power of the ruler and of procedures for removing an unjust ruler were left unresolved in classical thought.

In the modern period, Muslim thinkers have put forward ideas about the form of government mandated by religion. In many instances their proposals appear influenced by western political ideas. Indeed, some Islamic thinkers draw parallels between western democratic institutions and Islamic institutions. Modernists like Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) emphasized the equivalence between *shura* (consultation) and popular representation. Taking this further, Hasan al-Turabi, the contemporary leader of the Sudanese Islamic Front, identified Parliament as the body in which consultation takes place. The notion of *ijma'* or consensus is likened to majority rule. In classical theory, the consultative role was the prerogative of a kind of elite group called *ahl-al-hal wa-al-'aqd* (literally, 'those who loosen and bind'). In Al-Turabi's formulation of the Islamic state, consultation would involve not just those learned in religion, but also experts who are qualified to give advice on matters relating to their particular fields, for example, engineering or medicine. The whole process of consultation is explained as Islamic democracy (Al-Turabi, 1983). The emphasis on consultation is related to the question of where the locus of authority lies. Some Islamists have accepted the concept of popular sovereignty and the right of the people to elect their leaders. In fact, we find that the concept coexists, undoubtedly in tension, with the idea of divine sovereignty in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Meanwhile, militant Sunni Islamist thinkers have asserted that democracy is alien to Islam (Islamic notions of rule) and that rule should represent God's will. In their view, democracy represents the rule of fallible human beings, while Islamic government is identified with infallible divine rule. This divine government is conceived of as government which applies the *shari'a*. We should now turn to consider what, in effect, this means.

5 The Politics of the *shari'a*

Throughout most of Islamic history, politics was not subsumed under religion. However, the *shari'a* remains an area of politics that is thought to confirm and preserve the Islamic character of government. Thus, while the rulers neither constituted religious authority nor were delegated or approved by a religious body, their responsibility in ensuring the application of the *shari'a* conferred the symbolic legitimacy previously held by the office of the Caliphate. The *shari'a* itself was the domain of the *ulama*. There was a division of labour of sorts, whereby rulers devised matters of government and administration and the *ulama* looked after legal matters, interpreting and applying *shari'a* laws. The realm and scope of the *shari'a*, however, are open to debate and hence the nature of politics defined in relation to religion is not clearly identified. In the contemporary period, many Islamists contend that the *shari'a* should govern all aspects of society. This raises the questions of what the *shari'a* is and whether there is an agreement or consensus on its substantive content.

Using a narrow definition, the *shari'a* refers to rules and ordinances set out in the Qur'an. These are limited in scope and deal primarily with personal status matters, certain economic transactions, the ethics of personal conduct in such matters as sexuality and dietary prescriptions. Limiting the *shari'a* to rules and laws derived from the text circumscribes the political sphere in which it is active or to which it is relevant. It should be noted that the Qur'an contains 500 legal verses dealing with a limited range of matters. In this respect, it would be mistaken to argue that all legislation made under the direction of Caliphs and rulers who promulgated law in the name of God had a direct or indirect basis in the Qur'an (Hallaq, 1997: 10).

A broader definition of the *shari'a*, however, incorporates the fundamentals of jurisprudence and the rules and legal opinions proffered by earlier jurists. Using analogical reasoning, Muslim jurists expanded the body of laws said to be derived from the scripture over time. These dealt with problems and situations for which the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet did not provide a solution. They covered such issues as personal status matters, taxation and fiscal policies. It has been noted that the *shari'a* rulings are multivocal and open to review (Al-Azmeh, 1993: 94). Yet the relevance of the *shari'a* – broadly understood – to all issues arising in modern times, was and continues to be doubted not only by secularly inclined thinkers, but also by religious scholars. The writings of Islamic thinkers of all shades – modernist, conservative and radical – highlight the difficulties faced in trying to arrive at a formula of the *shari'a* that would make its workings consistent and relevant to their time while also ensuring that all matters of government and society be regulated in ways that conform to it. These difficulties underscore the problems associated with attempts to read off from the *shari'a* the specific implications for a wide range of modern socio-economic issues, not to mention technical ones, such as where to build a road system, what the terms of transport policy should be, and the like.

In dealing with the limitations of the *shari'a*, Islamic modernist thinkers like Muhammad Abduh reworked classical principles of jurisprudence to develop flexible means for the evolution of the *shari'a*. Abduh rejected the practice of *taqlid* (imitation), that is, reliance on previous rulings and the body of jurisprudence. Instead, he promoted the revival of *ijtihad* (personal effort of interpretation) to allow for adaptability to the needs of the time. He highlighted the principle of *maslaha* (interest) as a guiding principle that ensures the public interest. Abduh, who was influenced by western utilitarian thought and by natural law ideas developed in the western tradition, saw no contradiction between the public good and the purpose behind the *shari'a*.

Abduh's disciple Rashid Rida (d. 1935) attempted to integrate the centrality of the *shari'a* into a coherent theory of government. Rida viewed political authority as temporal but subject to religious sanction. This formulation carries much of the tension that runs through modern Islamist political thought. Most present-day advocates of one form or another of the Islamic state assert that their objective is not to establish theocratic rule. The ruler is not to be chosen on the basis of religious or spiritual authority. Rather, it is the application of the *shari'a* that is seen to invest the state with its Islamic character. In other words, legislation is the sphere in which the Islamic nature of government is actualized. At the same time, Rida, much like present-day advocates of the Islamic state, faced the problem of the relevance of the *shari'a* to actual or existing conditions. His resolution, which continues to inspire many, was to affirm that while rules must be developed to meet the imperatives of society at a given time, they must also remain within the framework of the *shari'a*, which, Rida argued, offered general principles for governing social transactions. Another caveat to the all-encompassing *shari'a* was the view that the spheres of administration and politics were subject to the discretion of the ruler and the community. Thus, in addition to the view that the *shari'a* rules in the social sphere are of a general nature and permit adaptability in line with society's interests, there also seem to be areas where it is not and cannot be operative. What, then, ensures the Islamic character, or the Islamicity, of rule? (Ismail, 2003b).

Rida's solution was to seek, in the requirement of consensus (*ijma'*) by the representatives of the community (*ahl al-hal wa al-'aqd*: the body of electors), a mechanism to provide constraints on the abuse of power by the rulers, and on deviation from the general principles of the *shari'a*. Like Abduh, he allowed that the field of *maslaha* is covered by a broad interpretation of current social needs and not by a literal reading of texts and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) (Kerr, 1966: 199; Ismail, 2003b). At the same time, Rida sought in consensus the means of avoiding error in judgement and interpretation. Rida's resolution, though unsatisfactory, highlights the dilemma faced by those seeking to bring in the *shari'a* as a frame of politics. On the one hand, there is an acknowledgement that certain realms are outside the scope of the *shari'a*. In this sense, the political appears separate and parallel to the religious (Enayat, 1982: 89). On the other hand, the idea that the *shari'a* presents general principles that act as a check on the legality of government raises the question of the absence of immediacy between text and context and the fact that interpretation remains, ultimately, the work of human beings.

The problems of the character, scope and relevance of legislation are sidestepped in contemporary Islamist discourses. The issues that thinkers like Abduh and Rida grappled with have been set aside in favour of a notion of the *shari'a* as all-encompassing, that is, as applicable to all time and space and as covering all aspects of social and political life. Thinkers associated with the Muslim Brotherhood Organization have maintained the view that the *shari'a* contains provisions for every possible facet of social life (Enayat, 1982: 89). In this, they seek to subsume politics under religion. Yet, in reviewing the sources of the *shari'a* – the *sunna* (tradition of the Prophet), for example – some contemporary Islamist thinkers have invoked the need for relevance when devising the rules. The greater weight they give to the Qur'an over the *sunna* is intended to place *ijtihad* (human reasoning based on authoritative texts and guided by practical considerations) at the centre of their programme for the application of the *shari'a*. The principles guiding *ijtihad* would appear to include the needs of the time, relevance and expediency (Brown, 1999: 122). The Islamicity / legality (*shar'aiya*) of government hinges once more on establishing the compatibility of its rules with the general principles of the *shari'a*. At the same time, a distinction is made between realms where *ijtihad* is not operative – these relate to issues that are regulated by Qur'anic texts – and realms that are the subject of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), that is, legal reasoning, allowing for personal effort of interpretation (*ijtihad*) and for difference or disagreement (*ikhtilaf*). One Islamic thinker identifies economic and agricultural projects as areas subject to *fiqh*. These issues fall into the category of people's interests that are defined as *masaleh mursala* (rationally identified benefits that have no basis of textual evidence) (Ma'amun al-Hudayabi in *Misr Bayna al-Dawala al-Dinniyya wa al-Madaniyya*, 1992: 50). The resort to such principles of jurisprudence reveals the limitations of a ready-made *shari'a*. Islamists inevitably recognize that they would be hard pressed to find guidance in the scripture or through the use of classical principles of jurisprudence for such matters as whether import-substitution industrialization is preferable to export-led growth.

The notion that the *shari'a* should govern all aspects of social and political life is articulated with the idea of divine sovereignty found in the thought of radical thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966). Here, supreme authority over worldly matters belongs to God. The conception of politics that emerges in Qutb's thought rests on a radical ethical and philosophical orientation which should guide individual action and all social relations and transactions – a sort of individual and societal philosophy that forms the basis of both perception and action (Abu Rabi'a, 1996: 154–5). The Islamic government is an expression of a religious consciousness which occupies the minds of the people. Islam, here, is a doctrine (*'aqidah*) which represents a mode of being in the world. It is a dynamic way of relating to the world and asserting one's submission to God, which ensures one's emancipation and freedom (Ismail, 2003b). Religious consciousness entails a responsibility to install God's government. Within the radical political philosophy advanced by Qutb, God's government could not be restricted to the application of the religious ordinances, but rather extends to all spheres of life. The realization of such a state of affairs seems to depend on a consciousness infused with *'aqidah* as a mode of being in the world. In other words, Islamic politics, conceived here as the government of the *shari'a*, would emanate from the social order. However, there is room for transformative action to be undertaken by the few who are infused with such *'aqidah*. Indeed, individual responsibility is placed on the Muslim to ensure that God's sovereignty is established. This means that all Muslims must undertake action to install God's government. This responsibility was accorded a central place in the Jihadist ideology of militant Islamist groups such as the al-Jihad organization and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt and the FIS in Algeria. Jihadist ideology places on the Muslim the duty to struggle against an un-Islamic government using any and all means, including force. It was in these terms that acts were justified such as the assassination of President Sadat in 1981 and the murder of Egyptian and Algerian intellectuals declared to be infidels.

6 The Politics of Morality

While there are no clear rules, in the tradition, regarding formal political institutions, it is important to recognize that many of the issues that have emerged as subjects of concern in *shari'a* regulations revolve around ethics and morality. According to Nazih Ayubi (1991), it is Islam's concern with morality that makes it appear to be political. Using a broad definition of politics that incorporates issues of power and domination, I argue that the concern with morality in Islamic discursive traditions should be read as political, and as defining certain realms of governance – in particular, realms that reinforce societal control over public morality, gender relations and so on. The politics of morality is played out in diverse terms, although it is characterized by certain basic themes and motifs.

The governance of morality entails a blurring of the lines separating the public and private, especially as drawn in much of western political thought. For example, the place of sexuality and sexual mores has been systematically pushed to the private domain in western politics, though not without contestation from segments of the population. In Islamic traditions, the regulation of sexual mores, including punishment for adultery and pre-marital sex, brings the state into the arena of personal conduct. Equally important is the implication of society in such regulation. The enforcement of the rules of morality is conceived of as a collective responsibility. Under the rubric of the injunction 'to enjoin good and forbid evil' (*al-amr bil-ma'aruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*), individual Muslims are entrusted with the authority to correct wrong. This injunction is used by contemporary Islamists to justify interventions in the public sphere that aim at restoring the moral order. Examples of such interventions are public preaching to women to don the veil and attacks on video shops and coffee shops as sites of immoral cultural practices. This kind of socially enforced regulation existed in earlier historical periods and involved gangs of youths known as *futuwwa*. Yet, here again, the picture is more complex as there are religious and cultural traditions that encourage maintaining privacy and allowing for concealment of transgressions. Further, if we accept that norms are socially constructed even when they are framed in religious terms, it becomes possible to see that the members of society negotiate these norms in their everyday-life experiences. In other words, the norms governing that which is permissible emerge in social situations and are defined by competing frames of reference and the situational logic that shape the interaction between religion and the social (Ismail, 2003a: 19).

The politics of morality has come to define Islamist activism in the contemporary period. In one view, this preoccupation expresses other conflicts and social strains associated with urbanization and other processes of modernization (Ayubi, 1991: 44). Proceeding from a view that politics is about power and contestation, I argue that this focus on morality is politics by other means. Islamists, opposing their government, find in morality grounds for pursuing political participation. This is also a ground of contestation in the family and in interaction between the sexes. This politics manifests itself in the perpetual drive for identifying behaviour within the conventional categories of the permissible and the impermissible or the licit and illicit (*halal* and *haram*), and for devising the Islam position on a wide range of issues from artificial insemination and sex change operations to outer space exploration. Public morality constitutes an arena where religious authorities are active and where members of the community participate, representing a public sphere of sorts.

In the discourses articulated by Islamists in the contemporary period, the politics of morality have extended to the politics of identity. Observing the rules of morality is, by convention, an essential precondition to preserving membership in the community. Classical categories of exclusion such as *jahid* (someone who denies the truth about God) and *kafir* (infidel) are deployed against transgressors. These categories are used to situate and construct otherness, and to draw the boundaries between the self and the other. The governance of ethics and morality sets the terms of inclusion and the conditions of exclusion in the community. Ethical and moral differences enter into the construction of the Self and the management of relations with the Other. The claims to difference rest on the production of essences enshrined in a cosmic order in which there is a privileged community, that of Muslims or true believers. According to Islamist ideologues, this community is predestined to lead humanity. The features and defining characteristics of this community are postulated as essences that override any historical considerations.

7 Islamicity of Government, Islamic Polity and Islamic Society

As noted above, the application of the *shari'a* is at the heart of the political order sketched out in Islamist discourses. Aziz al-Azmeh (1993) notes that the elements of this legalistic utopia are both arbitrary and single, in the sense that they do not constitute a coherent whole but are bound together only by reference to a name – Islam. The normative elements derive from the name. From it arise the tokens of Islamicity such as the veil, ordinances on various transgressions and the prohibition on usury. It would appear that these tokens guarantee the Islamicity of rule. Yet, things are not that simple. If we look at the experience of actually existing Islamic states, we find that no such guarantees exist and that the Islamic essence proves to be elusive in practice. The Iranian case illustrates the difficulty of pinning down this Islamic essence. In the first instance, the establishment of a Parliament entrusted with legislative power confirms that the *shari'a* is not an accomplished law. Further, the claims to its divine sources appear untenable when faced with matters of government and administration. For example, the Islamic government had to determine the status of administrative rules such as those governing traffic. In what way could they be said to conform to the rules of the *shari'a*? It is not only in areas of mundane government that the Iranian state has found that the *shari'a* may not be relevant. Even in matters concerning its basic principles, the *shari'a* was subjugated to politics. This is best evidenced in Imam Khomeini's declaration that the *shari'a* should be subordinate to the interests of the Islamic Republic. He stated that if the interests of the Republic necessitated the suspension of a *shari'a* ruling, then the ruling should be suspended. Khomeini's declaration was not simply the assertion of a pragmatic bent, but the expression of power and the affirmation of politics over all other considerations.

In Saudi Arabia, where the application of the *shari'a* is proclaimed by the state, the Islamist opposition has judged the government to be un-Islamic owing to its corruption, lack of accountability and the reported moral transgressions of members of the Saudi royal family. The Islamicity of government, then, seems to be associated with ideals such as justice and fairness that go beyond the application of religious ordinances. At the same time, we find that discursive mechanisms are used to confer an Islamic identity on rules and policies. For example, by adding the qualifier 'Islamic', Islamicity is claimed by religious authorities or by the Islamist opposition.

The examples of Islamic governments, such as the Iranian and Saudi governments, and the fact of the diversity of the Islamist movements, serve to highlight the difficulties of fixing the terms of the Islamic polity or identifying an essential type of Islamic politics. An Islamic conception of politics cannot be divorced from the lived reality of the religion. This lived reality is shaped by social factors such as class, gender, age and so on. The diversity that characterizes the everyday-life practices of the religion, and the terms through which that diversity comes to bear on public life, undermine the claim to a homogeneous society and, hence, the possibility that there exists an essential Muslim polity.

In a number of Muslim-majority countries, such as Turkey and Tunisia, secularization has been instituted by the state, and religion pushed to the private realm. In other countries, such as Egypt and Algeria, religion has functioned as an auxiliary to state policies and in such instances religious authorities have been subordinated to political authority. In Egypt, the post-colonial state moved to bring the main religious institution, al-Azhar, under its control. In Malaysia, *shari'a* courts were incorporated into the state project of modernity, reinforcing individual responsibility and promoting modern ideas of the nuclear family (Peletz, 2002).

If we turn our attention to the micro-level, we find diverse articulations and representations of Islam in the everyday life of Muslims. This diversity emerges from the different positions occupied by

Muslims in their social and political formations. Thus, not only are there varying lifestyles adopted by Muslims depending on their class, gender and life trajectories, but there are differing kinds of politics that are intimately linked to the settings in which they are engaged. In other words, there is no specific brand of Islamic or Muslim politics. Rather, what we have are competing styles of activism, contestation and claim-making that, at times, are best described in terms of their context, for example, urban politics, social movements, populism and nationalism. The deployment of signs and symbols from Islamic traditions has entered into these various expressions of politics. For instance, the assertion of a Muslim identity was integral to many nationalist movements struggling for independence. The Islamic idiom continues to be instrumentalized in a variety of settings, from struggles against occupation, as in the Palestinian case, to opposition and resistance to authoritarian rule in Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. The politicization of members of the Muslim Brotherhood Organization in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the formation of Hamas and Jihad was a response to the imperative of engagement in the liberation movement. In other words, their political activism and their success in mobilizing popular support are largely shaped by the politics of nationalism and would be better understood as the expression of nationalist politics and not religious zeal. Similarly, the Islamist movement in Egypt came to represent a protest movement of the popular strata whose everyday-life politics was determined by the characteristics of the urban setting. In this sense, Islamist politics in Egypt should be looked at from the perspective of urban politics and protest movements.

8 Conclusion

In addressing the relationship between Islam as a discursive tradition and politics understood in a broad sense, I have suggested that there is no single Islamic conception of politics and that the proposition that there is no separation between Islam and politics is flawed. I have tried to situate ideas about politics in their socio-historical contexts to demonstrate the diversity of debates and the variety of factors that come to shape these ideas. In classical Islamic thought, politics was conceived of as the art of keeping the community united and shielding it from infighting and disintegration. In a context of rival powers and contentions over rule, politics that consists of the management of the ruled and obedience to the ruler was the prerogative of power. The links between religion and politics were fleshed out in terms of the ruler overseeing that the *shari'a* is applied. The minimum classical jurists prescribed for maintaining loyalty to the ruler was that he did not counsel disobedience to God. Politics, on the whole, appears to be derived from power and not from religious or spiritual authority.

In the modern and contemporary periods the Islamist demand for the establishment of an Islamic government and the application of the *shari'a* has been made on the basis that Islam is both religion and state. My discussion shows that there is no consensus either on what the application of the *shari'a* entails or on what its substantive content covers. In Islamist theoretical writings, and in practice, we find that there is a wide scope of government and politics that is viewed either as parallel and separate to the religious or as governed by it in a general and often ambiguous manner. I have also underlined the focus on certain areas of *shari'a* regulations that the politics of morality represents. This focus crystallizes around certain spheres of power and contestation – those of gender relations and societal control over sexual mores, for example.

The diversity of experiences with regard to government and societal practices in Muslim societies underscores the impossibility of pinning down a single conception of politics or an essential Muslim polity. Islam, as a religion, interacts with social, political, economic and cultural determinants and is shaped by them. Hence, there does not exist a homogeneous and unchanged Islam that overrides politics and society. If we take politics to be about relations of power, then we should be concerned with how Islamic discourses and traditions are mobilized in contestation activities and in power struggles, whether involving formal political institutions or wider societal forces and processes.

NOTES

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1 I use the term 'Islamist' as both noun and adjective. As a noun, it refers to actors who call on signs and symbols from Islamic traditions to justify their interventions in the social and political spheres. As an adjective, 'Islamist' denotes the invocation of signs and symbols found in Islamic traditions. The term 'fundamentalism' has been used by scholars and journalists to describe beliefs and activities that are anchored in religious traditions, including Islamic traditions. However, there have been debates about the appropriateness of the term, given its origins in the Christian experience and the limitations that this places on the terms of discussion. Further, the term has acquired a pejorative sense as it came to be

associated with extremism and fanaticism. It should also be noted that actors involved in Islamist movements do not refer to themselves as fundamentalists but as *Islamiyyin*, which translates in English as 'Islamist'.

2 Lewis's analysis and reading of Islamic history have been very influential among American scholars and commentators. For example, his ideas were taken up by Samuel Huntington in his 'clash of civilizations' thesis.

3 According to Shi'i belief, the twelfth Imam in the line of Ali's successors, Muhammad al-Mahdi, became absent from the physical world in the tenth century. In his absence, all government was consequently seen to be illegitimate.

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11

Politics as Distorted Global Politics

Anthony McGrew

1 Introduction and Argument

Politics in the twenty-first century is, inescapably, a global affair. In an epoch in which power is organized and exercised on a transnational or even global scale, politics increasingly transcends local and national contexts. Globalization has woven together, in highly complex and uneven ways, the welfare and security of regions, nations and peoples. In the process, seemingly localized problems, from neighbourhood crime to unemployment, may be traced (quite literally) to the actions of criminal cartels and corporate executives on the other side of the globe. In turn, dealing with many global issues, from climate change to illegal migration, has involved the creation of new mechanisms of governance which are beyond the state and which exercise authority across national frontiers. In the process, they erode the distinction between foreign and domestic affairs. Politics and governance are being transformed. A global polity is in the making, in so far as people and organizations, from ethnic minorities to groups like Greenpeace, mobilize across borders to protect or advance their causes and interests, whilst national governments constitute but one layer, albeit a juridically and politically significant one, in an evolving system of global governance. If the twentieth century was the age in which politics came to be defined as, principally, a national affair, the twenty-first century is unquestionably the coming of age of global politics.

This chapter advocates a conception of politics as global politics. It argues that the traditional distinction between domestic and international politics has become a conceptual fiction which, despite its hold on the wider public imagination, no longer reflects the realities of a highly interconnected world. Politics and governance are becoming globalized as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent events vividly demonstrate. As the world confronts a new century, the classic questions of political life have been re-posed with greater urgency, namely: who rules, in whose interests, by what means, and to what purpose? Addressing these questions intellectually, however, requires moving beyond the mythical 'Great Divide' – namely the separation of the study of Politics from the study of International Relations – which has fragmented scholarly political analysis since the birth of the modern state. Analysing global politics is a radical endeavour which involves putting the pieces back together, thereby reconstructing in the process the study of Politics and International Relations.

In discussing the distinctive form and dynamics of global politics, this chapter will seek to address four key questions:

- What is global politics?
- How is global politics to be understood?
- Where does power lie in global politics?
- Why does the study of global politics matter?

2 Politics Beyond Borders: Towards a Global Politics

Some time ago James Rosenau observed that, 'Politics everywhere, it would seem, are related to politics everywhere else . . . now the roots . . . of political life can be traced to remote corners of the globe' (cited in Mansbach, Ferguson et al., 1976: 22). As this paragraph took shape, the residents of Lee-on-the-Solent, a small English seaside town in Hampshire, could be heard some streets away, protesting against Home Office proposals to place an asylum centre in the town. Political oppression and economic collapse in distant nations have generated controversy in a normally quiescent residential village. By contrast, the Jubilee 2000 campaign brought together a global coalition of aid, development, religious, human rights and women's organizations from across the North–South divide to campaign for the abolition of Third World debt. Coordinated campaigns within the national capitals of the G7 states (the USA, the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Japan and Canada) and at the G7 summits in the late 1990s forced the issue on to the global agenda and compelled a subsequent G7 policy response. Both these cases are manifestations of contemporary political globalization: namely, the intensification of worldwide political interconnectedness encompassing transnational policy problems, new systems of global regulation, political action at a distance and transnational solidarities.

Political globalization

Political globalization is defined by the worldwide or trans-sovereign reach of political power, systems of governance, and political agency. It is articulated in the stretching, thickening, broadening and speeding up of political interactions and processes. Turmoil on the West Bank ripples out across the globe, whilst the decisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) can dramatically affect (amongst many other constituencies) the livelihoods of steel workers in Europe, rice farmers in Japan or access to medicines for the world's poorest communities. Politics is effectively 'stretched' across frontiers as developments or decisions in one locality come to have significant (intended and unintended) consequences for distant communities. This is a politics marked increasingly by distant encounters or distant proximities such that borders no longer demarcate a bounded national political space. Under these conditions the 'reality of power', to borrow a phrase, cannot be disclosed simply by reference to local circumstances.

Associated with this stretching is a thickening of the infrastructures of global political interaction. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a phenomenal expansion and institutionalization of global, regional and transnational governance. Governments and their societies are deeply enmeshed in an evolving system of multi-layered global governance involving the growing regulation and legalization of transnational affairs. With this thickening of global infrastructures comes a blurring of the local–global divide as the politics of the global neighbourhood acquires increasing significance. A more intrusive system of global governance is accompanied by a broadening political agenda as domestic issues become internationalized and world affairs become domesticated. Managing the domestic economy requires concerted multilateral co-operation whilst dealing with global warming demands coordinated local actions. This broadening of the global political agenda reflects the growth of trans-sovereign or intermestic issues arising from the globalization of economic, social and cultural life.

Finally, the existence of worldwide communications infrastructures erodes the constraints of time and distance on the conduct of political activity. Instantaneous communications and almost real-time media reporting alter, sometimes quite fundamentally, the context and dynamics of political agency and policy-making. An incautious remark at a daily press briefing in Washington may require instant rebuttal from 10 Downing Street in London, lest it undermine the British Government's policy. Reaction and decision times have shrunk, complicated even further by the pressures of 24-hour-a-day global media reporting. Political ideas too – about neo-liberalism or human rights, for instance – are rapidly diffused in a media-saturated world. Global communications have transformed the situational context of political life, speeding up political processes and the diffusion of political ideas, amplifying the worldwide impacts of political agency.

Multi-layered global governance

Political globalization is, of course, not a novel phenomenon. Just a little over a century ago much of the world's population was subject to the imperial rule of European powers. However, contemporary political globalization has given rise to a distinctive form of global politics. This is distinguished by, amongst other things, the dynamics of a multi-layered global governance complex, the rise of transnational civil society, the emergence of international public spheres and the transformation of political community.

Although no world government (which presupposes a singular centralized global public authority which legislates for the common affairs of humanity) exists (or is ever likely to), the multiplicity of global and regional bodies – from the International Criminal Court to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – which have been created to deal with those matters which escape national control effectively constitute a multi-layered global governance complex. This evolving complex encompasses the multitude of formal and informal structures of political coordination amongst governments, inter-governmental and transnational agencies – public and private – designed to realize common purposes or collectively agreed goals through the making or implementing of global or transnational rules, and the regulation of trans-border problems. There are now some 6,415 multilateral bodies or agreements, not to mention countless regional bodies and trans-governmental policy networks regulating every aspect of global activity. With the end of the Cold War, classic geopolitical management of world affairs has become less plausible (and legitimate) as a governing framework for ensuring world order. In a highly interconnected world of diverse nation states, in which non-state actors also wield enormous influence, hierarchical forms of managing global affairs are losing their efficacy. As a consequence, there is evidence of a detectable shift from the classic multilateralism of the post-war order to the more complex architecture of global governance. But this global governance complex is marked by enormous inequalities of power, access and influence which distort its functioning and, as discussed below, pose crucial normative questions about justice and order. Moreover, this shift is by no means fully articulated or secure, nor is the world witnessing the demise of geopolitics. This is a period of transition in which multilateralism and geopolitics coexist in dynamic tension.

Transnational civil society

Alongside this global governance complex is an embryonic transnational civil society; that is, a political arena in which citizens and private interests collaborate across borders to advance their common goals or to bring governments and the formal institutions of global governance to account for their activities. In recent decades a plethora of non-governmental organizations, transnational organizations (as varied as the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the Rainforest Foundation and the Catholic Church), advocacy networks (ranging from the women's movement to Nazis on the net) and citizens' groups have come to play a significant role in mobilizing, organizing, and exercising people-power across national boundaries. Official sources record the existence of some 47,098 NGOs in 2001 as citizens and collectivities organize across national borders (Glasius, Kaldor et al., 2002: 195). This has been facilitated by the speed and ease of modern global communications and a growing awareness of common interests between groups in different countries and regions of the world. At the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the key representatives of environmental, corporate and other interested parties outnumbered the formal representatives of government. Of course, not all the members of transnational civil society are either civil or representative; some seek to further dubious, reactionary or criminal causes whilst many lack effective accountability. Furthermore, there are enormous inequalities between the agencies of transnational civil society in terms of resources, influence and access to key centres of decision-making. Multinational corporations, like Murdoch's News International, have much greater access to centres of power and the capacity to shape the global agenda than do organizations such as the Rainforest Action Network. Many of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the world community have no effective voice. Like the global governance complex, this embryonic transnational civil society is exclusionary.

An international public sphere

Conjoining the global governance complex and civil society is an evolving international public sphere. Traditionally the idea of a public sphere has been reserved to denote that political space in which citizens are able to deliberate about, and to communicate, public opinion on the issues of the day to politicians and those in government. In contemporary societies it is clearly, although not exclusively, reliant upon a functioning mass media. Since there is no real equivalent at the global level of a national mass media, a unified public or a national government, the idea of an international public sphere has to be treated with some caution. However, the domestic analogy may be misleading. Rather than a singular global public or world public opinion, it may be more appropriate to think in terms of a multiplicity of publics at the global level. For on almost any significant global issue, from the use of genetically modified organisms to globalization itself, it is possible to identify a public space of awareness and deliberation, which cuts across national cultures, frontiers and media. Few would dispute that, at the height of the UN Security Council debate on Iraq in 2003, public deliberations and opinion formation – referred to by Kofi Annan in a moment of hubris as 'the second great superpower' – had a decidedly transnational dimension, most especially in respect of the mobilization and communication of anti-war sentiment. Although, by comparison with domestic politics, such transnational or global public spheres are weakly institutionalized and more transitory, nevertheless even weak transnational public spheres perform an important political function in influencing global agendas, shaping political argument, encouraging transnational solidarities and challenging official constructions of the 'political'.

Deliberation about the global interest presumes the existence of a wider global community, or communities, and ties of solidarity which transcend borders. In the context of intense global and regional interconnectedness, the very idea of political community as an exclusive territorially delimited unit is problematic. In a world in which global warming connects the long-term fate of many Pacific islands to the driving habits of tens of millions of SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) motorists across the globe, the conventional territorial conception of political community appears decidedly antiquated. Keohane and Nye trace this complex intermeshing of fates to a heightened 'institutional velocity' such that decisions in one location rapidly cascade through global systems with cumulative worldwide effects often magnifying their unintended and adverse consequences (Keohane and Nye, 2000). When the Thai monetary authorities decided to de-link the Thai Baht from the US dollar in July 1997, they could not have predicted that this would trigger the worst financial crisis in East Asia since the great Depression. Globalization weaves together, in highly complex and abstract systems, the fates of households, communities and peoples across regions of the globe such that real 'communities of fate' can no longer be defined in exclusively national or territorial terms. As Dryzek concludes, the idea of political community 'presupposes the notion of a self-contained, self-governing community. However, in today's world, that notion is becoming increasingly fictional, as political, social, and especially economic transactions transcend national boundaries' (Dryzek, 1995: 14). This is not to assert that territorial political communities are obsolete, but rather to recognize that they are nested within global, regional and transnational communities of fate, identity, association and solidarity. Growing enmeshment in regional and global orders and the proliferation of trans-border problems has created a plurality of diverse and overlapping collectivities which span borders, binding together directly and indirectly the fate of communities in different locations and regions of the globe. These transnational communities of fate transcend existing political communities such that notions of citizenship, political identity and the public good have escaped their rootedness in the territorially bounded polity. Political community today is being reconfigured to accord with a world of 'ruptured boundaries'.

Global politics

Global politics is a term which seeks to capture this rupturing of boundaries in several significant respects. It acknowledges that the scale of political life has fundamentally altered: politics understood as the organization, distribution, exercise and consequences of power operates simultaneously on different scales from the local to the global neighbourhood. It asserts the growing irrelevance of the distinction between the domestic and the foreign, inside and outside the territorial state, and between the national and the international, as decisions and actions taken in one region impact upon the welfare of communities in distant parts of the globe such that domestic politics is internationalized and world politics becomes domesticated. It accepts that power in the global system is not the sole preserve of states but is distributed (unevenly) amongst a diverse array of public and private actors and networks (from international agencies, through corporations to NGOs) with important consequences for who gets what, how, when and where. It affirms that political authority has been diffused not only upwards to supra-state bodies, such as the European Union, but also downwards to sub-state bodies, such as regional assemblies, and beyond the state to private agencies, such as the International Accounting Standards Committee. It admits that sovereignty remains a principal juridical attribute of states but concludes that it is increasingly exercised as a 'bargaining chip' within the global governance complex, rather than as an effective barrier to the globalization of political life. Finally, it affirms that, in an age of globalization, national polities no longer function as closed systems. On the contrary, at the heart of the argument here is that all politics – understood as the pursuit of power, order and justice – is ultimately global politics.

3 Power and Distorted Global Politics

Making sense of the complexities of global politics involves analysing the principal power structures which shape the pattern of political outcomes, the distribution of values and resources: that is, who gets what, how, where and when in the global polity. Three such structures have been identified in the literature, namely: the structure of coercive power; the structure of productive power; and the structure of social power. Global politics, in this respect, may be compared to a three-dimensional chess game in which each dimension involves different configurations of actors, issues and power but in which outcomes are determined by the moves on each dimension (Nye, 2002). Understanding the organization, location, distribution and exercise of power in each of these three dimensions provides insights into the perplexing questions of global political life, namely: who rules, how, in whose interests and to what purposes?

Coercive power

At the height of the UN crisis over Iraq in early 2003, the White House made it clear that, whatever the outcome of Security Council deliberations, the United States reserved the right forcibly to disarm Saddam Hussein. With a military machine whose capabilities outstripped the combined firepower of the remaining permanent members of the UN Security Council, no credible countervailing power existed to prevent US unilateral action. Since the USA is effectively a hyper-power – the sole military superpower and the single largest economy in the world – its hegemonic position is decisive in shaping the patterns and outcomes of global politics. Central to this geopolitical account of global politics is an emphasis upon the structure of coercive power in the global system, most especially how the most powerful states ultimately legislate the form and rules of world order. The present liberal world order – of free trade and unhindered capital flows – is primarily a product of US global hegemony although it has the consent of other major powers. But coercive power, as the attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 demonstrated, is no longer a monopoly of states. And, because of globalization, even the most militarily powerful states are now vulnerable to what is euphemistically termed 'asymmetrical violence', or terrorist attack. Moreover, coercive power, though absolutely crucial in certain contexts, plays a very circumscribed role in the conduct of much of the substantive business of global governance and politics. In this respect, although US hyper-power and the concentration of coercive power amongst a few dominant states have significant consequences for the agenda, conduct and dynamics of global politics, they are by no means always the most significant or decisive factors. To conceive of global politics as simply an expression of great power politics or geopolitics is to overlook its complex origins and dynamics.

Productive power

In his book *One World: Ready or Not*, William Greider argues that as capitalism has become globalized, even the most powerful states, such as the USA, find themselves engulfed by the imperatives of the global market (Greider, 1997). Rather than conceiving global politics solely as an extension of geopolitics, radical accounts of global politics stress the dominance of global corporate capital and the consolidation, over recent decades, of a new global capitalist order. In this view global politics is dominated by the activities of powerful transnational social forces – elite, political, corporate and bureaucratic networks – centred on the USA (but not controlled by it) whose wealth, power and position are bound up with the reproduction and expansion of global corporate capitalism. Underlying this account is a conception of world order in which political empires have been replaced by what Hardt and Negri refer to as the empire of global capital (Hardt and Negri, 2000). In effect, the institutions of global governance and the apparatus of national states are principally transmission belts for securing and managing the global capitalist order in accordance with the disciplines of global market forces and the imperatives of accumulation. Suturing this order together is an emerging transnational class formation – the cosmocracy. This cosmocracy blends the interests and aspirations of key national business and state elites across the globe with those of transnational corporate capital and international bureaucrats into an unofficial global directorate, staffing and managing the citadels of world power in accordance with the precepts of an evolving global capitalist order. Within this cosmocracy, expertise and knowledge are critical qualifications for participating in and contributing to the management of its empire. Issues such as the environment and the safety of air transport are de-politicized by redefining them as technical or procedural matters that are best resolved by experts through a process of technical deliberation. As Winner suggests, this kind of technocratic ethic means that:

> One may register to vote on this level only by exhibiting proper credentials as an expert. The balloting will be closed to the ignorant and to those whose knowledge is out of date or otherwise not relevant to the problem at hand. Among the disenfranchised in this arrangement are some previously formidable characters: the average citizen, the sovereign consumer... and the home-grown politician. (Winner, 1977: 170–1)

Global politics is ultimately constituted by the clashing imperatives of this empire of global capital, the rule of experts and the global social and political struggles to which the former give rise.

Social power

Of course, it would be facile to argue that global politics is simply determined by the 'executive committee of the [global] bourgeoisie'. The terms of capitalist globalization have always been contested, from the campaigns against the Atlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century to Third World demands in the 1970s for a New International Economic Order. In recent decades the growing authority of regional and global institutions has created new arenas in which globalization has been, and continues to be, vigorously contested. A new kind of 'network politics' has evolved which, in mobilizing and organizing resistance to the rule of capital and experts, has encouraged global coalition building amongst diverse groups, whose otherwise divergent aspirations have been moulded into a common project of 'humane globalization'. Thus the 80,000 activists who attended the most recent annual World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2003 agreed a programme for global social change driven by a shared aspiration for global social justice and ecological and human security.

This eruption of raw social power, or politics from below, constitutes a global politics of protest and mobilization which advocates alternatives to the further rationalization and commodification of social life propagated by the agents of the cosmocracy. Facilitated by global communications infrastructures, this new political activism from below constitutes an increasingly significant social force through which communities and citizens come to challenge systems of domination and exclusion. In the global neighbourhood, community politics has acquired a worldwide impulse.

Taken separately, the analysis of coercive, productive and social power structures delivers at best only partial insights into the dynamics of global politics. This is primarily because global politics emerges out of the complex interplay amongst worldwide networks of coercive, productive and social power. Clearly, this interplay is shaped by cumulative inequalities of power and exclusion (across the three structures) – reflecting structural inequalities of power – such that contemporary global politics might be more accurately described as 'distorted global politics'. Making sense of distorted global politics, however, delivers a double challenge to the political analyst and the political activist alike. For most existing grand theories of politics remain trapped within a 'methodological territorialist' logic – the state as a power container – whilst, to paraphrase Jameson, the truth of power no longer resides in the locales in which it is experienced (Jameson, 1991). Globalization, and the emergence of global politics, demand 'substantial shifts in the ways that we theorize and practise politics' (Scholte, 2000: 61).

4 Globalization and the Reconfiguration of Politics

Orthodox accounts of politics

To talk of global politics is to advocate a conception of the political which challenges orthodox (state-centric) accounts of politics. Study a political map of the modern world and the most striking feature is the division of the entire earth's surface into over 190 neatly defined territorial units, namely states. To a student of politics in the Middle Ages such a division of the world, which gives primacy to borders and boundaries, would appear a little perplexing. Borders are a relatively recent invention as is the idea that states are sovereign, self-governing and territorially delimited political communities. For many obvious reasons, not least the primacy of nationalism, such a territorial conception of politics retains much conceptual influence. Pick up any textbook on politics in Britain, France, the USA or any other country and the underlying narrative will be broadly similar. In particular, it will tend towards a 'container' view of politics, power and governance as activities which can be explained principally by reference to domestic conditions and forces. If the world beyond the state intrudes into this analysis it will do so either in the form of a discussion of foreign policy, usually tacked on towards the end, or a broad overview of how the international factors impinge upon domestic politics. Such conventional accounts presume that the national polity or political community is simply coterminous with the bounded territorial state. Although a convenient fiction, this presumption remains constitutive of the very idea of the modern state and politics (Walker, 1994).

From its origins in the Peace Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, the institution of the modern state has evolved over the last four centuries to become the principal unit of political rule. Empires and city states gave way to nation states or state-nations. Nationalism and democracy reinforced the idea of the modern state as a sovereign, self-governing, territorially delimited and culturally homogeneous political unit. Much of the history of state formation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was accordingly bloody. Consequently, the conventional wisdom has it that politics is an activity that occurs within a bounded political community – namely, the nation state, which is normally thought to be constituted by shared norms, rules and governmental institutions which in turn exercise sovereign political authority. Politics is concerned ultimately with matters of governance and persuasion within a highly institutionalized political and legal order in which violence is illegitimate. Beyond the sovereign (national) political community, within the society of states, there is at best only a thin sense of community, no effective central political authority, and thus only a weakly institutionalized world order. In these circumstances, power ultimately trumps legality and legitimacy such that politics is essentially an activity defined by the struggle for power by coercive and violent means where necessary. To paraphrase Clausewitz, war is the continuation of politics by other means. Politics between states (or discrete political communities) is thus a radically different kind of activity to politics within the bounded political community. Such a stark differentiation between domestic and international politics is central to the orthodox conception of political life. It is expressed concretely in separate programmes of study for 'politics' and 'international relations', and sometimes replicated in separate Departments of Politics and International Relations.

A different reality

However, the Westphalian ideal of discrete, self-governing, sovereign political communities has always been at odds with the historical realities of global flows and movements of ideas, goods, people, technology and capital. Indeed, in a curious way, it is the desire of governments and peoples to control what transpires within their borders which has contributed to political globalization. Sovereignty, understood as the rightful claim to, and capacity for, self-governance, has always been decidedly problematic, if not in practice a form of 'organized hypocrisy' (Krasner, 1999). Politics has always had a global dimension. The movement for the abolition of slavery in the eighteenth century organized transnationally. During the American Civil War (1861–3) the cotton workers of Manchester provided support and demonstrated their solidarity for the Union cause. Peace campaigners from across the world lobbied governments for effective action to regulate international conflicts at the historic Hague Conferences in the late nineteenth century. Patterns of global economic integration, since the days of the East India Company, have enmeshed the political economies of states and communities in different regions of the world within a single global division of labour. And the combination of industrialized warfare and geopolitical competition turned the world into a single strategic arena in which distant but local conflicts could escalate into global confrontations. Politics has never stopped at the water's edge, so to speak, and the Westphalian ideal has always represented the exception rather than the rule. So, what is new?

Politics as global politics

As globalization has intensified over the last five decades, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the popular fiction of the 'great divide': that is, treating political life as having two quite separate spheres of action, the domestic and the international, which operate according to different logics with different rules, actors and agendas. Events, as daily news bulletins constantly report, no longer appear to fit with the Westphalian fiction. The anomalies, as Rosenau argues, keep piling up (Rosenau, 1997). To paraphrase a former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, under conditions of political globalization 'politicians and governments too often give the appearance of being in office without being in power'. Politicians and activists increasingly acknowledge, as former President Clinton once described it, that 'the once bright line between domestic and foreign policy is blurring. If I could do anything to change the speech patterns of those of us in public life, I would like almost to stop hearing people talk about foreign policy and domestic policy, and instead start discussing economic policy, security policy, environmental policy – you name it' (cited in Cusimano, 2000: 6). As the substantive issues of political life consistently ignore the artificial foreign / domestic divide, from the global organization of anti-war protests to national courts enforcing the rulings of the World Trade Organization, politics has experienced a profound transformation. Global (or geocentric) politics – the politics of worldwide social relations in which the pursuit of power, interests, order and justice transcends borders – constitutes the principal defining feature of the human condition in the twenty-first century (Modelski, 1972: 15).

5 Conclusion: Global Politics between Hope and Fear

Globalization does not prefigure the emergence of a harmonious world community. On the contrary, it simultaneously integrates and divides, universalizes and particularizes, generating both conflict and co-operation. Global politics gives political expression to these tensions or to what Stanley Hoffmann has referred to as the clash of globalizations: the escalating confrontations between alternative globalization projects which include the neo-liberal vision of a single global market, religious fundamentalism and the backlash against westernization, the advocacy of a more humane globalization, the impetus for liberal empire and the globalization of informal violence by terrorists and organized crime (Hoffmann, 2002). This clash of different globalization projects articulates an ever more acute confrontation between the politics of hope and the politics of fear. Trapped between hope and fear, the task of any responsible political analyst must be to pose and answer the question whether the good global community can be fashioned out of today's distorted global politics (Modelski, 1972) – in short, whether a better world is possible. Modern political theory, as with international theory, has tended to neglect the question of whether the global community can also be a good community. The advent of global politics, as Keohane suggests, demands nothing less than the displacement of this neglect by 'a new period of intellectual creativity' (Keohane, 2002: 285). A global political theory is called for which creates the conceptual resources for thinking about the normative and ethical principles which might inform the moral constitution of global politics as a catalyst for realizing the good global community.

As the tocsin has sounded, a renaissance of moral and political theorizing concerning the global condition has unfolded. This has begun to dissolve the artificial boundaries between political and international theory, to transcend the 'great divide' between the study of politics and the study of international relations. Within this new genre of global political analysis, two themes have acquired a special status: democracy and justice. A voluminous and expanding literature on global (or cosmopolitan) democracy and global justice has evolved (Held, 1995; Jones, 1999; Caney, 2001; Habermas, 2001; Keohane, 2001; McGrew, 2002; Singer, 2002). These literatures speak directly to two pressing and directly related matters, namely: the democratization of global politics, and the creation of a more just world order. In the context of a deeply divided world, in which violence is endemic and might seeks to impose right, the prospects for both currently appear somewhat dimmer than at the turn of the new century. Despite this, one of the critical tasks of contemporary political analysis must be to think rigorously and realistically about how the present distorted global politics might be further civilized and democratized. As Peter Singer acknowledges, this 'is a daunting moral and intellectual challenge, but one we cannot refuse to take up. The future of the world depends on how well we meet it' (Singer, 2002: 201).

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12

Politics as if Nature Mattered

Neil Carter

1 Introduction and Argument

Traditional definitions of politics, both broad and narrow, take it for granted that politics is concerned with the ways in which humans relate to each other. As a result the impact of human activities on the natural environment is often neglected, which suggests that existing definitions may be incomplete or flawed. In this chapter I argue that a focus on human–nature relations must be at the heart of a full and proper definition of politics – that politics is about the way people interact with their social and natural environment. This environmental approach encompasses all the concerns that are familiar to us from other definitions of politics – institutions, ideas, power, class, collective choice and so on – but, in addition, it brings the human–nature relationship to the centre of political analysis. Thus this approach both broadens the scope of politics as well as giving it a different focus from other definitions (which may also offer a new perspective on many familiar political problems).

I start by explaining why the environment has to be brought to the centre of political analysis, before outlining what an environmental approach to politics involves: its core characteristics, holistic assumptions and some of the key analytical implications of this perspective.

2 The Environment as Politics

To make a case for politics from an environmental perspective it is important initially to demonstrate the centrality of the environment to political analysis.

The label 'environment' encompasses a huge range of political subjects. Although it is a relatively new concept politically, acquiring widespread usage only in the late 1960s, many problems that we now call 'environmental' have been around for thousands of years. Plato wrote about soil erosion in Attica in the fourth century BC, a problem that today is now so extensive that it contributes to widespread desertification across many parts of Africa and Asia (Wall, 1994: 36–7). There are also plausible environmental explanations, including deforestation and soil erosion, for the collapse of the Mayan civilization in Central America hundreds of years ago (Ponting, 1992: 78–83).

Today there are myriad political issues that are immediately and widely recognizable as being 'environmental'. Many involve the depletion of scarce natural resources. In some places, marine fishing stocks are close to extinction, with cod fisheries completely wiped out in the once abundant fishing banks off Canada's Newfoundland coast and now delicately balanced in the North Sea. The land covered by tropical rainforests diminished rapidly at 14.2 million hectares per year, or almost 1 per cent annually, during the 1990s (FAO, 2000). Water scarcity is acute in many of the poorest parts of the world. Long-term energy supplies are threatened by the steady depletion of non-renewable natural resources, such as oil, coal and gas. There is also a multitude of pollution problems including air pollution caused by gaseous emissions from factory chimneys and car exhaust pipes; drinking water contamination from organic chemicals and heavy metals; and land pollution from toxic waste dumps. The loss of land, whether in the picturesque English countryside or the untouched American wilderness, and the resulting threat to habitats and fauna, from urban development, road construction and mineral extraction, relentlessly gathers pace. Other critical environmental problems include the rapidly expanding volume of municipal waste, urban traffic congestion and the impact of mass tourism.[1]

In recent years a new set of truly global environmental problems has emerged – notably climate change, ozone depletion and biodiversity loss – involving the disruption of ecosystems by human activities. These problems are global both in their cause and in their effect; all countries contribute to them and none will escape their impact. But some countries have more responsibility than others – the USA generates around 25 per cent of the global carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, whereas Bangladesh (with just under half the population of the USA) produces just less than 1 per cent. Conversely, the impact of global problems will vary; rising sea-levels might lead to the disappearance of the Maldives but will have little impact on land-locked, mountainous Switzerland (although climate change will cause many of its glacial ice caps to melt).

This litany of familiar problems and issues indicates the sheer breadth of the environment as an issue, and suggests several lessons for the study of politics.

First, the environment should not be regarded as a discrete aspect – an add-on extra – of political analysis. Since the 1960s, growing awareness of the threat posed by environmental problems has generated increasing political interest in the environment. This concern has taken many forms, including: the development of a green political ideology (often called 'ecologism'); the formation of green parties whose electoral success has enabled them to enter government coalitions in Germany, France, Belgium, Finland and Italy; the emergence of countless environmental pressure groups whose activities range from conventional lobbying of politicians to climbing trees in protest against new development projects; and the creation of environmental ministries and agencies of the state to address these 'new' problems. Today all countries, at least rhetorically, are committed to the new policy paradigm of sustainable development – 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987: 43) – which attempts to reconcile the often conflicting objectives of development and economic growth with environmental protection.

Traditional approaches to politics have attempted to deal with this new subject within their own terms: institutionalists study the way governments and political parties have responded to this new challenge; rational choice theorists analyse environmental 'bads' as problems of collective action; and Marxists explain them in terms of capitalism and class struggle. Indeed, there is a thriving 'sub-discipline' of academic politics called 'environmental politics', devoted to the study of political ideas, parties, movements and policies towards the environment (Carter, 2001; Connelly and Smith, 2002; Dobson, 2000). However, I will argue that the environment cannot and should not be treated simply as a separate and distinct sub-discipline; on the contrary, it must be brought to the forefront of what politics is about and hence what political analysis should be concerned with.

Secondly, it is apparent that environmental issues cannot be compartmentalized into a narrow issue area (although, in practice, in most countries the environment is still seen as a single issue with primary policy responsibilities allocated to an environment ministry). On the contrary, policies made in all core economic or producerist policy areas – the economy, industry, trade, agriculture, energy, transport – will have major consequences for the environment. This point can be illustrated by taking one traditional policy area – agriculture. In most industrialized countries across North America, Australasia and the European Union (EU), for example, the primary policy objective for many years has been to maximize agricultural yields in order to promote national self-sufficiency across a range of core crops and to build a profitable export market. These objectives have been achieved through the 'industrialization' of farming practices, but at a high price for the environment. The British countryside, for example, has been transformed since the Second World War by the widescale destruction of hedgerows, ancient woodlands, wetlands and lowland heaths, harming many species of animals, birds and insects. Intensive farming gradually erodes soil quality, consumes vast amounts of water and generates run-off from pesticides and slurry that pollutes rivers and underlying water tables. Modern agri-industry has also contributed new risks to food safety, notably from bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and exacerbated the impact of older problems such as foot and mouth, salmonella and listeria. A similar story can be told in core areas such as transport, where almost every decision – building new roads, taxing aviation fuel, privatizing railways – will have environmental implications. In short, core economic activities have profound, often devastating, implications for the natural environment.

A third lesson is that actions in all other policy areas can also have profound implications for the environment. Foreign policy probably provides the most extreme case: war. Modern warfare is incredibly damaging to the environment. Most obviously, in addition to the death and maiming of human beings, war destroys basic infrastructure, resulting in damaged sewage systems, leaking fuels and chemical emissions that poison waterways and harm natural habitats. Some of the most visible recent examples include the burning Kuwaiti oil wells during the 1991 Gulf War and the pollution of the Danube from NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. Chemical and biological weapons are particularly destructive, illustrated by the decimation of habitats when US troops used napalm in Vietnam, whilst the calamitous consequences of nuclear conflict are almost unimaginable.

Environmental disputes can also be a cause of war. Natural resources, notably oil, have often been a source of conflict, and it is not hard to imagine a future war over contested water rights in the Middle East where water is at such a premium. Indeed, environmental diplomacy has become an increasingly important part of 'normal' foreign policy. There are now around 200 multilateral environmental treaties and agreements, covering such issues as climate change, ozone depletion, biodiversity, marine pollution and mineral exploitation of the Antarctic. But even when not directly addressing such explicitly 'environmental' problems, environmental considerations are (or should be) a central part of almost every aspect of foreign policy. The use of development aid to support massive capital projects, such as the Pergau dam in Malaysia or the Ilusu dam in Turkey, which will flood great tracts of land and disrupt natural water courses, has provoked major international environmental disputes. Trade issues, which form the core of most contemporary foreign policy, have profound environmental consequences. For example, many regulations introduced to protect the environment can be construed as a constraint on free trade. Thus the USA has recently questioned whether it is legitimate under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules enforcing free trade for EU member states to ban the import of genetically modified foodstuffs.

The same point is true for even the most unlikely policy areas. School education policy, for example, has direct and indirect consequences for the environment. There are many environmental impacts arising out of the daily routines of schooling; these range from the 'school run' which involves parents driving children to and from school, thereby producing carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, to the energy consumption and waste generated by operating school buildings. Perhaps more fundamentally, the achievement of a more sustainable society requires us all to become 'ecological citizens' whereby we learn to think and behave in ways that are less damaging to the environment. It is therefore vital that environmental issues be included in the school curriculum, so that children are educated about problems such as biodiversity loss and climate change, and what they can do to prevent them.

Finally, I have made the point that the environment is omnipresent, permeating every aspect of politics. Currently, policy-makers either do not recognize this reality or else they regard those environmental consequences as unimportant. An additional reason why the environment needs to be placed centre-stage is the powerful notion of the *limits to growth*. This idea dates back to the early 1970s when a group of scientists published a report (Meadows et al., 1972) analysing the complex interdependencies between five key variables – industrial output, resource depletion, pollution, food production and population growth – and concluded pessimistically that if existing growth trends continued then the limits to growth on the planet would be reached within 100 years. *The Limits to Growth* report has subsequently been rightly criticized for its crude scientific and computer modelling and wildly inaccurate predictions. Nevertheless, it did introduce the important concept of finitude; the highly plausible notion that sooner or later economic growth must encounter limits imposed by the Earth's carrying capacity, or that human activities may irreparably damage and destabilize delicate ecosystems (and suggested that the technocentric belief that human ingenuity will always find a solution to every problem may be far too optimistic). Of course, on most accounts, politics is concerned with scarcity and the distribution of scarce resources; hence the familiar who? how? what? when? questions of political analysis. However, the environmental perspective brings an additional dimension to these questions by suggesting that political activity takes place in a planet of finite natural resources. I am not arguing that the 'end of the world is nigh', as some survivalists of the 1970s may be accused of doing; instead, as pointed out by a group of the world's leading economists, it is reasonable to assume that sooner or later economic growth must reach the limits of the Earth's environmental carrying capacity (Arrow et al., 1995). In short, the environment is of fundamental importance to political understanding.

To sum up, the most important practical point that flows from the above discussion is that politics needs to be seen in terms of the interaction of humans and nature, because almost everything that we do involves humans interacting, for good or ill, with the environment.

3 Politics as Human–Nature Interaction

So if we accept the basic idea about the centrality of the environment to political activity – what kind of conception of politics results from it?

The first assumption is that humans are part of nature – we are natural beings; or, as Aristotle observed long ago, and countless others have repeated subsequently, we are political *animals*. As Hayward (1998: 8) puts it:

> Despite widespread and deeply ingrained habits of talking about nature as something 'out there' and 'other' or radically different from 'us'...there is nothing in the world – at least of which we are or could be aware – which is non-natural, so humans are not in any politically relevant respect 'non-natural'.

Certainly, humans have various capacities which some or all other natural beings do not have – capacities that set humans apart in many ways from other natural beings (just as the characteristics of any species set it apart from another) – but they do not set humans apart from nature.

From an environmental perspective, the study of politics must bring nature to centre-stage. Most traditional definitions of politics – including those found elsewhere in this book – make little or no specific reference to nature or the environment. Some do at least acknowledge that political activity involves making decisions that affect many aspects of nature. In particular, Leftwich (in this volume) defines politics as comprising 'all the activities of co-operation, negotiation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby people go about organizing the use, production or distribution of human, natural and other *resources* in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life' (p. 103). In short, politics is about resources, which include both human resources (income, capital) and natural resources (land, animals, rivers, forests, minerals and seas). However, even in this account, whilst nature is incorporated within a broad definition of politics, nevertheless it remains marginal – an add-on extra. For there is no intention here to think of politics as the human–nature interaction; rather the environment is treated as just one of many 'resources' to be dealt with. By contrast, politics from an environmental perspective differs profoundly because it brings human–nature relations centre-stage, to become the very essence of political activity.

This approach entails not only asserting that nature is at the heart of politics, but also changing the way we think about nature, and therefore how we should treat it. One way to explain this is to show how all traditional conceptions of politics regard nature. For example, if we return to the definition of politics as being about resources, namely 'any things, both material and non-material, that people *use* to further their own desired ends, as individuals or collectively in groups' (Leftwich, p. 106 above), it is clear that this conception of politics regards nature in purely instrumental terms, as a resource to be used to further human interests. This understanding of politics, along with the others found in this book, is profoundly *anthropocentric*, which is a way of thinking that regards humans as the source of all value and is predominantly concerned with human interests. Underpinning anthropocentrism is the belief that ethical principles apply only to humans and their relations, and that human needs and interests are of the highest, perhaps exclusive, significance: humans are placed at the centre of the universe, separated from nature, and endowed with unique values. Only humans have intrinsic value, independent of anyone else finding it valuable. The rest of nature is of instrumental value; it has value and deserves moral consideration only insofar as it enhances human well-being. Non-human nature – the koala bear or brown rat, field of tulips or tract of wilderness – is simply a 'storehouse of resources' for the satisfaction of human ends (Eckersley, 1992: 26).

Many environmentalists believe that the unsustainability of present economic and political practices is a direct result of this human-centred arrogance towards the natural world that legitimates its exploitation in order to satisfy human interests. If we regard nature as simply there for us to use at our whim, then it is perhaps hardly surprising that we seem to have made a mess of it: 'Concern for ourselves at the expense of concern for the non-human world is held to be a basic cause of environmental degradation and potential disaster' (Dobson, 2000: 51).

An environmental view of politics questions the notion that we are somehow separate, or apart, from nature. It condemns the strong anthropocentric view that it is acceptable for humans to show moral consideration exclusively to their own kind. Instead, we need an understanding of politics that is based on respect and benevolent consideration for non-human nature. In saying this, I am deliberately skirting round the lively ethical debates about the grounds on which we might offer moral consideration beyond humanity. For example, some radical 'deep ecologists' argue for a radical reconceptualization of the human–nature relationship based on the claim that nature has intrinsic value, independent of the existence of humans (Naess, 1989). By contrast, other environmental theorists claim that there are perfectly good reasons for defending the environment on purely human instrumental grounds, notably the 'future generations' argument that we have an obligation to hand over to our descendants a world where environmental quality is no worse than when we inherited it from our parents (Norton, 1991). There is no need here to take sides in these debates between ecocentric and anthropocentric approaches to the environment (and all points in between), for that is the very stuff of politics, but to take from them the simple shared assumption that the study of politics has to reach out beyond humanity by attributing greater respect to nature.

4 Holistic Political Analysis

An approach to politics that brings human–nature relations centre-stage will also be influenced by the recognition that life on this planet is characterized by interdependence in human–nature relations. Unlike most other approaches to politics, an environmental perspective is partly rooted in the natural sciences, notably ecology, but also biology, physics, chemistry and geography. It is informed by a holistic[2] perspective which recognizes the way different parts of nature interact with each other in ecosystems and the biosphere – the interdependence and reciprocity that make up the 'whole' – and the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This approach contrasts with the mechanistic and atomistic Enlightenment accounts of nature that focus on different parts in isolation. It is also different from Marxist holism, or the unified science of historical materialism, which embraces and integrates all the social science disciplines (see Callinicos in this volume). Instead, a holistic environmental approach to politics recognizes the interdependencies between both social and natural sciences (and treats all disciplinary boundaries with some scepticism). To understand a complex environmental issue such as climate change requires knowledge of almost every discipline, from the chemistry of carbon emissions to the economics of the capitalist market. Conversely, politics shapes the way these natural and social processes operate. Thus inequities between rich and poor nations will mediate the impact of climate change: the wealth and infrastructure of the affluent Netherlands will prevent it from being affected by rising sea-levels as badly as the similarly low-lying Bangladesh.

There are many ways to demonstrate the importance of interdependence in the study of political activity. The interconnectedness of ecosystems means that many problems are non-reducible: they cannot be resolved by addressing individual parts in isolation. Indeed, policies that deal with one discrete environmental problem may have unintended and damaging consequences elsewhere. For example, in the 1950s local air pollution in Britain's industrial towns was reduced by building taller factory chimneys, only for it to be discovered many years later that this 'solution' had simply exported the pollution to fall as acid rain in Scandinavia. Similarly, modern cars are fitted with catalytic converters to reduce the nitrogen oxide emissions that cause acid rain, but the resulting reduction in engine efficiency increases fuel consumption and, therefore, carbon dioxide emissions which contribute to global warming. Ironically, one recent attempt to address climate change – EU regulations limiting carbon emissions from new cars – has encouraged manufacturers to substitute plastic components for metal parts to produce a lighter, less thirsty car. Unfortunately, as plastic is harder to recycle than metal it increases the proportion of old car parts going into landfill sites, thereby undermining different EU regulations (on end of life vehicles) intended to reduce waste.

Thus the interdependence of natural and social phenomena must inform the development of policy solutions to specific environmental problems, such as acid rain, climate change or waste. Indeed, actions in any policy sphere might have an unintended environmental impact. As already noted, the traditional compartmentalization of government functions, such as agriculture and transport, means that decisions are often made in one policy sector without regard to their consequences for the natural environment. So the challenge for the student of politics is to recognize and understand the interdependence of human–nature relations, and to give due importance to the complex and varied ways in which it shapes political activity.

5 Analytical Implications for Politics

Having established the importance of human–nature relations to the practices and study of politics, we can examine some of the analytical implications of this view of politics.

First, this approach entails a very broad definition of politics, indeed, probably the broadest in this book. It is an approach that not only incorporates narrower definitions of politics that focus on the activity of governments, institutions, political parties and ideas, but also broader definitions that regard politics as permeating all societies and groups engaged in conflict and co-operation over the use, production and distribution of resources. Further, by focusing on the impact of human activities on nature, an environmental perspective casts its net even wider than Leftwich's definition. For example, the need to consider the entire ecological lifecycle of resource use brings the full process of extraction, production, consumption and disposal within the ambit of political activity. At one end of the product lifecycle, the politics of resource extraction is easy to illustrate by the controversial plans to mine uranium in the Kakadu tropical rainforest in Northern Australia or President George W. Bush's intention to allow drilling for oil in Alaska. At the other end, the politics of waste is growing more urgent and important as the sheer volume of waste produced by modern consumer societies threatens to swamp us: for example, approximately 1.3 billion tonnes of waste is generated each year in the EU alone (European Environment Agency, 2003).

Perhaps the key element in this entire process is the politics of consumption. Mass consumption is a feature of all modern capitalist societies. Economic growth is maintained by the creation of new 'wants', through advertising, fashion and peer pressure, that encourage a throw-away culture. For example, millions of perfectly functioning but 'out-dated' computers and mobile phones are thrown into landfill sites every year; great swathes of forest are cut down to provide 'unnecessary' packaging; un-recyclable plastic is used for supermarket carrier bags and disposable drink bottles. Whatever the causes of this 'wasteful' consumption – and the explanations range from the nature of capitalism to the innate greed of humans – it is clear that we cannot understand the politics of consumption without analysing individual lifestyles. The way we live our lives – eat, drink, work, travel, shop, play, relax, holiday, reproduce – has profound environmental consequences. Daily decisions about travelling by foot, bicycle, public transport or private car are unavoidably political. In short, drawing on the familiar mantra of the feminist movement, the personal is political.

Indeed, taken to its furthest extreme, it can be argued that an environmental approach to politics moves beyond the confines of social activity. The traditional view of politics is that Robinson Crusoe, in isolation on his desert island, cannot be involved in politics; for politics is an intrinsically social activity. However, a view of politics that focuses on human–nature relations implies that individuals are engaged in political activity even when they are not interacting with other humans, because by their very existence they have an impact (an ecological footprint) on the environment and must and do interact with it.

Another analytical implication of the environmental approach is that politics takes place on several levels. The previous discussion of individual lifestyles demonstrates the veracity of another familiar Green mantra, the slogan 'Think global, act local'; clearly the spotlight of political analysis must focus on the local level. However, to think local we need also to act globally. Political analysis must have a strong international dimension because environmental problems transcend the human drawn 'political' boundaries between nation states or regions: acid rain, climate change, desertification, ozone depletion and biodiversity loss do not respect national jurisdictions. Many are global, or at least regional, in cause and effect, and they require international solutions involving collective action between states. However, even when there is widespread recognition of a problem, such as over-fishing or climate change, it is often very difficult to secure such co-operation. To understand why individual countries (or fishers) continue to catch fast-diminishing fish stocks or increase carbon emissions, it is often helpful to analyse environmental problems, particularly those of the global commons, from a collective choice perspective (see Weale's chapter in this book).

Many environmental 'resources' at the global level are 'public goods' in that they are common property to which everyone has free and open access. Whether a common pool (fish) or common sink (fresh air), it is difficult – sometimes almost impossible – to exclude *potential beneficiaries from using them* (catching fish or releasing greenhouse gases from car exhaust pipes). Conversely, it is hard to persuade people *to take responsibility for solving these problems* because every individual has an incentive to free-ride on the joint efforts of others to solve the problem. This problem of collective action is particularly acute where there are millions of individuals (car drivers) each contributing a tiny bit to the overall problem (climate change), so each individual sees little point in changing behaviour as it will make little difference to the overall problem if one person decides to swap the car for a bicycle. At the international level, it is equally irrational for one country to reduce its emissions by imposing a range of unpopular measures (carbon taxes, restrictions on car use) on its citizens, if other countries that do nothing to help cannot be excluded from the benefits of its actions. This problem of collective action may result in the situation that Garrett Hardin (1968) has called the 'Tragedy of the Commons': each individual acts perfectly rationally (by continuing to consume as usual) but produces a collectively irrational outcome (the depletion of the commons). Thus national fishing fleets continue to over-fish because if they stop doing so then the fishing fleets of another nation will simply fish those same waters.

Of course, from an environmental perspective, collective choice theory alone provides an incomplete and flawed view of politics, not least because (perhaps even more than other approaches in this book) it regards nature as no more than a resource to be used for human interests. It certainly needs to be complemented by other approaches; for example, Marxists might explain an unwillingness to co-operate in terms of class and social inequalities, while institutionalists might look to design institutional structures that will make co-operation more likely. Nonetheless, analysing global commons problems from the perspective of collective choice is an essential tool of political analysis.

6 Conclusion

I have argued that the environment should be at the forefront of political analysis. Politics is about human–nature relations – the way people interact with their social and natural environment. To make my case I have focused in this chapter on the natural environment, so it is important to note that the environmental approach does not ignore or downplay humanity. Indeed, the holistic assumptions underpinning this approach mean that environmental problems are inextricably tied up with social and development issues: for example, the causes and solutions of many environmental problems are closely related to issues of poverty, equity and social justice, which underpin the popular policy paradigm of sustainable development. An environmental approach to politics embraces all the analytical concerns of the traditional views of politics discussed in this book. However, whereas other perspectives are concerned with relations between humans (groups, classes, societies, individuals), the environmental approach is about how humans interact not only with each other but also with the natural environment. This approach provides a more complete understanding of politics and, by demonstrating the importance of the environment to every area of politics, might help move us towards a more sustainable world.

NOTES

1 See UNEP (2001) for an analysis of the state of the global environment.
2 The use of 'holistic' here is not intended to convey the specific political meaning adopted by ecocentric holistic theorists (Carter, 2001: 19–26).

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