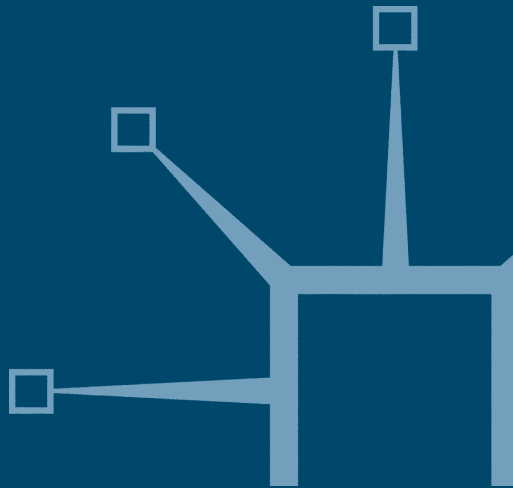# Theory and Methods in Political Science

Third Edition

Edited by

David Marsh and Gerry Stoker

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Series Editors: B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre and Gerry Stoker

Political science today is a dynamic discipline. Its substance, theory and methods have all changed radically in recent decades. It is much expanded in range and scope and in the variety of new perspectives – and new variants of old ones – that it encompasses. The sheer volume of work being published, and the increasing degree of its specialization, however, make it difficult for political scientists to maintain a clear grasp of the state of debate beyond their own particular subdisciplines.

The *Political Analysis* series is intended to provide a channel for different parts of the discipline to talk to one another and to new generations of students. Our aim is to publish books that provide introductions to, and exemplars of, the best work in various areas of the discipline. Written in an accessible style, they provide a 'launching-pad' for students and others seeking a clear grasp of the key methodological, theoretical and empirical issues, and the main areas of debate, in the complex and fragmented world of political science.

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The series reflects our view that the core values of political science should be coherent and logically constructed theory, matched by carefully constructed and exhaustive empirical investigation. The key challenge is to ensure quality and integrity in what is produced rather than to constrain diversity in methods and approaches. The series is intended as a showcase for the best of political science in all its variety, and demonstrate how nurturing that variety can further improve the discipline.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Series Editors: B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre and Gerry Stoker

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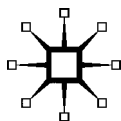
Theory and Methods in Political Science

Third Edition

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David Marsh

and

Gerry Stoker

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Contents

List of Figures, Tables and Boxes

Preface to the Third Edition

We produced the first edition of this book when we were both based at Strathclyde University in Scotland in 1995. Since then we have moved further south and to different universities. Gerry's geographical move was the more modest. He is based at the University of Southampton in England. Dave's was a little more of a big move as he is now based in Canberra at the Australian National University. This spatial separation has made co-operating on the book more challenging but still very rewarding. We would like to thank all of our authors who have responded to our demands for copy and changes with good grace. In this third edition we have added some new authors and some new topics to reflect developments in the discipline. All of the chapters have been extensively updated and, in our view, improved. We have a new chapter on psychological approaches to political science. There is a new chapter on use of experimental methods in political science. We have added a chapter to deal directly with the issues of research design. Finally we have provided a different way of concluding the book by looking at the issue of the relevance of political science.

The editing of the book was greatly advanced by the efforts of two PhD students at Southampton University: Aamer Taj and Alex Kirkup. The referees' comments we received on the first draft of the book were very helpful. As ever the input of Steven Kennedy, our publisher, was invaluable. We thank our families for their forbearance through the production of the book. Most of all we would like to acknowledge the help and support of those teachers and students who use the book. We have learnt a lot from your comments and feedback and hope that you continue to find the book what we intend it to be: an accessible introduction to the way that political scientists carry out their work in today's world.

DAVID MARSH
GERRY STOKER

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Introduction

GERRY STOKER AND DAVID MARSH

This book aims to provide an introduction to the way that political scientists carry out their studies. In universities it is quite common to have societies set up by students that correspond to the various disciplines that they are studying. These societies provide a number of intellectual events for students to attend but they also organize some social activities. They produce their own merchandise, normally T-shirts or sweaters that society members can wear. The shirts, at least in Southampton, carry mildly risqué slogans reflecting on some aspect of the discipline. Slogans that can be observed include 'psychologists like to experiment' and 'economists do it with models'. The Politics Society has so far been unable to make an allusion to the methods and approach of its subject and its most recent offering is the rather abject 'political scientists do it on the backbenches'. This book is not a response to this relative failure but it could be argued that the failure of wit on the part of Southampton's Politics Society reflects a wider challenge in the discipline of political science. We are not clear enough or self-reflective enough about the way our subject is studied. Our book is certainly a response to that concern. And readers of the book may be moved to suggest a future slogan along the lines of 'political scientists do it with variety'.

All disciplines tend to be chaotic to a degree in their development (Abbott, 2001) and political science is certainly no exception. But we would argue that the variety of approaches and debates revealed in this book are a reflection of the richness and growing maturity of political science. When trying to understand something as complex, contingent and chaotic as politics can be, it is not surprising that academics have developed a great variety of approaches. For entrants to the discipline it may be disconcerting that there is no agreed approach or method of study. Or, as we shall see, no agreement about what politics is. But we argue that as political scientists we should celebrate diversity rather than see it as a failure. The Nobel Prize winner Herbert Simon makes a powerful case for pluralism as central to the scientist's commitment to constant questioning and searching for understanding:

> I am a great believer in pluralism in science. Any direction you proceed
> in has a very high *a priori* probability of being wrong; so it is good if
> other people are exploring in other directions – perhaps one of them
> will be on the right track. (Simon, 1992:21)

Studying politics involves making an active selection among a variety of
approaches and methods and this book aims to provide students with the
capacity to make informed choices. But whatever your choice is we hope
to encourage you to keep an open mind and reflect that some other route
might yield better results.

The study of politics can trace its origins at least as far back as Plato
(Almond, 1996) but our concern is with its contemporary expression as
an academic discipline. It has a rich heritage and a substantial base on
which to grow and develop. The American Political Science Association
was formed in 1903 so we can say that political science is over a hundred
years old. As the subject has expanded so it has got more varied in its
approach. Other national associations for the profession of political
science followed. It is still true to say that the Americans are the most
powerful force in political science but we agree with the assessment of
Goodin and Klingemann (1996) that in the last few decades the discipline
has become a genuinely international enterprise. Excellent and challeng-
ing political science is produced in many countries and this book seeks to
reflect an appreciation of the internationalization of political science in
two senses. First, we have authors that are based in the UK, elsewhere in
Europe, the United States and Australia. Second, many of the illustrations
and examples provided by authors offer up experiences from a range of
countries or provide global flavour. Our authors draw on experiences
from around the world and relate domestic political science concerns to
those of international relations. In a more globalized world all this makes
sense.

The increasing influence of global forces in our everyday lives makes
globalization a central 'social fact' in the modern era. The battle over
collective decisions which provides the dynamic to the systems of politics
we observe at international, national and local levels takes place through
a dynamic of governance (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009). In the world of
governance, outcomes are not determined in the last analysis by cohesive
unified nation states or formal institutional arrangements but are rather
driven by individual and collective actors both in and beyond the state
operating through complex and varied networks. The gap between
domestic politics and international relations has narrowed. Domestic
politics is increasingly influenced by trans-national forces. Migration,
human rights, issues of global warming, pandemics of ill-health, and
energy provision challenges cannot, for example, be contained or

addressed within national boundaries alone. A new *world politics* – not 'international relations' – is emerging in which non-state actors play a vital role alongside nation states (Cerny, 2009). The study of international relations is not a separate world focused on the study of diplomatic, military and strategic activities of nation states. Non-state and international institutions at the very least provide a check to the battle of nation states. Moreover, the breadth of the issues to be addressed at the international level has extended into a range of previously domestic concerns with a focus on financial, economic, employment, health, human rights, and poverty reduction concerns. The nature of politics even at the international level has become more politically-driven by bargaining, hegemonic influence and soft power – rather than military prowess and economic strength, although the latter remain important. The questions to be asked about politics at local, national and global levels are fundamentally the same. How is power exercised to determine outcomes? How is co-ordination and cooperation achieved to deliver shared purposes? How are issues of justice and rightness of outcome to be identified and understood? The examples and illustrations of the academic study of politics in this book reflect the growing interlinking of domestic politics and international relations.

This book looks at the general ways of thinking or theorising offered by political scientists and the methods they use to discover more about the subject at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is inevitable that the book will not either be fully comprehensive in its coverage of political science or provide sufficient depth in approaching all of the issues that are considered. Our claim is rather that we can provide an introduction to the main approaches to political science and a balanced assessment of some of the debates and disagreements that are an appropriate feature of a discipline that has several thousands years of history behind it and many thousands of practitioners in the modern world.

The book is divided into two broad parts. The first eight chapters aim to map the broad ways of approaching political science that have had and will, we think, continue to have a major effect on the development of political science (see Table 0.1). 'Approaches' is the right term to use because what we focus on in each chapter is broader than any particular theory or methodology. Our focus is on different general ways of approaching the subject matter of political science. We deal initially with empirically oriented theory expressed in behavioural, rational choice, institutional, constructivist, psychological, feminist, and Marxist approaches. Each of the approaches combines a set of attitudes, understandings and practices that define a certain way of doing political science. We have asked each of our authors not simply to advocate their approach but also to take on board a range of critical comments and

Table 0.1 *Approaches to political science*

	Scope of political studies	*Understanding of the scientific claim*	*Attitude to normative political theory*	*Relationship to the practice of politics*
Behaviouralism	Concentrates on processes of politics associated with mainstream politics and government	The generation of general laws and at a minimum the development of theoretical statements that can be falsified. Keen to subject claims to empirical test through direct observation	In early phase keen to emphasize difference between the new science and old armchair theorizing. Now gives due recognition to the value of political theory	Claims to be value free, neutral and detached
Rational Choice Theory	Concerned with conditions for collective action in mainstream political world	The generation of general laws and in particular laws with predictive power	Gives recognition to the value of political theory but focus is less on what could be and more on what is feasible	Claims to be able to offer value free expert advice about how to organize politics
Institutionalism	Focus is on the rules, norms and values that govern political exchanges; tends to look at institutional arrangements in mainstream political world	Science is the production of organized knowledge. The best political science is empirically grounded, theoretically informed and reflective	Keen to make connections between empirical analysis and normative theory	Keen to make connections, sees itself as working alongside the practitioners of politics
Constructivism	Politics is driven by the meanings that actors attach to their actions and their context. Politics can be broad in scope reflecting people's diverse world views about what it involves	Understanding of human activity is inherently different to that of the physical world	Tends to the view that there is fusion between all types of theorizing. Political analysis is essentially contested and has a necessarily normative content	A mixed range of responses but tendency is towards wry commentary on the narrative battles of the political world

Psychology	Views politics through the lens of the personality and cognition of the individuals who engage in its practice, primarily within the mainstream world	How individuals identify and frame the political challenges they face can be studied in a way that allows for theoretical generalizations to be tested by empirical investigation using mainstream research tools	Would tend to view assumptions made about human nature in much political theory as inadequate. Generally not oriented towards normative theory	Often seeks to offer insights into how politics works and how it could be made to work better
Feminism	A broad process definition that recognizes that the personal can be political	A mixed range of responses to this issue but with strong tendencies towards anti-foundational and critical realist perspectives	Normative theory, like all aspects of political studies, needs to take gender issues seriously	Political engagement is strongly part of the feminist impulse
Marxism	Politics is a struggle between social groups, in particular social classes	Critical realist: the discovery of below the surface forces that guide but do not determine historical events	Normative theory is at its most useful when it provides a guide to action: the point is to change the world	Committed to engagement in struggles of suppressed social groups or classes

concerns about that approach. In this respect we hope that each author offers a robust but self-aware and critical understanding of his or her way of doing political science. The final chapter in this first part of the book explores the issue of normative theory. A focus that takes us back to one of the most traditional of approaches to political science but one which, we would argue, still has considerable relevance today. Political science should be interested not only in understanding 'what is', it should also be concerned with the normative issues of 'what should be'. Further, we agree with Baubock (2008:40) that 'empirical research can be guided by normative theory; and normative theory can be improved by empirical research'. The distinctiveness of normative theory is not to be denied but as with other parts of the political science family there is a greater scope for a dialogue between normative theory and the other approaches we identify than is often recognized. Empirical theorists can benefit from the specification and clarification of arguments provided by normative theory and normative theorists would do well to look to empirical research rather than hypothetical arguments to help support their case. Moreover, the emergence of new empirically-driven theoretical insights – such as those associated with the governance school for example (see Chhotray and Stoker, 2009) – may open new issues and challenges for normative theory.

The second half of the book moves to issues of methodology and research design. We introduce the major debates about ontological, epistemological and meta-theoretical issues. We examine the range of both qualitative and quantitative techniques that are available and how these techniques can be combined in meeting the challenge of research design. We move on to consider the potential and limitations of comparative method to understanding political phenomena. There is a particular set of issues thrown up by the attempt to understand politics on a cross-national basis. We investigate the potential of using experimental methods in political research. Finally, we have a chapter that judges political science not by its methods but by whether it has anything relevant to say.

In the remainder of this introductory section we aim to provide an analysis of the term 'political' and some reflections on justifications of the term 'scientific' to describe its academic study. We close by returning to the issue of variety within political science by arguing that diversity should be a cause of celebration rather than concern.

What is politics? What is it that political scientists study?

When people say they 'study politics' they are making an ontological statement in that within the statement there is an implicit understanding

of what the polity is made of and its general nature. They are also making a statement that requires some clarification. In any introduction to a subject it is important to address the focus of its analytical attention. So put simply, we should be able to answer the question: What is the nature of the political that political scientists claim to study? A discipline, you might think, would have a clear sense of its terrain of enquiry. Well, not so in respect of political science. Just as there are differences of approach to the subject, so there are differences about the terrain of study.

As Hay (2002: Ch. 2) argues, ontological questions are about what is and what exists. Ontology asks: what's there to know about? Although a great variety of ontological questions can be posed, a key concern for political scientists relates to the nature of the political. There are a range of other meta-theoretical questions, such as the relationship between structure and agency and the role of ideas in explaining political outcomes, that could also be addressed. Indeed, discussion devoted to these issues is featured later in the book in Chapter 10. For now, our attention is focused on the 'primary' ontological question for political science, namely: what is the nature of the political world?

There are two broad approaches to defining the political (Leftwich, 1984; Hay 2002). The first defines the field of study by reference to an arena or particular set of institutions. Much of the interest of political scientists in the first three approaches that were identified above – behaviouralists, rational choice theorists and institutional analysis – is devoted to the formal operation of politics in the world of government and those who seek to influence it. This idea about what is political makes a lot of sense and relates to some everyday understandings. When people say they are fed up or bored with politics they usually mean that they have been turned off by the behaviour or performance of those politicians most directly involved in the arena.

The second approach to the definition of the political sees it as a social process that can be observed in a variety of settings. Politics is about more than what governments choose to do or not do; it is about the uneven distribution of power in society, how the struggle over power is conducted and its impact on the creation and distribution of resources, life chances and well-being. This broader definition of the political is particularly associated with the other three approaches to politics identified earlier – feminism, constructivist work and Marxism. For feminists in particular there has been much emphasis on the idea that the personal is political, that issues defined as private by some are indeed deeply political in the sense that they involve the exercise of power and the practice of domination. As Randall argues in Chapter 6, feminists have been in the forefront of demands for a wider definition of politics with 'the emphasis on power relations between men and women and whenever and wherever they

occur – as much, if not more, in the bed or the kitchen, for example, as in Westminster or Whitehall' (see p. 123). Marxists have also preferred generally a definition of politics that defines it in terms of a wider struggle between social groups in society. Constructivists are also more likely to see politics as a process conducted in a range of arenas.

The alarm bells might be ringing here since it appears that political scientists cannot even agree what the subject matter of their discipline should be. Yet, our view is that both arena and process definitions have their value. Moreover, all of the different approaches to political science we identify could accommodate themselves to much shared ground on the issue of what the political is.

It would be fair to say that in the abstract all of the approaches to politics with which we are concerned could go along with a definition of politics as a struggle over power. Indeed, Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 7) suggest that a broad consensus could be built around a definition of politics along the lines: 'the constrained use of social power'. The political process is about collective choice without simple resort to force or violence. It is about what conditions and constrains those choices. It is about the use of that power and its consequences. It would cover unintended as well as intended acts. It would deal with passive as well as active practices. Politics enables individuals or groups to do some things that they would not otherwise be able to do and it also constrains individuals or groups from doing what it is they would otherwise do. Although the different approaches to political science may have their own take on that definition of politics – in the sense that how power is put into practice would be a matter of dispute between them – they could well be willing to sign up to such a definition. Although, as we argue below, it is still possible to identify different shades of opinion.

So a process definition can lead our understanding of the political but the arena definition also captures an important insight. Politics is much broader than what governments do but there is something especially significant about political processes that are or could be considered to be part of the public domain. As Randall points out in her chapter, the slogan 'the personal is political' has sometimes been misinterpreted as meaning that 'only the personal is political'; whereas feminist analysis is and should also be deeply concerned about the relative under-involvement of women in formal politics as well as emerging forms of informal involvement in social movements, grass-roots organizations and community groups. In a pragmatic sense it is probably true to say that most political scientists tend to concentrate their efforts in terms of analysis and research on the more collective and public elements of power struggles. The key is to retain a sense of the collective or public arena that takes you beyond the narrow machinations of the political elite.

What is a scientific approach to politics?

As Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 9) comment, 'much ink has been spilt over the question of whether, or in what sense, the study of politics is or is not truly a science. The answer largely depends upon how much one tries to load into the term "science".' If you adopt what they call a minimalist approach, the question can be answered fairly straightforwardly; namely that political science is science in the sense that it offers ordered knowledge based on systematic enquiry. There is no reason to doubt that political science in all its forms has or could achieve that level of knowledge. It is worth exploring the differences within political science, beyond what would be a basic agreement by all, that political science is about the production of systematic knowledge about the political. There are indeed some diverse paths taken on this issue by the approaches that we consider in this book.

What is at stake here is the various epistemological positions taken by the different approaches. Epistemology is concerned, as Furlong and Marsh argue in Chapter 9, with what we can know about the world and how can we know it. As they argue, epistemological positions come in various forms. There is a fundamental difference between foundationalists, who argue that a real world exists independently of our knowledge of it but can be discovered, and those who view the world as socially constructed and can at best only be interpreted in different ways. The former would claim that they are in tune with a modernist scientific understanding. The anti-foundationalists can call on a long tradition of political and human studies and draw inspiration from strongly emerging constructivist and interpretivist schools within political science and more recent postmodern thought. Within the 'scientific' or foundationalist group there is a further distinction to be drawn between positivism and realism. Positivists look to follow the style of the natural scientists and establish causal relationships developing explanatory or even predictive models. The realists, in contrast, do not privilege direct observation but see explanation of reality as often lying in deep structures that cannot be directly observed. These distinctions are useful but ultimately quite crude and the practice of political science reveals a more nuanced approach within many areas of the discipline.

It is by no means straightforward to divide the various approaches to political science that we identify on the basis of their epistemological position. The behavioural and rational choice approaches are those that most obviously claim the positivist position. The former will see its task as to produce knowledge that expresses general laws about the ways things work, the latter places more of an emphasis on the predictive capabilities of its models. But as writers such as Sanders, in Chapter 1, point out,

among contemporary behaviouralists there is a strong move in the direction of epistemological relativism. The view that there is an objective social reality 'out there' in the world of observation waiting to be discovered by 'scientific' analysis is not so widely held in contemporary behavioural analysis. Modern behaviouralists recognize the possibility that different theoretical perspectives might generate different observations. Moreover, they hold that causality may be as much a reflection of the way we think about the world as it is of 'reality'. What marks out modern behaviouralists, then, is not their epistemological position but their determination to advance their work and that of others through the generation of empirically falsifiable predictions that can be tested against observations. Even here, as Sanders notes, modern behaviouralists do not take a crude position in terms of claims about discovering scientific truth. It is never possible, he argues, to definitively establish that a particular causal relationship exists but it is possible to determine how far a particular set of empirical observations is consistent with a specific proposition about a cause and effect relationship.

A similar nuanced position to that relating to epistemological positions is taken by Parsons in terms of constructivist approaches. There are, as Parsons convincingly points out in Chapter 4, a number of different positions within the broad school of constructivist understanding. One view that sets itself up in opposition to the scientific pretensions of positivists and realists is that, given that the world is deeply socially constructed, there is little 'real world' for political scientists to study. The social sciences thus amount to an interpretive search to understand meaning rather than a scientific search for causal relations. But another position taken up by many constructivists does not break with science and causality and would allow for greater dialogue and exchange. This perspective is that although action depends on meaning, that does not necessarily imply that there can be no 'real' analysis of why certain people do certain things. If the real, objective truth about human action is that people act within meaningful social constructs then logically a careful observer can demonstrate this persuasively in competition with non-constructivist theories, as Parsons argues.

Of the other approaches that we cover in the first part of the book, it is clear that institutional, psychological and feminist approaches all have practitioners taking different epistemological positions. The institutionalist group is perhaps the most eclectic, according to Lowndes in Chapter 3. The psychologists lean towards a foundational scientific approach but many would be comfortable with the modern behaviouralist position outlined by Sanders. Feminism does have a strong line of advocates for an anti-foundationalist position but it also has many studies that look for causal explanations in a way that would fit in with a positivist perspec-

tive. The Marxist camp is dominated by the realist position, although it has given some ground to constructivist arguments.

This last point is an appropriate one to bring this section to an end. As Furlong and Marsh will elaborate in their chapter, the epistemological positions of the different approaches reviewed in this book have been subject to change and development. Different parts of the discipline have listened to and learnt from each other. We would support the idea of further dialogue. The contributions from Sanders, starting from a behavioural position, and Parsons, leading off from a constructivist, in this book, suggest that there may be quite a lot of common ground that would include a sensitivity to the importance of meaning in explaining human action, a willingness to think in terms of causal statements and a determination to test arguments in a rigorous empirical manner. So while it is important to recognize the distinctness of different ontological and epistemological positions, it may also be possible to find more common ground among practising political scientists than you might imagine.

The discipline of political science: a celebration of diversity

Read many of the reviews of political science and they agree that political science has become more diverse and more cosmopolitan in character (see for example Almond, 1990; Goodin and Klingemann, 1996; and on the social sciences in general Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Some of those who pioneered what they called the scientific treatment of the subject had expected that the scientific revolution would lead to a unity in the understanding of political science (Weisberg, 1986: 4). There can be little doubt that those ambitions have not been realized. There is a basis for some common agreement about what constitutes 'minimal professional competence' but as Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 6) note, when it comes to judging the value of work beyond some agreed baseline of coherence and craftsmanship 'the higher aspirations are many and varied'. There is a *de facto* pluralist view of the nature of political science endeavour.

We would emphasize only two points beyond supporting the pluralism that is now widely acknowledged. First there is a need to recognize just how considerable is the variety of political science at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There are many distinct approaches and ways of undertaking political science. Our book presents a particular focus on eight options in terms of approaches that seek to explain the way that politics works in our world. The spread of our coverage is greater than that offered in recent reviews of political science in Britain (wider, for

example, than that offered by Hayward *et al.*, 1999) and the international review offered by Goodin and Klingemann (1996). We believe that at this stage in its development it is important for political science not to depict itself as a small club of like-minded people. The better image is of a broad church with different starting points and concerns but a shared commitment to developing a better understanding of politics.

This observation leads on naturally to our second point, namely that the key challenge is not to launch a campaign for unity but to argue for diversity to be combined with dialogue. Almond (1990, 1996) warns that the discipline should avoid constructing itself into an uneasy collection of separate sects. There is a pluralism of method and approach out there that should not be denied; however it should not be 'isolative', but rather interactive. It should be eclectic and synergistic. That is what is meant by our claim to celebrate diversity. We argue that political science is enriched by the variety of approaches that are adopted within the discipline. Each has something of considerable value to offer. But each benefits from its interaction with other approaches. Our book in giving space and room to a variety of ways of doing political science aims to provide the essential ingredients for an ongoing exchange so that different approaches to the discipline can gain a baseline understanding of each other.

In this introduction we briefly addressed two questions: what is the scope of political studies and whether it can claim the label of science? We conclude that political scientists are divided on these issues but that there is scope for identifying some common ground. At the moment, we argue that we should embrace the diversity within the field. Hedging bets is a good way to approach the challenging task of understanding at core human activity such as politics.

Theory and Approaches

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Introduction to Part 1

GERRY STOKER

Part 1 of the book introduces the dominant approaches to understanding politics. As noted in the general introduction to our book, political science is about a hundred years old as a focus for a separate academic discipline. The discussion below focuses on domestic politics but a parallel argument could be made about the broadening out of international relations theory from an initial dispute between the liberal internationalist and realist schools at the beginning of the twentieth century to a subsequent expansion in the range and variety of theories and approaches (Brown and Ainley, 2005). But sticking to a domestic focus and looking back from the standpoint of the early years of the twenty-first century, we can argue that the debate in political science has moved from a focus on three broad paradigms to a wider set of approaches. Three paradigms dominated debate for much of the twentieth century: institutionalism, pluralism and elitism. These paradigms reflected to a degree different ontological and epistemological positions in the study of politics but the focus of their difference – what they disagreed about – was more directed at the level of analytical divisions. For institutionalists the analytical effort was to be directed at constitutions and institutions, for pluralists the focus was to be on groups and bargaining and for elitists the focus was on elites and power.

The institutionalist school is referred to by Lowndes in her chapter as the 'old institutionalist' school, in order for her to direct attention to the emerging approach of new institutionalism. The 'old' school was characterized by a focus on formal rules and organizations rather than informal conventions and on official structures of government rather than broader institutional networks of governance. The approach was structuralist, in the sense that it held that structures determine political behaviour, historicist, in that it took the influence of history as central to the explanations that it offered, legalist, in that law was seen as having a major role in governing, and holistic, given its concern with describing and comparing whole systems of government. It also had a strong functionalist tendency – that is, an assumption that particular institutions are present because they help the political system work well.

Some of the work in this tradition offered a simplistic, commonsense understanding that tended to assume the superiority of certain forms of government institutions and structures (usually those of the United Kingdom or the United States) for achieving good government. There was a tendency within the approach to express disappointment for others that did not operate under such benign conditions for rule. Yet some of the literature was often insightful and valuable despite the difficulties of the approach. However, it did tend to air its ideological preferences in a taken-for-granted way. Sammy Finer's powerful study of comparative government (1970) provides an example of this form of analysis. It has many strengths but does divide the governments of the world up into liberal democracies, totalitarian states and third world; a division which a student colleague in political science summed up – at a time when we were both postgraduates in the late 1970s – as those we like, those we don't like and those we don't know that much about. Understanding the constitutional and institutional basis of different forms of government is not a bad starting point for political science but it has increasingly found itself rightly under challenge.

The pluralist challenge emerged first with the publication of Bentley's *The Process of Government* in 1908. That book challenged the institutional paradigm in two ways (Cerny, 2009) by arguing that formal structures were not the key to understanding politics but rather that informal practices and the dynamics of play between groups were. To understand politics you need to look not at formal structures but the doing of politics, a call to intensify empirical analysis that has been heeded by many political scientists in the subsequent century. Pluralism also placed bargaining and aggregation at the centre of analysis. Politics was enacted through the building of coalitions of influence through the competition between a pluralist range of interests. Politics was about a battle between groups for influence. Pluralism became by the 1950s the dominant paradigm in political science but a range of different types of pluralism began to emerge. Table 0.2 lays out the key characteristics of three variants: classical pluralism, policy network pluralism and neo-pluralism (see Smith, 1995, 2006).

Classical pluralism took up the themes of Bentley's work. The state was a site of group conflict. Groups were relatively free to compete with one another to influence policy. Power as such was dispersed leading to a government that was responsive to the organized wishes of its citizens and able to predict what demands from the unorganized might be in order to create in practice a working democracy. The policy network approach added the complication that the state was a site of multiple players that had special relationships with some outside groups networked into some parts of the government machine. The policy communities that formed around a whole array of policy issues could at times be very tight and effectively exclude other interests. The interests of democracy were there-

Table 0.2　*Varieties of pluralism*

	Classical pluralism	*Policy networks*	*Neo-pluralism*
View of state	A site of group conflict	A differentiated institution offering differential access	Biased towards particular interests, especially business
Nature of groups	Easily formed and in open competition	Some groups on the inside with good access, other groups with more limited access	Business has a structural advantage in group competition because of its centrality to economic and social welfare
Understanding of power	An observable phenomenon and generally widespread	Generally observable but some groups able to strongly influence state actors through their presence in tight networks	Less easily observable and reflected in structural advantages of business and associated ideological assumptions in favour of business
Example of relevant studies	Bentley (1908); Truman (1951); Dahl (1961)	Richardson and Heclo (1978) Jordan (1979)	Lindblom (1977)

fore threatened by 'iron triangles' and power was not as dispersed as assumed by the classical pluralist model. The third variation of pluralism – called neo-pluralism – took an even more jaundiced view of the state. Over many big issues it was in the hands of big business, not necessarily because of close ties created by networks but rather because the economic significance of business success to the welfare of society meant that governments of all persuasions had to listen to the demands of business. The neo-pluralist idea of an uneven competition between different interests sustains a great deal of support among analysts of politics at both domestic and international level.

Pluralism in turn found itself challenged by elitism. Again, it is possible to identify three variations of the argument (see Table 0.3) that politics tends to be dominated by elite groups (Evans, 2006). Classical elitism rejected the viability of prospects for democratic control over states and institutions. The weakness and lack of organization of the wider collective is always going to be trumped by the oligarchic control exercised through bureaucracy and technological domination by those at the top of decision-making structures. Elites tend to be cohesive and self-perpetuating in this classical framing of the issues and elite domination is seen as an inevitable

Table 0.3   *Varieties of elitism*

	Classical elitism	Power elite perspective	Regime elitism
Domination of elite over state and society	Total	Substantial	Partial but strategic
Cohesiveness of the elite	Strong and unified	Unified but with distinctive branches	Divided but can be reinforced through emergence of a regime
Understanding of power	Observable and formal	Hidden but observable	Power to make things happen rather than overweening direct control
Driving force behind elitism	Inevitable feature of human society; reflects weakness of non-elites	Power of business and social intermingling	The drive to get things done draws together those with relevant resources
Examples of relevant studies	Michels (1911); Mosca (1896)	Mills (1956); Hunter (1963)	Stone (1989); Stoker (1995)

feature of large-scale societies. Elite domination was obvious and relatively easy to observe from the standpoint of classical elitism but a second and later version of elitism suggested that the processes took a more subtle form. C. Wright Mills (1956) argued that the mistake of the pluralists was to assume that what could be easily observed – the organized politics of lobbying and interest group conflict – was the be-all-and-end-all of politics. Rather, from his view there were two other levels of politics. One much lower in power capacity, where even there some disadvantaged groups lacked organization and the ability to join in the lobbying, and another much higher level of power where all the key decisions were taken leaving lobby-style and open politics to deal with relatively minor issues. The power elite at the top of the system were the dominant group exercising control over most substantial issues and in most systems it was possible to discover a combined elite at work with economic, political and military branches. The group acted ultimately to sustain common interests because they shared similar outlooks and social origins and sustained that cohesiveness through social and personal intermingling. Alongside the national elite identified by Mills, other studies showed at the local level in towns and cities the domination of similar arrangements, although usually without the direct engagement of the military and driven by a growth coalition committed to expanding and re-developing an area (Hunter 1953; Moltoch, 1976).

A further version of elite theory takes the view that powerful groups tend to emerge to influence decisions but that the process is not inevitable and is driven not so much by an intermingling of leading actors but rather by the sheer complexity and challenge of getting things done which in turn requires leading players to blend their capacities and resources in order to form effective regimes. The theory finds its strongest application in urban settings (Stone, 1989; Stoker, 1995). Regime analysis views power as fragmented, and regimes as the collaborative arrangements through which state and private actors assemble the capacity to govern. Stone describes the political power sought by regimes as the 'power to', or the capacity to act, rather than 'power over' others or social control (Stone, 1989: 229). Achieving the capacity to act is by no means certain; cooperation needs to be created and maintained (Stone, 1993). Regimes overcome problems of collective action and secure participation in the governing coalition through the distribution of selective incentives such as contracts and jobs. Collaboration is achieved not only through formal institutions, but also through informal networks. There are parallels between this regime version of elite theory and neo-pluralism. The two sides of an established great debate in political science would appear to have moved closer to each other.

There has been a coming together around the two central 'revolutionary' claims of Bentley's initial pluralist critique of formal constitutionalism which provide a core manifesto for political science. All the authors in this book argue that we need to look beyond the formal arrangements of power to understand politics (including and indeed most particularly the new institutionalist work outlined in Chapter 3). All the authors in this book could accept that power is central in political study but not many would share the optimism of classical pluralism about its relatively equal distribution according to intensity of preferences.

In the 1970s, when I first started to study politics in an academic setting, a focus of the three paradigms of institutionalism, pluralism and elitism would have provided a good starting point for dividing up the field. But even by the time of the first edition of *Theories and Methods* in 1995 it was already clear that the divisions within political science had got more varied and also more profound. They had moved beyond the status of analytical differences to take into account different ontological and epistemological positions. There were differences about what to study, how to study it and why study. Is the purpose of political science to reveal meaning, capture causal paths between actions and events or reveal the deep substructures that drive society and politics? In order to explore this world we needed to step between a focus on three paradigms and instead explore the broad approaches that political scientists adopted in their work. That is what this book offers in Part 1: a review of the most prominent and dynamic ways of doing political science today.

Part 1 begins with the behavioural approach to political science in Chapter 1, written by David Sanders. It is appropriate to start with this approach since the behavioural revolution can perhaps be seen as constituting the key development in the establishment of modern political science against which all other approaches have to situate themselves. Above all, the behavioural movement confirmed the earlier pluralist call to decisively shift attention away from the formal, legalistic study of political institutions and constitutions. As noted earlier, that shift remains an accepted part of the terrain for all political scientists. All empirically oriented political science shares with the behaviouralists a concern with the way politics operates in practice. Sanders offers a subtle account of how the behaviouralist approach has evolved and provides a convincing and powerful account of where modern behaviouralism stands now.

The second approach to be considered is rational choice theory (Chapter 2). It too claimed to bring a revolutionary new approach to the discipline. There can be little doubt about the impact of this approach within the discipline. Some of its advocates argue that it constitutes the key approach for delivering a political science, which is cumulative in its knowledge production and a powerful member of a wider social science practice, unified in their approach in axioms and methods initially derived from economics. While some emphasize the overweening virtues of an approach which favours formal theory and mathematical rigour, others now see the rational choice approach as one among a variety of paths that can be taken. That second option is certainly the position taken by Andy Hindmoor in his chapter and one shared with the editors. The way of thinking and the challenge posed by rational choice analysis has something to offer all in the discipline but its claim to be a high priest is rightly regarded with scepticism.

The third style of political science that is a focus of attention in the book is institutional analysis. As Vivien Lowndes points out in Chapter 3, those interested in institutional studies may have found themselves out of favour as first behaviouralists and then rational choice advocates looked to blaze a trail for a new political science unencumbered by the old interest in institutions and constitutions. However, a new institutionalism has emerged, as a check to the under-socialised accounts of political action offered by behaviouralism and rational choice, that shares a core view that institutions significantly structure political relationships. There are many ways in which that interest in institutionalism has been expressed. As Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 11–12) suggest, the new interest in institutions has indeed provided a basis for a rapprochement within the discipline with both behaviouralists and rational choice students giving recognition to the importance of institutions in recent decades.

In Chapter 4 Craig Parsons gives full coverage to constructivist theory and in so doing challenges the approaches outlined in the previous chapters, although as he notes, some institutionalists make constructivist arguments. What is distinctive about this approach is the claim that people act due to the presence of certain 'social constructs': ideas, beliefs, norms, identities. These interpretive filters work through affecting the way people see the world and human action is in turn structured by the meanings that particular groups of people attach to themselves and their circumstances. Non-constructivist scholarship, by contrast, like that surveyed in Chapters 1 (Behaviouralism), 2 (Rational Choice), and 7 (Marxism), suggests that our interpretive filters do not greatly affect how we act. But Parsons' core message, which the editors fully endorse, is that these different approaches have much to learn from each other. Constructivism can offer a distinctive, plausible means of understanding why people act the way they do. Constructivists should think about and engage non-constructivist alternatives to their claims, but non-constructivists should also routinely consider constructivist competitors in their own research.

In Chapter 5 we remind readers of the importance of political psychology. As Paul 't Hart argues, although it has long historical roots, the political psychology perspective is still somewhat marginal to the discipline of political science. But we agree with him that this situation makes little sense, not least because of its theoretical wealth and creativity. Political psychologists tap into a reservoir of concepts, propositions and paradigms about human and social behaviour that all in mainstream political science should be willing to consider. Furthermore, its methodological sophistication and commitment to careful research design provides lessons for us all.

Political science remains in need of challenge from all quarters. As Vicky Randall points out in Chapter 6, feminist analysis has challenged political science on two fronts: first it calls for a full rounded account of the role of women in politics and second it raises fundamental questions about the way that politics is conceptualized, including the conventional distinction between public and private, and as such has major implications for the scope and boundaries of political science as a discipline.

A further element of challenge comes from Marxism. Diarmuid Maguire in Chapter 7 makes a compelling case for the continuing relevance of this approach. He argues that Marxism has created a rich research programme around the political and economic links between nation state, international and city levels whilst theorizing around the agency of cultural intervention. Our understanding of the globalized world we live in would be the poorer if it lacked the insights from this approach.

We should also not forget that normative political theory continues to play a key role in political science and Buckler in Chapter 8 provides an overview of that theory. He illuminates the great debates in political theory over liberty, equality and community and shows how they are relevant to the challenges to political science today.

Chapter 1

Behavioural Analysis

DAVID SANDERS

The behavioural approach to social and political analysis concentrates on a single, deceptively simple, question: Why do people behave in the way they do? What differentiates behaviouralists from other social scientists is their insistence that (a) *observable* behaviour, whether it is at the level of the individual or the social aggregate, should be the focus of analysis; and (b) any explanation of that behaviour should be susceptible to empirical testing. Behavioural scholars take the view that, whatever theoretical categories any analysis uses, social enquiry is fundamentally about trying to understand what it is that (some) people do, think or say.

Scholars working in the behavioural tradition have investigated a wide range of substantive problems. Behaviouralists have extensively analyzed the reasons that underlie the main form of mass political participation in democratic countries: voting (for example, Heath *et al.*, 1994; Clarke *et al.*, 2009). They have also examined the origins of participation in other, more unconventional, forms of political activity such as demonstrations, strikes and even riots (for example, Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Parry *et al.*, 1992; Anderson and Mendes, 2006). At the elite level, behaviouralists have analyzed leadership behaviour, placing particular emphasis on the connections between the way in which leaders view the world (their attitudes and values) and the particular actions that they take (for example, Allison, 1971; King, 1985; Sanders, 1990; Dunleavy and Jones, 1993; King, 2002). In terms of social aggregates, behavioural analysis has examined the actions of interest groups (for example, Grant and Marsh, 1977; Nownes and Lipinski, 2005) and political parties (for example, Budge and Fairlie, 1983; Budge and Laver, 1992; Dalton, 2002; Ezrow, 2008). At the international level, behavioural analysis has also focused on the actions of nation states (for example, Rosenau 1969), as well as on the behaviour of non-state actors such as multinational corporations, international terrorist groups and supranational organizations like the EU (for example, Keohane, 1984; Baldwin, 1993; Plümper and Neumayer, 2006). In all these diverse contexts, the central questions that behaviouralists seek to answer are simple: What do the actors involved actually do? How

can we best explain why they do it? These are obviously not the only questions that can be asked about individual and social actors. Behaviouralists simply believe that they are the most important ones.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides a brief outline of the origins of behaviouralism and summarizes the core analytic assertions that underpin it. The second section reviews the main criticisms that, with varying degrees of justification, have been levelled at the behavioural approach. The third part describes one major study – Plümper and Neumayer's analysis of the effects of violent conflict on women's life expectancy rates – which illustrates some of the more positive features of behavioural analysis. The final section considers the influence that behaviouralism continues to exert on contemporary political researchers.

The rise of the behavioural movement and its core characteristics

The behavioural movement assumed an important position in the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s. Its philosophical origins were in the writings of Auguste Comte (Comte, 1974) in the nineteenth century and in the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s. Positivism, which was popularized in Britain by Alfred Ayer and in Germany by Carl Hempel, asserted that analytic statements made about the physical or social world fell into one of three categories. First, such statements could be useful tautologies: they could be purely definitional statements that assigned a specific meaning to a particular phenomenon or concept. For example, we might define families living on less than one-third of the average weekly wage as 'living below the poverty line'. Second, statements could be empirical, that is to say, they could be tested against observation in order to see if they were true or false. Third, statements that fell into neither of the first two categories were devoid of analytic meaning. For the positivists, in short, meaningful analysis could proceed only on the basis of useful tautologies and empirical statements: metaphysics, theology, aesthetics and even ethics merely introduced meaningless obfuscation into the process of enquiry.

It would not be correct, of course, to assume that behaviouralism accepted all the philosophical precepts of positivism. Even as behaviouralism was gaining increasingly wide acceptance among social scientists in the 1950s, positivism itself was being subjected to ferocious philosophical criticism – not least on the grounds that it was unclear whether positivism's assertion that there were only three types of statement was itself tautological, empirical or meaningless. This said, behaviouralism's view of the nature of empirical theory and of explanation were

strongly influenced by the positivist tradition. Although there are many definitions of these two critical terms, most behaviouralists would probably accept something along the following lines:

- An *empirical theory is* a set of interconnected abstract statements, consisting of assumptions, definitions and empirically testable hypotheses, which purports to describe and explain the occurrence of a given phenomenon or set of phenomena.
- An *explanation* is a causal account of the occurrence of some phenomenon or set of phenomena. An explanation of a particular (class of) event(s) consists in the specification of the minimum non-tautological set of antecedent necessary and sufficient conditions required for its (their) occurrence.

The importance of these definitions of theory and explanation lies in the implications that they have for theory evaluation. For positivists, the crucial question that should always be asked about any purportedly explanatory theory is: how would we know if this theory were incorrect? Behaviouralism's endorsement of the central importance of this question is precisely what demonstrates its intellectual debt to positivism. For both positivists and behaviouralists there are three main ways in which explanatory theories can be evaluated:

1. A 'good' theory must be internally consistent: it must not make statements such that both the presence and the absence of a given set of antecedent conditions are deemed to 'cause' the occurrence of the phenomenon that is purportedly being explained.
2. A 'good' theory relating to a specific class of phenomena should, as far as possible, be consistent with other theories that seek to explain related phenomena.
3. Crucially, genuinely explanatory theories must be capable of generating empirical predictions that can be tested against observation. The only meaningful way of deciding between competing theories (which might appear to be equally plausible in other respects) is by empirical testing. This testing can be conducted either at the level of the individual social actor or at the level of the social aggregate – whichever is appropriate given the nature of the theory that is being tested.

It is this emphasis on empirical observation and testing that produces the two characteristic features of the behavioural approach to social enquiry.

The first – and less contentious – of these is behaviouralism's commitment to the systematic use of all the relevant empirical evidence rather

than a limited set of illustrative supporting examples. This commitment simply means that, when a particular theoretical statement is being investigated, the researcher must not limit her/himself to a consideration of only those observed cases that provide 'anecdotal' support for the theoretical claims that are being made. Rather, the researcher must consider all the cases – or at least a representative sample of them – that are encompassed by the theoretical statement that is being evaluated.

It is in this context that the use and development of statistical techniques is justified by behaviouralists – as a vehicle for analyzing large amounts of 'relevant empirical evidence'. It should be emphasized in the strongest possible terms, however, that behaviouralism is not synonymous either with quantification or with the downgrading of qualitative research. Certainly, behavioural researchers have frequently used quantitative techniques as heuristic devices for handling evidence. There is nothing intrinsic in behaviouralism's epistemological position, however, that requires quantification. On the contrary, quantitative and qualitative forms of empirical analysis are equally acceptable to behavioural researchers. What matters for them is not whether evidence is qualitative or quantitative but (a) that it is used to evaluate theoretical propositions; and (b) that it is employed systematically rather than illustratively.

The second characteristic feature of behavioural analysis is slightly more subtle in its implications – but no less important. It is simply that scientific theories and/or explanations must, in principle, be capable of being falsified. Note here that the reference is to 'scientific' rather than simply to 'empirical' or 'explanatory' theories. This usage reflects behaviouralism's commitment to Karl Popper's revision of traditional positivism in which he (a) substituted the principle of falsifiability for that of verification; and (b) simultaneously identified the falsifiability criterion as the line of demarcation between 'scientific' and 'pseudo-scientific' enquiry (Popper, 1959).

In order fully to appreciate the import of this statement, a brief digression is necessary. We need to consider precisely what is meant by a theory or an explanation being 'falsifiable'. Consider the familiar statement that Popper himself used as an example: 'All swans are white'. Suppose that we observe a black swan. What does this tell us about the statement? One interpretation is that observing the black swan shows the statement to be empirically false: the statement was in principle *capable* of being falsified and it has been falsified. But there is another way of interpreting the statement in the light of a black swan being observed. The statement says that all swans are white. It follows that the black swan that we have observed cannot be a swan because it is not white: the statement, therefore, is not false.

Can both of these interpretations be correct? The answer is 'yes'. Each

interpretation makes a different set of assumptions about the definition of a swan. The first assumes that a swan is a large bird with a long neck that looks very pretty when it paddles through water; it says nothing of the bird's colour. In these circumstances, the definitions of 'swan' and 'colour' are *independent:* there is no overlap between them. In other words, it *is possible* to observe something that has all the characteristics of a swan regardless of its colour. We have observed a black swan and, therefore, the initial statement must have been false. The second interpretation assumes that a swan is a large bird with a long neck that looks very pretty when it paddles through water *and that it is also white.* In other words, this second interpretation assumes that whiteness is part of the *definition* of being a swan. In these circumstances, when a black 'swan' is observed it cannot be a swan, because part of the definition of it being a swan is that it is white.

What is clear from this discussion is that the status of the statement depends upon whether or not its constituent terms are independently defined. With the first interpretation, the terms 'swan' and 'white' *are* independently defined. As a result, the statement is an empirical or falsifiable one: it is possible to test it against the world of observation. With the second interpretation, however, the terms 'swan' and 'white' are not independently defined. As a result, the statement is (partially) tautological: it is simply an untestable assertion that one of the defining features of a swan is that it is white.

This problem of interpretation is common in the social sciences. Consider the following statement: 'In general elections, people vote against the incumbent government if they are dissatisfied with its performance.' Without further information, we cannot tell whether this is a testable empirical statement or merely a definitional tautology. The statement can, in fact, be interpreted in two completely different ways. First, we can interpret the statement in purely tautological terms. Looking at a particular election, we could say: (a) that every voter who voted for the government must have been satisfied with its performance (otherwise s/he would not have voted for it); and (b) that every voter who did not vote for the government could not have been satisfied with its performance (otherwise s/he would have voted for it). With this interpretation, we can always 'believe' in the statement but we have not *demonstrated* that it is empirically correct; we have treated it purely as a tautology. The second interpretation is to regard the statement as an empirical one – but this is possible only if we provide a definition of dissatisfaction with the government that is independent of the act of voting. If we were to devise some independent way of measuring dissatisfaction, then we would obviously be able to test our initial statement against any available empirical evidence. We might find that all those who voted for the government were

satisfied with its performance and that all those who voted against it were dissatisfied – in which case we would have corroborated the statement. Crucially, however, by providing independent definitions of 'voting' and of 'dissatisfaction' we create the possibility that the statement might be empirically incorrect: we render the statement *falsifiable* – even though we might hope that it will not be falsified.

Having distinguished between falsifiable and non-falsifiable statements, Popper (1959) goes on to suggest that theories can only be regarded as 'scientific' if they generate empirical predictions that are capable of being falsified. Theories that do not generate such predictions are merely sophisticated tautologies that explain nothing – no matter how elegant and elaborate they might appear. Many behaviouralists are unconcerned as to whether or not their research should be described as 'scientific'. Crucially, however, they are unequivocally committed to the principle of falsifiability. Behaviouralists do not deny that there are other ways of evaluating the adequacy of a particular theory. They none the less insist that a genuinely explanatory theory must engender falsifiable propositions of the form 'if A, then B; if not A, then not B'; and it must specify causal antecedents that are defined independently of the phenomenon that is supposedly being explained.

All this is not to suggest, however, that behaviouralists believe that all aspects of their theories must be capable of being falsified. As Lakatos (1970) has argued, most theories in the physical and social sciences contain a non-falsifiable set of core propositions. These core propositions often take the form of highly abstract assumptions that are not susceptible to empirical testing. The non-falsifiability of the core propositions, however, does not necessarily mean that the theory itself is non-falsifiable. Provided that a series of testable predictions, which can be examined in the light of empirical observation, can be derived logically from the core, then the theory as a whole can be regarded as falsifiable. It does represent something more than sophisticated tautology; it does provide the analyst with an opportunity to specify the conditions under which s/he would know that the theory was 'incorrect'.

Behaviouralists, then, emphasize the twin notions that theories should: (a) seek to explain something; and (b) be capable, in principle, of being tested against the world of observation. For behaviouralists, non-falsifiable theories are not really theories at all. They are merely elaborate fantasies of varying degrees of complexity that scholars can choose to believe or disbelieve as they wish. For behaviouralists, theory evaluation must proceed beyond merely examining a theory in order to assess its internal consistency and the nature of the 'puzzles' that it seems to resolve: theory evaluation must also involve subjecting theoretical propositions to empirical test.

Criticisms of the behavioural approach

As with any other general approach in the social sciences, behaviouralism has been the target of a number of important criticisms. These criticisms can be grouped under three broad headings and each will be examined in turn below.

(a) Objections to the positivist claim that statements which are neither definitions (useful tautologies) nor empirical are meaningless

It was noted earlier that behaviouralism has its philosophical roots in positivism and that starting point could appear to make it vulnerable to any weaknesses inherent in positivism. But as we shall argue, that line of reasoning may not apply. Among the many criticisms that have been levelled at positivism, perhaps the most important one is the simple proposition that the large class of statements that positivism labels as 'meaningless' contains, in fact, many ideas that can add very significantly to our understanding of social behaviour and the human condition. In strict positivist terms, there can be no role for normative theory for the investigation of what ought to be – because normative discourses are not restricted to definitional and empirical statements. Similarly, there can be no role for aesthetic or moral arguments, for the same reason. And there can be no role for the sort of hermeneutic analysis that seeks to under-stand social behaviour through deep reflection about the nature of human perceptions, thought processes and motivations. If positivism seeks to exclude these forms of reflection, the argument runs, it must be in error.

The extent to which positivists ever genuinely denied the value of non-empirical analysis need not concern us here. It is important to point out, however, that most contemporary researchers who continue to work in the behaviouralist tradition would almost certainly reject the notion that there can be no role for normative theory, aesthetics or hermeneutics in political and social analysis. They would argue, instead, that these approaches yield a different form of knowledge or understanding – not that they are 'meaningless'. In essence, modern behaviouralists openly acknowledge this particular criticism of positivism. They deflect it from themselves by recognising that other, potentially useful, forms of knowl-edge can be acquired by scholars working in other intellectual traditions. Modern behaviouralists simply prefer to subject their own theoretical claims to empirical test. They also suspect that scholars working in non-empirical traditions are never able to provide a satisfactory answer to the crucial question: 'How would you know if you were wrong?'

(b) The tendency towards mindless empiricism

One of the claims of the early positivists was that theoretical understanding could be obtained only through a process of enquiry that began with theory-free observation of 'all the facts up to now' and which then derived law-like generalizations inductively from the empirical regularities that were observed. Later positivists, notably Hempel and Popper, strongly rejected this 'narrow inductivist' view of the nature of scientific enquiry, arguing that enquiry could only proceed if the researcher's efforts to observe 'relevant facts' were guided either by clear theoretical expectations or, at a minimum, by some kind of explanatory 'hunch'. Hempel (1966: 11–12) is worth quoting at length in this context:

> [A narrow inductivist investigation] ... could never get off the ground. Even its first [fact gathering] phase could never be carried out, for a collection of all the facts would have to await the end of the world, so to speak; and even all the facts up to now cannot be collected since there are an infinite number and variety of them. Are we to examine for example, all the grains of sand in all the deserts and on all the beaches, and are we to record their shapes, their weights, their chemical composition, their distances from each other, their constantly changing temperature, and their equally changing distance from the centre of the moon? Are we to record the floating thoughts that cross our minds in the tedious process? The shapes of the clouds overhead, the changing color of the sky? The construction and the trade name of our writing equipment? Our own life histories and those of our fellow investigators? All these, and untold other things, are, after all, among 'all the facts up to now'.

In spite of positivism's moves away from inductivism, there can be no doubt that, between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s, a number of scholars working within the behavioural tradition did still appear to be committed to an inductivist approach to research. It would be unnecessarily invidious to isolate particular examples of this tendency. It is nonetheless fair to say that, during this period, many behaviouralists acted as if law-like scientific generalizations could be constructed purely by identifying the statistical regularities evident in large quantities of empirical data. This emphasis on data and the concomitant downgrading of *a priori* theoretical reasoning in turn produced two undesirable tendencies in behavioural research.

The first of these was a tendency to emphasize what can be easily measured rather than what might be theoretically important. This sort of criticism is always easy to make, in the sense that one person's triviality may be another's profundity. Nonetheless, the tendency to play down the

potential importance of phenomena that are intrinsically difficult to measure has always been a matter of concern to both critics and advocates of behavioural research. This has been especially true in relation to the analysis of electoral behaviour. Since the explosion of behavioural research in the 1950s, voting studies have concentrated primarily on elec-tors' social profiles, partisan identifications, ideological positions, policy preferences and economic perceptions. Complex models have been devised – and tested empirically – which show the relative importance, and causal ordering, of different aspects of these various phenomena in the determination of the vote (see, for example, Sarlvik and Crewe, 1983; Heath *et al.*, 1985; Heath, 1991).

Yet despite the considerable contribution that behavioural analysis has made to our understanding of a voter's decision calculus, it has often been argued that, somehow, an important part of what it means to vote – as well as part of the calculus itself – may have been omitted from behav-ioural analyses. There has perhaps been insufficient attention paid to inconsistencies and contradictions in voters' political perceptions and to the possibility not only that many voters change their political preferences frequently, but also that their preferences vary, quite genuinely, with the social context in which they are expressed. There are other areas – relat-ing to the way in which individuals reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, upon themselves – where behavioural electoral research has simply not dared to tread. What sort of person do I think I am? What aspirations and expectations do I have about my future life? What sort of life do I think I am capable of leading or should lead? How do I relate my notions of personal morality to the moral stances of the major political parties? The answers to questions such as these may have no bearing on the way in which political preferences are formed and transformed. Within the behavioural frame of reference, however, it is very hard to envisage how the responses to such questions – given the difficulty of measuring those responses systematically – could ever be incorporated into formal analy-sis. As a result, they are largely excluded from the analytic frame.

A second, and related, undesirable feature of behavioural research that arises from its overly empirical focus has been a tendency to concentrate on readily observed phenomena – such as voting – rather than the more subtle, and perhaps deeper, structural forces that promote stability and change in social and political systems. One obvious concept that has been neglected by behavioural research in this context is that of *interests*. The notion of interests has played an important part in a wide variety of social and political theories ranging from Marx, Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto in the domestic field to Hans Morgenthau and E. H. Carr in the field of international relations. In all these contexts, social actors – whether they are individuals, groups of individuals or even nation states –

are seen as pursuing strategies that are aimed at maximising their 'interests'. Yet, as scholars working in the behavioural tradition have found repeatedly, it is extraordinarily difficult to observe the 'interests' of a particular individual, group or state directly. In consequence, behavioural research has tended to shy away from the theoretical and empirical analysis of interests – preferring to leave the field clear for scholars working in other, non-empirical, traditions.

(c) The assumed independence of theory and observation

The early behaviouralists proclaimed their approach to social enquiry as being both 'scientific' and 'value-free'. They claimed not to be seeking to justify any particular ethical or political stance. Rather, they sought simply to uncover 'the facts' through impartial observation and to offer politically-neutral theories that would explain them in the most parsimonious way. As the passage from Hempel quoted earlier shows, the degree of inductivism thus implied – in which 'explanatory theory' emerges only after all the relevant facts have been surveyed impartially – was always impossible. Some sort of initial theoretical understanding is necessary before the researcher can decide what it is that should be observed.

Modern behaviouralists, along with researchers working in other intellectual traditions, roundly reject the notion that theory and observation are independent. On the contrary, most behaviouralists would now accept the relativist view that what is observed is in part a consequence of the theoretical position that the analyst adopts in the first place.

Modern behaviouralists, however, are distinguishable from most relativists. It is one thing to allow that observations are coloured by theory; it is quite another to conclude that this means that one set of theories and observations are as good as another. For modern behaviouralists, the ultimate test of a good theory is still whether or not it is consistent with observation – with the available empirical evidence. Modern behaviouralists are perfectly prepared to accept that different theoretical positions are likely to elicit different descriptions of 'reality' – that they are likely to produce different 'observations'. They insist, however, that whatever 'observations' are implied by a particular theoretical perspective, those observations must be used in order to conduct a systematic empirical test of the theory that is being posited.

Finally, it is worth noting that behaviouralists are sometimes criticized – with some justification – for failing to comprehend the 'big picture' of social and political transformation. That is to say, by emphasizing the description and explanation of observable individual and group behaviour, behaviouralists underestimate the importance of 'more profound' social and political changes that might be taking place. For example, theo-

rists who debate the ways in which 'the state' evolves under conditions of advanced capitalism (for example, Adorno, 1976; Habermas, 1976; Jessop, 1990) tend to deride behavioural analysis as being concerned merely with superficialities and with failing to offer a theory (or explanation) of significant social or political change. Behaviouralists respond by pointing out that broad ranging social theories which purport to analyze significant social change must be based on some sort of empirical observation. If a writer wishes to argue, for example, that 'the capitalist state' is in 'crisis', then s/he must be able to specify what the observable referents of the crisis actually are. If there is a 'crisis', (some) people must be taking certain sorts of action or must be thinking certain things that enable the analyst to know that a 'crisis' exists. Similarly, if some new form of social relationship is emerging (perhaps as a result of new patterns of economic production) then that new form of relationship must have some empirical referent or referents, otherwise, how can the analyst know that the new form is indeed occurring? Behaviouralists are entirely prepared to recognize that broad-ranging social and political theories are both possible and desirable. They merely insist that, if such theories are to be credible, they cannot be couched indefinitely at so high a level of abstraction as to render them incapable of being tested empirically. For behaviouralists, social and political theories are supposed to describe and explain, what can be observed – whether it involves stasis or change. Theories of social change only start to be interesting to behaviouralists when they: (a) specify the empirical referents that are used in order to make the judgement that profound change is indeed taking place; and (b) provide the empirical evidence which shows that these referents are indeed changing in the specified direction. Behaviouralism is entirely neutral as to what the 'referents' in any theory should be – this is the domain of the social theorist her/himself. To behaviouralists, however, a social 'theory' without clear empirical referents is nothing more than mere assertion.

The strengths of the behavioural approach: an example

While it is clear from the foregoing discussion that the behavioural approach can be subjected to serious criticism, it would be very wrong to infer that all examples of behavioural research are flawed. On the contrary, behavioural research at its best can make a considerable theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding and explanation of social behaviour.

The strengths of the behavioural approach derive primarily from its advocates' determination to pursue forms of analysis that are *capable of*

replication. Scholars working in the behavioural tradition are always concerned to establish that other researchers who make similar sets of assumptions as them and examine the same evidence would draw broadly similar conclusions. This need to ensure that research findings are capable of replication necessarily means that behaviouralists are obliged to be very clear in their specification of: (a) what it is that they are trying to explain; (b) the precise theoretical explanation that is being advanced; and (c) the way in which they are using empirical evidence in order to evaluate that theoretical explanation. The need for clarity of exposition in turn means that behaviouralists rarely enter into that most sterile area of academic debate: 'What did writer X mean when s/he argued Y?' For behaviouralists, unless X makes it clear what s/he means in the first place, then X's work is clearly not capable of being replicated and argument Y is therefore likely to be treated with suspicion in any case.

The strengths of 'good' behavioural analysis can be illustrated by reference to Plümper and Neumayer's (2006) analysis of the effects of violent conflict on the life expectancy rates of men and of women. Their analysis involves a combination of rigorous theorising, careful model specification and systematic empirical testing. It offers both a methodological advance in the way that the consequences of violent conflict can be assessed and a substantive account of the impact of war on life expectancy rates around the world between 1975 and 2005.

Plümper and Neumayer (2006) focus on a question that has concerned international policy analysts, human rights activists and feminists for many years: to what extent do wars, whether they are inter-state wars or civil wars, have a disproportionately damaging effect on women rather than men? In many conflicts around the world, although the majority of combatants are men, it often appears to be the case that many of the victims of such conflicts are women. Surprisingly, until Plümper and Neumayer's study was published, there was no clear evidence about the impact of violent conflict on women's life expectancy rates.

Plümper and Neumayer (2006) begin their study by pointing out that, in most countries most of the time, women live longer than men. The effect of violent conflict is to reduce life expectancy rates for both men and women. However, what violent conflict also does is to reduce the 'gender gap' in life expectancy rates: as a result of war, women's life expectancy falls more rapidly than men's, so that the two rates become much closer. Plümper and Neumayer identify three main mechanisms through which wars can disproportionately reduce women's life expectancy rates. The first is an *economic damage effect*. Wars destroy transport and health infrastructures and food supply chains, seriously impeding the resources available to disadvantaged groups – which, in times of war, disproportionately involve women. The second mechanism involves *displacement*.

Violent conflicts typically create large numbers of refugees, as people try to flee from combat zones in order to find safe havens elsewhere. The greater precariousness of life in such situations again affects women disproportionately, as they frequently find themselves trying to support both themselves and their children in situations where healthcare and other resources needed for survival are either in short supply or non-existent. Finally, there is also a *sexual violence effect*, which reflects the greater vulnerability of women in conflict situations to trafficking, prostitution, rape and murder.

Plümper and Neumayer's core aim is to estimate as precisely as possible the effects of violent conflict on gender differences in life expectancy rates. In order to do this, they develop a statistical model that allows them to apply 'controls' for a range of other factors (such as income levels, education and gender equality) that could also affect life expectancy. This idea of applying controls is crucial to their case. They need to take account of other potentially relevant factors in order to show that any observed correlation between violent conflict and changing life expectancy patterns is not simply a 'coincidence' – that it represents a real causal effect.

Plümper and Neumayer's first task is to assemble an evidential base – a dataset – that allows them to explore these various relationships, both across countries and over time. As their *dependent variable* – the phenomenon that they are trying to explain – the authors take the *annual change* in the ratio of male to female life expectancy, in each country in each year, for as many country-years as they can collect. They use the most reliable cross-national dataset available for this purpose, that provided by the US Census Department, which has been assembling comparative data on life expectancy rates since the 1970s. This gives them data for over 100 countries, covering the period between 1975 and 2005, a total of 2,956 country-years.

In order to assess the direct and indirect effects of inter-state and civil wars, which represent their core *explanatory or independent variables*, Plümper and Neumayer turn to existing conflict databases that have been assembled by teams of other researchers over many years. For information on the occurrence and extent of *civil wars*, they use Fearon and Laitin's widely-used Civil War dataset coding. An internal conflict within a state is defined as a civil war if it involved over 1,000 battle deaths and at least 100 deaths per year after the onset of the conflict. For their operational measure of *international war*, Plümper and Neumayer use the Upsalla PRIO Armed Conflict database. This defines an international war as a conflict between two or more states that involves at least 1,000 battle deaths and at least 25 deaths per year after the onset. The authors exclude those cases where conflict occurs *outside* the territory of a combatant

state (for example, NATO countries' involvement in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s), since in these cases, life expectancy rates of either men or women are unlikely to be affected in the 'intervening' country.

Having specified the circumstances in which civil and international wars can be said to exist, Plümper and Neumayer go on to differentiate between civil wars where the main battle-lines are drawn between members of *different ethnic groups* and those where they are not. Their supposition here is that civil wars in ethnically divided societies – ethnic civil wars – are likely to have more damaging consequences for women's life expectancy, particularly through displacement and sexual violence effects. The Fearon and Laitin (cited in Plümper and Neumayer, 2006) database provides clear information on whether a particular civil war has an ethnic dimension or not, so Plümper and Neumayer are easily able to incorporate this distinction into their own dataset. A further effect proposed by Plümper and Neumayer is that in situations where the central authority of the state has completely collapsed, the effects of civil war on female life expectancy will be even more marked. They accordingly collect data on an additional explanatory variable, the *collapse of political order*, for which they use data derived from the University of Maryland's Polity Project. Their expectation is that women's life expectancy will be further reduced under conditions of complete state collapse.

In addition to these core theoretical claims, Plümper and Neumayer recognize that, in order to assess the effects of warfare on gendered life expectancy, they also need to take proper account of a range of *control* variables. These controls include the existing *level* of life expectancy in a country; measures of economic wealth (gross domestic product per capita); education (the literacy rate); gender equality (the percentage of the labour force that is female); the degree of autocracy as opposed to democracy; the durability of the main political institutions of the state (the latter two measures derived, again, from the Polity project); the occurrence of natural disasters; and the incidence of major health epidemics (the latter two measures based on data taken from the Emergency Disaster Database).

Plümper and Neumayer develop a simple statistical model of gendered life expectancy rates using all these explanatory and control variables. In essence, this model says that the annual *change* in the ratio of male:female life expectancy is influenced by war (civil or international); by the type of conflict (ethnic or not); by the maintenance (or collapse) of state political institutions; by wealth, education and gender equality; by the degree of autocracy; and by natural disasters. The huge advantage of the sort of statistical approach that the authors adopt is that it allows the relative

magnitudes of effect of each these 'explanatory variables' to be estimated very precisely. However, although the model itself is relatively straight-forward, it turns out that considerable caution has to be used in order to estimate the sizes of these effects. This is because Plümper and Neumayer's data constitute what is called a cross-sectional-time-series *panel*. This means that, for each of the 106 countries covered in their analysis, there are multiple, annual, data observations, some of which (like literacy rates and autocracy levels) do not vary very much over time within a given country. These characteristics of panel data render the esti-mation of statistical effects very tricky. It would be unnecessarily tedious to explain in detail how Plümper and Neumayer address these very specific problems of panel data. It is sufficient to note that through a combination of a 'lagged dependent variable' (which means that the model in effect estimates the *change* in the male:female life expectancy ratio) and a three-stage estimation process expressly designed for dealing with panel data, they produce estimates of the effects on life expectancy of all of their independent variables that minimise bias and maximise effi-ciency.

Table 1.1 summarizes Plümper and Nuemayer's core empirical find-ings. The key to understanding results of this sort is to look at the *signifi-cance* levels, the *signs* (positive or negative), and *relative magnitudes* of the various coefficients in the model. The significance levels indicate with what degree of certainty we can be sure that a particular statistical effect operates (or not). For example, the coefficients that have three asterisks (***) next to them are highly statistically significant: we can be 99.9 per cent certain that the independent variable indicated has an effect on the dependent variable that we are trying to explain; two asterisks means we can be 99 per cent certain; and so on. The signs on the coefficients indicate whether the independent variable concerned serves to increase (a positive sign) or decrease (a negative sign) the dependent variable. Given the nature of the dependent variable here, a positive sign means that the ratio of male:female life expectancy increases; whereas a negative sign means that it falls – that women's life expectancy relative to men's is worsening. Finally, the relative magnitudes of the different coefficients indicate which variables have the largest (and smallest) effects on life expectancy rates.

Viewed in this light, we can see from Table 1.1 that both inter-state and civil wars have significant negative effects, of roughly the same magni-tude, on the gender gap in life expectancy. This means that, controlling for a host of other theoretically relevant factors, violent conflicts do indeed reduce the gap between men's and women's life expectancy rates. In other words, violent conflicts of either sort (internal or external) do indeed inflict disproportionate damage on women's life expectancy. The table also shows the very important roles played by natural disasters (see the

Table 1.1   *Plümper and Neumayer's core empirical findings*

Dependent variable is ratio of men's to women's life expectancy rates in a given 'country-year'

Independent variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Lagged dependent variable (at t-1)	0.89***	0.01
Change in population life expectancy	0.06***	0.02
Interstate war/not	-0.38*	0.20
Civil war/not	-0.35***	0.06
Income per capita	0.00	0.00
Autocratic institutions	0.03***	0.01
Regime durability	-0.01**	0.00
Female labour force participation	0.04***	0.00
National disaster/not	-1.58***	0.33
HIV/Aids victims>10% of population 15-45	-0.74***	0.08
Intercept	12.18***	0.95
Observations (country-years)	1836	
Countries	106	
Adjusted R2	0.96	

*** Coefficient significant at 0.001 level; ** at 0.01; * at 0.05.
Source: Plümper and Neumayer (2006), table 1, p. 744.

significant negative coefficient, b = –1.58) and by HIV/Aids epidemics (b = –0.74), which also seriously damage women's life chances disproportionately. Plümper and Neumayer (2006) go on to investigate the roles played by ethnic divisions and by state failure in exacerbating the problems faced by women. They find that if there *is* an ethnic basis to a conflict, the damaging consequences for women's life expectancy are even more pronounced. The worst consequences for women's long-term survival rates arise if there is a combination of ethnic conflict and state collapse.

Plümper and Neumayer's findings are important because they show that violent conflict has long-term consequences for women's life chances, long after any actual fighting has stopped. The effects of violent conflict that the two authors observe take full and proper account of a range of other factors that influence life expectancy rates. Their findings have important implications for the policies and approaches adopted both by governments that contemplate the deployment of peacekeeping forces and by humanitarian aid agencies that seek simply to alleviate suffering on the ground. If women are not to be disproportionately disadvantaged by violent conflicts, then greater policy effort needs to be made to ensure that their interests are given greater priority when peacekeeping or crisis-alleviation measures are being planned.

If this seems a rather timid conclusion, then so be it. Plümper and

Neumayer (2006) begin their study with a simple empirical question: Does violent conflict disproportionately damage women's, as opposed to men's, interests? By specifying and estimating a comprehensive model of the gender gap in life expectancy rates, they are able to show, convincingly, that such damage does indeed occur, and to estimate its precise extent under different sets of conditions.

Plümper and Neumayer do not claim to have developed a definitive model of life expectancy across time and space. Their empirical analysis implies the requirement for further theoretical work – theorizing – which will in turn require further rounds of empirical evaluation. In all this, they are engaging in a process of *retroduction* (Hanson, 1958). That is to say, their research involves a continuous interplay between theory and empirical testing, in which theory acts as a guide to empirical observation, operationalization and testing and in which empirical findings are subsequently used to modify, revise and refine theory.

Crucially, however, because Plümper and Neumayer's research follows behaviouralist precepts, it is always possible for the dispassionate observer to know exactly what it is that they are arguing and to know exactly what evidence they are using to substantiate their theoretical claims. In the often vague and confused world of social science theorizing and research – in which some writers seem, almost deliberately, to deploy obfuscation as a means of preempting criticism; these are qualities to be cherished and nurtured. Plümper and Neumayer's work analysis can obviously be criticized – on the grounds, for example, that its empirical analysis does not differentiate among the three mechanisms (economic damage, displacement, and sexual violence) that connect violent conflict to women's lower life expectancy rates. But, like all good behaviouralists, Plümper and Neumayer at least present a clearly expressed target for would-be critics. For behaviouralists, it is better to be clear and (possibly) wrong than to be so impenetrable that other writers are obliged to debate the 'meaning' of what has been written.

Conclusion: the behavioural legacy in the 21st century

Among contemporary behaviouralists, it is widely accepted that theoretical analysis must almost always be the starting point for serious empirical enquiry. This is not to say that theories cannot be modified, enhanced or rejected on the basis of empirical observation. Rather, theory acts as a vehicle for distancing the analyst from the potentially overwhelming detail of what can be directly observed, so that abstract deductions can be made about the connections between different phenomena. In addition,

theory not only generates testable hypotheses but also provides guidelines and signposts as to the sort of empirical evidence that should be gathered in the first place. In short, theory plays an indispensable role in contemporary behavioural empirical analysis. Many modern behaviouralists would go even further than this in the direction of epistemological relativism. It often used to be argued that there was an objective social reality 'out there' in the world of observation, waiting to be discovered by 'scientific' analysis. This view is by no means so widely held in contemporary behavioural circles. Not only do modern behaviouralists accept that theory must play a central role in social analysis, they also recognize the possibility that different theoretical perspectives might generate different observations. Obviously, this possibility renders the task of subjecting rival theories to empirical testing rather more complicated. According to contemporary behaviouralists, however, it does not render the task any less significant. Whatever observations a theory may engender, if it is to be considered a truly explanatory theory, it must generate falsifiable predictions that are not contradicted by the available empirical evidence. A social enquiry is, by definition, about what people do, think or say. There is, ultimately, nothing else other than people doing, thinking and saying things – whatever fancy concepts analysts might use in order to characterize 'reality'. Behaviouralism allows all theories to make whatever characterization of 'reality' they like. However, if they are to be considered explanatory, they must make statements about what people will do, think or say, given certain conditions. There is no reason why each theory should not be evaluated on its own observational terms. But unless a theory can be evaluated – that is, tested empirically – on its own observational terms, behaviouralists are not prepared to grant it the status of explanatory theory in the first place.

For contemporary behaviouralists, the main purpose of social scientific enquiry is to explain behaviour at individual and aggregate levels. The central questions that behaviouralists ask are: Why do individuals, institutional actors and nation states behave the way they do? And what are the consequences of their actions? Embedded in the behaviouralist notion of explanation is the idea of causality. Although behaviouralists are aware that causality may be as much a reflection of the way we think about the world as it is of 'reality', they nonetheless insist that, unless a theory makes some sort of causal statement, it cannot be deemed to explain anything. They also insist that, if an explanation is to be believed, it must make empirically falsifiable predictions that can be tested against observations. While it is never possible definitively to establish that a particular causal relationship exists, it is possible to determine how far a particular set of empirical observations is consistent with a specific proposition that links different phenomena together. For behaviouralists,

in short, believable explanatory theories must be capable of receiving, and must receive, empirical support. Modern behaviouralists argue, with considerable justification, that nearly all social researchers who work with empirical materials in some way (which is nearly all social researchers) subscribe broadly to this view. In this sense, the legacy of behaviouralism among empirical researchers is enormous. In many respects, we are all – or should be – behaviouralists now.

Further reading

The following list provides an outline of texts that employ and offer critiques of the behavioural approach to social explanation.

- The best introduction to the philosophy of science in general, and to behaviouralism's place within it, is Chalmers (1986).
- For various critiques and related ideas, see Winch (1958), Rudner (1966) and Thomas (1979).
- On positivism and 'scientific' approaches to social explanation, more generally, see Kuhn (1970), Hempel (1965, 1966), Hanson (1958), Halfpenny (1982) and Chalmers (1990).
- On the philosophical origins of behaviouralism, see Carnap (1936, 1950), Schlick (1974) and Ayer (1971).
- For a useful explanation of some of the terms used in these studies, see Lacey (1976).
- For justifications of quantitative approaches to the analysis of empirical evidence in the social sciences, see Blalock (1964, 1969, 1970, 1972) and King (1989).
- For a summary of the ways in which qualitative data can be employed within the 'behavioural-scientific' approach, see King *et al*. (1994).

Chapter 2

Rational Choice

ANDREW HINDMOOR

The rational choice approach to the study of politics involves the application of the method of economics to the study of politics. I will say more about this method in the following section. But two key assumptions which are of absolutely central importance to the rational choice approach ought to be immediately highlighted: rationality and self-interest. Whether analysing the creation of cabinet coalitions in Europe, the transition to democracy in Latin America, the origins of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, or the trading of campaign donations for policy favours in the United States, rational choice theorists assume that people can be relied upon to act in ways which best secure their goals and that these goals reflect their self-interest.

The plausibility of these assumptions can be challenged. But there is no doubting their utility because *if* people are rational and self-interested it becomes possible to explain and even predict their actions in ways that would allow rational choice theorists to claim for themselves a mantle of scientific credibility. If you know that someone wants X and believes Y then, if people can be relied upon to effectively further their goals, it becomes possible to predict that they will act in way Z. Rational choice theorists often construct dizzyingly complex models of political behaviour replete with equations and mathematical appendices. But the explanatory work being done by the assumptions of self-interest and rationality is nevertheless easy to grasp. Why did a government cut taxes shortly before an election? Forget arguments about consumer choice, manageable deficits or crowding out private investment. The rational choice theorist will be at one with the cynical voter in suggesting that the government cut taxes in order to boost its own chances of re-election and did so in the belief that voters reward governments who can deliver the appearance of prosperity.

Rational choice theorists were not the first to employ the assumptions of rationality and self-interest. A 'realist' tradition within international relations, tracing its origins back to ancient Greece and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War,* suggests (at its simplest) that states'

actions are explicable in terms of a self-interested drive for power and that their leaders' commitments to justice, peaceful co-existence and international norms of behaviour are 'cheap talk' (see Dunne and Schmidt, 2007). But over the last few decades it is rational choice theorists who have most zealously applied the assumptions of rationality and self-interest to the broadest range of political activities. Rational choice theory was developed by a small number of economists and political scientists working in a handful of American universities in the 1960s. Having initially been confined to the pages of economics journals; rational choice entered the political science mainstream in the early 1980s. By the end of that decade, around 40 per cent of the articles being published in the discipline's leading journal, the *American Political Science Review*, used rational choice theory (Green and Shapiro, 1994: 3). Indeed, during this period one leading proponent, Mueller (1993: 147) went so far as to predict that 'rational choice and political science will be indistinguishable in another generation': that rational choice 'will be a field within economics, and will encompass all of political science'.

Mueller's prophecy has not come to pass. Rational choice constitutes just one of many available approaches to the study of politics. Indeed, when judged in terms of the number of its adherents, rational choice remains very much a minority taste. In most political science departments across the world, rational choice theorists are heavily outnumbered by institutionalists, behaviouralists, interpretivists and normative theorists. Yet, rational choice theory retains a high profile within the discipline. This is partly because new applications of rational choice theory continue to be published in large numbers in leading journals. But it is also because other political scientists have launched a series of trenchant theoretical and empirical broadsides against the pretensions of rational choice. Rational choice theory may not be universally admired but it is an approach to which few remain indifferent. This chapter analyzes the method of economics which rational choice theory applies to the study of politics, provides an overview of one branch of rational choice theory – spatial models of party competition – and discusses various criticisms of the rational choice approach.

The method of economics (and rational choice)

In 2005 an economist based at the University of Chicago, Steven Levitt, published an unexpected bestseller. *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner, 2005) has been translated into thirty languages, spent two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list and encouraged publishers to rush into print books with titles like *The Undercover Economist* (Harford, 2006)

and *The Economic Rationalist: Why Economics Explains Almost Everything* (Frank, 2008). Levitt's book consists of a series of often controversial answers to some interesting questions. What do estate agents and the Ku Klux Klan have in common? Why do drug dealers usually live with their mothers? Why did the American crime rate start to fall dramatically in the 1990s?

In answering these questions Levitt suggests that 'incentives are the cornerstone of modern life' and that we need to discover people's incentive structures in order to explain their actions (Levitt, 2005:11). So what do the Ku Klux Klan and estate agents have in common? They each have an incentive to hoard information. Estate agents are reluctant to inform vendors of the contact details of potential buyers because they do not want to be excluded from any deal. Klan members guard the secrets of their meetings because they want to prevent outsiders from claiming the benefits of membership (we might suppose that they also have good reason to hide the fact that they are members from their friends and neighbours). Why do drug dealers live at home? They do so because they are not paid very much and cannot afford to move out. At the bottom end of the market dealing is a low-skill occupation which attracts a large number of applicants. Drug dealers get low wages for the same reason junior employees in fast food restaurants get low wages: the laws of demand and supply work against them. Why did the crime rate fall in the early 1990s? Not because of a stronger economy or better policing. It fell because many women from poor backgrounds whose children who would have gone on to commit crimes in the 1990s instead terminated their pregnancies following the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion in 1973.

The front cover of *Freakonomics* breathlessly describes Levitt as a 'rogue economist'. Yet, when judged in terms of the way he analyzes problems and explains situations, Levitt is about as orthodox as it gets. Economists – or at least the neo-classical economists who now dominate the discipline – assume that people are rational and self-interested *and that this is why they respond so predictably to incentives*. Estate agents hoard information because they are profit-maximizers who have strong incentives to protect their market niche. The gangsters who control dealing operations do not pay junior dealers very much because they, too, want to maximize their profits. In assuming that people are rational, self-interested, and sensitive to changes in incentives, Levitt is assuming what most economists would assume.

There is a second but perhaps less obvious sense in which Levitt remains very much a part of the economic orthodoxy. Levitt does not simply assert that legalized abortion resulted in the fall of the crime rate. By collecting data on crime levels, demographics, economic growth, police expenditure and the number of abortions, he seeks to show that

this is the only explanation consistent with the evidence. Levitt, like most economists, believes that theories must be capable of generating predictions and that by testing these predictions against available evidence it is possible to learn more about how the world 'really is'.

What makes Levitt an unorthodox economist is his subject matter: the way he uses the methods of economics to explain what the front cover of *Freakonomics* calls the 'hidden side of everyday life'. And this is ground over which rational choice theorists walk. They have taken the explanatory logic of economics – the emphasis upon incentives and empirical testing and the assumptions of rationality and self-interest – and applied it in a non-market setting to the analysis of political decision-making. Do politicians cut taxes, raise spending and boost growth in the run-up to an election (Grier, 2008)? Is multilateral diplomacy or unilateral action most likely to ensure the success of nuclear non-proliferation regimes (Verdier, 2008)? When will prime ministers accept the resignation of a minister (Dewan and Dowding, 2005) or reshuffle their Cabinet (Indridason and Kam, 2008)? In what circumstances can conflict between 'great powers' erupt (Braumoeller, 2008)? These questions might not be quite as eye-catching as those posed by Levitt. But they are of obvious relevance to political scientists and students of international relations.

Rational choice in action: the logic of party competition

The rational choice method is one which can be widely applied within political science. But in order to understand its strengths and limitations I will now look at just one area of work: the spatial theory of party competition. The Austrian economist, Schumpeter (1942: 269), defines democracy as an arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for votes. Voters want certain things – tighter regulation of banks, lower taxes, more schools in their constituency, or perhaps a ban on gay marriage – and must choose which party to support in an election. What kinds of policies will parties adopt in order to increase their chances of election?

The Downs perspective

In one of the founding texts of rational choice, Downs (1957) argued that if there are only two parties, if voters vote for the party they are closest to in political 'space', and if voters' preferences can be expressed in terms of a single (left–right) dimension, that competition will force political parties to adopt essentially identical policies.

Downs (1957:27) assumes that the leaders of political parties are driven not by a sense of what policies are in the public interest but 'in order to attain the income, prestige and power which come from being in office'. Because they are pure vote-maximizers, leaders will 'formulate policies in order to win elections rather than win elections in order to formulate policies' (ibid). But which policies will they adopt? In Figure 2.1 the horizontal axis shows a series of positions in political space running from the far left to the far right. Each of these positions can be associated with a particular set of policies: the one on the far left with tougher regulation, higher taxes, more public expenditure on education and so on. The vertical axis shows the level of support within the electorate for each of these policy positions. The resulting distribution of preferences can take any form. Here, it shows an electorate in which there is a standard distribution of preferences and most voters are located at or around the centre. Assume now that there are two parties, A and B, and that A adopts position X. What should B do? If its leader is a vote-maximizer who formulates policies in order to win elections, they have an incentive to locate just to the right of A at Y, so attracting the majority of voters who are closer to Y than to X. But precisely because it is so vulnerable, we can predict that the leader of A will not adopt position X. But what will they do?

At first glance, this looks like a question without an answer. Where A goes will depend upon where B goes and where B goes will depend upon where A goes, and so on. There is a potentially infinite regress here from which it appears impossible to extract any clear predictions. But there is a simple way out of this impasse. The *equilibrium* position is one in which both parties locate at the position of the median voter: that person whose preferences are such that there are exactly as many voters to their left as to their right. In figure 2.1 the median voter is at point Z. If party A locates at Z then B has an incentive to adopt the same position and, crucially, neither A nor B then have any incentive to *change* their strategy. So competition leads parties to converge upon the electoral centreground, or more precisely, upon the position of the median voter.

Downs' argument can be recast as a series of predictions about party behaviour and tested against empirical data on the spatial position of political parties during election campaigns (see Clough, 2008: 462). But the appeal of Downs' argument is as much psychological as it is empirical. Using a set of clearly stated and easy to understand assumptions, Downs constructs an argument which accords with many people's experience of elections ('why bother voting, they're all the same anyway') and can be used to explain party behaviour in a variety of settings. Political parties are complex organizations and elections are complicated events. Political scientists can devote their whole lives to understanding all that there is to know about party competition in one particular country. Downs' argu-

Figure 2.1 *Two-party competition and convergence to the centre*

Number of people
preferring policy
position
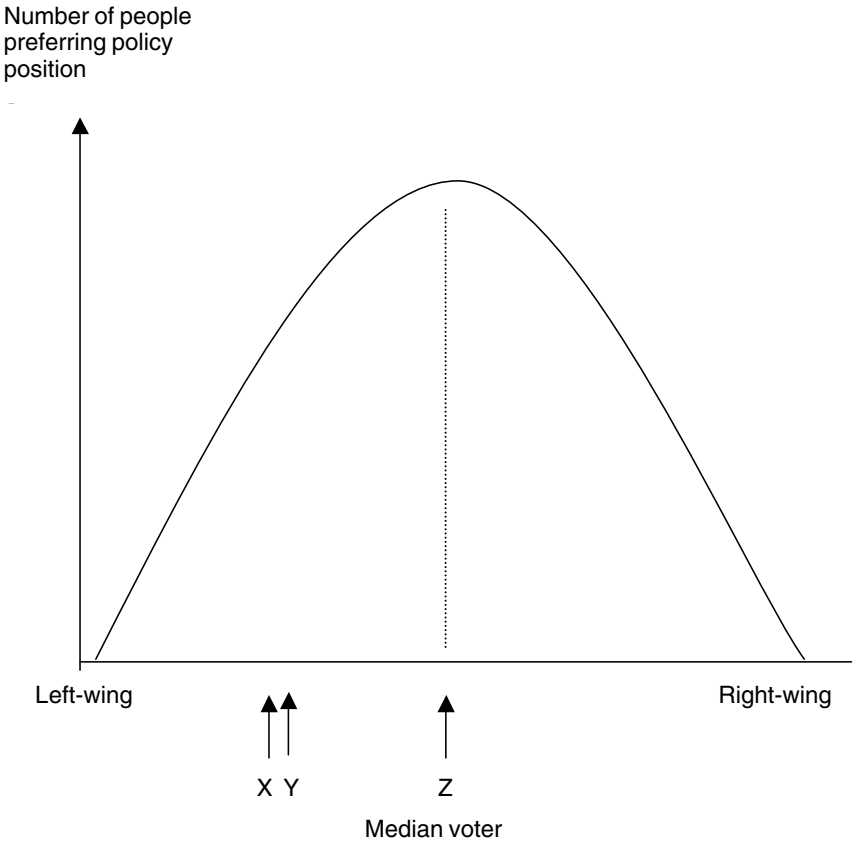
ment offers a simple and potentially attractive means of cutting through this complexity. This is not to say that the empirical evidence about whether parties really *do* converge upon the position of the median voter is unimportant. But the appeal of Downs' argument is not simply a function of its empirical support.

Up from Downs

Of course you don't need rational choice theory to tell you that parties move to the centreground in order to get elected. Newspaper columnists can be relied upon to make the same point in the run-up to an election. But rational choice theory adds value to such arguments by identifying the precise circumstances under which parties converge upon the centre-

ground and by telling us what might happen when these circumstances are not met.

Let us start here by examining what happens when there is more than one dimension. Dimensions are bundles of issues over which voters, politicians, or other actors have consistent preferences. In many countries, attitudes toward public ownership, taxation and globalization form a part of a left–right dimension in so far as voters who favour more public ownership and higher taxation also tend to be more sceptical about the benefits of globalization. But voters' preferences cannot always be understood in terms of this one dimension. Attitudes towards the environment (the trade-off between economic growth and environmental protection), individual freedom (legalization of drugs and gay marriage) and the desirability of international intervention (to overthrow a tyrant who is terrorizing their own population), routinely split voters on the left and right.

Figure 2.2 shows a situation in which the preferences of three voters (X,Y and Z) are mapped against a left–right space on the horizontal axis and a pro-intervention, anti-intervention space on the vertical axis. So, for example, voter X is left-wing and pro-intervention. Assume that there are two parties, A and B, located, initially, at A1 and B1. If we retain the assumption that voters vote for the party closest to them in political space and that our two voters consider these two dimensions of political conflict to be equally important, X and Y will vote for A and Z will vote for B. Is there a stable equilibrium in this situation? The simple answer is 'No'. No matter where one party positions itself, the other party will *always* be able to adopt another position, which attracts the support of at least two of the voters. If B moves from B1 to B2 then it will attract the support of X and Z. If A *then* moves to A2 it will attract the support of Y and Z and so on. It would appear that switching from one dimension to two dimensions generates huge instability. Indeed, Riker (1986) suggests that opposition leaders have an incentive to raise new issues and create new dimensions precisely in order to destabilize dominant incumbent parties.

But this does not mean that the centreground necessarily loses all of its appeal. We might not be able to pick a stable equilibrium in Figure 2.2 but we might nevertheless say that *most* of the time *most* of the positions which can defeat the *status quo* will be located in and around the position of the dimension-by-dimension median. The dimension-by-dimension median is, as it sounds, the point at which the two medians intersect. In case of left–right dimension Y is the median voter (X is to the left of Y and Z is to the right). In the case of intervention Z is the median voter (X is more pro-intervention and Y is more anti-intervention). Drawing upwards from Y and leftwards from Z the dimension-by-dimension median is at W where the two dotted lines in Figure 2.2

Figure 2.2 *Party competition in two dimensions and the dimension-by-dimension media*

Pro-intervention

Anti-intervention

Left-wing   Right-wing
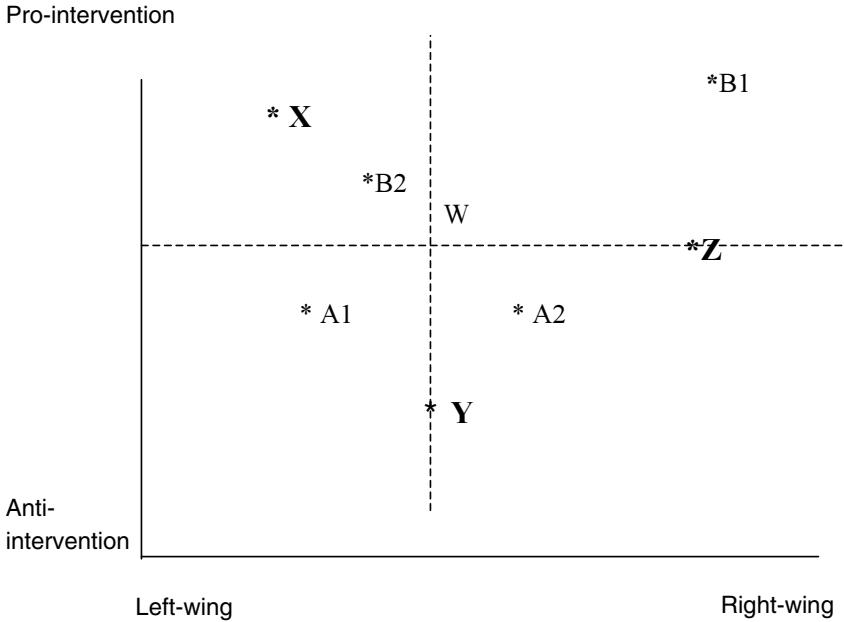
intersect. This point in political space is not unbeatable in the same way as Z (the position of the median voter) is in Figure 2.1. If party B locates at W it would lose if A is then located at A2. But if you had nothing else to do for a few hours but to play this game and if you kept a note of *all* the positions which could defeat the *status quo* at any one time then you would notice that positions *around* the dimension-by-dimension median dominate.

Does this mean we can explain the decision of a particular political party to locate itself at the centreground in a political system with more than one dimension in terms of this vote-maximizing logic? Intuitively, the theoretical demonstration that parties have an incentive to move to the centreground, when combined with a bridging assumption that parties in the 'real world' are vote-maximizers, would seem relevant to such an explanation. But we must be careful not to construct an 'as if' story here. Correlation does not mean causation and for all we know, it may be the case that the leader of the party whose behaviour we are attempting to explain moved to the centreground following consultations with an astrologer. We will return to this issue about how best to apply the logic of rational choice theory in the final part of the chapter.

Rational choice in the round

Rational choice theorists have engaged with a number of other explanatory issues relating to party competition. They have developed and tested models of coalition formation in multi-party democracies (Laver and Shepsle, 1996; Baron and Diermeier, 2001). They have sought to identify the circumstances in which vote-maximizing parties find it in their electoral interests to break their campaign promises (Alesina, 1988; Razin, 2003). They have examined whether voters vote for the party 'closest' to them in political space (as Downs assumes) or the party on their 'side' of an issue (Merrill and Grofman, 1999). Finally, they have been forced to try and explain why it is that people bother to vote at all, given that voting is costly and the chances of any one person's vote making any difference to the election outcome is vanishingly small.

Party competition remains an important application of rational choice theory. But there are, for example, several other vibrant areas of research. First, work on 'rent-seeking', redistribution and 'political business cycles' has sought to account for governments' decisions to support certain firms, redistribute income to certain groups of people and cut taxes in the run-up to an election in terms of a logic of electoral advantage (Tullock, 2005). Second, theorists have examined the management of the 'principal–agent' relationships between parliaments and executives and between executives and bureaucracies and quasi-independent regulatory agencies. Here, theorists have examined the incentives principals sometimes have to delegate decision-making authority to agents and have assessed whether and when this delegation gives agents the opportunity to pursue their own policy preferences (see Moe, 1997). Third, within the broad area of comparative politics, theorists have analyzed the ways in which the number and identity of 'veto players' within a political system determines the character and stability of political systems, the durability of policies, and the influence of 'agenda setters' (Tsebelis, 2002).

Fourth, and whilst operating under the label of constitutional political economy, rational choice theorists have studied the ways in which constitutional rules, that is, 'rules about rules' (Brennan and Buchanan, 1985), get made by self-interested political actors and, more specifically, the empirical relationship between economic growth and political freedom. Fifth, rational choice theorists have continued to study the problems posed by collective action problems where everyone in a group has an incentive to 'free ride' upon the provision of a good that everyone could potentially benefit from. Rational choice theorists suggest that international efforts to address problems posed by climate change or terrorism are beset by collective action problems which can prove costly or, on occasions, even impossible to overcome (Sandler, 2004). Finally, a large body

of work within international relations theory has sought to identify the potential for cooperation between nationstates in an 'anarchical' system in which there is no sovereign authority; and, within this, the creation and durability of alliances and international organizations and the circumstances in which countries engage in armed conflict (see Snidal, 2002).

What's wrong with rational choice?

Riker (1990) argues that it is the failure of political science to wholeheartedly embrace rational choice theory which accounts for its lack of theoretical and empirical progress. But critics argue that rational choice is a flawed enterprise. We will consider four fundamental objections.

(a) The assumptions are wrong. People are just not like that

People are rational to the extent that they select the best possible means to achieve their goals. But people may not always know what consequences of their actions are going to be and for this reason actors can make mistakes. Indeed, Searle (2001) argues that people are rational to the extent that they deliberate or reason about their goals and how best to secure those goals in a world in which the relationship between actions and consequences is inherently uncertain. Rational choice theory has actually proven to be quite adept at analyzing the behaviour of actors in conditions of uncertainty. Recent work on the principal–agent problems which beset relations between governments and bureaucracy (Bendor and Meirowitz, 2004) and on the 'signalling' behaviour of nation-states prior to the outbreak of war (Gibler, 2008) show that rational choice theory is not wedded to the assumption of perfect information.

Yet whilst recognizing that individuals may not always have all the information they need to make the best possible decision, rational choice theorists do continue to assume that people always make the best possible use of the information they *do* have. Yet we know people are not always very good at making decisions and routinely act in sub-optimal ways by excessively discounting the future, eschewing even minimal risks, discounting information which does not fit with their existing beliefs and succumbing to 'group think' (see Chapter 5, pp. 110–11). Indeed, many economists and some political scientists (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005) now seek to explain behaviour on the assumption that people are 'boundedly rational' and experience definite (but varying) limits in their capacity to receive, store, transmit and act upon information. The notion that people are boundedly rational is closely related to, and manifested in, 'satisficing' behaviour. Because people are not perfectly rational they do

not and cannot attempt to 'maximise' their utility. They instead 'satisfice' in the sense that they take decisions that seems likely to achieve some basic level of utility. Rather than assume away people's imperfections, a new generation of 'behavioural' economists draw upon the results of experimental observations about how such boundedly rational people actually behave to predict how they might respond to prevailing incentive structures (Dawnay and Shah, 2005).

Putting aside such considerations, let us return to the issue of how much information a rational actor ought to collect. A rational actor makes the best possible use of the available information. But how rational is it to collect and store information in the first place? Here, the assumption that voters are capable of selecting the party closest to them in political space sits uncomfortably alongside survey evidence that many voters know next to nothing about politics (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 7–16). Does this mean that voters are irrational? Rational choice theorists argue that it does not and that we ought not to confuse knowledge with rationality. Individuals recognize that their vote is almost certainly not going to make any difference to an election outcome and that they therefore have no incentive to collect political information.

> The health of the national economy may in fact have a greater effect on voters than whether their next vacation is fabulous or merely good, but time spent deciding where to travel leads to better vacations, whereas time spent evaluating … policies tends not to lead to better policies but only a better-informed vote. (Popkin, 1995: 17)

In *The Myth of the Rational Voter* Caplan (2007) argues that voters are irrational rather than simply rationally ignorant. People do not simply have beliefs about the world which they act upon. They have preferences over beliefs in the sense that they sometimes believe what they want to believe rather than what they ought to believe given the available evidence. Citing extensive survey evidence, Caplan argues that people have deep-seated prejudices against market decision-making and foreigners, that they wrongly equate prosperity with levels of employment, and that they are overlypessimistic about the current and future state of the world. Caplan does not doubt that party competition gives voters what they want. But he suggests that people do not always want what is good for them.

In the case of the assumption of self-interest, critics suggest that what distinguishes economics from politics is precisely people's willingness to act on the basis of their commitments to other people as well as to general principles of fairness and justice. Politics, especially party politics, is frequently a grubby business in which there are tactical advan-

tages in breaking promises and betraying friendships. But politics can sometimes bring out the best in people. In accounting for apparently altruistic behaviour, rational choice theorists can always find a self-interested motive. Politicians who are prepared to go to jail for their beliefs are simply seeking a reputation for trustworthiness. Activists who risk their lives to campaign for a cause are simply seeking cama-raderie and the adrenaline rush of a violent confrontation. But there is, once again, a danger of creating 'as if' explanations here. It is significant that, in experimental settings where people have been deliberately left facing a clear choice between self-interest and fairness, self-interest does not always win out.

In a thought experiment that game theorists call the Ultimatum game two players must decide how to divide a sum of money which has been given to them. The first player makes a proposal about how to divide the money and the second player can either accept or reject this offer. If the second player rejects it then neither player receives anything. If the second player accepts the proposed division the money is split accordingly. The game is only played once and is usually played anonymously. If you are the first player, what kind of an offer should you make? If you are entirely selfish you should propose giving yourself 99 per cent of the money so leaving the second player with the choice between getting one per cent and getting nothing. But when the game is played for real in experimental conditions the *average* offer made to the second person is actually between thirty and forty per cent, whilst many propose a fifty–fifty split. Furthermore, many of the players who are left with a choice between getting almost nothing and getting nothing choose nothing so as to prevent the first player from getting almost everything (see Camerer and Thaler, 1995).

George Orwell once wrote that the quickest way to end a war is to lose it. In the introduction, I defined rational choice in terms of the assump-tions of rationality and self-interest. But one way of dealing with the objection that people are not really selfish is to assume instead that people's preferences reflect their broader interests and commitments. So instead of assuming that politicians are desperate to get elected in order to enjoy the perks of office, we might assume that politicians want to get elected in order to implement particular policies. Self-interest remains the standard assumption within rational choice because many of its practi-tioners continue to believe that people really are self-interested and because it is easier to make definite predictions about how people are going to behave when using this assumption. But rational choice theorists might argue that it is perfectly possible to practise rational choice theory without assuming self-interest.

(b) The logic of the explanation is wrong. Rational choice privileges structure over agency and ignores ideas

Within political science arguments about the relative significance of structure (underlying conditions) and agency (individuals' capacity to achieve their goals and affect their environment) have given way to more nuanced debates about the interplay between these two factors (see Chapter 10). It would now be a brave person who argued that agency is all that matters or that structure is all that matters in explaining political processes and outcomes. Yet rational choice theorists come close to doing just that.

The problem here is not that rational choice theorists ignore structure or agency. Rational choice theorists recognize that structure affects agency by determining incentives. At the same time, constitutional political economists and rational choice 'new institutionalists' (see Chapter 3) recognize that agents can consciously create and reform structures in order to change those incentives. The problem instead comes with the way in which agency is conceived. Rational choice theorists assume that groups of actors – politicians, regulators, bureaucrats, interestgroup leaders – have the same exogenously given, fixed and self-interested goals which they pursue in the same rational manner. Placed in the same situation, these groups can be relied upon to make the same choices in the same way that different pocket calculators can be relied upon to provide the same answer to a question (Hindmoor, 2004: 31). When there are two parties and one dimension of competition then party leaders – *any* party leader – will locate at the position of the median voter. Structure here completely determines behaviour and this has the effect of eliminating the possibility of *individual* choice and active agency (Hay, 2002: 103–4). Differences in behaviour are exclusively accounted for in terms of differences in the incentive structures agents face rather than in terms of the differences between agents.

In ignoring the possibility of *individual* agency, rational choice is also in danger of ignoring the causal significance of ideas. One obvious way in which agents differ from each other is in terms of the ideas they consciously or sub-consciously possess. People have different *normative* ideas about how they ought to behave and how the world ought to be and these ideas lead people to behave in different ways with some people voting for left-wing parties and some proposing an equal division of resources in Ultimatum games. Of course, we may sometimes be able to explain the normative ideas people possess in terms of their interests. People often believe what it is in their self-interest to believe. But it is not plausible to argue that ideas are always and everywhere explicable in terms of interests. Furthermore, individuals also have different *empirical* ideas about how the world works and these differences can lead people to make contrasting calculations about which course of action *is* in their self-

interest (Hay, 2002: 208–9). The bottomline here is that agents do not always act in the same way when placed in the same situation. If we are going to explain why people behaved in certain ways it would appear that we need to account for the significance of ideas and individual agency. This is no easy challenge. The social sciences have consistently struggled to reconcile the competing demands of structure, agency, ideas and interests in ways that would allow it to account for people's preferences.

(c) Rational choice's empirical record is quite poor

When confronted with evidence that people are not always rational or self-interested and that people's ideas can and do make a difference to the way in which they behave, rational choice theorists can respond by adopting an 'instrumentalist' defence of their approach. That is to say they can argue that in judging a theory, any theory, what ought to count is not the realism of the theory's assumptions but the rigour and accuracy of its predictions (Friedman, 1951). Instrumentalism is a contentious approach because we should not necessarily assume that a theory which makes accurate predictions is actually offering us a good explanation. As I have already emphasized, correlation does not always mean causation. But the instrumentalist defence is nevertheless an attractive one for rational choice theorists to employ in so far as it directs attention away from assumptions and towards results.

In *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* Green and Shapiro (1994) argue that rational choice's empirical record is however actually quite poor:

> To date, a large proportion of the theoretical conjectures of rational choice theorists have not been tested empirically. Those tests that have been undertaken have either failed on their own terms or garnered theoretical support for propositions that, on reflection, can only be characterised as banal: they do little more than restate existing knowledge in rational choice terminology. (Green and Shapiro 1994: 6)

Green and Shapiro did not object to the use of rational choice theory *per se*. Indeed they welcomed its attempt to study politics scientifically and identified circumstances in which 'rational choice explanations should be expected, *prime facie*, to perform well' (Green and Shapiro, 1994: 94–5). What they instead pointed to was the mismatch between what rational choice theorists said about their method and the way in which they actually applied it. *Pathologies of Rational Choice* provoked a furious response from critics who argued that Green and Shapiro had deliberately ignored many of rational choice's empirical achievements, had underestimated its capacity to generate novel insights, and ignored the many fail-

ings of other political science approaches (see Friedman, 1996; Cox, 1999).

(d)   Rational choice is politically destructive

In the years after the Second World War many economists argued that monopolies, public goods and other forms of market failure necessitated political intervention. Rational choice theory was developed by economists who wanted to show how political processes in which participants were driven by the pursuit of their self-interest rather than a concern for the public interest could generate even more inefficient results. The resulting theory of government failure attracted the attention of neoliberal governments who saw in rational choice theory a fertile source of arguments and policy ideas (see Hindmoor, 2005).

Does the politically partisan nature of rational choice theory undermine its claims to scientific objectivity? Rational choice theorists would argue that it does not; that government intervention *is* inefficient and counterproductive and that it would be a mistake to shoot the messenger for delivering an unpalatable message. During an election campaign, regulators require news programmes to be objective in the sense of devoting an equal amount of coverage to the major parties. But within the confines of academic debate, rational choice theorists will want to argue that objectivity means 'telling it like it is'. Is this a convincing argument? Critics are likely to accuse rational choice of practising a rather naive positivism: of simply assuming that the truth is 'out there' waiting to be discovered. One problem here is the way in which the political proclivities of rational choice theorists lead them to simply ignore the many successful instances of government intervention and downplay the role opposition parties and the media can play in exposing and so deterring political malfeasance (Wittman,1995). A second problem concerns the way in which rational choice risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy in which teaching students that everyone is self-interested and that government intervention is driven by considerations of electoral interest rather than the public interest encourages people to act in self-interested ways which increase the chances of government failure. Far from 'discovering' reality, rational choice theory may be creating it. In a series of experiments conducted in the early 1980s Marwell and Ames (1981) showed that teaching students about the basic principles of economics *made* them more likely to act in a self-interested manner. More recently, Marglin (2008) has argued that a growing reliance upon markets has resulted in the destruction of communities and a loss of individual identity:

> In adopting a particularly extreme form of individualism, in abstracting knowledge from context, in limiting community to the nation, and in

positing boundless consumption as the goal of life, economics [and rational choice theory] offers us no way of thinking about the human relationships that are the heart and soul of community other than as instrumental to the individual pursuit of happiness. Economics takes very much to heart the famous dictum of the nineteenth-century physicist Lord Kelvin that we know only what we can measure. Indeed, economics takes the dictum a step further, from epistemology to ontology; what we can't measure – entities like community – doesn't exist. (Marglin, 2008: 9).

Types, tokens and leverage: a qualified defence of rational choice

Over the last few decades the intensity of critics' objections to the rational choice method has been matched only by the fervour of its supporters. Yet it is not hard to see how a middleground might be staked out. The trick here comes in clarifying what it is that rational choice can and cannot be expected to explain. In his monumental *Logic of Scientific Discovery* Popper (1959: 59) employs a neat metaphor in support of his positivist account of scientific theory. Theories, he suggest, are 'nets cast to catch what we call "the world": to rationalize, to explain, and to master it. We endeavour to make the mesh ever finer and finer.' What I want to suggest is that this metaphor cuts in more than one direction. If they want to catch small fish and do not mind having to separate these fish from the other detritus they collect, fishermen may indeed want to use a net with a fine mesh. But if they want to catch a larger fish then fishermen will have good reason to use a larger mesh precisely because they do not want to catch everything in their net.

The most obvious objection to rational choice theory – and one that is implicit within the list of criticisms considered previously – is that it is too simple: that it misses too much of the inherent complexity of political life. Any student asked to write a paper about the limitations of rational choice will want to argue that there is more to rationality than calculation; that people act out of habit, jealously, friendship, sympathy and commitment as well as self-interest; and that ideas as well as interests matter. But whilst all of this is no doubt true, it also misses the point. Precisely because the political world is so complex, simple theories with a large mesh are attractive because they allow us to explain something without knowing everything. The assumptions made by rational choice theorists about individuals' capacities and motivations are simplifications but as I have already argued in the case of Downs' account of party competition, they are simplifications which offer a great deal of explanatory leverage.

One potentially useful distinction here is between 'types' and 'tokens'. A token is a specific example of a general class of events. A type is a general class made up of many specific tokens. Presidential elections are a type of event. The presidential election in the United States in 2008 was a particular token of that type of event. Dowding (1994) suggests that rational choice is not well equipped to explain token events the specific details of which may depend upon the idiosyncrasies of people's ideas and decision-making processes. In the case of a particular election campaign, it may well be that political science must reply upon psychological explanations to account for the decisions people make (see Chapter 5). But by picking out the key features of a situation and, within this, the 'mechanisms' which cause things to happen, rational choice theory may be able to offer generalized explanations of particular types of events. Such explanations are of value for two reasons. Firstly, because there are occasions when we want to explain types of events rather than token events. Secondly, because type of explanations can provide the startingpoint for more detailed token explanations in so far as they identify certain factors as being of potential causal significance. Imagine the challenge facing someone who wants to explain why Barrack Obama won the 2008 election in the United States. There are a huge range of issues to consider here, including the personality of the two candidates, voting patterns in previous elections, the policy arguments, the presidential debates and so on. Although pitched at the level of a type explanation, Downs tells us that one crucial factor we ought to consider is candidates' policies and perceptions of those policies in the electorate. Who held the centreground in 2008? How did they get there and what did they have to do to hold it?

Can we make the 'mesh' on the rational choice net finer in order to develop more detailed token explanations? Doing so will require rational choice theorists to develop models in which actors, although still responding to the prevailing incentive structures, are assumed to have more nuanced motives and decision-making processes. Bates *et al*. (1998) have constructed a number of these 'analytical narratives' the veracity of which we can test against actors' own accounts of their reasons for acting, hence minimizing the dangers of creating an 'as if' explanation. Bell (2002) argues that these narrative explanations are nevertheless inherently limited in so far as they cannot account for the *origins* of actors' preferences. But even if this is true we may still want to use rational choice theory to help us explain *other* aspects of a situation. such as the difference made by a change in the incentive structure facing actors. It does not follow that we cannot use rational choice to help us explain anything just because we cannot use it to explain everything.

Conclusion

Rational choice theory is unlikely to colonize the rest of political science in the same way as the neo-classical approach has colonized economics. But neither is it simply a passing intellectual fad and for this reason disputes between rational choice theorists and proponents of other approaches are likely to persist. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Political scientists often express concern about the lack of a theoretical consensus within their discipline. But it is one of the valuable lessons of economics and of rational choice theory that monopolies are inefficient and that competition, whilst often painful, is beneficial. Vigorous academic debate can identify points of weakness and act as a spur for theoretical and empirical innovation. If Green and Shapiro's arguments have the effect of encouraging rational choice theorists to engage in more diligent testing of their arguments, that is a good thing. If rational choice theorists are forced to treat ideas as more than the handmaiden of interests that would be equally positive. But, equally, other political scientists ought, at least, to consider how they might usefully apply rational choice explanations within their own work. Rational choice theory need not always be undertaken by rational choice theorists. In a recent work on globalization and the structure of international institutions and hegemony, Drezner (2007) has, for example, shown how some simple pieces of rational choice analysis can be woven into and used to clarify the logic of a broader argument about the enduring influence of the 'great powers' of the United States and European Union.

Although the logic of rational choice theory is one that can be applied to just about any political situation, the limits of the rational choice approach ought to be recognized. I have argued here that rational choice is better suited to providing a general analysis of types of situations which can then be used to inform more specific, token, explanations. In this sense, rational choice might usefully be seen as offering, not an alternative to, but a complement for other political science approaches.

Further reading

- For extended discussion of rational choice see Hindmoor (2006) and for further debates see Hay *et al.* (2006).
- Green and Shapiro (1994) provides an empirical challenge to rational choice.
- Mueller (2003) provides a benchmark for rational choice interests and claims.
- The journal *Public Choice* offers great examples of applied rational choice arguments.

Chapter 3

The Institutional Approach

VIVIEN LOWNDES

This chapter begins by teasing out the implicit theory and methods of the traditional institutional approach within political science which is referred to in the introduction to this section of the book. The chapter goes on to explore what's new about the 'new institutionalism'. It identifies core characteristics and key distinctions among the different new institutionalist positions. The chapter considers the challenges facing new institutionalism, not least the charge that its many variants are based upon fundamentally incompatible premises. The chapter concludes by considering whether the multi-theoretic character of the new institutionalism may actually prove to be its greatest asset.

Until the 1950s the dominance of the institutional approach within political science was such that its assumptions and practices were rarely specified, let alone subject to sustained critique. Methodological and theoretical premises were left unexamined behind a veil of academic 'common sense'. Outside of political theory, the core activity within political science was the description of constitutions, legal systems and government structures, and their comparison over time and across countries. Institutionalism *was* political science. But this traditional form of institutionalism found itself under attack from a range of quarters. Rather than taking the functions of political institutions at face value, behaviouralists sought to explain how and why individuals acted as they did in real life (see Chapter 1). The behavioural revolutionaries, as Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 11) argue, 'were devoted to dismissing the formalisms of politics – institutions, organizational charts, constitutional myths and legal fictions'. A generation later, rational choice theorists sought to explain politics in terms of the interplay of individuals' self-interest (see Chapter 2). From another direction, neo-Marxist accounts focused upon the role of 'systemic power' (deriving from capital/labour relations) in structuring political action and the organization of government (see Chapter 7). 'Modern' political scientists of all colours seemed intent upon debunking the institutionalist certainties of their forebears. The clear message was that there was much, much more to politics than the formal

arrangements for representation, decision-making and policy implementation.

What happened to the institutionalists who got left behind as these powerful currents took the discipline in new directions? Many continued to practise their art in the conviction that: 'You only need to sit still, it all comes "round again"' (cited in Rhodes, 1995: 57). Others have been stimulated to specify and defend their 'common sense' assumptions and methods – notably in sub-fields like public administration and constitutional studies. In fact, by the end of the 1980s institutionalism had 'come round again' as the internal limitations of the new paradigms became clear. The new institutionalism was taken up by the former approaches critical of the traditional form of institutionalism as a way of bolstering their understanding.

A 'new institutionalism' has emerged as a reaction to the 'undersocialized' character of dominant approaches in the discipline; both behaviourism and rational choice theory had dismissed institutions as no more than the simple aggregation of individual preferences. The new institutionalists assert that 'the organisation of political life makes a difference' (March and Olsen, 1984: 747). Even within rational choice theory, scholars have turned their attention to the role of institutional factors in structuring individuals' choices (see Weingast, 1996). Neo-Marxists have developed 'regulation' and 'regime' theories to analyze the institutional variation that was played down by the structuralists of the 1970s (see, for instance, Painter, 1995; Stoker, 1995).

Institutions are back in fashion, although not necessarily in their old guise. Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 25) describe the so-called 'new instutionalism' as 'the next revolution' in political science. The 'new institutionalism' operates with a more expansive (yet more sophisticated) definition of its subject matter and with more explicit (if diverse) theoretical frameworks. Political institutions are no longer equated with political organizations; 'institution' is understood more broadly to refer to a 'stable, recurring pattern of behaviour' (Goodin, 1996: 22). The new institutionalists are concerned with the informal conventions of political life as well as with formal constitutions and organizational structures. New attention is paid to the way in which institutions embody values and power relationships, and to the obstacles as well as the opportunities that confront institutional design. Crucially, new institutionalists concern themselves not just with the impact of institutions upon individuals, but with the *interaction* between institutions and individuals. As March and Olsen (2006: 4) explain, institutionalism is a 'set of theoretical ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance, and change'.

The 'traditional' institutional approach

Rod Rhodes (1988, 1995, 1997) has stalwartly defended the institutional approach in the study of government and politics. He describes it as the 'historic heart' of the subject and 'part of the toolkit of every political scientist' (1997: 5, 64). Peters (1999: 2) characterizes their methodology as 'that of the intelligent observer attempting to describe and understand the political world around him or her in non-abstract terms'. The silence regarding theory and methods actually tells us something about the approach – that it was generally unreflective on issues of theory and method, took 'facts' (and values) for granted, and flourished as a kind of 'common sense' within political science (Lowndes, 1996: 181).

Critics of traditional institutionalism point to its limitations in terms of both scope and method. It was concerned (of course) with the institutions of government, and yet operated with a restricted understanding of its subject matter. The focus was upon formal rules and organizations rather than informal conventions; and upon official structures of *government* rather than broader institutional constraints on *governance* (outside as well as within the state). Critics have sought to 'out' the assumptions that lurked behind the descriptive method and disdain for theory. Peters (1999: 6–11) characterizes the 'proto-theory' of old institutionalism as: normative (concerned with 'good government'), structuralist (structures determine political behaviour), historicist (the central influence of history), legalist (law plays a major role in governing), and holistic (concerned with describing and comparing whole systems of government). John (1998: 40–1) points to a strong functionalist tendency – that is, the assumption that particular institutions are the 'manifestations of the functions of political life', or 'necessary for a democracy'. For the modern reader, the old institutionalists' claims of objectivity and 'science' often sits uneasily alongside their polemical idiom and desire to foster the 'Westminster model' (see Box 3.1).

Rhodes (1995: 49) counsels, however, against erecting a 'straw man'. Many of the 'old' institutionalists adopted a far more sophisticated form of analysis than their critics imply. Herman Finer in the 1930s went out of his way to show that the study of constitutions extended far beyond written documents (Finer, 1932). Nevil Johnson's work in the 1970s reveals a concern with procedural norms as well as formal structures (Johnson, 1975). Exponents of the historical-comparative method from Woodrow Wilson onwards understood that the values underlying one system become clearer when contrasted with another.

Box 3.1   Traditional institutional analysis in action: contrasting examples

- Looking at political institutions in the US, Britain, France and Germany, Finer (1932) eschewed a country-by-country analysis (more typical of his time) and instead compared institution-by-institution (e.g. parties, electorates, civil service, judiciaries) across countries. Representing an enlightened version of the traditional approach, he grounded his analysis in an understanding of the state as the 'monopoly of coercive power'.
- Woodrow Wilson (1956), himself an early president of the United States, studied the problems of 'divided government' that were beginning to affect the presidential system, and analysed the possibilities presented by parliamentary government as an alternative.
- Studying the emergence and functioning of nationalised industries in Britain, Robson (1960) provided a comprehensive account of all aspects of the organization and management of public corporations. Despite the critical climate of the time, Robson was determined to defend the public corporations as 'an outstanding contribution to pubic administration', and provided prescriptions as to their future reform.
- Polsby's (1975) famous essay on legislatures was typical of the reductionist strain of institutionalist analysis; it focused upon 'how a peculiar form, the legislature, embeds itself in a variety of environmental settings'.

Sources: Examples drawn from Rothstein 1996; Rhodes 1997; Peters 1999.

The rise of the 'new institutionalism'

But, with the decline of traditional institutionalism, something was lost. March and Olsen (1984: 734), who coined the term 'new institutionalism', argued that political institutions had 'receded in importance from the position they held in the earlier theories of political scientists'. They criticized mainstream political science as 'reductionist'. For behaviourists, institutions emerged out of the aggregation of individual roles, statuses and learned responses. For rational choice theorists (of the first generation, at least), institutions were no more than an accumulation of individual choices based on utility-maximizing preferences (Shepsle, 1989: 134). March and Olsen (1984: 747) asserted that political institutions played a more autonomous role in shaping political outcomes, arguing that 'the organization of political life makes a difference'. Thus:

> The bureaucratic agency, the legislative committee, the appellate court are arenas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standards operating procedures and structures that define and defend interests. They are political actors in their own right. (March and Olsen, 1984: 738)

March and Olsen's proposition prompts fascinating questions – about what constitutes a 'political institution', about the way institutions 'do their work' (how can they 'define and defend interests'?), and about the capacity of individual actors to influence the shape and functioning of relatively 'autonomous' political institutions. The questions are of particular interest at a time of rapid institutional change. How, in Britain, have institutional innovations like privatization or devolution affected political behaviour, and how do they sit alongside the 'old' institutions of 'public service' or parliamentary sovereignty? In the former communist countries of East and Central Europe, has the design of new political institutions shifted political behaviour towards the expectations of liberal democracy? If political institutions are 'actors in their own right', how easy has it been for South African leaders to reform an army, police force and legislature that have historically 'defined and defended' white supremacy? If 'path dependency' defines institutional development, what prospect is there for the creation of a new type of regulatory regime in response to a global credit crunch?

There is no single 'new institutionalist' response to these questions. Where the old institutionalists were disdainful of theory, the new institutionalists are markedly enthusiastic, developing diverse (if overlapping) theoretical projects. Where traditional institutionalists employed a descriptive-inductive method (drawing conclusions from empirical investigation), the new institutionalists are experimenting with deductive approaches that start from theoretical propositions about the way institutions work. The 'institutionalist turn' (Jessop, 2000) in political science actually comprises a range of developments which, initially at least, occurred in relative independence from one another (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 937; Rothstein, 1996: 160). There has been a multiplication of institutional approaches (see Box 3.2). In 1996 Hall and Taylor identified three variants and, by 1999, Guy Peters had discovered seven!

For our purposes, it is important to focus upon the basic cleavage within new institutionalist thinking – that is, between 'normative' approaches and those inspired by a new, more sophisticated version of rational choice theory. *Normative institutionalism* argues that political institutions influence actors' behaviour by shaping their 'values, norms, interests, identities and beliefs' (March and Olsen 1989: 17). Hence 'normative' refers to a concern with norms and values as explanatory variables (owing much to the traditions of *sociological institutionalism*),

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Box 3.2   Different strains of new institutionalism

Normative institutionalists study how the norms and values embodied in political institutions shape the behaviour of individuals (see the seminal work of March and Olsen 1984 and 1989).

Rational choice institutionalists argue that political institutions are systems of rules and inducements within which individuals attempt to maximize their utilities (see Weingast 1986 for a review of rational choice approaches).

Historical institutionalists look at how choices made about the institutional design of government systems influence the future decision-making of individuals (see Hall and Taylor 1996 for a review).

Empirical institutionalists, who most closely resemble the 'traditional' approach, classify different institutional types and analyse their practical impact upon government performance (see Peters 1996 for a review).

International institutionalists show that the behaviour of states is steered by the structural constraints (formal and informal) of international political life (for an accessible example, see Ritberger 1993).

Sociological institutionalists study the way in which institutions create meaning for individuals, providing important theoretical building blocks for normative institutionalism within political science (see Meyer and Rowan 1991 for the classic statement).

Network institutionalists show how regularized, but often informal, patterns of interaction between individuals and groups shape political behaviour (see the Marsh and Rhodes 1992 edited collection).

Constructivist institutionalism sees institutions as shaping behaviour through frames of meaning – the ideas and narratives that are used to explain, deliberate or legitimise political action (see Schmidt 2006 and Hay 2006 a and b).

Feminist institutionalism studies how gender norms operate within institutions and how institutional processes construct and maintain gendered power dynamics (see Kenny 2007 and Chappell 2006).

and not to 'normative theory' in the sense of promoting particular norms. 'Normative institutionalists' argue that seemingly neutral rules and structures actually embody values (and power relationships), and determine 'appropriate' behaviour within given settings. Institutions 'simplify' political life by ensuring that 'some things are taken for granted in deciding other things' (March and Olsen, 1989: 17).

Rational choice institutionalism denies that institutional factors 'produce behaviour' or shape individuals' preferences, which they see as endogenously determined and relatively stable (favouring utility maximization). Political institutions influence behaviour by affecting the context in which individuals select strategies for the pursuit of their preferences (Ostrom, 1999). Institutions provide information about others' likely future behaviour, and about the incentives (and disincentives) attached to different courses of action. While normative institutionalists stress the embeddedness of political institutions within temporal and cultural contexts, rational choice theorists argue that institutions are purposeful human constructions designed to solve collective action problems. These distinctions are explored further as the chapter progresses.

The other versions of new institutionalism described in Box 3.2 denote particular clusters of academic activity and the elaboration of institutionalist insights in different contexts, rather than representing distinct ontological positions in their own right. We return later in the chapter to the compatibility (or otherwise) of different institutional approaches. Our next concern is to identify the core features of the 'new institutionalism', whilst acknowledging the key distinction between normative and rational choice variants.

What's new about new institutionalism? The core features of the approach

Taking new institutionalism as a 'broad, if variegated, approach' (Peters, 1999: 149), what are the ways in which we can say it has taken forward the study of institutions in political science? What value have the 'new institutionalists' added to traditional political science perspectives? Because of the variety of positions represented by both the 'old' and the 'new' institutionalism, it is not helpful to draw too sharp a contrast between the two. In many cases, new institutionalism is actually building upon the insights of the best of the traditional institutionalists, within the context of more explicit and sophisticated theoretical frameworks. The points of departure represented by the new institutionalism are, therefore, best represented in terms of movement along six analytical continua:

(a)   from a focus on organizations to a focus on rules
(b)   from a formal to an informal conception of institutions
(c)   from a static to a dynamic conception of institutions
(d)   from submerged values to a value-critical stance
(e)   from a holistic to a disaggregated conception of institutions
(f)   from independence to embeddedness

The discussion that follows attempts to capture what Goodin (1996: 20) calls 'the moving spirit of the new institutionalism', whilst recognizing that important differences exist among new institutionalist positions.

(a) From a focus on organizations to a focus on rules

New institutionalism represents a departure from what Fox and Miller (1995: 92) call the 'brass name-plate' tradition of institutional analysis. Political institutions are no longer equated with political organizations; rather, they are seen as sets of 'rules' that guide and constrain the behaviour of individual actors. Rather than focusing upon Britain's Ministry of Defence as an institution, for example, new institutionalists are more likely to study the decision-making, budgetary, or procurement procedures within it. Institutional rules are important because they provide information on others' likely future behaviour and on sanctions for non-compliance (Knight, 1992: 17). For those on the 'normative' wing of the new institutionalism, rules work by determining 'appropriate' behaviour (March and Olsen, 1984, 1989); for those influenced by rational choice assumptions, rules determine the basis of exchanges between utility-maximising actors (Weingast, 1996). Institutions, then, provide the 'rules of the game', while organizations – like individuals – are players within that game. The institutional dynamics of the Ministry of Defence are best understood by studying the particular combination of institutions *within* it, which are themselves influenced by the 'rules' that characterize the wider governmental, legal and financial systems (and which, as we shall see below, do not necessarily 'fit' neatly together). As Fox and Miller (1995: 92) explain, institutions are sets of rules that exist 'within' and 'between' organizations, 'as well as under, over and around them'. While organizations are not 'the same as' institutions, they remain an important focus for new institutionalist analysis – in their role as collective actors subject to wider institutional constraints, and also as arenas within which institutional rules are developed and expressed.

(b) From a formal to an informal conception of institutions

In contrast to the traditional institutional approach, new institutionalism focuses upon informal conventions as well as formal rules. In British local government, for example, some rules are consciously designed and clearly specified (like contracts, job descriptions, committee terms of reference, budget systems), while others take the form of unwritten conventions (concerning, for instance, the role of the party group in decision-making or the relations between parties in a 'hung' administration). As Anthony Giddens (1999: 124) has argued, formal rules 'should be taken not as

exemplifying rules in general but as specific types of formulated rule'. The informal rules of political life – while hard to research – can be every bit as important in shaping actors' behaviour as formally agreed procedures. Informal conventions may reinforce formal rules. New rules about the separation of the executive and assembly function in British local government, for example, are influencing political behaviour to a greater extent in those cities which already have a strong tradition of civic leadership. Dominant informal conventions may also override formal rules (as in the fate of many 'equal opportunities' initiatives!), or serve to incorporate (and 'defuse') changes in formal arrangements. The 'Next Steps' agencies, created in the 1980s in British central government, were intended to separate managerial and policy control, yet some ministers continued to draw upon informal conventions in seeking to influence agency 'chief executives'. Studies of policy networks show how informal mechanisms for policy-making may exist alongside formal arrangements as a parallel institutional framework (see Lowndes, 1996: 192–3). A focus on informal as well as formal rules adds breadth as well as depth to an understanding of political institutions.

(c) From a static to a dynamic conception of institutions

Stability is a characteristic of institutions: four decades ago, Huntington (1968) defined political institutions as 'stable, valued and recurring patterns of behaviour'. March and Olsen (1989: 16) see institutions as 'creating and sustaining islands of imperfect and temporary organisation in potentially inchoate political worlds'. New institutionalists are concerned to explore how institutional stability is accomplished through human action. Institutions are not 'things', as implied in some traditional approaches, but processes. Institutional rules have to be sustained over time – hat drives (and interrupts) the ongoing process of institutionalization is, however, a matter of debate (Lowndes, 1996: 193–4). Those new institutionalists influenced by rational choice theory argue that institutional arrangements will persist only as long as they serve the interests of utility-seeking rational actors (crucially as a means of solving collective action problems) (Shepsle, 1989: 134). Others argue that institutions tend to change incrementally in response to environmental signals, as individuals seek 'to encode the novelties they encounter into new routines' (March and Olsen, 1989: 34). Pierson (2004: 15) shows how institutional arrangements become 'deeply embedded over time', directing our attention to 'institutional *development* rather than institutional *choice*' (original emphasis). Those adopting a network perspective emphasize that institutional stability is dependent upon a continuing process of consensus and coalition building among actors, within a continually changing

environment (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992: 196). While not ruling out the possibility of intentional institutional change, normative institutionalists emphasize that change is messy and hard to control – given the interplay of vested interests, and the interaction of political institutions with wider institutional contexts (these points are discussed further under (v) and (vi) below).

(d) From submerged values to a value-critical stance

As we saw earlier, the 'old' institutionalism had an explicit concern with 'good government', and an implicit commitment to a particular set of values and model of government. In contrast, new institutionalists seek to identify the various ways in which institutions embody – and shape – societal values, which may themselves be contested and in flux. On the 'normative' wing, seemingly neutral procedures and arrangements are seen as embodying particular values, interests and identities (March and Olsen, 1989: 17). For those influenced by rational choice theory, institutions are not seen as affecting preferences and yet, as Peters (1999: 19) argues, they must reflect some relatively common set of values if incentives are to function equally well for all participants. The value-critical stance of new institutionalism is well summed up by Pierre (1999: 390) who argues that 'the structure of governance – the inclusion or exclusion of different actors and the selection of instruments – is not value neutral but embedded in and sustains political values'. Offe (1996: 685) notes that institutions typically change when 'their value premises have changed or because they are considered incompatible with other values'. Turning the issue on its head, scholars like Goodin (1996) and Rothstein (1996, 1998) consider how political institutions can be designed in order to cultivate desired values within society at large.

(e) From a holistic to a differentiated conception of institutions

In contrast to the 'old' institutionalists who tended to describe and compare whole systems of government, new institutionalists focus upon the component institutions of political life: electoral systems, tax and benefit systems, cabinet decision-making, arrangements for budgeting or policy-making, inter-governmental relationships, or contracting rules (Peters, 1999: 8–9). Such 'institutions' are expressed through formal structures and official procedures, but also through tacit understandings and conventions that span organizational boundaries – both inside and outside the public sector. Institutions are understood as 'differentiated' in the sense that they do not necessarily 'fit' together to form a whole, or

represent functionally desirable solutions. Institutions are also differentiated in the sense that they 'embody, preserve, and impart differential power resources with respect to different individuals and groups' (Goodin, 1996: 20). Institutions embody power relations by privileging certain courses of action over others and by including certain actors and excluding others. A third source of internal differentiation arises to the extent that institutions are never fully 'closed' or complete (March and Olsen, 1989: 16). Institutional rules may produce variation and deviation as well as conformity and standardization. They evolve in unpredictable ways as actors seek to make sense of new or ambiguous situations, ignore or even contravene existing rules, or try to adapt them to favour their own interests. When purposive institutional change is attempted, 'old' and 'new' rules may exist in tandem, governing interactions in different parts or at different levels within political systems (Lowndes 2005). For Elinor Ostrom (2005: 4), diversity is the 'core problem in understanding institutions'.

(f) From independence to embeddedness

Building on the insights of the best of the traditional institutionalists, new institutionalists stress that political institutions are not independent entities, existing out of space and time. Albeit from different angles, new institutionalists explore the way in which political institutions are 'embedded' (Granovetter, 1985) in particular contexts. 'Historical institutionalists' study the way in which institutional choices made early in the development of a policy area delimit policy choices thereafter (Hall, 1986; King, 1995; Pierson, 1996). Comparing political systems, or particular policy areas, in different countries, historical institutionalists show how institutions become deeply embedded, producing 'path dependent' policy-making (Krasner, 1984). Rational choice scholars have studied the interaction between institutional rules at different 'levels'. Kiser and Ostrom (1982), for instance, distinguish between operational (or day-to-day) rules, collective (legal) rules, and constitutional rules (the rules that govern the rules!). According to Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 18), institutional rules are 'nested within an ever-ascending hierarchy of yet-more-fundamental, yet-more-authoritative rules and regimes and practices and procedures'. Elsewhere, institutionalists have focused upon the 'bottom-up' influence of locally specific institutional constraints. The social capital debate is concerned with the relationship between institutions of civil society and the performance of political institutions (Putnam, 1993). From an organization theory perspective, Clegg shows how locally specific institutional environments serve to reinforce or undermine society-wide institutional frameworks (1990: 163). The diver-

sity of political institutions arises at least in part from their interaction with non-political institutions at the local level, which creates opportunities 'to do not only different things but also the same things differently' (Clegg, 1990: 151).

New institutionalist dilemmas

We have established 'what's new' about new institutionalism as a broad approach. It reasserts what the best of the 'old' institutionalists also knew: that political structures shape political behaviour and are themselves normatively and historically embedded. New institutionalists take care not to equate political institutions with political organizations; 'institution' is understood more broadly to refer to a 'stable, recurring pattern of behaviour' (Goodin, 1996: 22). The new institutionalists are concerned with the informal conventions of political life as well as with formal constitutions and organizational structures. New attention is paid to the way in which institutions embody values and power relationships, and to the obstacles as well as the opportunities that confront institutional design. Crucially, new institutionalists concern themselves not just with the impact of institutions upon individuals, but with the *interaction* between institutions and individuals. In contrast to the traditional approach, the new institutionalists are interested in testing theoretical models of how institutions affect behaviour, rather than relying upon a descriptive-inductive method to generate conclusions. Box 3.3 provides a selection of examples of new institutionalist approaches in action.

There are, however, many areas of disagreement among self-styled 'new institutionalists', and between institutionalists and sceptics in other parts of the discipline. Below we review three of the most hotly debated issues, finishing with the most fundamental – can the 'big tent' of new institutionalism really span the radically different ontologies of its normative and rational choice versions?

(a) What is an institution anyway?

New institutionalists are agreed that political institutions are 'the rules of the game' – but what should be included in the category of rules? By including informal conventions as well as formal procedures, the new institutionalists are able to build a more fine-grained and realistic picture of what *really* constrains political behaviour and decision-making. An expanded definition of 'institution' runs the risk, however, of 'conceptual stretching' (Peters, 1996: 216) – its meaning and impact diluted as it comes to include everything that guides individual behaviour. North

Box 3.3   New institutionalist analysis in action: some diverse examples

- Comparing Britain, Sweden and the US, Steinmo (1993) shows that constitutions influenced the distribution of tax burdens more than the organizational strength of different social classes.
- In a comparison of health policy in France, Sweden and Switzerland, Immergut (1992) shows how the institututionalized 'veto points' explained the influence of pressure groups better than the initial strength of the groups themselves. Pierson (2004) studies the way in which 'institutional resilience' is related to self-interested actors seeking to preserve veto points over time.
- Explaining the shift from Keynesianism to monetarism in Britain, Hall (1992) argues that political institutions structured policy by influencing how new ideas came to the surface and became expressed in government decisions. Schmidt (2002) builds on this work to compare the interaction of ideas and institutions in shaping the market economies of France, Britain and Germany.
- In research in Southern California, Ostrom (1990) shows how voluntary associations established for the management of scarce resources (like water) changed the view of individual famers about where their self-interest lay.
- Explaining variations in British policy-making, Marsh and Rhodes (1992) argue that relationships between political actors were differently institutionalized in different sectors, being more or less stable and exclusive.
- Comparing presidential and parliamentary systems, Weaver and Rockman (1993) show that division of powers inherent in the former made legislation more difficult.
- The role of creative actors ('institutional entrepreneurs') in seeking to achieve institutional change through combining different modes of governance is considered by Crouch (2005) in relation to economic policy and by Lowndes (2009) in terms of local government.
- In international relations, Rittberger (1993) argues that states accepted treaties and conventions in order to reduce uncertainty about the behaviour of other nations, whether friends or adversaries. Duffield (2006) looks at the role of international institutions in conferring legitimacy upon states seeking to maximize others' cooperation and limit potential opposition, using the case of US action in Iraq.

(1990: 83) goes as far as to include tradition, custom, culture and habit as informal 'institutions', and for March and Olsen (1989: 17) there seems to be no clear distinction between institutions and norms in general. As Rothstein (1996: 145) notes, if the concept of institution 'means everything, then it means nothing' – how can political institutions be distinguished from other social facts? John (1998: 64) argues that the new

institutionalists 'include too many aspects of political life under one category… (which) disguises the variety of interactions and causal mechanisms that occur'. On a practical level, how can political scientists recognize (and measure) an institution when they see one? On a theoretical level, how can they avoid the traps of reductionism and tautology? As Peters (1996: 215) notes:

> If the rules that shape behaviour are expanded to include implicit rules and vague understandings, in order to cover instances in which observed behaviours do not correspond to the formal rules of any institution, then the theory may not be falsifiable. If we observe behaviours that do not conform to the strictures of the formal rules then there must be other rules that were not identifiable.

Peter Hall's (1986) concept of 'standard operating procedures' offers a helpful way forward: the researcher's aim should be to identify the specific rules of behaviour that are agreed upon and (in general) followed by agents, whether explicitly or tacitly agreed (see Rothstein, 1996: 146). Informal institutional rules are, in this formulation, distinct from personal habits or 'rules of thumb': they are specific to a particular political or governmental setting, they are recognized by actors (if not always adhered to), and can be described and explained to the researcher. The style and form of questioning in a UK Parliamentary Select Committee, for example, may not be set down in writing; however, it is clearly identifiable as a 'standard operating procedure' that structures political behaviour, whilst expressing particular values and power relationships. This 'SOP' can be described, evaluated, and compared with alternative arrangements for scrutiny. In contrast, the way that a Select Committee member organizes his or her papers (however regularly and systematically) is a matter of personal habit or routine, and does not qualify as an informal institution or SOP.

Standard operating procedures may be circumvented or manipulated by certain individuals or groups of actors, but actors in general are still able to identify, and reflect upon, the nature of such 'rules'. At the same time, new rules may be formally agreed upon but take time to acquire the status of a standard operating procedure. In politics, as elsewhere, rules exist to be broken as well as to be obeyed! Peters' (1999: 144) charge of tautology only really applies to those rational choice perspectives that *define* institutions by the creation of regularity, that is, by the acceptance of rules of behaviour. The notion of standard operating procedures offers institutionalists a way of combining a concern for formal and informal 'rules', and yet distinguishing political institutions from broader customs and habits. Elinor Ostrom (1999: 38) helpfully distinguishes between

'rules in form' and 'rules in use', which she defines as the distinctive ensemble of 'dos and don'ts that one learns on the ground'.

The difficulty of identifying and measuring rules-in-use is considerable. Peters (1999: 145) is right, however, to remind new institutionalists of the 'need for more rigour in conceptualisation and then measurement of the phenomena that are assumed to make up institutions'. As shown in Box 3.4, new institutionalists are responding by developing a broad repertoire of techniques, which range from ethnography to laboratory studies and game theory (Ostrom, 2005). While historical, comparative and case study method (not so very different from those of the better 'traditionalists') continue to dominate, investigation now tends to proceed from theoretically generated propositions.

(b) Where do institutions come from, and how do they change?

As we noted earlier, stability is a defining feature of institutions; it is often said that new institutionalism is at its weakest when trying to explain the genesis and transformation of institutions (Peters, 1999: 147–8; John, 1998: 65; Rothstein, 1996: 153). The way that change is conceptualized depends upon how the relationship between the individual and the institution is understood. While rational choice theorists see individual pref-

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Box 3.4   New institutionalist methodologies

- Mathematical modelling – Crouch (2005) uses modelling to show that institutional heterogeneity facilitates innovation in economic policy, by presenting new opportunities when existing 'paths' are blocked, and by allowing for new combinations of elements from existing paths.
- Game theory – Dunleavy (1991) uses game theory to develop his theory of 'bureau shaping' as an alternative to conventional 'budget maximising' assumptions in explaining how self-interested bureaucrats seek to influence the institutions they work through.
- Laboratory studies – Ostrom *et al.* (1994) use experimental methods to investigate the institutional and physical variables that affect whether cooperation can be achieved, and overexploitation avoided, in the use of 'common pool resources' like forests or grazing lands.
- Ethnography – Douglas (1987) uses anthropological and ethnographic methods to develop her theory of 'how institutions think', differentially structuring categories of thought across cultures, whether in law, religion or science.
- Case studies – Streeck and Thelen's (2005: 9) international collection of 'theoretically self-conscious … empirical cases' develops a comparative analysis of the ways in which incremental change can lead to institutional transformation in contemporary capitalism.

erences as prior to institutions, other forms of new institutionalism see preferences as shaped by institutions. Rational choice theory tells us that political institutions are human constructions, designed to solve collective action problems – to maximize gains from co-operation. Institutions can be 'undone' when they no longer serve actors' interests – they provide only short-term constraints on individuals' behaviour (Peters, 1999: 148). It has not, of course, escaped the notice of more sophisticated rational choice theorists that institutions tend to be self-reinforcing, and remarkably enduring. These theorists argue that actors will only change institutions where the likely benefits outweigh the expected costs of change itself – which include the costs of learning how to operate within a new structure, of dealing with new sources of uncertainty, and of engaging in change (which itself presents a collective action problem!) (Rothstein, 1996: 152).

Normative institutionalists, who see individuals' preferences as shaped by institutions, do not have an easy answer as to *why* institutions in general (or particular political institutions) come into being. They are better at describing how they persist and exercise their ongoing influence over actors (see Lowndes, 1996: 194). As March and Olsen (1989: 17) explain, institutions 'increase capability by reducing comprehensiveness'; they 'simplify' political life by ensuring that 'some things are taken as given in deciding other things'. In Giddens' terms (1999: 127), structure is not 'external' to individuals but 'instantiated' in their practice. But if, as March and Olsen (1989: 159) insist, 'institutional actors are driven by institutional duties', how is it that they 'break out' in order to criticize existing arrangements or design new political institutions?

Normative institutionalism actually allows more room for reflexivity and human agency than might initially seem to be the case. Normative institutionalists expect institutions continually to evolve. Rules are seen as producing variation and deviation as well as conformity and standardization; this is because there are always areas of ambiguity in the interpretation and application of rules (not least because individuals vary in terms of their own values and experiences), and because rules are adapted by actors seeking to make sense of changing environments (Lowndes, 1996: 193). As Peters (1999: 149) notes, normative institutionalism 'permits the mutual influence of individuals and institutions'. 'Historical institutionalists' also rely on evolutionary models to explain how institutions change, predicting both incremental adjustment to changing demands (Pierson, 1996, 2004) and dramatic moments of 'punctuated equilibrium' (Krasner, 1984) in which new ideas become embodied in institutional form.

Goodin (1996: 24–5) distinguishes between three basic ways in which institutions arise and change over time: as a result of intentional design,

accident or evolution. If rational choice approaches prioritize intentional design, then normative institutionalists do not rule it out. They argue, however, that attempts at institutional reform are hard to control. Once one 'logic of appropriateness' is destabilized, space opens up for deliberation over competing norms and values; institutional change 'rarely satisfies the prior intentions of those who initiate it' (March and Olsen, 1989: 65; see also Brunsson and Olsen, 1993: 3). Dominant theoretical models have focused on stop/go models of change – path dependency punctuated by critical junctures – with a focus on exogenous triggers to change (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). But new research suggests that change in political institutions is better understood as an emergent process, in which endogenous and exogenous factors combine in the fashioning of new hybrid forms of 'recombinant governance' (Crouch, 2005). In a similar vein, Paul Pierson (2004: 160) talks about 'menus of institutional change', and Kathleen Thelen (2003) processes of 'institutional layering' and 'conversion'.

There exist creative spaces in between extremes of institutional stability and volatility, in which 'institutional entrepreneurs' seek to adapt 'the rules of the game' in order to meet the demands of uncertain and changing environments, and to protect (or further) their own interests (Lowndes, 2005). Institutional change involves active processes of experimentation – or what Lanzara (1998) calls 'institutional *bricolage*' – through which diverse institutional elements are patched together (old and new, formal and informal, external and internal) in elaborating new rules(for a further discussion of bricolage see Chapter 4, pp. 96–7).

While rational choice theory provides us with a valuable hypothesis about why political institutions emerge (that is, to solve collective action problems), normative and historical approaches help explain why all political institutions are not alike. New institutionalists of all colours remain preoccupied with the central paradox, or 'double life', of institutions, which are both 'human products' and 'social forces in their own right' (Grafstein, 1988: 577–8).

(c) Are the normative and rational choice approaches compatible?

We have referred throughout our discussion of new institutionalism, to the 'normative' and 'rational choice' variants. We have argued that they share characteristics of a distinct 'new institutionalist' movement within political science, but are built upon different theoretical assumptions about the impact of institutions upon political behaviour, and about the interaction between individual actors and institutions. Is this a sleight of hand?

Some critics have objected to any attempt to seek common purpose, or even complementarity, between such diverse theoretical positions. In 1998, Hay and Wincott argued that the distinction between 'calculus' (rational choice) and 'cultural' (normative) approaches 'represents an intractable divide between two contending and incompatible approaches to institutional analysis'. They counselled against the 'cobbling together of institutional insights from differently-informed institutionalisms', and urged historical institutionalists, in particular, to develop a new and distinctive social ontology that could *overcome* rather than reproduce traditional binary thinking (1998: 953). In 2006, Colin Hay responded to his own challenge with the elaboration of 'constructivist institutionalism as a new addition to the family of institutionalisms' (2006a: 62). Hay expresses his concern that historical institutionalists like Pierson and Hall have drifted towards a rational choice settlement of their ontological dilemma. But, while claiming ontological distinctiveness for the approach, Hay's constructivist institutionalism falls back on the additive, binary formulations he previously criticised: 'actors are both strategic and socialised'; both 'ideas and practices' matter; and attention should be paid to both 'institutional creation and post-formative institutional change' (Hay, 2006a: 58–59).

Such statements serve simply to remind researchers of the premises of good institutionalist analysis – and of the dangers of searching for the political scientist's equivalent of 'an alchemist's stone' (Hall and Taylor, 1998: 960). The real contribution of constructivist, or discursive, institutionalism is its conceptualization of institutions as 'codified systems of ideas'(Hay, 2006a: 59). Institutions shape behaviour through the frames of meaning they embody – the ideas and narratives that are used to explain, deliberate or legitimize political action (Schmidt, 2006: 99). Explaining the origins and subsequent development of political institutions requires an understanding of how ideas become codified over time, and the conditions under which underlying ideas are 'contested, challenged, and replaced' (Hay, 2006a: 65).

But do we need to choose between normative, rational choice and constructivist accounts? Perhaps the special character of institutions lies precisely in the fact that institutions are 'over-determined'. In robust institutional arrangements, regulative, normative and cognitive mechanisms work together to shape behaviour (Scott, 2001: 51). Indeed, it is this combination of characteristics that constitutes an 'institution' – a set of valued, meaningful and recurring patterns of behaviour – and distinguishes it from an 'organization' or a 'rule book' or a set of personal habits. While theoreticians inevitably emphasize the distinctive features of each variant, Vivien Schmidt (2006: 116) reminds us that 'problem-oriented scholars tend to mix approaches all the time, using whichever

approaches seem the most appropriate to explaining their object of study'. Discipline-watchers Goodin and Klingemann argue that the special significance of the new institutionalism lies precisely in its capacity to defuse the unconstructive stand-off between structuralists and behaviouralists that has bedevilled political science. They argue that the rise of the new institutionalism has been the 'single most significant contribution' to the 'period of rapprochement' which characterizes political science at the present time. In a pragmatic rather than a heroic vein, they observe that:

> Political scientists no longer think in the either/or terms of agency or structure, interests or institutions as the driving forces: now, virtually all serious students of the discipline would say it is a matter of a judicious blend of both… it is a matter of analyzing behaviour within the parameters set by institutional facts and opportunity structures. (Goodin and Klingemann, 1996: 10–11)

Conclusion

We can conclude that it is misleading to describe new institutionalism as a 'theory'. New institutionalism is better understood as what Gamble (1990: 405) calls an 'organising perspective'. It is not a causal theory in the behavioural sense; instead it 'provides a map of the subject and signposts to its central questions' (Rhodes, 1995: 49). As such, its value lies in provoking 'questions that might not otherwise occur' and in producing 'new and fresh insights that other frameworks or perspectives might not have yielded' (Judge *et al.,* 1995: 3). The new institutionalism can be considered a 'broad, if variegated, approach to politics', held together by the assertion that 'institutions are the variable that explain most of political life, and they are also the factors that require explanation' (Peters, 1999: 150).

Where traditional institutionalists were silent on matters of theory (smuggling in their assumptions under a veil of 'common sense'), the new institutionalists are highly vocal. New institutionalism does not require any one particular theory, but it does demand a critical stance towards theory. The strength of new institutionalism may be found precisely in its multi-theoretic character, which allows for the assessment of competing propositions drawn from different political theories. As Rod Rhodes (1995: 56) has pointed out:

> No theory is ever true, it is only more or less instructive. You can learn from the critical assessment of one theory; you can learn much more

from a comparative critical assessment of several theories brought to bear on a single topic. The study of political institutions will benefit greatly from such multi-theoretic research.

The contribution of new institutional approaches within political science is perhaps best understood in terms of 'epistemic gain'. Such a gain is constituted by the 'movement from a problematic position to a more adequate one within a field of available alternatives', and can be contrasted with 'epistemology's mythical movement from falsity to truth' (Calhoun, 2000: 538). In reviewing, twenty years on, their seminal contribution, March and Olsen (2006: 16) agree that the institutionalist project is work-in-progress: 'The spirit is to supplement rather than reject alternative approaches... Much remains, however, before the different conceptions of political institutions, action, and change can be reconciled meaningfully.'

Further reading

For some further introductory material on the institutional approach, see:

- chapters on 'institutions' in Goodin (1996) and Goodin and Klingemann (1996) .
- articles – Hall and Taylor (1996) and Lowndes (1996).
- a seminal work on institutionalism – March and Olsen (1989).
- on the variety of institutional approaches – Peters (1999, 2005).

Chapter 4

Constructivism and Interpretive Theory

CRAIG PARSONS

A constructivist argument claims that people do one thing and not another due to the presence of certain 'social constructs': ideas, beliefs, norms, identities, or some other interpretive filter through which people perceive the world. We inhabit a 'world of our making' (Onuf, 1989), and action is structured by the meanings that particular groups of people develop to interpret and organize their identities, relationships, and environment. Non-constructivist scholarship, by contrast, like that surveyed in Chapters 1 (Behaviouralism), 2 (Rational Choice), and 7 (Marxism), suggests that our interpretive filters do not greatly affect how we act. Instead we inhabit a 'real' landscape of features like geography, resources, and relative power, to which we respond fairly directly. Some institutionalists (Chapter 3) also make non-constructivist arguments, though other institutionalists overlap with constructivism. The institutionalists – defined by Lowndes as offering a rational choice account – tend to treat organizations and rules as fairly clear, 'real' objective obstacle courses to which we respond directly. But as Lowndes highlights, another key variant of the new institutionalism understands institutions through a more constructivist lens, where 'institutions' are themselves meaningful social constructs. For this chapter, the key point is that an approach is only constructivist to the extent that it argues that subjective interpretation of some sort affects what people do.

At a more meta-theoretical level, constructivism has a complex and contested relationship to other approaches. Many constructivists espouse an interpretive epistemology, as discussed in Chapter 9. If our world is deeply socially constructed, they reason, there is little 'real world' for political scientists to study. The social sciences thus amount to an interpretive (or 'hermeneutic') search to understand meaning rather than a scientific search for causal relations. This view suggests little possibility for direct debate between constructivists and non-constructivist scholarship, since the latter are portrayed as illegitimate. This position can be

labelled as postmodern. On the other hand, many constructivists do not break with science and causality. The claim that action depends on meaning does not necessarily imply that there can be no 'real' analysis of why certain people do certain things. Perhaps the real, objective truth about human action is that people act within meaningful social constructs – and perhaps a careful observer can show it persuasively in competition with non-constructivist theories. Constructivists who take this position tend to see their approach as a new kind of alternative that can make links to other political science approaches. This position can be labelled as modern.

Not only do constructivists vary epistemologically in how they think their claims relate to reality, science, and causality, but they vary substantively and methodologically as well. Just as there are many different rational-choice theories, or many different behaviouralist claims, so there are many constructivisms. They address different levels of action, from 'world culture' (Meyer *et al*., 1997) to much more discrete policy arenas (Hall, 1989), and invoke different mechanisms of social construction. They draw on practically all kinds of methods, from interpretive ethnography and process-tracing narrative to conventional comparisons and even quantitative studies.

This chapter begins with a short historical survey of constructivism and how it has come back into focus. It then provides an account of what is distinctive about the approach. Thereafter the main task of the chapter is to explore the varieties of constructivism.

Origins of constructivism

The basic notion of constructivism originated along with the discipline of sociology in the late 19th century, most clearly in the work of Durkheim (1984[1893]). Durkheim argued that human societies are held together by the 'social facts' of culture, not just objectively rational responses to 'natural' or 'material facts,' and that particular societies creatively invent different socially constructed identities and beliefs. His work and that of his students (for example, Mauss, 1954[1923]) set the concept of culture at the centre of sociology, and also of the closely related new discipline of anthropology.

Probably the next most famous father of constructivist thinking is Max Weber, a German sociologist who attempted to synthesize a Durkheim-style emphasis on ideas and culture with more Marx-style attention to the material landscape – but with a priority for the former. He suggested that ideas are like 'switchmen' which often 'determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest' (Weber, 1958[1922]:

280). In his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that it was the religious ideas of Protestantism that led indirectly to the rise of capitalism (Weber, 1992[1930]). This claim 'turned Marx on his head', reversing Marx's view that ideas and ideology were just rationalizations that people made up as they pursued wealth and power in a material landscape. For Weber, ideas and culture deeply defined what people saw as their 'interests'.

Durkheim and Weber's focus on the impact of socially-constructed ideas, norms and culture first entered the emerging discipline of political science mainly through the scholar who initially translated Weber into English, Talcott Parsons. A professor in sociology at Harvard, Parsons was enormously influential across the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s, and his students developed the first distinctively political-science literature on 'political culture'. The best-known example was *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba, 1963), which used surveys to judge how well attitudes and values in various countries might sustain democracy. After a brief heyday, however, the Parsonian line of thought fell out of favour (even if it inspired some later work: see Wilson, 1992; Diamond, 1993). Critics pointed out that the 'political culture' approach was often very tautological (Barry, 1970). Whatever people said they valued politically, or whatever seemed to show up in their political actions, was portrayed as their 'political culture'. Then these scholars argued that their political culture explained their values and actions. Partly because the study of ideas and culture in political science became associated with the circular problems of Parsonian thinking, it largely dropped out of the mainstream of the discipline in the 1970s.

It was not until the late 1980s that scholarship on ideas, norms, and culture re-entered political science in force. Over the next decade there was an explosion of such work. As part of a reaction to the perceived failures of non-constructivist theorizing in international relations – most notably in failing to predict or account for the end of the Cold War – a movement arose with the new name 'constructivism'. Drawing on cultural theorists in sociology, Alexander Wendt argued that the apparently 'anarchic', conflictual structure of international politics did not result from a natural, material system; instead, 'anarchy is what states make of it', and the rules and identities of international relations are socially constructed (Wendt, 1992, 1998; also Onuf, 1989). At roughly the same time, related movements developed in other parts of political science. Scholars of comparative politics argued that they could not understand changing domestic policies and institutions without attention to the introduction of new ideas (Hall, 1989; Sikkink, 1991; Berman, 1998; Blyth, 2002). As noted in Chapter 3, political scientists also discovered the large literature in sociology on 'sociological institutionalism',

which is (despite its name) a variety of constructivism (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Katzenstein, 1996; Finnemore, 1996; Swedberg and Granovetter, 2001). Yet another related school of thought grew up mainly in Britain, where scholars drew on the ideologically-focused Marxism of Antonio Gramsci to analyze the social construction and 'hegemony' of neoliberalism and globalization (Cox, 1987; Jessop, 1990; Gill, l993). And another strand appeared mostly in continental Europe, drawing on theorists like Derrida (1976), Michel Foucault (1975), and Lacan (1977) to advance what became known as 'poststructuralist' or 'postmodern' constructivism (Jachtenfuchs, 1995; Diez, 1999; Rosamond, 1999; Jørgensen, 2000).

By the turn of the millennium, constructivism was better established in political science than ever. Scholars of social construction from all these different lineages held prestigious faculty posts and published in highly-regarded venues. On one hand, the thriving variety in constructivism was a sign of strength: much like the many different rational-choice theories, the many different kinds of constructivist arguments displayed the rich range of tools and logics that could be developed out of its basic insights. On the other hand, some of the differences within constructivism amounted to fierce fights over what it is, how it is distinctive from other scholarships, and how much it can and should engage with the rest of the discipline.

What is and isn't distinctive about constructivism

At a basic level, no-one contests the emphasis of the first paragraph of this chapter: the distinctiveness of constructivism lies in its attention to the role of interpretation in human action. But as the introduction hinted, there is a great deal of contestation about whether and how arguments about interpretive social constructs can engage with other work in the social sciences. Many theorists argue that a focus on social construction connects to even deeper kinds of distinctiveness that locate constructivism in its own realm of inquiry.

The best-known view along these lines can be traced to one of Max Weber's other observations. Weber posited a distinction between two modes of argument about human actions. First, *explanation* is concerned with an argument's 'adequacy on a causal level': how well it shows that someone's actions followed predictably from certain conditions. Second, *understanding* concerns an argument's 'adequacy on the level of meaning': how well it captures how the actor interpreted what she was doing. Weber saw these two components as somewhat separate – suggesting that we might be able to predict and 'explain' someone's actions without really

understanding how she was thinking – but argued that a valid 'causal interpretation' of action always covers both (Weber, 1978[1922]: 11).

Other scholars later developed the explanation–understanding line into two distinct views about where constructivism stands in the social sciences. The more aggressive version arose from the argument that this line does not fall between two modes of argument about human action (as Weber suggested) but between arguments about human action and those in the natural sciences. We can offer causal-explanatory claims for natural outcomes, but human action never responds to conditions in an automatic push–pull or stimulus–response causal relationship (Winch, 1958). Instead people always act through meanings and have some free will to choose. I call this the 'aggressive' version because it implies that only constructivist arguments about meaning are valid approaches to human action; there is no such thing as legitimate arguments about action that overlook meanings in a non-constructivist way. This set of arguments essentially leads us to (or is formulated together with) the interpretive epistemology mentioned above. It suggests that valid scholarship on human action is not scientific at all in a natural-science sense, but instead amounts to an exercise in a 'double hermeneutic': scholars' interpretations of actors' interpretations (Taylor, 1985). When it comes to human action, constructivism is all there is.

The more moderate view is closer to Weber's own position, maintaining the explanation–understanding line within the social sciences. As developed most clearly by Hollis and Smith (1990), this argument presents Weber's two components as separate and incommensurate categories. On this account, we can approach any human action from two valid modes of argument that are 'each persuasive but not readily combined' (1990: v–vi). 'Outsider' accounts seek natural-sciencestyle causal explanations of patterns in action. 'Insider' accounts interpret meanings, perceptions, and the process of action. By this logic, constructivists and non-constructivists make separate contributions within a division of labour. We 'always and inevitably' have 'two stories to tell' about action (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 210). This view breaks with Weber's emphasis on the necessary combination of the two modes of argument – presenting them as more fully separate than he did – but preserves their equal validity and importance.

Many scholars today subscribe to one of these views, and make constructivist arguments that make little or no attempt to engage with non-constructivist theories. Many non-constructivists also gladly accept the second of these views, which absolves them from engaging with constructivists. As far as I can see, however, neither view stands up to scrutiny.

The trouble with Weber's distinction is that it creates the 'understand-

ing' category by using an old, increasingly rejected definition of 'explanation'. This old, long-dominant definition of 'explanation' comes from David Hume (1975[1748]). He argued that we can never actually observe the process by which something causes something else; we just see snapshots of conditions that seem to follow from others. For Hume, then, 'to explain' meant to provide a set of patterns across cases in which A (the cause) always precedes B (the effect). In other words, we explain by offering correlations across many instances, not by actually offering a theoretical mechanism or process by which one thing produces another (which, he said, we can't see or document in any case). Weber relied on this definition in drawing his distinction. Explanation subsumes an action in a pattern of correlated conditions, but doesn't say anything about the process that produced it. 'Understanding' traces how people arrived at that action, looking at their meanings and perceptions, and is quite a different enterprise.

As many philosophers have pointed out over the years, however, Hume's definition of explanation has problems. First, we often simply cannot infer causation from correlations. The mercury in a barometer drops regularly and predictably before a storm, but no one would say that our barometer causes or 'explains' the storm. Second, at a common-sense level, what most people want from something they would call an 'explanation' is exactly what Hume leaves out: a mechanism or process by which one set of conditions produced another. Over time, then, most philosophers of causality and most social scientists have moved to different definitions of explanation. While many still say that a good explanation includes correlations – it shows that B does indeed tend to occur given A – it also offers a plausible mechanism by which A produces B. This is what most of our theoretical arguments in political science try to do today: to capture some relationships in the world, and show that they produce some patterns. We expect good arguments to offer some evidence that they get some patterns right, and (breaking clearly with Hume) that we can see at least some rough evidence for the mechanisms they posit.

This is important for how we characterize constructivism because more contemporary definitions of explanation erase Hollis and Smith's line between constructivist and non-constructivist scholarship. Consider a rational-choice argument that some people enacted a certain policy due to their real, objectively rational interests in certain economic benefits. If we took an old Humean view of explanation, such an argument might just try to show that the pattern of action correlated to some pattern of benefits – the supporters stood to benefit, the opponents did not – and rest its case. But by the definitions of explanation that most political scientists use today, we would also ask for at least some evidence that the actors actually perceived the benefits and acted for the reasons posited by the

theory. In other words, we would want at least some evidence of the right mechanism. Any mechanism involving 'rational choice' quite obviously makes some claims about meanings and perceptions; to say that certain choices were rational under certain constraints is a very strong claim about what actors perceived and how they made their decisions. In my example the author would try to show us, at least roughly, that people perceived the benefits and used a rational logic to consider them and arrive at their choices. In Weber's terms, it would include a major component of 'understanding'. The mechanism behind *any* argument about human choices would do the same, necessarily passing through some account of people's perceptions. No one argues that human beings respond to any interesting phenomena without perceiving and thinking about it somehow. Thus given today's prevailing definitions of explanation, attention to 'understanding' is not what is distinctive about constructivism. All valid explanations try to say something about some patterns of action and some mechanisms of action – all of which include some claims about perceptions and meanings – and constructivism is just one kind of competitor in that debate.

Even for readers who find my position persuasive, this is not the end of contestation on the status of constructivism. There is another common argument that at least partly locates constructivism in a separate realm of inquiry. It has been set out most forcefully by the constructivist standard-bearer Wendt, who draws a line between causal and 'constitutive' arguments (Wendt, 1998, 1999). Wendt argues that traditional causal-explanatory scholarship asks 'why' questions about how one set of conditions dynamically produced another, whereas constructivist-style 'constitutive' scholarship asks 'how' or 'what' questions about the static properties that constitute things. Culture, norms, ideas, and identities do not usually cause things in a dynamic, one-thing-knocks-into-another way; instead they define the properties of the world we perceive. For example, Wendt notes that it doesn't make sense to say that the norm of sovereignty preceded and *caused* the rise of the modern state system. At the very moment that people took up the norm of sovereignty, they looked around and saw modern states. States and sovereignty norms have a relationship of static identity, not causality. Wendt does not insist that all constructivist work is constitutive rather than causal; some constructivists may argue that people invented new ideas and that we can see the new ideas leading, subsequently, to new actions, in a rather traditional, dynamic, causal-explanatory way. But he writes that constructivism, more broadly, is distinctive because it is mainly interested in constitutive relationships that do not respond to the 'why' questions posed by non-constructivists. 'So even though I have framed the issue differently than Hollis and Smith', Wendt writes, 'I agree with them that there are always

'two stories to tell' in social inquiry' (1999: 85). He too thinks that most constructivists pursue a different kind of inquiry from non-constructivists.

In my view, Wendt deserves considerable credit for underscoring that 'constitutiveness' is indeed central to constructivism. The deepest point of constructivism is that the natural world is meaningless and indeterminate for human beings until we begin to socially construct some shared meanings about it. From a natural world in which we could do many things, we construct certain meanings and so 'constitute' certain political arenas and actions. That is why constructivists suspect that it is social construction (not a raw material landscape, or even an obvious organizational landscape) that makes the biggest difference in how we ultimately act. Still, I think Wendt's characterization overlooks that constructivism is about more than constitutiveness. When we make a claim about 'social construction,' we do not just make a claim about the static 'deontic' power of ideas and norms (the power to assign rights and obligations: Searle, 1995). As the phrase 'social construction' directly suggests, we also make a claim about a *process* by which people constructed themselves into those ideas and norms. And those claims about the process of social construction can engage in direct debates with non-constructivist explanations (and must, to be persuasive).

What I mean is easiest to see if we consider a bit more about the standard alternatives to constructivism. Non-interpretive theories like Marxism, realism in IR, or the variety of rational-choice theories do not actually claim that people have no ideas in their heads. That is an absurd claim (especially coming from academics who spend their lives playing with ideas). Instead non-constructivist theories simply suggest that the ideas and norms we appear to 'believe' in – all the rhetoric political actors tend to spout about principles, rules, and identity – are just congealed rationalizations of some set of roughly rational responses to some 'real', non-socially-constructed set of incentives and constraints. In other words, they claim that we arrived at our apparent ideas, norms and identities by a roughly rational and objective process. Thus the ideas, norms, and identities are not 'constitutive' of anything; they are by-products of political action, or what Marx called 'superstructure'. Against this kind of alternative, constructivists cannot just present evidence that people seem to be interpreting the world through certain static ideas and norms. The retort will be: 'Sure, they are, but they have those apparent ideas or norms for non-constructivist reasons.' Constructivists can only make their point that certain ideas, norms, or identities really do have constitutive power – they really have made the difference between worlds – by showing a *process of social construction* by which people arrive at their ideas, norms, or identities. Their arguments about this process are necessarily

dynamic, 'why' arguments that compete directly with non-constructivist theories about the same actions.

In my view, then, all valid explanations require some understanding, and all constructivist claims about constitutiveness depend on making some causal 'why' arguments that can debate directly with more standard causal-explanatory theories. I do not conclude, however, that constructivism is just like other political-science arguments but with different causes – as we might say about a contrast between Marxism (with causes located in an economic landscape) and realism in International Relations (IR) (with causes located in a security landscape). There *is* something special about constructivism that follows from its focus on a distinctive 'social' and 'deontic' kind of cause. To show a process of social construction that supports claims about the constitutive power of ideas or norms, we must make a kind of argument that is qualitatively different from arguments about the processes behind standard non-interpretive causal claims.

As I see it, the core distinctiveness of constructivism lies in its relationship to *contingency*. This is not exactly a secret: the standard-bearers for constructivism in IR, like Onuf and Wendt, told us from the beginning that they see a 'world of our making', and that politics 'is what we make of it'. But the importance of contingency in constructivism, and just what it means for the relationship of constructivism to non-constructivist work, has been obscured by the confusing lines discussed above. Standard non-constructivist explanations are enemies of contingency and human agency. They look for reasons why some set of conditions – in geography, economics, security competitions, and so on – required a certain response that we see in action. To the extent real-world conditions were indeterminate, leaving some real openness for agency or accident in action, they have nothing to say. That is not to say that they cannot comfortably acknowledge contingency. They can coherently allow that conditions were indeterminate over some range of possibilities, or that their causes have a probabilistic relationship to outcomes rather than a deterministic one. But contingency is not an integral part of their arguments. Constructivists, by contrast, base their arguments in contingency. The logical format of any constructivist argument is that certain people faced an indeterminate set of 'real' conditions – at least across some range of options – and only arrived at a course of action when they adopted certain social constructs. By creativity or accident, in a moment of contingency they chose one of many possible sets of meanings, thereby building certain interpretations around themselves and 'constituting' one world from many that were otherwise possible.

Once certain social constructs are in place, some constructivist arguments may seem just as deterministic as others. Indeed, many construc-

tivists who focus on a late stage of social construction – past initial acts of construction, when social constructs may become deeply embedded – are often criticized for exaggerating how tightly our inherited ideas, norms, and identities lock us into certain worlds (just as critics say that realists exaggerate the importance of the international distribution of power, or that Marxists exaggerate the importance of class conflict, or that institutionalists exaggerate the channelling power of institutions). But at its roots, even this kind of argument has a different overall relationship to contingency than do standard non-constructivist theories. Even if a constructivist argues (for example) that we have all slavishly adopted ideas of globalization and neoliberalism, binding ourselves into an invented world of 'market pressures', a fundamental implication of labelling such ideas 'socially constructed' is that *it did not have to be this way*. There was a time when people could have made many choices, but their creative or accidental adoption of certain ideas or norms engaged a series of social mechanisms that embedded them in one world. Another implication is that such a time may come again. If this is deeply a 'world of our making', though changing it may be difficult, it is imaginable that we can remake it.

Variations within constructivism

I do not expect all constructivists to accept the points mentioned above. I offer them in a textbook context not because students must accept them as clearly right (though I see them that way, of course), but because they may help students to understand the debates around and within constructivism. Even if everyone did accept the points above, however, there would still be important variations within constructivism (as illustrated in Figure 4.1).

Modern and postmodern variations

Much of the preceding discussion has been about epistemology: debates about how to define 'explanation' and the relationship between causality and constitutiveness are debates about how we acquire knowledge about the world. But part of the point has been to argue that constructivism is not necessarily distinctive in epistemological terms. In my view, we can accept the core substantive point of constructivism – interpretation and meaning matters for political action – without leaving the epistemological realm of standard political-science explanations. Nonetheless, many constructivists *do* part ways with non-constructivists in epistemological terms. The difference between those who do and those who don't is the

Figure 4.1   *Multiple levels of differences in varieties of constructivism*

Epistemology	MODERN	POST-MODERN INTERPRETIVE

↕   ↕
SOME RELATIONSHIP

Schools of thought

SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONALISTS

IR CONTRUCTIVISTS

COMPARATIVE 'IDEAS' LITERATURE

GRAMSCIAN 'HEGEMONY' THEORISTS

POST-STRUCTURALISTS

↕   ↕
SOME RELATIONSHIP

Methods

NARRATIVE PROCESS-TRACING
+

LARGE-N COMPARISON	SMALL-N COMPARISON	COUNTERFACTUALS

↕   ↕
NO NECESSARY RELATIONSHIP

Mechanisms	SOCIALIZATION	PERSUASION	BRICOLAGE

most common distinction emphasized in surveys of constructivism, between 'modern' constructivists and 'postmodern' constructivists (Hopf, 1998; Adler, 2002; Checkel, 2005; Jacobsen, 2003).

This division concerns views about how much the subjectivity of social constructs affects not just political actors but academic observers as well. If political actors are bound within certain interpretations, why should we expect academics to be any less subjective? Postmodern constructivists tend to argue that the very notion of social construction means that science itself (and especially science about human action) is more a political, power-focused clash of interpretive agendas than anything that can relate to remotely 'true' claims about a 'real' world. In other words, they connect substantive views of social construction to an interpretivist epistemology. 'Modern' constructivists, on the other hand, tend to think that we can posit social construction among actors but still manage to make some acceptable (if modestly tentative) claims about how the socially-constructed world 'really' works. The core of their position is usually

quite simple (and is also a standard position in non-constructivist scholarship): just being aware of our inclination to interpretive bias helps us to solve the problem. If we set up careful research designs,and submit our arguments to open debate among a wide range of people with different views, then we can arrive at pragmatically acceptable claims about how the world really works. In short, for modern constructivists – as for other 'modern' scholars – how much the world is socially constructed is something we can document.

As one might expect, this difference between constructivists shows up most obviously in their engagement with non-constructivist alternatives. For example, in his recent book *Capital Rules*, the modern constructivist Rawi Abdelal carefully tries to show that traditional theories of power or economic interest fail to offer convincing explanations of the emergence and shape of the rules of international finance (Abdelal, 2007). Instead he offers evidence in the content, timing, and patterns of support for various international agreements that traces much of today's financial world to the ideas and entrepreneurial leadership of (counterintuitively) some key leaders from the European Left. In a book on similar subjects but from a postmodern constructivist approach, de Goede (2005) traces the 'genealogy' of the discourse and meanings surrounding international finance. She is especially interested in how activities that were perceived as corruption or gambling in the past have become valued strategies of investment and risk management in the present day. Though she engages to a certain degree with non-constructivist thinking on finance, she is not directly concerned with showing that she offers a superior argument to account for certain international developments. Her emphasis is more that non-constructivist scholarship simply ignores the meanings and normative bases of financial dealings, and that she offers a very different kind of narrative about how people have understood 'the moral dimension of money.'

Different methods

The methods with which constructivists specify and support their claims are almost as diverse as the arguments they make. Choices constructivists make in methods connect most strongly to the kind of constructivism in which they were trained, which carry certain kinds of methodological training as well. Constructivists with IR-focused training usually undertake close process-tracing over time to show how certain ideas or norms inform certain actions. Comparative political economists tend to set up small-N cross-national comparisons to show how particular ideas or norms generate certain similar or different modes of action across cases. Post-structural scholars focus first and foremost on discourse analysis

and deconstructionist critique. Sociological institutionalists (especially those in sociology itself, and in the well-developed subfield of economic sociology) tend to be trained in multiple methods, but frequently build their studies around quantitative analysis of changing patterns in norms, models, and action over time.

This methodological diversity belies the common view of constructivist scholarship, especially among non-constructivists in political science, as a pure exercise in process-tracing or narrative story-telling. Process-tracing is indeed a central part of every constructivist methodology. But it is not as distinctive to constructivism as many scholars seem to think, and most constructivists combine process-tracing with other methodological steps.

Process-tracing has recently attracted complex discussions from methodologists, but its core dictum is rather simply to seek evidence of the pressures, incentives, motivations, and decision-making calculus in any given instance of action (George and Bennett, 2005). It instructs us to provide 'within-case' evidence of mechanisms that stands independently from cross-case patterns of initial conditions and outcomes (Brady and Collier, 2004). If one explanation of a deregulatory reform privileges sectoral business interests, did relevant business people perceive these interests and have contact with government officials? If another explanation focuses on the deregulatory ideology of party-political actors, what evidence do we have that these actors held these views? Did the push to reform largely circumvent business people or bureaucratic experts? If another explanation focuses on the influence of international organizations (IOs), what evidence do we have that IO actors held certain views, and did IO contacts or actions feature prominently in the process and timing of regulatory change? These examples of process-tracing for diverse arguments (some constructivist, some not) effectively echo a point I made earlier: whatever kind of explanation they offer, political scientists today tend to ask for some evidence of mechanisms and processes. All kinds of plausible mechanisms in human action – rational choice, constructivist, or otherwise – make interpretive claims about what people perceived and thought. Thus constructivist methods are not fundamentally distinctive for including interpretive process-tracing.

If constructivist scholarship seems distinctive in its strong reliance on narrative process-tracing, this is a question of degree. Once we posit the plausibility of social construction – variation in actors' interpretations that is autonomous, to some degree, from a 'real' environment – we are certainly driven to pay fine attention to evidence of rhetoric, discourse, and apparent rules in decision-making. Besides just seeking thicker evidence of actors' understandings or discourse and decision-making processes than in typical rationalist accounts, however, the moves most constructivists make fit at a basic logical level with classic methodological

orthodoxy. In particular, they hold up thickly interpretive accounts of processes to various kinds of comparisons across patterns of action and environmental conditions. Like non-constructivist scholars, they use either counterfactual comparisons, 'small-N' comparisons, or 'large-N' comparisons to highlight the emergence and/or distinctive effects of particular social constructs.

IR-trained constructivists and post-structuralists tend to rely the most heavily on counterfactual comparisons. Their most common approach is to argue, on the basis of close interpretive process-tracing, that certain people could have (or, more aggressively, would have) acted quite differently given the presence of other imaginable social constructs. Post-structuralists tend to pay less attention to documenting the indeterminacy of objective conditions that feature in non-constructivist arguments, but by the same basic process they often reach insightful observations about how certain actions depended on particular discursive foundations. This is not to say that counterfactual thinking is unproblematic, but it has been increasingly accepted by mainstream methodologists (Tetlock and Belkin, 1996). Even if all we have is one case, we can use contrasts to counterfactual 'cases' (scenarios where conditions were different) to formulate and even support accounts of action.

Like many non-constructivist scholars in political economy, many constructivists turn to small-N comparison as a middle ground between the pitfalls of single-case counterfactuals and abstract large-N studies. They tend to seek closely matched cases to show that the interpretations they reveal in process-tracing make a substantial difference in otherwise similar contexts. In studies ranging from the early Industrial Revolution to the emergence of 19th-century workers' movements to 20th-century economic policy-making, scholars have shown that actors in comparable situations adopted different strategies due to different ideas (Dobbin, 1994; Biernacki, 1995; Berman, 1998; Blyth, 2002). The reverse strategy is to show that similar interpretations prevail across strikingly different material contexts, as in Finnemore's study of UNESCO's diffusion of science bureaucracies (Finnemore, 1996; see also Meyer *et al.,* 1997). Another inversion of the same logic is to turn comparisons inward on standard national cases, moving downward analytically to see how small groups or individuals within a shared context held similar or different interpretations of collective problems and action (Parsons, 2002).

Demonstration of constructivist claims through large-N comparisons, finally, is common in sociology and is beginning to appear in political science. Economic sociologists tend to use process-tracing-based interpretation to uncover what they suspect are socially-constructed norms, models, or practices, and then turn to sophisticated quantitative tools to show why these norms or models fit with constructivist-style arguments

better than alternatives. They typically gather data sets on organizational models, norms, or behaviour, or on network links between individuals or organizations, to show how changing patterns over time reflect the diffusion of certain social constructs rather than patterns of technical competition or material resources (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Such methods are still rare among political-science constructivists, but they are beginning to spread (Chweiroth, 2007; Darden and Gryzmala-Busse, 2006). Chweiroth (2007), for example, shows that the extent of neoliberal economic reforms across Latin America correlates more strongly to the presence of nodes of elites trained in neoliberal economics than to the material or organizational conditions that non-constructivists would expect to see behind patterns of liberalization.

Different mechanisms and different social constructs

Beyond their abstract epistemological differences, constructivists vary even more widely in the terms of concrete arguments they make about how social construction works. One of the clearest kinds of distinctions lies in the kinds of mechanisms that different scholars portray in the process of social construction. I cannot discuss all the mechanisms they use, nor do distinctions between mechanisms exhaust the concrete variations in constructivist arguments, but a few examples provide some sense of the variety within this approach. Depending on which mechanism scholars emphasize, they also tend to evoke different views of the results of social construction: how people relate to the social constructs around them.

Socialization

Socialization is probably the most common mechanism in today's constructivist literature, and is even sometimes presented as a synonym for social construction overall (Checkel, 2005). In my view, however, scholarship since Durkheim has tended to imply a certain kind of mechanism in using this term. It suggests that norms or ideas spread in a relatively incremental, evolutionary way generated by repeated interaction within groups. A group of people come together in interaction. They could interact in a wide variety of ways, but either through accident, deliberation, or initial innovative leadership; they orient themselves around certain norms or beliefs. Action becomes increasingly robustly embedded in the norms or beliefs over time, though the norms and beliefs are also constantly reshaped on the margins as they are reproduced.

To the extent that we see social construction operating by socialization mechanisms (either in general, or in some piece of the world of politics), we also take on a certain view of what the resulting socially-constructed

world is like (or the part of it we are analyzing). Socialization suggests a diffused, decentralized, collective, and consensual process in which a group of people work their way to certain norms or ideas. It implies relatively low levels of contestation and variation within groups, since such irregularities would disrupt the repetitive rehearsing or social learning by which norms and ideas enter individual thinking. This in turn makes socialization fairly distinct from power and politicking; it does not depend on 'carriers' with special authority, entrepreneurial spirit, or charisma for social construction to happen. It need not be limited, however, to small groups, or to arenas where considerations of power are not in play. Wendt (1992) portrays the worldwide perception of international politics as an arena of anarchy and distinct 'national interests' as the result of long-term socialization processes. In a much more specific empirical argument, Lewis (2005) shows how national diplomats in the European Union have become socialized into patterns of rhetoric and bargaining that produce more cooperative, consensual deal-making than rational-choice theory would predict.

Persuasion

Another common line of constructivist argument focuses on entrepreneurial people who invent new ideas and sell them to others. These 'carriers' bring new interpretations into an arena and persuade others to take them up. These arguments tend to be much more explicitly political than socialization arguments. Rather than portraying social construction as something that evolves almost without the consciousness of the actors, persuasion arguments rely on explicit advocates, who clearly believe in their new ideas or norms at a time before the ideas in question are embedded in broader action. Then the 'carriers' purposefully manage to spread the new ideas to others – either due to some qualities of the carriers (like charisma), the sheer force of their new concepts, or frequently the indirect 'fit' of the new ideas with existing ideas or norms. To take another example from the context of the European Union, advocates of the creation of a European single currency (euro) in the 1990s tended to argue that the euro and a highly independent European Central Bank would deliver credible and stable monetary policies for all of Europe. Economists at the time often pointed out that these two things did not have to go together; national-level central banks could also provide credible, stable policies. But by connecting the euro project to widely-shared notions of good monetary policy – an indirect 'fit' of ideas – champions of a single currency helped legitimize and sell their idea (Jabko, 1999).

Persuasion mechanisms imply quite a different socially-constructed world from socialization mechanisms. The more social construction operates by persuasion, the more we should see a world of conscious

advocates of competing ideas, jockeying to persuade other key actors to adopt their agenda (for example, Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). At the same time, we should see groups or networks of people with relatively coherent, conscious ideologies. The notion of persuasion and 'fit' tends to imply that people consciously consider and knit together their ideas, seeking at least some coherence in their overall mix of ideas and norms.

Bricolage

A third mechanism of social construction has some of the bottom-up, incremental feel of socialization, some of the notion of entrepreneurial 'carriers' of persuasion, and an emphasis on complexity and incoherence that is somewhat different from both. In French, the verb *bricoler* means 'to tinker.' Bricolage arguments start from a view of a messy world of overlapping social constructs. In this view, we tend to develop ideas and norms and practices to suit rather discrete problems and goals, and we end up with a complex landscape of overlapping realms of action. At a daily level, our norms and ideas in schools, as consumers, as producers, within families, with friends, or in politics may in fact be quite separate, though many of our actions have implications in more than one of these arenas. The same is true of political action more specifically: it often engages considerations at many levels, and encounters 'friction between multiple political orders' (Lieberman, 2002). While this complexity of norms defines many actions as illegitimate, its overlaps and contradictions create space for actors to tinker with the available social constructs and recombine them in novel ways. Innovative recombinations alter the 'tool kit' of 'strategies of action' available to other actors in similar positions, changing the limits and possible overlaps for future action or further bricolage (Swidler, 1986). The overall result is a fairly decentralized, incremental mechanism of socially-constructed change (Levi-Strauss, 1966[1962]; Campbell, 2004). People who are placed at intersections of a landscape of incoherent norms and ideas generate new lines of action in an entrepreneurial way, but do not necessarily persuade others to take them up or impose them. Instead, they simply feed back to alter future possibilities in the shared tool kit.

This emphasis on incremental change may sound similar to socialization, but to the extent we see social construction through bricolage, it tends to imply quite a different view of the resulting socially constructed landscape. This is a world of incoherence, not consensual, collective identities. It is a world where people have a very 'externalized' relationship to ideas and norms. Unlike in most socialization arguments, where the notion is that collective norms seep into our internal consciousness, actors encounter the hodgepodge of norms and practices as a set of external

concepts. They are just 'the way things are done' in certain areas, whether or not we value or even consciously recognize them.

Again, these alternative mechanisms only begin to touch on the variations between different kinds of constructivist arguments. The broader take-away point is one made in the introduction to this book: constructivism, like rational-choice theory or institutionalism, is a broad approach within which we can make many theoretical arguments. These arguments share some characteristics, but need not be consistent with each other: some constructivists think that socialization processes are important in international bargaining within the EU, for example, and others do not. The basic notion that people create and act within social constructs can be built into a very wide range of more concrete theoretical claims.

Conclusion

Constructivism is a broad family of arguments built on the notion that people only arrive at certain actions due to their adoption of certain 'social constructs' to interpret their world. It provides a distinct substantive view of how and why the political world forms and 'hangs together' (Ruggie, 1998). As such, we might think of it as just adding another kind of approach alongside more traditional approaches in political science, which tend to debate the relative influence of various kinds of causes. To take some of the usual suspects, Marxists explain the world as a function of an economic landscape, realists as a function of a landscape of security competition, (most) institutionalists as a function of an organizational landscape – and constructivists as a function of a 'landscape' of ideas, norms, identities, and practices.

But social constructs are not *just* another kind of cause. Since this 'landscape' of social constructs is created by actors themselves, and since it is a relatively intangible kind of 'landscape,' constructivists have long debated whether their arguments even operate in the same realm as non-constructivist arguments. I have argued that the two most common views about why constructivism exists in its own scholarly realm – the explanation–understanding and causal–constitutive distinctions – do not quite make sense, and that constructivism can engage in causal–explanatory debates with non-constructivists (and *vice versa*). Nonetheless, a causal-explanatory approach that invokes social constructs with 'constitutive' power does have a special relationship to causality. A full-fledged constructivist argument incorporates contingency and human agency directly into its account in a way that most non-constructivist work does not.

Whether we count an argument founded on contingency as an 'explanation' is, admittedly, a more complex question than I can engage here, though I argue elsewhere that we should (Parsons, 2007). Whether or not we want to allot the powerful word 'explanation' to constructivism, however, it can offer a distinctive kind of plausible, potentially demonstrable logic about why people act the way they do (at least for those 'modern' scholars who think that we can reasonably demonstrate any kind of claim at all). As such, I believe constructivism should become a standard part of research design in the social sciences. Not only should constructivists think about and engage non-constructivist alternatives to their claims, but non-constructivists should also routinely consider constructivist competitors in their own research. If we do, we will all come to richer, stronger, more interesting conclusions.

Further reading

- For a short summary of Durkheim and Weber in historical context, see Andrew Janos (1986), chapter 1.
- Two classics of constructivist thought – both remarkably readable – are Weber 1992[1930] and Polanyi (1944).
- For a relatively accessible entry-point to constructivist thinking from a philosopher, see Searle (1995).
- For a broader and deeper discussion and 'mapping' of constructivist thinking, see Parsons (2007), chapter 4.
- Very accessible major discussions of the basic notion of constructivism, though they may conflict partly with some views offered here, are Winch (1958) and Geertz (1973).
- The best-known landmark in contemporary constructivist theory remains Wendt (1999).

Chapter 5

Political Psychology

PAUL 't HART

This chapter provides a thumbnail sketch of political psychology as a perspective within political science. Political psychology asks somewhat different questions to those that tend to be dominant in mainstream political science (see Box 5.1). Psychological interpretations of political actors and processes have been around ever since the Greeks, but as a more systematic academic endeavour, political psychology dates back in Europe to the final decades of the 19th century. That was when the rise of mass politics inspired social theorists such as LeBon and Tarde to think systematically about the psychological bases of various forms of politically salient 'crowd behaviour' (Van Ginneken, 1992). In the US, it took until the 1920s for pioneers such as Charles Merriam and Harold Lasswell to lay the foundations of the modern, empirical study of the human factors shaping political behaviour and thus political outcomes (Asscher and Hirschfelder-Asscher, 2004). Political psychology has become a firmly footed part of the American political science scene, has been a steady component of the discipline in various Western and

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Box 5.1   Questions asked by political psychology

- Why do generally smart and decent leaders and governments sometimes pursue really stupid and/or morally offensive policies?
- Why are so many people prepared to severely disadvantage and even mutilate or kill others when instructed to do so by authority figures?
- What makes people ascribe such different traits and skills to female as opposed to male politicians?
- Why are some people so much more likely than others to support leaders and belong to political groupings who espouse deeply negative stereotypes about people of different race, religion, ethnicity or class to their own?
- Who or what determines which social and political issues citizens attend to, regard as problematic, and blame incumbent governments for not solving?
- When, how, why and upon whom does negative campaigning work?

Southern European as well as Latin American countries, and has produced small but innovative pockets of scholarship in Japan, UK, Canada and Australia (e.g. Moser, 1998; Van Ginneken and Kouijzer, 1986).

Below we examine the key assumptions underlying the political-psychological perspective on political analysis, and in the process draw an intellectual map of its key areas and endeavours. In the third section we present some classic and contemporary examples of political psychologists at work. And we conclude this chapter by offering some promising avenues that those who wish to jump on the bandwagon of political psychology may pursue. The chapter begins by examining the development of the approach.

Roots and promise of political psychology

Political psychologists have contributed quite significantly to our understanding of political *elites*, dissecting the personalities (beliefs, traits, motivations), the most eventful political stances and choices, and the life histories and careers of key politicians, bureaucrats and activists. Lasswell in particular seeded the fields of personality and politics (Greenstein, 1987; Winter, 2003), attitude formation and its relation to ideology (Lane 1962, 1969) and studies of power, including dispositions of power in international relations (Etheredge, 1978).

Likewise, political psychologists have provided new insights into the sources of the political behaviour of ordinary *citizens*, as documented in countless studies of the formation of public opinion about political issues, actors and policies; voting, protest and other forms of political participation; and patterns of conflict and cooperation between members of different social groups and categories. The focus on the psychology of mass politics has all but eclipsed the initial focus on the psychology of political elites. In part this was driven by desires, on the one hand, to understand widespread dispositions that explained the descent into totalitarianism (Adorno *et al.*, 1950) and mass cruelty (Zimbardo, 2007), and, on the other, to identify the conditions that encouraged dispositions conducive to democratic pluralism (Almond and Verba, 1963).

Finally, political psychologists have started to grasp the *nexus between* elite and mass political behaviour, for example in studies of leader–follower relations; political rhetoric, persuasion and communication; collective mobilization; political legitimacy; and elite 'responsiveness' to public opinion, as in 'pandering' and 'poll-following'.

More recently, an emphasis on theories of social cognition – how people make sense of others and of themselves – has entered the domains

both of personality and politics research (Axelrod, 1976) and of mass political behaviour research (Mutz, 1998; Althaus, 2003; Stenner, 2005). Just as the 'behavioural turn' dominated political science from the 1950s, the 'cognitive revolution' has impacted on most subfields of politics at present, and political psychology is no exception. The fruits of these decades of research have been laid down in specialized journals (most notably *Political Psychology*), a series of major handbooks (Knutson, 1973; Hermann, 1986; Sears *et al*., 2003), stocktaking volumes and monographs (Singer and Hudson, 1992; Iyengar and McGuire, 1993; Renshon and Duckitt, 2000; Kuklinski, 2002; Monroe, 2002; McDermott, 2004), anthologies of classic texts (Kressel, 1993; Jost and Sidanius, 2004), advanced research monograph series (e.g. at Cambridge and Duke University Presses), and student texts (Stone and Schaffner, 1988; Cottam *et al*., 2004; Houghton, 2008).

The sheer scope of this brief listing of some key subject areas reveals that political psychology is a wide river. It has two main tributaries. It is fed by psychologists choosing to apply their more general theories of human behaviour in the political sphere, and by political scientists borrowing from the bigger and arguably theoretically much more advanced discipline of psychology to provide (better) explanations of political phenomena.

Why would psychologists bother to study politics? Some do it simply because they are interested to see if the conclusions of their often laboratory-based studies travel well into the real world, and because they happen to be interested in political issues and phenomena. Their main focus is to advance the discipline of psychology (Krosnick, 2002). There are, however, also psychologists who turn to studying politics out of concern about the state of the world or about specific political developments. They seek to ameliorate politics by exposing the psychological causes of troubling phenomena – arms races, violent social conflict, war crimes, dictatorial and aggressive political leaders, the rise of populist movements and parties – and arguing for therapeutic interventions tackling what they see as the root psychological causes of these phenomena. Theirs is a more normative, activist stance, triggering criticism that they are engaged in not in political but in 'politicized' psychology (Sears, 1994; Tetlock 1994a, 1994b).

Perhaps even more poignantly for a volume such as this one, the related question is why political scientists would turn to psychology to understand political life. Surely a discipline whose state of the art was recently covered in no less than ten volumes of a thousand pages each (*The Oxford Handbooks of Political Science*) has enough analytical tools to offer already? Well, the short answer is: apparently not. Most political scientists that have 'gone psychological' have done so in opposition to mainstream

approaches that they see as fundamentally misguided or narrow. Examples include critiques of Realism and other 'billiard ball' approaches to the study of international relations (Jervis *et al.,* 1985; Ripley, 1995) and of the limited use of 'economic man' and rational-analytic paradigms in studies of political and bureaucratic decision making (Steinbruner, 1974; Simon, 1985). Others have sought to complement what they see as valid but incomplete approaches in these and other areas, for example in the study of political attitudes and voting (hitherto dominated by political-sociological approaches emphasizing the role of macro-social factors such as class, religion, region, and ethnicity; see Sniderman *et al.,* 1991; Marcus *et al.*, 2000), or in the analysis of political elites and leadership (complementing classic and neo-institutional as well as sociological perspectives (see Blondel, 1987).

'Homo psychologicus' in political life

The case for importing psychological concepts and theories into political science rests on two key assertions. The first is that *political processes and outcomes are shaped at least in part by the preferences, choices and actions of individuals and groups*. Political psychologists do not deny the relevance of political structures – movements, parties, governments, bureaucracies, courts, unions, international institutions, laws, policies, programmes (and cultures), traditions, norms, discourses – typically studied by mainstream political scientists. But they reject accounts of political life that implicitly or explicitly assert that these macro- and meso-level factors largely determine what goes on in politics. Yes, they argue, all things being equal, small, poor, isolated and militarily weak nations have fewer policy options than bigger, richer, aligned and militarily strong ones. And yet they have no difficulty pointing out numerous instances of the governments of such states ignoring or deliberately defying these constraints. Likewise, political psychologists do not dispute that democratic politicians will always take into account the potential popularity/electoral consequences of what they do, but they signal many cases of leaders and governments making highly unpopular policy choices even in the absence of overwhelming situational constraints. And they point to critical junctures in political life – situations of great uncertainty, stress and time pressure in which there is a breakdown of established institutional structures and/or cultures and the relevant 'rules of the game' are not so easy to discern or momentarily do not seem to apply.

In all of these situations, they suggest, we need to drill down to the level of the individual actors involved. As Hermann (2002: 46–47) argues:

The assumption is made that people play an active role in constructing their views of politics; their experiences may lead them to challenge as well as to respect the constraints that the other potential levels of analysis impose on them. They are not merely responsive to their political environments nor are they passive receptacles easily shaped by the milieu in which they are located… True, in much of politics, people are embedded in groups, institutions, cultures and governments, and it is the decisions of those entities that we seek to understand. However, it is individuals who identify and frame the problems that face such entities, who have disagreements and jockey for position, who generate compromises and build consensus, and who originate and implement change.

Some 'what if?' examples make the point. Surely the drastic scaling down or closure of key noncompetitive industries such as shipbuilding and mining became a near inevitability in the broader international economic environment of the 1980s. Yet the process would not have been as acrimonious and even violent in Great Britain had not implacable hardliners such as Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher been among the key *dramatis personae* on both side of the divide between unions and government? (Wilsher, *et al.*, 1985). Likewise, what if not Margaret Thatcher but John Major had been prime minister when Argentinian forces invaded the Falkland Islands? From all we now know about their respective world views, leadership styles and foreign policy proclivities it is reasonable to assume that there may well have been no war (Heppell, 2007; Steinberg, 2008; Dyson, 2009). What if Gordon Brown instead of Tony Blair had been prime minister following the attacks of 11 September 2001? All the analyses of British foreign policy in the wake of the attacks suggest that it was driven by Tony Blair's personal beliefs, self-confidence, and prior conflict management experiences (Kampfner, 2005; Dyson, 2006, 2007). And what if Ian Paisley had died or retired from politics in the early 2000s? Would a new, relatively inexperienced leader have been willing and able to take the risk of doing a 'Nixon goes to China' and persuading the hard core DUP supporters to support the Northern Irish peace process? (Gormley-Heenan, 2006).

Moving beyond individual cases and counterfactuals, Greenstein (1987) has formulated a few rules of thumb to help analysts decide when it makes sense to delve into the personality and other personal characteristics of key actors to explain political processes or outcomes. He argued that the likelihood of personal impact (1) increases to the degree that the environment admits of restructuring (for example during periods of political upheaval or crisis); (2) varies with the political actor's location in the environment (for example office-holding and non office-holding individuals

possessing different levels and kinds of resources to exercise leadership); and (3) varies with the personal strengths and weaknesses of the actor. These are as valid today as when they were originally formulated back in 1969.

The second fundamental assertion of political psychology is that *to explain the political preferences, choices and actions of individuals and groups, we need to study personal characteristics and relationships empirically.* This is the crucial difference between political psychology and other perspectives such as rational choice theories (see Chapter 2) or governmental politics as popularized by Graham Allison (Allison, 1971; see also Stern and Verbeek,1998). These other models impute goals and strategies to actors on the basis of theoretical assumptions (about perfect information availability and processing capacity, or about behaviour being role driven – 'where you stand depends on where you sit') in order to predict their behaviour or rationalize it *post hoc*. Political psychologists in contrast are often particularly interested in explaining behaviours and choices that surprise, startle or dismay – and are therefore difficult to explain with models assuming self-interested utility-maximizing behaviour. As we shall see below, political psychologists have a wide range of ideas about which personal features of political actors we should study to produce such explanations. Cognitive scholars focus on the way in which people view the world and the situations they are in as products of their root beliefs, prior experiences, and information-processing capacities and styles. Motivational scholars study the nature, origins and effects of people's drives, values, and styles. And social psychologists concentrate on the interpersonal relations, group dynamics and inter-group relations of the collectivities in which individual political actors operate and/or identify with.

Table 5.1 provides a map of these three approaches: their key assumptions about human nature and the main thrust as well as key sources of their application to both mass and elite political behaviour. There are, however, no hard boundaries between them. The rise of cognitive psychology has in fact been so pervasive throughout the discipline, that it has profoundly affected the agendas of the other branches. So a lot of contemporary research in social psychology can be characterized as being about social cognition: examining the consequences for group processes and inter-group relations of the ways in which individuals perceive and categorize their social world and construe their identities and loyalties accordingly (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Turner, 2001; Turner and Reynolds, 2001).

Combined, these different strands of psychology offer an indispensable body of knowledge for political science. Those sceptical of the alleged 'reductionism' of psychological accounts of larger social and political

Table 5.1 *Political psychology: an intellectual map*

	Cognitive	*Motivational*	*Social*
Key assumption	Man as imperfect information-processor	Man as intricate blend of conscious and unconscious traits, drives and styles	Man as a social animal
Elite behaviour	Political decision making is product of boundedly rational actors struggling to make judgment calls under conditions of information overload, ambiguity, time pressure and conflict	Political actors' personalities, core beliefs and values, and leadership style – all of which are shaped by their family background, socialization and experience – are crucial determinants of their policy stances and behaviour	The policy stances and choices of leaders and governments are more often than not shaped by advice, deliberation and negotiation – all of which are essentially group processes
	Classic: Jervis (1976) State of art: Tetlock (2005)	Classic: George and George (1962) State of art: Post (2003)	Classic: Janis (1972) State of art: 't Hart *et al.* (1997)
Mass behaviour	Citizens' views of public issues, political parties, political candidates and public institutions are filtered by their beliefs and world views as well as the way in which information about these matter is being framed and transmitted in media of mass communication	Collective political action is, at least, in part a product of the 'public emotions' : shared hopes, fears, needs, and passions which are transmitted in public discourse and can be sensed, nurtured and mobilized by political leaders and social movements	The political beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours of citizens are shaped in large part by their (subjective) membership of social groups and categories and the relations these entertain with other groups and categories.
	Classic: Converse *et al.* (1964) State of art: Thaler and Sunstein (2008)	Classic : LeBon (2002), Canetti (1984) State of art : Schnapp and Tiews (2007)	Classic: Tajfel (1981) State of art: Reicher and Hopkins (2001)

processes may find comfort in the fact that political psychology is not an imperialistic endeavour. Its proponents generally accept that political behaviour is the product of complex and variable combinations of both objective and subjectively perceived social conditions and institutional factors on the one hand, and the choices of political actors, both as individuals and as members of (real or imagined) groups and categories, on the other hand. They merely specialize in developing the latter part of the puzzle.

Finally, it should be emphasized that political psychologists are methodological pragmatists. To be sure, the ideals and methodological trappings of positivist behavioural social science are numerically dominant in the field's output. But there is also plenty of small-N, comparative, qualitative and sometimes explicitly interpretive work going on, for example in studies of policy decision making and in political applications of what is sometimes referred to as discursive psychology (Billig, 2003).

Political psychology at work

This section provides a flavour of the kinds of research political psychologists engage in, one of each of the three main school of psychological thought presented in Table 5.1: cognitive, motivational and social psychology.

The cognitive dimension: how beliefs and perceptions shape political action

Good governance should rest on carefully considered connections between past, present and future. Yet research on policy learning, and particularly on the role of historical analogies in problem perception and decision making shows that these connections do not come easily (Brandstrom *et al.*, 2004: 207). Historical analogies refer to instances when a person or group draws upon parts of their personal and/or collective memories, and/or parts of 'history', to deal with current situations and problems. The best known among these are the so-called 'big' analogies or 'master frames' (Snow and Benford, 1992): standardized evocations of global, epoch-making charismatic figures and critical episodes (for example, 'Munich', which has come stand for ineffectual and immoral appeasement of aggressive dictators based on the events at the 1938 Munich meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain over Czechoslovakia).

Relying upon historical analogies is one of the cognitive heuristics that

politicians, experts and citizens alike rely upon to make up their minds about new, complex, disturbing or otherwise exciting events about which they have only limited information at their disposal. Once we classify a new situation A as being 'just like' an old situation B, we provide ourselves with well-established memories, lessons, and action repertoires that enable us to respond to A in a concerted fashion without actually having to devote the time and resources of first investigation the properties of A in detail. It is what military, police and fire brigade commanders to all the time: their experience provides them with a *rich repertoire* of analogies that serve as 'mental slides' enabling them to reliably diagnose situations and take appropriate action swiftly. Likening an as yet unknown situation to one that the actor has already experienced or has learned about in great detail thus provides a powerful, quick and cheap sense-making device.

The other side of the coin is that not all of us are trained, experienced experts, and that the range of analogies, we survey when interpreting new situations, may be limited and skewed. When that happens, the 'framing' power of historical analogies may impede rather than enhance an actor's sense-making capacities. Examples of decision makers misapplying historical analogies are not difficult to come across (May, 1973; Neustadt and May, 1986). The Munich analogy and its intellectual brainchild, the domino theory, was a crucial factor in American perceptions of the Vietnam conflict, and helped drag the United States into a costly quagmire (Khong, 1992). The EU's ill-fated decision to take sanctions against Austria after the electorally successful right-wing populist leader Jorg Haider and his party were included in the country's coalition government, was based on an analogy between Haider and Hitler that came to dominate a Holocaust conference attended by most European leaders at the time, during which the foundations of the EU's later decision were laid (Brandstrom *et al.*, 2004).

Political psychologists have since developed their understanding of how historical analogies work. Research has focused on two questions: when are historical analogies likely to be invoked, and what (type of) impact might they have on public beliefs or elite decision making? With regard to the former question, current research revolves around the following general propositions, which are partly derived from the broader work on cognitive schemata: (1) the more *recent* the events to which a historical analogy refers, the higher the likelihood that this analogy will be evoked; (2) the higher the proportion of politically salient actors whose *personal experience* of the events referred to in a particular historical analogy, the more likely it will be evoked; (3) the greater the individual and mass *psychological impact* of the events referred to in a particular historical analogy, the more likely it will be evoked; and (4) the

more a particular historical analogy *fits the standard operating procedures and/or organizational interests* of the entity that a political actor or group belongs to, the more likely it will be evoked by that individual or group.

Historical analogies may act as 'filters', i.e. providing a readily available 'script' that political actors evoke to interpret reality. This has both enabling and constraining effects. On the enabling side, the more widely shared a particular historical analogy is, the easier it becomes for people to reach consensus about the definition of the situation at hand. But analogies can also be thought of as 'teachers': beyond assisting in diagnosis they also provide clear policy guidelines on how not to act. Key components of analogies may in fact become deeply institutionalized in professional doctrines (for good and for bad, for example French military doctrine after the First World War and its fatal emphasis on building the Maginot line) and organizational standard operating procedures. As suggested above, the filtering power of historical analogies can be so strong that they become mental 'prisons': the reduction of uncertainty provided by diagnozing the situation in terms of a seemingly perfect historical parallel can be *too* successful. Indeed, when particular analogies come to monopolize public or elite discourse on current events or issues this turns other possible analogies into 'blind spots' or 'silences': particular memories are so dominant as to cause other potentially relevant experiences to be forgotten or at least left unused as an aid to contemporary sense-making. Finally, it should be noted that analogies are not just spontaneous, purely cognitive devices; they can also be deliberate political framing tools. In fact, the cognitive and political functions of historical analogies may go hand in hand. In the sanctions case, some leaders were captivated by the Hitler analogy not just cognitively but also emotionally. At the same time, and partly because of it, they 'used' the analogy to persuade or put pressure on others to join the action against Haider.

The motivational dimension: personality and political style

Research on the political impact of leader personality or leadership style has taken many forms (Winter, 2003). Some scholars have focused on aspects of the individual leaders, ranging from psychoanalytic studies exploring the 'character', psychological development and psychological disorders – such as excessive narcissism or paranoia – of individual leaders (George and George, 1964; Glad, 1980; Walter, 1980; Renshon, 1996) to those focusing on specific personality traits (the so-called 'big five': extraversion-surgency; warmth, agreeableness; conscientiousness; emotional stability, neuroticism; and openness to experience, Rubenzer *et*

al., 2000). Other studies have synthesized the personal qualities and backgrounds of leaders into distinctive styles in office (Sternberg, 2007). A wealth of larger-N comparative research also exists regarding the individual traits of leaders and how these shape (both within and outside of groups) their styles of decision-making, interpersonal interaction, information processing, and, allegedly their electoral success and 'historical greatness' in office (Winter, 1987; Simonton, 1988 and 2000). For example, among the psychological studies of the characteristics of leaders are ones examining personal needs for power, achievement and affiliation (Winter, 2003), their emphasis on task accomplishment or interpersonal relations (Rowe and Mason, 1987), and their self-esteem and self-confidence (House, 1990).

By way of example, let us just focus on one such line of research, the need for power. This need for power (or dominance) is a personality characteristic that has been extensively studied and linked to specific types of behaviour and interactional styles with others (Etheredge, 1978). Specifically, one would expect leaders with progressively higher psychological needs for power to be increasingly dominant and assertive in their leadership styles in office and to assert greater control over subordinates and policy decisions. For example, research by Fodor and Smith (1982) found that power-motivated leaders were more associated with the suppression of open decision-making and discussion within groups than were leaders low in need for power. Similarly, a number of studies have found that, relative to leaders low in need for power, leaders high in need for power require a far greater degree of personal control over the policy process (Preston, 2001) and are more inclined to domineering behaviour toward subordinates than do leaders low in need for power (Winter, 1973, 1987).

In a study examining the characteristics and leadership styles of past US presidents in cases of foreign policy decision-making, Preston (2001) found that leaders high in need for power preferred formal, hierarchical advisory system structures designed to enhance their own personal control over the policy process. These leaders tended to centralize decision-making within tight inner circles of trusted advisers and to insist on direct personal involvement and control over policy formulation and decisions. Their policy preferences tended to dominate both the policy deliberations within advisory groups and the nature of the final policy decisions. In contrast, leaders low in need for power preferred less hierarchical advisory system structures and required less personal control over the policy process. Their policy preferences tended not to dominate advisory group deliberations or final decisions. As a result, the input of subordinates played a greater role in policymaking. Unlike these leaders low in need for power, leaders high in need for power were found to have

assertive interpersonal styles in which they would actively challenge or seek to influence the positions taken by their advisers; further, these leaders were also more likely to override or ignore the conflicting or opposing policy views of subordinates.

The social dimension: groups and intergroup relations

Inspired by reading his daughter's high school essay on the Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco, Yale psychologist Irving Janis's 1972 book *Victims of Groupthink* has become one of the most influential psychological contributions ever made to the study of decision-making in politics, management and the professions. Janis (1972) challenged the then dominant view in theoretical and applied social psychology that group cohesion always results in better performance. He maintained that under certain conditions and when a group engages in stressful decisional tasks, strong group cohesion can in fact contribute to defective decision-making which, in turn, may lead to a policy disaster. He defined groupthink as a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. He also stated that groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures.

Janis (1972) identified eight main symptoms of the groupthink 'syndrome': an illusion of invulnerability among group members; the use of rationalizations to discount warnings and other negative feedback; a shared belief in the inherent morality of the group; stereotyped views of members of opposing groups; self-censorship on the part of group members; an illusion of unanimity; self-appointed 'mindguards' within the group who act to shield the group from information challenging its premises or decisions; and direct pressure put on any members of the group showing signs of dissent with the assumed consensus. In Janis's formulation, three types of antecedents are likely to trigger groupthink. First, the group is highly cohesive. Second, there are structural faults in the organization in which the group is embedded, serving to neutralize potential checks and balances on and within the group (such as group insulation from the rest of the organization, a lack of norms requiring methodical procedures for group deliberation, and a lack of a tradition of impartial leadership). Third, the group is acting in a provocative situational context generating a high degree of stress in the members of the group.

Groups that are affected by groupthink are likely to display a series of decision-making defects such as an incomplete survey of alternatives, fail-

ure to re-examine the preferred choice as well as initially rejected alternatives, and a poor scrutiny of information. Combined, such decision defects set the group up for choosing, and rigorously sticking with, decisions that are unrealistic and often morally questionable.

Since 1972, numerous attempts have been made to reformulate groupthink theory in response to the rather mixed results of casestudy as well experimental efforts to test it. Various scholars have now linked groupthink to simpler and more firmly rooted social-psychological phenomena (for example, Turner and Pratkanis, 1998). These include:

(a) group polarization: the tendency for group discussions to lead individual members to adopt more extreme versions of their initial predispositions;
(b) framing: when a problem is defined as a threat, people are more likely to be willing to take risks in dealing with the problem;
(c) collective efficacy: group members' shared belief about the group's ability to successfully perform some task;
(d) conformity: groupthink as a form of anticipatory compliance of a group to a revered, intimidating or otherwise powerful leader whose mind is clearly set on a given course of action at the outset of group deliberations.

Janis offered gripping interpretations of notorious case such as the ill-fated decisions to escalate the Korean and Vietnam wars as well as the Watergate cover-up by President Nixon and his inner circle. Symptoms of groupthink have since been detected in a host of fiascoes world-wide, ranging from the British cabinet during the 1956 Suez crisis (Verbeek, 2003) to the 1980 Iran rescue mission tragedy, major corporate and governmental IT bungles, as well as US intelligence failures preceding 9/11 and the British decision to join the US in invading Iraq. Groupthink however does not just offer an empirical theory of group decision-making fiascoes. Following Janis's lead, its students have also offered detailed recommendations for preventing groupthink and more generally improving the quality of collective decision making in government (see 't Hart, 1998). This demonstrates how political psychology can produce not just policy-relevant empirical knowledge but also practical tools (see Box 5.2).

The future for political psychology

Although it has long historical roots, in many national political science communities the political psychology perspective still has a long way to

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Box 5.2   Preventing groupthink: recommendations

- Each member must be critical evaluator of the group's course of action; an open climate of giving and accepting criticism should be encouraged by the leader.
- Leaders should be impartial and refrain from stating their personal preferences at the outset of group discussion; they should limit themselves initially to fostering open inquiry.
- Set up parallel groups working on the same policy question under different leaders.
- Each member of the group should privately discuss current issues and options with trusted associates outside the group and report back their reactions.
- Different outside experts should be brought in from time to time to challenge the views of the core members.
- There should be one or more devil's advocates during every group meeting.
- In conflict situations, extra time should be devoted to interpreting warning signals from rivals and to constructing alternative scenarios of their intentions.
- Second chance meetings should be held to reconsider the decision once it has been reached and before it is made public.

Source: Janis (1982) p. 262.

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go in widely becoming seen as an integral part of the discipline. Its inter-disciplinary character will be both a strength and a handicap in taking it into the political science core. Its strength lies in its theoretical wealth and creativity: political psychologists tap into a reservoir of concepts, propositions and paradigms about human and social behaviour that is much bigger and has been far more successful in producing cumulative knowledge than what mainstream political science has produced. The handicaps are that to be a credible political psychologist requires extensive knowledge of not one but two academic disciplines, which goes against the grain of mono-disciplinary productivity measurement and career advancement regimes that have come to dominate the academic landscape worldwide. Furthermore, its methodological variety and pragmatism indicate a level of immersion in matters of research design and methods that is now common in US postgraduate programmes but still lagging (if not actively resisted) in many other places.

Having said that, the general tide seems to be with political psychology. The hitherto separate worlds of elite and electoral studies are converging in their joint awareness of the growing 'personalization' of power and authority, and therefore the need to revisit the role of leaders and leader-

ship rhetoric, decisions and actions in shaping public opinion, political behaviour and policy outcomes, and *vice versa* (McAllister, 2007). Likewise, the 9/11 attacks and their enduring worldwide political fallout have reconfirmed the need to better understand and if possible, manage the processes of social identification, interpersonal perception, and inter-group relations. These are precisely the kinds of issues political psychology has long committed itself to clarifying.

Further reading

- A solid general textbook is Cottam *et al.,* 2004 (new edition forthcoming).
- Excellent thematic overviews of key areas within the field are in Sears *et al.* (2003).
- Many key approaches to studying political leaders using psychological lenses can be found in Post (2003),Greenstein (2009), George and George (1964), Jervis (1976) and Janis (1972).
- Cambridge University Press runs a monograph series edited by James H. Kuklinski that contains state of the art studies in the psychology of mass political attitudes and behaviour, including Stenner (2005) and various others.
- Those interested in the dark side of human behaviour as it plays out in public life should read Kelman and Hamilton (1989) and Zimbardo (2007).

Chapter 6

Feminism

VICKY RANDALL

Feminism is innately political. To the extent that 'It picks out and prob-
lematizes the fundamentally political relationship between gender and
power' (Höjer and Åse 1999: 73), it has had, and still has a great deal to
say to political science, although it is not always apparent that main-
stream political science is listening. Feminism, however, is not an
approach that has grown up within the confines of social science. It orig-
inated outside academia as the ideology of a critical and disruptive social
movement. As such its absorption into social, let alone political science,
has been partial and selective and there remains quite a gulf between femi-
nism 'out there' and feminist political science. In the following discussion
there is inevitably, therefore, some disjuncture between characterizations
of feminism as a perspective and its implications for political analysis, on
the one hand, and the actual preoccupations and achievements of feminist
political science on the other.

Almost from the outset there has been a range of perspectives *within*
the feminist perspective and this trait has increased with time until some
might question whether feminism still exists as a single coherent
project. Many now prefer to talk about feminist perspectives in the
plural. These varying perspectives have differing and even conflicting
messages for political analysis. Rather than maintain that feminism
offers a coherent account or meta-theory of its own, then, it is more
appropriately viewed as a developing dialogue around a common but
evolving agenda.

Taken together, these two traits considerably complicate the task of
presenting a simple and single feminist perspective within political
science. In the following discussion the focus will be on the more empiri-
cally-based and less overtly prescriptive or normative side of the disci-
pline. The discussion begins with a brief overview of feminism, its
development and differentiation over the last four decades. The second
main section considers in tandem both the implications of a feminist
perspective for political science and the actual impact of this feminist
perspective on feminist-inspired political science. It begins by considering

epistemological issues and then focuses on feminist conceptualization and analysis of the 'political'. The third section reviews the criticisms that feminist political science has encountered and the still somewhat limited overall impact of feminism on political science, while the final substantive section looks to the future.

Debates within feminism

Like most social phenomena that really matter, feminism is difficult to define, let alone to provide an agreed definition for. Probably the best approach to definition is historical. Feminism emerged as a movement and body of ideas that aimed to enhance women's status and power. It called into question power relations between men and women that were conventionally defended as 'natural'. From the start, however, feminists differed in the reasons they advanced for existing inequalities, in the terms in which they framed their objectives, and the strategies they favoured for realizing them. Only a brief account of these debates is possible here (see Bryson, 1999; Squires, 1999). Three strands were predominant from the 1960s.

Liberal feminism tended to build, though not uncritically, on many of the assumptions of existing liberal thought, with its emphasis on individual rationality, the public–private distinction and the reformability of institutions. Marxist feminism similarly built on the premises of Marxism but came to recognize that the 'sex-gender system' could have its own logic and to seek more satisfactory ways to analyze the interrelationship of this system with class (see Barrett, 1988). Radical feminism was the newest, least precedented, element. It uncompromisingly identified the sex war as the most basic political struggle, thereby clearing vital space for analysis of the mechanisms of male power or 'patriarchy'. It highlighted the 'private' sphere as the terrain where women's oppression was founded. And through its exposé of rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse, and its critique of pornography, it drew attention to the physical/sexual dimension of male oppression.

Over time the strands evolved, partly as a consequence of their interaction, though clear differences remained. However, they shared a tendency both to regard women as a self-evident and straightforward category and to assume that while women were clearly not the same as men – or why the need for feminism? – the differences between them had been exaggerated and invoked where they were not relevant: that is, a tendency to stress similarity. But a further axis of differentiation was emerging that to some extent cut across these older categories of feminism, and which turned on the whole issue of 'difference'.

To begin with, the ontological basis of male–female difference appeared increasingly contentious and problematic. Were the differences between male and female 'nature' physiologically determined or essential in some sense, or were they more a cultural outcome? Marxist feminists began a move away from simple sex categories to the concept of 'gender', which was meant to emphasize its historically contingent and socially constructed character, as in Rubin's notion (1975) of a sex-gender system. In the meantime within Radical feminism, a 'cultural' or 'pro-woman' strand emerged which accepted and celebrated 'difference' or women's distinctive nature, especially their maternal, caring qualities. How far this amounted to essentialism is open to debate and varied amongst proponents. Such a perspective can be seen as part of the inspiration for the distinctive epistemological position of 'standpoint feminism' discussed below, which in different ways has seen women's identity or experience as potentially a basis for an ontologically privileged alternative to mainstream knowledge and understanding.

But these attempts to elaborate 'woman' as the subject of feminism and in opposition to man, inevitably invited further questions about the differences *between* women. This issue, first articulated in the context of the radical-lesbian critique of heterosexuality, was most forcefully posed, by black women, in Britain and the United States, protesting against their implied exclusion from the white feminist movement. This burgeoning politics of 'identity' posed a huge challenge for a coherent feminist project.

Partly as a response, but also reflecting current intellectual trends, some influential feminists turned to post-structuralist approaches that emphasise the contingent and discursive nature of *all* identities. They even called into question the social constructionist understanding of gender. Rather than avoiding essentialism, they argued, the uncoupling of sex and gender simply puts essentialism at one remove. Sex remains a largely uninterrogated category, when it should instead be recognized that sex differences are themselves socially constructed, refracted through the lens of gender (Nicholson, 1995). Beyond this point, we arrive at the view that the anatomical body is itself a discursive construct, where the very notion of corporeality is problematized.

But by this process of reasoning, post-structuralism also called into question the identity 'woman'. As a result its feminist critics charged that whilst it might provide an effective tool for deconstructing and thereby undermining masculine foundational concepts, by the same token, through problematizing the notion of 'woman', it removed the intellectual grounding of feminism as a political project. Can one really be a feminist and a post-structuralist? Butler (1992: 16), responding to these concerns, accepted that at times it may be politically necessary to speak 'as

and for women', that is, to use this language in a rhetorical or strategic way. But, in a formulation that aptly illustrates another criticism often made of post-structuralism – its intellectual opacity and elitism – she still insisted that feminism can retain the category of women only if it 'presupposes that 'women' designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category' so that 'the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability'.

If this post-structural response to identity politics seemed too drastic, another approach has been to accept the existence of multiple standpoints but see these as a basis for a dialogic process of reaching truth. This concept of 'transversal politics' has particularly appealed to those feminist activists working with very diverse women's groups, such as those involved in building global networks, or legal advocacy (see Yuval-Davis, 2006).

To summarize the argument of this section, whilst feminism can be understood historically as a movement challenging entrenched male power, it has always encompassed great diversity. The three original strands have themselves evolved, whilst new debates and strands have cut across them. Much recent debate has centred precisely on the nature of the subject of feminism, 'woman', and on how to respond to differences amongst women. We need to be conscious of these internal arguments, together with ongoing arguments about whether and how women should engage with public politics and the state, which are elaborated further below, when we consider the implications of a 'feminist perspective' for political science.

Feminism and political science

Given its central concern with the power relationships between women and men, feminism should be of the greatest relevance to how we think of and analyze politics. This next section considers some of the main potential implications of (different strands of) feminism for political analysis at the same time as describing more specific ways in which feminism has been taken up in practice.

Traditionally, political scientists were almost all men and the spheres of public politics they studied were likewise overwhelmingly male. Political science either ignored the subject of women, referred to women primarily in terms of their relationship with significant men or, if obliged to consider them more directly, was happy to reproduce stereotypical and sexist understandings of women's nature. Perhaps the most cited and blatant example is the American political scientist Robert Lane's reflection on the adverse consequences of feminism:

> It is too seldom remembered in the American society that working girls and career women, and women who insistently serve the community in volunteer capacities, and women with extracurricular interests of an absorbing kind are often borrowing their time and attention and capacity for relaxed play and love from their children to whom it rightfully belongs. As Kardiner points out, the rise in juvenile delinquency [and, he says, homosexuality] is partly to be attributed to the feminist movement and what it did to the American mother. (Lane, 1959: 355)

Numbers of women within the discipline, whilst still relatively low, have grown from the 1970s and, influenced by developments in feminism as a movement and body of thought, many have sought to apply insights derived from feminism in their own analysis. In this connection, a distinction is often made between different 'stages' in this process, whilst recognizing that these stages have not always been chronologically distinct (Carroll and Zerilli, 1993; Lovenduski ,1998). The first stage was mounting a critique of male political science for its virtual exclusion of women as political actors (Bourque and Grossholtz, 1974; Iglitzin,1974). There was a parallel move by feminist political theorists to expose the misogynist tendencies of traditional political thought (Brennan and Pateman, 1979; Clarke and Lange, 1979).

Closely related to this enterprise was a second stage which is sometimes rather dismissively referred to as 'adding women in' and entailed a much more systematic investigation into the extent of women's under-representation and its institutional and non-institutional causes. As, partly as a consequence of feminist ideas and activism, more women came to be involved in public politics, new questions also arose about the forms and *impact* of their participation. Whilst the limitations of this kind of analysis have been pointed out retrospectively, as a preliminary exercise, it has been essential. Even now it remains an important aspect of feminist research.

For instance, in the enthusiastic rush to analyze the widespread process of democratic transition, especially evident in Latin America, through the 1980s, political scientists largely ignored questions about women's participation or the implications of associated institutional and policy changes for women (Waylen, 1994). A second generation of feminist researchers has had to take up these basic questions. In another example, Lowndes (2000: 533) points out that in the new upsurge of interest in the notion of 'social capital', there has been a 'curious silence ... about gender dynamics', although these could arguably shed considerable light on key issues in the social capital debate. Most recently, Annersley *et al.* (2007:12) consider the extensive literature on public policy under New Labour in Britain but they find that: 'One notable aspect of this whole

genre is, with a couple of exceptions … the *lack* of attention paid to gender or gender issues.' Their book is presented in part as an attempt to rectify this silence.

But in any case this very process of bringing women in has inevitably led feminist political scientists to a third 'stage', in which they raise more fundamental questions about their discipline: about limitations of the characteristic methodologies employed in political science, about the way that politics is conceptualized; and about the 'gendered' character of political institutions and processes. Linking these to broader developments in feminist thinking, each of these issues is explained in turn.

Epistemology and methodological issues

Given what has already been said about feminist diversity, there is not one single shared feminist epistemological position. Feminism has been described as going through three epistemological phases: rationalist (positivist), anti-rationalist and post-rationalist (interpretive) (Di Stefano, 1990; Squires, 1999). Whilst this is up to a point helpful, it is difficult to satisfactorily locate either Marxist feminism or standpoint feminism (to be discussed below) within these categories. Certainly both liberal feminism and early Radical feminism were implicitly rationalist, but without really reflecting upon their own epistemological basis. Marxist feminism inherited the more realist notion of historically circumscribed consciousness. But what could be called 'second generation' feminism has been much more conscious of this issue. In particular, the post-structuralist turn has depended on a 'post-rationalist' epistemology, which is deeply self-aware, in which indeed in some sense epistemology becomes everything.

In embracing post-structuralism, feminists have adopted a ready-(man-) made epistemological stance. It could be argued that the most distinctively *feminist* epistemological developments have been associated with difference-based feminism. Pro-woman feminists have sometimes represented the world that we experience in terms of a series of dualistic oppositions, for instance, between culture and nature, or mind and body, identified with men and women respectively. In this process, features of 'male' thinking – such as 'rationality' and 'method' – have been rejected not simply as instrumental to male domination but as intrinsically 'male', with preference given to alternative modes of thought or expression, for instance poetry that can subvert the patriarchal order and allow a different vision to emerge.

The value of such an uncompromisingly anti-rationalist approach is inevitably limited for feminists working in the social sciences, but, as noted earlier, one attempt to escape the problem of embedded masculinism is

through the elaboration of a 'feminist standpoint'. While this endeavour seems to reflect a Radical feminist agenda, one very influential exponent, Nancy Hartsock, has a Marxist feminist background. For Hartsock, 'the concept of a standpoint depends on the assumption that epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life' (p. 286). Originally she argued, in a way that parallels the Marxist notion of the intellectually 'privileged' vantage point of the urban proletariat, that the sexual division of labour has meant that all women share a distinctive experience of life, based on their actual or potential role in subsistence and childrearing. This experience, mediated by feminist political awareness and activism, could provide the basis for a feminist standpoint (Hartsock, 1983).

Standpoint theory has been criticized by other feminists on a range of grounds. Inasmuch as consciousness is seen to reflect specific material conditions, this approach has been charged with 'essentialism'. Whilst the theory recognizes that experience is not 'innocent', that it needs to be interpreted, this process of interpretation is never adequately spelled out. Finally and perhaps most importantly, it has been accused of failing to take account of the substantial differences *between* women's lives. In response to such criticism, Hartsock has accepted in principle the existence of multiple concrete realities and corresponding perspectives, at the same time becoming less specific about their content (Hartsock, 1998; Welton, 1997). In a parallel development, there have been attempts to elaborate the contours of a black feminist standpoint (Hill Collins, 1991). To the extent that the standpoint approach has become more fractured and contingent, it could be argued it has approached closer to the postmodern position, though significant philosophical differences remain. In response to this fractionating tendency, we have seen that some feminists have offered the concept of 'transversal' politics in which subject positions can be negotiated and imaginatively transcended through a process of dialogue, although this approach brings its own conceptual challenges (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002).

This more recent feminist questioning of epistemological foundations has not only found echoes in many areas of feminist scholarship; it has also been significantly bound up with the increasing feminist presence within academia. Feminist post-structuralism and standpoint theory have been elaborated and debated in the context of cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, and even history. Within the broad field of political studies, they have also been taken up by political philosophers, such as Hartsock herself. Feminist political scientists, however, have not called into question their discipline's rationalist foundations or embraced these alternative epistemologies in any wholesale way. Rather, they have drawn on them more selectively, in order to problematize specific methodological assumptions and as a source of alternative or supplementary research methods.

While much feminist-inspired political research has accommodated itself to dominant methodologies in political science, some feminist political scientists have been more critical. They have been influenced by wider critiques of positivism and claims for 'objectivity' (the belief that it is possible to separate fact from value), together with their own 'discovery of strong biases in pre-feminist scientific research regarding women's political behaviour' (Carroll and Zerilli, 1993: 59). This wariness about the possibility of value-free research has focused in particular on what has arguably been the excessive reliance in the discipline on quantitative analysis of forms of political behaviour, above all of electoral behaviour, which pays insufficient attention to the 'meaning' or context of the 'behaviour' it enumerates (Randall, 1991; Lovenduski, 1998).

A further example of feminist methodological critique is provided by the sustained criticism of the assumptions underpinning rational choice theory. This critique at the same time illustrates both the diversity and the epistemological development of feminist positions. From a broadly liberal feminist position, Sapiro initially argued that rational choice theory, with its focus on individual calculation of self-interest, presupposed a (male) model of moral free agency. Rather than considering how they were produced, 'The origins and processes of development of individual preferences (were) taken as "givens"' (Sapiro, 1979:13). Instead, the rational choice approach needed to take account of the consequences of oppressive relationships – between classes, or genders – for the decision-making of the oppressed.

Diamond and Hartsock, adopting a position closer to cultural feminism, took issue with Sapiro. They suggested that her real mistake was to attempt to work within the conventional categories of political analysis at all. Instead, they argued that there were 'commonalities which grow from women's life activity of producing and sustaining human beings, a consequence not just of socialization but of the biological fact of living in a female body'. For women, relations with others transcended mere instrumental co-operation for the attainment of joint ends, calling into question the appropriateness of the language of interest altogether (Diamond and Hartsock {1981} 1998).

Later still, and reflecting the growing post-structural turn, Pringle and Watson questioned the conceptualization of interests as in some sense static and objectively knowable. We should not think of interests as existing 'out there' and able to be simply read off from categories of class, gender, race and so on. Instead, interests should be understood as 'precarious historical products', representing a multiplicity of subject positions and discursively articulated through the political process itself (Pringle and Watson, 1992). Given this cumulative critique, it is not surprising that (as noted by Krook and Squires, 2006) rational choice has

not been widely used as an analytic approach in the field of gender and politics.

Beyond the critique of specific traditional political science methodologies, there has been a call for more 'feminist methodology', better gauged to reveal and enhance our understanding of the gender dimension of politics (Hawkesworth, 1994; Kenney, 1996). The characterization of this methodology, however, tends to be moderate and tentative. There is no sweeping repudiation of rationalist foundations or of a scientific approach in the limited sense of 'being logical and systematic in its method of reasoning' (Randall, 1991: 524). It is suggested we should combine different research methods, rather than relying on just one. Anticipating an issue explored more extensively in the next section, we should certainly not confine our analytical toolkit to methods originating in political science but draw eclectically, for instance, from the sociology of organizations and ethnography. Above all, we should expose the androcentric bias of mainstream political science methods and models and ensure that those we adopt are 'neither gender-biased nor gender-blind' (Hawkesworth, 1994: 98). The relationship between feminist political science and methodology has recently been neatly summarized by Krook and Squires (2006) who suggest that there is no distinctive feminist methodology but there is a distinctive feminist approach to methodology and methods.

In summary, although liberal feminism and, to begin with at least, radical feminism, have been broadly 'rationalist' in their approach, feminist thought, especially within academia, has been increasingly exercised by questions of epistemology. Standpoint feminism represents an attempt to construct a specifically feminist epistemological position, whilst other feminists have espoused the tenets of post-structuralism. Feminist political scientists remain broadly committed to rationalist assumptions but some have drawn on these feminist epistemological debates to criticize 'positivist' methodologies that inadequately contextualize their findings or draw on masculine behavioural models. Their call for a 'feminist methodology' entails methodological eclecticism, including borrowing methods from outside the discipline, and above all, gender awareness.

Re-conceptualizing politics

Feminism has challenged traditional modes of conceptualizing politics, and 'the political', in the discipline. Again we must acknowledge the diversity of feminist positions regarding political participation and the state in theory and in practice. Feminists were divided from the outset over how far to engage with mainstream political institutions. Radical

and Marxist feminists tended to depict themselves as revolutionaries and liberal feminists as 'reformist'. In practice, all these groupings mounted campaigns directed at the central or local political authorities, and over time, feminists of all kinds seemed increasingly willing to engage in conventional politics. To a large extent, the reformist perspective won out and at the same time women, including feminists, have made steady inroads into political institutions and the professions. But anxieties about the perils of co-option and de-radicalization have not entirely disappeared. In Britain, for instance, the advent of the 'New Labour' government in 1997 and the election of 120 women MPs sparked them anew.

These differing approaches to political activism were associated with different conceptions of the political. The real inspiration for new thinking, however, was radical feminism, which called into question the conventional understanding of the scope and nature of politics, rejecting its distinction between private and public spheres, and highlighting the ubiquitous role of male power or patriarchy and the masculine character of mainstream political institutions.

To take first the question of the scope of politics, traditional political science has included different views. One very influential strand, however, has understood politics primarily as a distinctive kind of public activity. Some, including Marxists, have preferred a concept of politics that associates it more intimately with power – that is generally of the 'power over' kind – as in the 'Who gets what, when, where, how?' formula. This notion of politics in principle does not presume a distinct public political arena. However, in practice, many political scientists of all persuasions have overwhelmingly opted to study processes centred in government and surrounding political institutions.

For feminist analysis this definition of politics is much too restrictive. Radical feminism in particular has argued for the broader conception of politics as relationships of power but with the emphasis on those between men and women and whenever and wherever they occur – as much, if not more, in the bed or the kitchen, for example, as in Westminster or Whitehall. The approach was summed up, for many, in the slogan 'the personal is political', although recently this distillation has seemed vulnerable to misinterpretation as '*only* the personal is political'.

Feminist political scientists seeking to foreground and explain the under-representation of women in the conventional political sphere have been bound to grapple with the question of what we are to mean by politics. Many have argued the need to go beyond more institutional or formal kinds of political participation, to include involvement in social movement networks, community activism and so on, what might now be referred to as 'civil society' (Randall, 1987). Some more recently have been attracted by the analytical approach offered by Foucault, which

focuses on political 'micro-practices' or the exercise of power and simultaneous resistance at the micro-level of society (Fraser, 1989; Cooper, 1994).

This question of scope raises the further issue of the boundaries of political science as a discipline. If political science needs to take a much broader view of its subjectmatter, what does this mean for the relationship between political science and other disciplines? The boundary between political science and sociology appears particularly arbitrary: much of what sociology deals with – family relationships, sexual behaviour, welfare functions – look pretty political to a feminist. Should political science expand to embrace these aspects of the social or is the problem more fundamentally the way the traditional disciplines have been constructed around male understandings? In practice, feminist political scientists have expanded the range of subject matter that is considered appropriate for political analysis, and have pointed out the often arbitrary nature of disciplinary boundaries from a gender perspective, though not necessarily advocating the thoroughly interdisciplinary approach associated with 'women's studies'.

Second, in arguing that politics was ubiquitous, radical feminism was calling into question the conventional distinction between public and private spheres. It regarded this distinction simply as an ideological device through which to legitimize the continuing exclusion and oppression of women. Feminists working within the discipline of political science have absorbed this perception to the extent that they have been interested in exploring and demonstrating the close interdependence of public and private spheres. As feminist activists have helped to bring 'private' issues like domestic violence, abortion or childcare, onto the public policy agenda, feminist political scientists have undertaken studies of policy-making in these fields. However, they have been more reluctant to abandon the public–private distinction entirely. They see that to the extent that it has shaped social behaviour, it needs to be taken into account. Indeed, without condoning the division, many have found it to have considerable explanatory power.

But while a feminist perspective does not necessarily require the public–private framework to be jettisoned, it does suggest the need to approach this framework much more critically. Moller Okin (1991) has provided a particularly effective dissection of the public–private distinction in liberal thinking, noting two major areas of ambiguity. One is the use of public–private to refer both to the distinction between state and society/economy, as in public and private ownership, and to the distinction between state and the family or domestic sphere. In the first, the socio-economic realm is in the private while in the second, it is in the public sphere. The second has resulted from traditional identification of

the household with its male head and the consequent failure to recognize that his right to privacy could precisely deny privacy to other household members.

Third, underpinning the radical feminist critique of conventional understandings of the meaning of politics was the ideologically powerful, if undertheorized, notion of 'patriarchy' or systematic male dominance. Patriarchy, while it worked through different levels and agencies – sexuality, physical force, control over reproduction, the church, the state and so forth – had a basic unity which was what called the public–private distinction into question. The radical feminist notion of patriarchy was taken up more widely and elaborated in different ways. At the same time, other feminist strands criticized its tendency to be ahistorical, to disregard cultural differences, to underestimate women's sources of power – and in all these ways to falsely 'universalize' women's experience.

Some feminist academics have sought to impart greater rigour and specificity. Pateman (1983) traced the changing articulation of patriarchy in normative political theory, from a traditional form of authority based on the rights of the patriarchal family head into a 'sexual contract' subordinating women that remained the unacknowledged premise of the modern 'fraternal' contract between men. Pateman (1983) and Walby (1990) identified a gradual shift in Western society from private patriarchy, based on men's power within the home. to public patriarchy in which women had exchanged dependence on their menfolk for dependence on the state, as employer, welfare provider and so on. Such ideas have been taken further in feminist analyses of the state, and specifically the welfare state, discussed below.

Finally, along with the concept of patriarchy, radical feminism promoted a view of politics, at least public politics, as intrinsically male: competitive, hierarchical, aggressive, and exclusively concerned with the furtherance of male interests. Feminist political scientists have generally been less inclined to accept such a determinist view. Some have, however, been interested in exploring the possibility that there either is or could be an alternative women's way of doing and thinking about politics, as in the idea of a distinct 'women's culture'. In a much-cited study, the feminist psychologist, Carole Gilligan, suggested on the basis of her own research findings that women tended to reason about moral questions in 'a different voice'. Where men focused on interests and more abstract rights and rules, associated with an ethic of justice, women, because of their greater involvement in personal relationships and caring responsibilities, were more likely to espouse an 'ethic of care' (Gilligan 1982). This helped to generate interest in the existence and potential contribution of a distinct 'ethic of care' that women could bring to public political life, as developed in particular by the feminist political theorist, Tronto (1993). Although

Tronto has been anxious to emphasize that such an ethic reflects not so much a female standpoint as a more generalized experience of subordination and that the ethic of care should be seen as supplementing rather than replacing established notions of justice.

To give a recent example, Mackay's analysis of the views and experiences of Scottish women councillors expressly examines how far they speak in a 'different voice' about care, as a burden and as a value. She draws in particular on Tronto's notion of a 'vocabulary of care', or the language in which care-related issues could be articulated in order to reveal the real distribution of caring responsibilities and the way that care-giving is devalued and obscured. In her interviews with 53 women councillors, she found that:

> Caring responsibilities were recognized by women politicians to constitute a disadvantage and constraint; conversely, caring was understood to be a source of strength and value. There was seen to be a need to place what Tronto has characterized as an 'ethic of care' centrally in political and social life ... However, there was a struggle to see this as a wholly legitimate political issue; and uncertainty as to how an 'ethic of care' might be introduced into current political systems. (Mackay, 1998: 265; see also Mackay, 2001)

Feminist political science has appeared, at least until recently, more interested in considering the difference that women's political participation could make than in examining directly the character and impact of 'masculinity' in politics. Sociologists such as Connell (1995), as well as feminist authors like the psychologist Segal (1990), have helped to generate a substantial literature exploring the social construction of masculinity, or masculinities. However, feminists working in the field of international relations have seemed readier to engage with this question than those in political science.

This may, however, be beginning to change. The topic of 'nationalism' and the 'nationstate' provides one instance. Nagel (1998) reflects in general terms on the relationship between Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (as opposed to subordinate forms of masculinity) and what she calls hegemonic nationalism. Waetjen (2004), in her case study of black on black violence in South Africa, takes issue with what she sees as the typical assumption that masculinity discourses are functional for nationalism; she argues that they actually contributed to the failure of Zulu nationalism and to political fragmentation within the anti-apartheid movement. Another example is Beckwith's analysis (2001: 299) of the role of masculinities in the construction of social movement repertoires of action. She shows how, in the case of the famous 1989 Pittston coalmin-

ers' strike in the United States, when the strike leaders introduced new tactics of non-violent civil disobedience, 'a gender frame that employed traditional mining masculinities was adopted as the foundation upon which the new repertoire rested'.

Summarizing once more, feminism and most notably Radical feminism entails a major critique of conventional understandings of the scope and character of politics: it rejects the public–private distinction as ideology, discerns an underlying system of patriarchy and condemns the masculinism of public politics. Feminist political scientists have been strongly influenced by these arguments even whilst applying their insights more cautiously and critically. They have challenged assumptions about the scope and disciplinary boundaries of political science; they have simultaneously questioned the public–private dichotomy and used it as a valuable analytical tool; and whilst not automatically endorsing them, they have taken up notions of patriarchy and the masculinity of mainstream politics as hypotheses to investigate or elaborate empirically.

Gendering the state

But whilst feminist political scientists have criticized the discipline's traditional concentration on mainstream political institutions and argued the need to expand conceptions of the political, they have also, and perhaps increasingly, devoted attention themselves to a gendered analysis of these very same institutions, or the 'state'. To begin with, Marxist and radical feminists, both drawing strongly on traditional 'leftist' thinking, absorbed the concept of the 'state' quite comfortably and uncritically into their perspectives. Although the state was regarded with deep suspicion, as an agent of capitalism and/or patriarchy, there was also felt to be a need for a distinctive and systematic feminist theory of the state which, however, did not really materialize.

Early radical feminists saw the state as simply a site and instrument of patriarchy, and to begin with, Marxist feminism offered a similarly functional account of the state's role in maintaining capitalism. As it sought increasingly to 'marry' class and gender analyses, the state was identified as the possible site where these two systems were reconciled (Eisenstein, 1979). In the 1980s the Marxist or socialist, feminist account of the state became more sophisticated and less determinist. Intellectually it drew on developments in Marxist theory allowing the capitalist state a degree of 'relative autonomy' from capitalism and recognizing that rather than being monolithic, the state consisted of multiple arenas in which political struggles could be waged. Such ideas were attractive because they sanctioned a more instrumentalist view of the state, thereby helping to

legitimize socialist feminists' growing involvement in mainstream political institutions. Many socialist feminists were subsequently drawn to more Foucauldian understandings of the circulation of power in which the contours of the state as such become extremely hazy.

These days we are less inclined to ask of a political ideology or perspective that it delivers something as categorical as a 'theory of the state'. It was never, in any case, all that clear what such a theory should entail. But while there may not be a 'grand' theory, feminist thinkers have increasingly grappled with both the constitutive and the more normative questions raised by

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Box 6.1   The Gendered State: Connell's Theoretical Framework

1. Connell offers a theory of the state that provides a framework for empirical analysis

2. The state helps to shape gender relations in its role as a central institution used in the gendered exercise of power. At the same time, the state's form and practice is influenced by the historical impact of gender relations and the continuing influence of contemporary gender politics

3. There is no such thing as a 'male state' but each empirical state can be viewed as offering a '*gender regime*' that is in turn linked to gender struggles and wider structures of society. The idea 'gender regime' portrays how the state embodies a historically influenced set of power relationships between men and women. The three main structures of a gender regime are:
    a. a gender division of labour amongst state employees and actors
    b. a gender hierarchy reflecting a structure of power
    c. a structure of cathexis or emotional attachments

4. The state can influence gender relations to a substantial but not unlimited degree and its structures and practices become involved with the historical process of generating and altering the basic components of the gender order.

5. Because it can both regulate and create the state has a major stake in gender politics. It provides a focus for interest-group formation and mobilization in sexual politics.

6. There is always the possibility of change. The state and gender relations are historically dynamic. Shocks and crisis tendencies can develop in the gender order which in turn opens up the prospects for new political possibilities.

Source: Connell (1990)

women's engagement with specific political institutions, processes and policies. To that extent, as Connell has argued, they have helped to develop aspects of an implicit feminist view of the state (see Box 6.1). Connell, who still provides perhaps the best account to date, draws on the literature to offer his own synthesis, which is more a framework for a theory than a theory but very useful nonetheless. He uses the term 'gender regime' to describe how the state embodies a set of power relationships between men and women, which is itself the precipitate of its earlier gender history. The gender regime operates through hierarchy, the division of labour and the structure of cathexis, or emotional attachment. Embodying gender in this way, the state is both impelled and enabled to regulate gender relations in society, thereby actually helping to reconstitute the categories being regulated and is thus 'involved in the historical process generating and transforming the basic components of the gender order' (Connell, 1990: 529).

Feminist social scientists have also contributed significantly to analyses of the Western 'welfare state'. They have debated amongst themselves how far particular welfare states are best seen as instances of 'public patriarchy' or as 'woman-friendly'. They have criticized the influential typology of welfare states propounded by Esping-Anderson (1990) for its neglect of gender questions, one suggestion being the need to consider how far social and economic policies have been predicated on a 'male breadwinner' model (see Lewis, 1997). And they have assessed the implications for women as employees and as mothers of the ongoing process of welfare state restructuring.

But there has also been a growing interest amongst feminist political scientists in providing a *gendered* account of particular political institutions. This is seen as the field of inquiry that follows on logically from the earlier questions about why women were politically under-represented and what difference women's participation could make. Now the emphasis is on the features of the institutional context that help to explain and shape women's participation, and which might indicate feminist strategy. Invoking the language of the 'new institutionalism', Chappell (2006: 225) describes this as a focus on the gendered 'logic of appropriateness' within institutions.

Earlier reference was made to a shift in feminist thinking from sex categories to the notion of gender, in which the socially constructed character of gender roles and identities was emphasized. Postmodernist feminists, we saw, subsequently queried the simple opposition of (given) sex and (socially constructed) gender, and even without this step the concept of gender is hardly straightforward: both actual and potential usage admit of infinite variation (Carver, 1998). Nonetheless, as Lovenduski (1998: 338) describes, feminist political scientists who experienced 'growing

dissatisfaction with the analytical utility of the concept of sex', have taken up gender as an organizing term. As Beckwith (2005: 131) notes, there are still inconsistencies in the ways that feminist political scientists understand the idea of gender: 'Our common language of gender … is not yet fully established.' She proposes, however, that they should agree on the meaning of gender as a category as 'the multidimensional mapping of socially constructed, fluid, politically relevant identities, values, conventions and practices conceived of as masculine and/or feminine'. Gender is deployed as a category but also increasingly as a *process*, by which institutions are 'gendered'. In this sense, again following Beckwith (2005) it can refer either to the effects of structures and policies on men and women or to the means by which men and women 'actively work to produce favourable gendered outcomes'.

An influential early collection of essays that helped to establish this approach was edited by Savage and Witz (1992). Illustrating how arbitrary disciplinary boundaries can often seem when dealing with gender issues, it ranges over many different forms of bureaucracy (not all of them governmental) and draws heavily on the sociology of organizations. But in addition to the editors' valuable overview of the field, Halford (1992) provided an excellent illustration of the gendered analysis of political institutions in her study of the difficulties encountered by 'women's initiatives' (as promoted by women's committees, women's officers and so forth) in British local government authorities.

This kind of gendered institutions approach has been applied in an expanding range of institutional and country settings. A recent instance is Dema's examination (2008) of the development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Spain. Relying primarily on in-depth interviews, deliberately targeted to reflect the variety of voices and experiences within the NGOs, Dema explores the contradiction between the explicit discourses of gender equality and high visibility of women on the one hand and the continuing reality of gender inequality on the other, within these organizations.

One of the most impressive examples of this approach however is Kathlene's much cited study (1995) of gender power dynamics in US state legislative committees. Kathlene is disputing the widespread assumption that increasing the number of women elected to public office will automatically increase their influence within legislative arenas. In the US, for state legislators, individual influence over the policy-making process lies mainly in committees and sub-committees. If legislative committees are genuinely gender-neutral, she suggests, female committee chairs should have the same opportunities to influence the legislative process as male chairs. And similarly, if there is a sufficient proportion or 'critical mass' of women committee members, 'the effects of tokenism and marginalization

should be eliminated, allowing women to join freely in the debate on bills' (1995: 168). On the other hand, and illustrating the readiness of many feminist political scientists to draw on research methods and findings outside the narrowly defined sphere of political science, Kathlene cites analysis of women's experience in the workplace which indicates that 'sexism rather than group size produces inequities ... and highly masculinized occupations become more, not less, resistant to rapidly increasing numbers of women' (1995: 167).

Kathlene explores this question through an examination of the verbal dynamics of committee hearings. During 1989 a series of committee hearings were taped in the lower house of the state legislature of Colorado, where the proportion of women representatives at 33 per cent was relatively high. Kathlene uses these data to analyze the verbal interventions of the different participants – chairs, members and witnesses – looking at such aspects as the percentage of time that had elapsed at the point when the speaker entered the discussion, the frequency of words spoken and turns taken and the percentage of interruptions made and received. The actual findings of her study are complex. Position does make a difference; for instance men and women chairs acted more like each other than their male and females counterparts in other positional roles. But sex is also unmistakeably significant. Thus women chairing committees spoke less, took fewer turns and made fewer interruptions than corresponding men chairs. Sex was likewise a powerful predictor of verbal participation in hearings by committee members. Participation by members and witnesses was often affected by whether the chair was a man or a woman: for instance under a female chair, male witnesses demonstrated increased verbal aggressiveness, even interrupting the chair.

Besides analysing verbal behaviour statistically, Kathlene considers modes of address. She observes that

> A woman who testified was usually addressed by her first name by male chairpersons, whether she was an unknown expert or citizen or a familiar lobbyist or bureaucrat; but a witness who was a man received a title in front of his name, both at the time of introduction and at the conclusion of his remarks... The most egregious example of this sexist treatment occurred in a hearing on a health issue where several doctors testified. Although the woman witness clearly stated her title and name as 'Dr Elisa Jones' (author: this is a fictitious name), the male chairperson addressed her repeatedly as 'Elisa' and finally thanked 'Mrs Jones' for her testimony. Needless to say, none of the male doctors were referred to as anything but 'Dr Surname'. (1995: 180)

She also goes beyond verbal behaviour to look at the impact of seating

arrangements, finding that where these enabled women to sit closer to other women, they could have a positive impact on women members' interventions. Overall, Kathlene's study is a fine illustration of the potential of gendered institutional analysis, where it is imaginatively devised and carefully undertaken, to reveal the powerful, if complex, gender dynamics at work within formally gender-neutral political institutions.

Critical responses to feminist political science

The way a feminist perspective has been applied in political science has been criticized from a number of different vantage points (here the focus is on feminist political science rather than feminism *per se*, since it has been argued they are by no means the same thing).

Universalism

In the first place, since the diversity of viewpoints *within* feminism has to an extent been mirrored or incorporated in feminist political studies, some of the criticisms consist of forms of argument internal to the feminist enterprise itself. So earlier feminist political science has been criticized, at least implicitly, for too 'universalistic' a conception of woman that insufficiently recognized the diversity amongst women, the fact indeed that there could be profound conflicts of interest and perception between groups of women.

Essentialism

Closely related has been the charge of 'essentialism', although as Squires discusses, in feminist theory this term is 'much overused and very confused' (Squires, 1999: 66). Those favouring a social constructionist account of identity tended to equate essentialism with biological determinism but they have been criticized by post-structuralists in turn, for a kind of residual essentialism constituted at the material or symbolic level. Within the canon, 'essentialism remains a term still uttered in a tone of contempt' (Quinby cited in Squires, 1999: 67). This raises the question to be returned to in the final section of how far, so long as we are feminists, we either can or should want to escape all hint of essentialist thinking.

Uncritical

But it has been noted that feminist thinking as a whole, and most significantly, women's studies and feminism within other disciplines, have

shown little interest in or approval for feminist political science (Sapiro, 1998). This suggests a second line of criticism, that could be made from a feminist perspective, which is that feminist political science has not been bold enough. It has not pursued the feminist analysis of politics to its most radical conclusions. In practice, certainly whilst feminist political science was establishing itself, there was a tendency, as we have seen, to adopt fairly uncritically traditional 'male' methods, especially quantitative analysis of aspects of political behaviour, that were considered the most rigorous and 'scientific' and that accorded highest status to the user. Within the field of international relations, some critics have perceived recent elements of de-radicalization or 'neo-feminism', as in the move from women to gender, together with increased readiness to adopt positivist methodologies (Squires and Weldes, 2007). But in the case of political science, there is less sense of an earlier heroic age but rather of continuing moderation. One general factor constraining feminist political science may be that women have played, and continue to play, a relatively marginal role in the profession and have experienced difficulty in their search for 'academic validation' (Lovenduski, 1998: 351) and career progression.

Restrictive

Related to this is the criticism that whilst feminist political science has raised important questions about the relationship between private and public political spheres, as these affect participation, policy-making and content, and so forth, in practice it has concentrated its attention too narrowly on that sphere or level of activity conventionally equated with the political. By the same token it has not sufficiently challenged the traditional boundaries between political studies and cognate disciplines, although, as I have described, feminist political scientists have been increasingly willing to make use of frameworks and methods drawn from other discipline areas. Up to a point, of course, this is again explicable in terms of the difficulties women political scientists face in establishing themselves within the discipline. As Kenney suggests, 'the discipline values more highly work that addresses central or fundamental questions of the subfields rather than asks new ones or crosses subfields or disciplines' (Kenney, 1996: 447). So long as the existing disciplinary compartmentalisation of training and research remains, moving too far out from its traditional core region must pose a threat to the identity of political science, and its claims to expertise. Unfortunately, the traditional parameters of political science reflect a strongly masculine experience and concept of politics, which tends to cut across the 'wide-angle lens' (Carroll and Zerilli, 1993: 60) that is needed to give a fully gendered account.

Ineffective

But if feminist political science has been criticized for its timid or partial incorporation of feminist insights, perhaps its main 'failing' has been in bringing about significant change in the mainstream discipline. Political science, unlike sociology say, or history, remains remarkably undented by the feminist perspective. This is true in Britain but even in the United States 'despite the size of the gender politics community, and despite the fact that most political science departments now offer at least one course in the area, gender politics has not been fully integrated into political science; its theories, questions and conclusion have not been 'mainstreamed' to any significant degree' (Sapiro, 1998: 68). As already emphasized, political science remains a very 'male-dominated' profession. In addition to this, its core subjectmatter, the world of 'high politics', remains stubbornly masculine. As Phillips writes, 'feminism has been less successful in challenging "malestream" politics than in the near-revolution it has achieved elsewhere. We are living through a time of major transformation in sexual relations ... In politics, by contrast, it still seems like business as usual' (Phillips, 1998: 1).

Conclusion: the way forward

Squires summarizes the feminist impulse as 'a political position aiming to alter the power balance between men and women in favour of women, complicated by the perception that there are power balances between women and that the category of women may itself be a product of patriarchal relations' (Squires, 1999: 76–7). Despite its internal diversity and debates, the feminist perspective is badly needed in political science. The achievements of feminist political science in ensuring a full and discerning account of women as political actors have been substantial, and whilst the limitations of this approach are increasingly recognized, it will go on being necessary. Feminist political science has also raised more fundamental questions about the way that politics is conceptualized, including the conventional distinction between public and private, and the implications for the scope and boundaries of political science as a discipline. The most recent trend is back towards a focus on political institutions but informed now by a more sophisticated conception of the complex ways they are constituted and operate, in order to demonstrate and explore their gendered character. Though the impact of feminism on the discipline remains somewhat marginal, as do women in the profession and in most arenas of 'high politics', as Phillips (1998) points out, there can be some intellectual advantages or opportunities to be found in marginality. The

ambiguous position of feminist political scientists questioning central elements of an established discipline both enables and encourages them to look 'outside' for perspectives and a language in which to construct and express an alternative viewpoint.

As, over time, the way in which feminism formulates its central problem has been continuously contested and revised, feminist political science has also, if gradually, had to re-articulate its agenda of inquiry. The universalized and unified concept of 'woman', originally defined in terms of its power relationship to 'man', has been increasingly called into question, to the point where it is really very difficult if not impossible to retrieve it from the days of political, and philosophical, innocence. Even so, there is no reason, it seems to me, to let go entirely of the idea that there may be differences between men and women that are relevant in particular political contexts. For instance, while not all women bear children or even want to, men (for the moment) cannot (Phillips, 1995). Many poststructuralist feminists are willing to entertain the notion of 'contingent femininity' (Coole, 1990) or some other form of 'strategic essentialism' (Nash, 1994). But in the move to 'gender' is also entailed a more systematic investigation of the masculinity of politics and political institutions. Of course, just as we have been compelled to recognize the diversity not just of women but of femininities, so we must acknowledge that there is not one single form of masculinity. Work is already beginning but in the future, feminist political science will need to engage more fully with questions surrounding the formation of masculinities, reflected in a growing body of literature and research, without losing hold of its original political commitment to women.

Further reading

- Bryson (1999) provides a highly accessible introduction to developing debates within feminism, whilst Squires (1999) is a more demanding text that analyzes these debates in the context of feminist political theory.
- Some of the questions about conceptions of 'the political' and of politics are taken up in Jones and Jonasdottir (1988), while McKay (2001) uses a case study to explore further the notion of 'an ethic of care'.
- In different ways Connell (1987), Phillips (1991) and Savage and Witz (1992) illustrate and take further interest in a feminist analysis of the state and political institutions. Useful recent additions to this literature are Beckwith (2005) on conceptualizing gender and Chappell (2006) on gender and comparative institutional analysis. Both Phillips (1998) and Randall and Waylen (1998) are also useful edited collections.
- To the extent that we now need to be looking more critically at assumptions about masculinity, Connell (1995) is an excellent starting point.

Marxism

DIARMUID MAGUIRE

One of the paradoxical outcomes of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the revival of Marxism. No longer were Marxists held responsible for sins of the Soviet Empire, the debate had shifted focus, to analyze less how 'socialism' did not work but how global capitalism is failing. Global capitalism has developed a system of production that involves sweatshops, outsourcing and temporary employment. The latest financial crisis has seen the reversal of free market principles with countries bailing out and nationalizing banks. Wars are being fought over oil with the Middle East and in Central Asia. In some large cities, mansions are protected by private security firms while slums are left with rundown public services. The environment is polluted and faces the effects of climate change. Finally, the struggle between global and indigenous cultures is resulting in loss of languages, but also opportunities for solidarity. Next time you enter your local bookshop witness the predominance of books on these issues that Marxists would interpret as stemming from global capital. Most of the writers of these books are by no means Marxists, but we can see how *Marxism*, in terms of the questions it poses has become 'the common sense of our epoch' (Halliday, 1994).

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, preferred 'good sense' to 'common sense', that is, he saw good sense as something achieved through analysis whereas common sense is bestowed passively. It is not difficult to find someone at random who will agree that the state system is dominated by greedy politicians, wars are fought over resources, and that national culture is dominated by outside powers. As they stand, these are areas of *opinion* around the role of the state, warfare, and culture. For Marxists, the transformation of 'common sense' into 'good sense' is achieved through *analysis*. In other words, seeing through the surface to an underlying reality is fundamental.

Marxism's contemporary arsenal is extensive. In this chapter we will leave aside the most fundamental aspect of Marxism as a political practice, namely, its emancipatory project, and focus instead on the range of political analysis that it offers. The chapter begins by looking at Marx's

Box 7.1 Some contemporary Marxist perspectives

Political economy The economic role of class under capitalism produces global structures which everyone must adapt to 'on pain of extinction' (Marx and Engels, 1848). The inherent contractions of this system would ultimately see its demise. Leo Panitch (2009) discusses recent interest in Marxist political economy.

Nationalism The problem of nationalism has been the main problem for Marxists since the nineteenth century. Ben Anderson (2008) takes an historical materialist approach to this issue, arguing that nation is born from print capitalism, develops culturally, and plays an independent role in nations and states.

State formation Barrington Moore Jr (1966) argues that different class formations and alignments produce different types of states.

Nation state Globalism or the nation state is rejected as a simple choice by Ellen Meiskins Wood (2003). She argues that the nation state plays an important policing role for global capitalism.

Neo-Gramscian approach The international system requires hegemony to keep relations under international capitalism intact. According to Robert Cox (1981, 1999) and Stephen Gill (1999, 2003) this hegemony is maintained by power and consent at the international level (socially, economically and politically).

World System Theory The world system is dominated by the core and its relationship with the periphery. The semi-periphery plays an intermediate role. According to Wallerstein (2004), the relationship between these three zones is dominated by trade and geopolitics.

Space David Harvey (2006) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) contend that geographic space is crucial to the workings of capital and labour. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization play a dialectical role across all boundaries established by people. Ira Katznelson (1981, 1993) studies the importance of this at the urban level.

Political culture E.P. Thompson (1980) argued that social classes are also a cultural formation. Walter Benjamin (1933) observed how technology shocks the cultural imagination. Franco Moretti (2000) used World System Theory to examine the emergence of world literature. All assert the interwoven nature of culture with class and capital.

theory of political economy through the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 to examining theoretical developments around the financial crisis of 2008–9. Then we shall consider Marxist theories of international relations centring

on the relationship between capitalism, the state, and the interstate system. The unfolding of the Iraq War will be used as a case study to test various Marxist accounts of the motivations for George Bush's American government in going to war. Marxist works in comparative politics typically question the inherent globalism of the original Marxist model. An examination of contemporary Marxist comparisons of nations, states, geographic boundaries, and cultures – most of which are empirical – will be used against the original global model of Marxism. Marxism, as we shall see in the areas of urban politics and cultural studies, has created new approaches within a broad Marxian framework that both strengthen and complicate underlying concepts.

Marxism in general examines how capitalism operates at social, economic and political levels and thereby affects and is affected by the role of the state, international relations, spatial relations and culture. Marxism stems from the secular Enlightenment and is based on foundationalist ontology, meaning in this instance that the science or epistemology of Marxism seeks to discover the essence of capital as opposed to its appearance. Essence is based on what happens in the real world with, for example, capital exploiting labour power in order to make profit. This stands in stark contrast to mere appearance with capital (or the market) depicted as logical and just. Epistemologically, Marxism seeks the empirical excavation of reality based through close attention to history and materialism, to discover the links between social, economic and political life (see Box 7.1). This requires a dialectical approach to reality involving dynamic, transformative, and the contradictory nature of social existence. Some contemporary Marxists maintain this original demand for a grand theory while others call for a plurality of approaches founded on diverse epistemologies and methodologies.

The continuing relevance of Marxism: From Communist Manifesto to No Logo

It is important to understand how Marxism was formed in order to understand its development and evolution. According to classical Marxism, capitalism introduces a complimentary and contradictory (that is, dialectical) relationship between wage labour and capital. This relationship is established through linking the means of production, that is, labour and technology. In turn, this process was subject to relations of production and exchange, defined narrowly as the organizational arrangements for circulation of commodities. A broader definition of the relations of production and exchange relates to the many requirements of production such as labour contracts, maintaining agreements around

delivery of goods, managing the interactions between producer and consumer, but also to socio-economic and political forces more generally. At its most basic, capitalism organized a workforce which was free to work and got paid. For Marx, this was both liberating and oppressive: workers had the freedom to choose between jobs but they all had to sell their labour power: simply put, just as you will have many different jobs in your working life you will always be selling your labour power.

In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848 Marx and Engels wrote: 'The history of all hitherto existing society has been the history of class struggle.' Marxism begins with a capitalist mode of development at the global level within a system of exploitation that sustains but paradoxically undermines it. Capitalism arises *within* a system of production that already exists, namely feudalism; capitalism becomes the new system of class exploitation. For Marx, capitalism was confined to a handful of countries in the West but it would spread worldwide and engulf pre-capitalist modes of production and exploitation. Capitalism was preceded by the slave mode of production. The 'feudal system of industry' (Tucker, 1978: 473) with privileged labour and national markets was surpassed by a bourgeoisie demanding wage labour and access to global markets. The bourgeoisie continually changes 'the instruments of production' (Tucker, 1978: 476) with marvellous achievements but little thought for the consequences. The *Communist Manifesto* is a hymn to the bourgeoisie and praises its tremendous accomplishments. It also serves as a warning about the growing power of wage labour with socialism and communism portrayed as the next two stages in history.

It is important to realize that Marx wanted to see full-scale capitalism introduced into 'every quarter of the globe' (Tucker, 1978: 476). He had little time for those seeking a nostalgic return to an imagined past (for example, Old Money proclaiming superiority over New Money) or for various forms of socialism that offer only reform or utopia. For Marx, it was imperative that the bourgeoisie globalized the economy. This would create the contradictions that would lead to an international working class coming to power. Most importantly, the working class would be enlightened as a result of entering into wage labour under the constantly changing political and economic conditions established by global capitalism. As Marx and Engels wrote:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned,

and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind. (Cited in Tucker, 1978: 476)

Here Marx linked socio-economic relations as experienced through wage labour to Enlightenment ideals about doing away with superstition: people would be 'compelled to face with sober senses' the 'real condition of life'. Direct exploitation of the workforce therefore stripped the relationship between dominant and subordinated class of any excuse other than brute reason. The worker was not being exploited due to inferiority or religion (Tucker, 1978: 475), but as a result of selling labour power in a competitive situation. That is, the bourgeoisie produces capital through exploiting labour directly. As a result, Marx praised the bourgeoisie for initiating a socio-economic system in which 'all that is solid melts into air' (Tucker, 1978: 476). Reason, manifest as capital, dictates that everything can be bought and sold within the market, introducing 'uncertainly and agitation' in social life with everyone forced to adapt 'on pain of extinction' (Tucker, 1978: 477).

In some ways, translating these initial claims about political economy in 1848 to recent events in the early 21st century stands the test of time. Although 'class struggle' is difficult to measure beyond the traditional role of strikes and mass demonstrations, recent events in Europe, the Americas and Asia suggest that at least this form of protest is likely to continue. The contention that the working class has disappeared (made by Gorz, 1983) is based on examining trends within Western countries rather than global trends and usually refers to industrial workers. Alex Callinicos (1989: 125) stated that the percentage of industrial workers had risen at a global scale; more recent figures (ILO, 2009) confirm that in 2008 three billion people, or 61 per cent of the population were wage workers. This represents a minor increase, in total terms, over 2007. While it is true that the majority of wage workers within the West do not come from the manufacturing working class this has little effect in terms of capitalist exploitation (Callinicos, 1989: 127), and in new arenas of work such as those reserved for casual, part-time and migrant labour.

In the contemporary context we see capitalism survive off pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, in the worst cases slavery to new forms of exploitation such as casualization. This has been documented by Naomi Klein (2001), whose popular book *No Logo* helped form the corporate anti-globalization movement. In this book she highlights how North America simultaneously exploits low paid labour domestically and lower paid labour abroad operating with unsafe work practices. This analysis could explain why capital has been attracted to China: it provides a large labour force which is lowly paid, no independent trade unions, and unsafe work conditions. The wage labourer in China now has the 'freedom' to

choose amongst jobs available and to leave the land and live in big cities, but this freedom is limited by both the power of the state and capitalism. However, labourers must spend more of their income on resources that were previously free, due to increasing disparities in income within Chinese society.

During the financial crisis of 2008–9 it was not difficult to argue that capitalism continues to suffer from over-production and over-investment. The global economy is presented by the media to its audience as a mathematical puzzle that individuals or households must resolve practically. News on interest rate levels, the stock market and business reports highlights the need to have a financial adviser, for those who can afford one. The distribution of loans is a sophisticated form of taking 'a second dip' into the surplus (Bryan, 2008). Or as Marx himself put it: once a worker was paid he would be set upon by 'the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker' (Tucker, 1978: 479). Furthermore, in examining the role of states, it is undeniable that during severe crises they bail out financial institutions, nationalize them temporarily and, in the case of the United States, spend money to save automobile companies or banks. From the perspective of classical Marxism, the state attempts to manage the affairs of capitalism by taking action to resist global depression.

Continuing problems in Marxism

Marx's universal attempts to demystify the role of capital and labour as well as state and inter-state relations contrasted with historically based theories portrayed in *The Civil Wars in France* (Marx, 1871) or *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx, 1852). These two works dealt with how the French state with its peculiar bureaucracy dealt with both the French bourgeoisie and an emerging French working class. In other words, the state had a degree of autonomy which Marx's work addressed but failed to include theoretically. Three points are made within Marx's political economy which continue to dog later Marxists.

First, the idea that capitalism is condemned to over-production and crises introduced a sense of automaticity or inevitability to this model. Kees van der Pijl (2007: 625) has put it: 'One of the mistakes often made is to assume that capitalist development drives forward socialization "objectively", so that, at some point, only the capitalist shell has to be removed and we have the finished infrastructure of a socialist society.' Economic development, civil society and the state move according to related but separate delineations. During the First World War, the Bolsheviks were able to seize power in a period of state breakdown in Russia while their Western counterparts in Italy and Germany were

unable to repeat this because of state strength in both countries. Italian communist leader Antonio Gramsci called for more reconnaissance on *national* situations with greater attention to *political* forces.

The era of communist parties producing radical change has ended with attention turned now to looser and more inclusive collectives like the anti-corporate globalization movement. Structurally, capitalism is dominated by exploitation, discovery of new markets and development of new instruments of production and this system creates unintentional outcomes due to over-production. At this stage, Marx described the capitalist as 'the sorcerer' deprived of its powers. Yet the solution for these crises of 'over-investment and over-production' is typically devaluation of capital, labour and prices, therefore 'the seeds of recovery are within the crisis itself' (Desai, 2002: 77). In fact, Marx (1867) in *Capital* wondered whether capitalism is designed to fall as a result of internal contradictions, or if capitalism has automatic powers of regeneration. This brings in the question of agency. Bob Jessop's (2002, 2008) development of the strategic-relational approach allows us to understand how 'structure and agency' works routinely but also in these sorts of crises: 'Structures are thereby treated analytically as strategically-selective in their form, content, and operation; and actions are likewise treated as structurally constrained, more or less context-sensitive, and structuring.'

Second, the nation state is portrayed as 'the Executive Committee managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie', with limited options for the working class to intervene in a progressive fashion. This declaration does not fare well under comparison. How can Marxists explain nation states improving (or impairing) the conditions of workers in countries like Sweden or Brazil? One way is to examine the nature of living conditions at the national level by engaging in comparative analysis. However, Przeworski (1986) uses this approach analytically to suggest that social democracy is the best that labour could hope for due, in part, to the fact that full scale socialism would see international disinvestment. Paradoxically, this argument reinforces Marx's idea of the limited role of states within the international system. Politics is reduced to a mere epiphenomenon, hemmed in by structures of individual economic choice and collective political cost. In explaining the logic of social democracy, Przeworski (1986) uses rational choice to explain how the economic base largely determines the political superstructure within an analytical framework that is dichotomous rather than dialectical.

Third, the *Communist Manifesto* and *No Logo* call on workers to cooperate internationally rather than compete with each other nationally. The popularity of nationalism was Marxism's key rival in the 20th Century with two world wars plus wars fought between communist states. Marx had called for workers to unite on the basis of international

interest but workers, instead, were recruited and indeed supported war on the basis of nationalistic identity. Lenin tried to come up with an economic explanation of the First World War in 'Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism.' Lenin stated that this war broke out due to rivalry amongst monopoly capital for colonial possession. Analyzing war in the modern age of 'the brand' (Klein, 2001) or under 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2008) provides interesting insights, particularly with the privatization of military affairs. However, Benedict Anderson (2008) casts doubt on the Marxist interpretation of warfare by portraying nationalism as a creation of print capitalism and popular imagination. In his view, nationalism is not necessarily imposed upon the working class and, in interpreting warfare between nations, must be compared within their imagined and concrete geopolitical settings.

Marxism and international relations

Marxist analyses of the global economy sit uncomfortably beside explanations of how nation states operate within the international arena. Lenin came up with a new explanation of the relationship between the international economy and the interstate system when war broke out in 1914. The dependency school epitomized Lenin's reasoning in part, but is used to examine how advanced countries maintain a system impoverishing large parts of the world population. World Systems Theory developed from this school (Wallerstein, 2004), contending that ruling powers have dominated a world system of trade since the 16th century. Outside of this theoretical development stand the neo-Gramscians (Cox, 1981) using Gramsci's theory of hegemony originally developed to examine political forces domestically. After a brief examination of these theories we shall test how they relate to the outbreak of the Iraq War in 2003.

Classical Marxism, like classical liberalism, has great problems in dealing with nationalism and the nation state with little left to construct a theory of international relations. The premise of a global economy automatically resulting in global interdependence among capitalists and international cooperation within labour broke down at the turn of the 20th century. The growth of independent states with divergent interests resulted in the First World War which Lenin tried to explain through his theory of monopoly capitalism and imperialism. Lenin claimed that monopoly capitalism through European nation states exploited the colonies with internal warfare as the ultimate arbiter. At the level of international relations, Lenin developed a theory of imperialism through capitalist geopolitics explaining inter-state conflict as a result of colonialism. Finance capital, in particular, fuelled this system of monopoly production

that depended on raw materials from the colonies, the ownership of which led to war.

Within international relations as an academic discipline, Lenin's approach was developed and modified. Imperialism or dependency was taken as an explanation for the brutal forms of capitalism that affected Africa and Latin America (Andre Gunter Frank, 1967; F. H. Cardoso, 2001). For example, rice, rubber and coffee beans are mono-crops; and copper, oil and diamonds are mono-industries. With inequitable terms of trade and external control of elites, countries like Britain and America were able to reap vast surpluses. Attempts at resistance to imperialism would see military coups (Chile, 1973) or war (Algeria, 1954–1962, or Iraq from 2003). Liberals portray the possession of natural resources as an internal 'curse' undermining economic and state development. Dependency theorists argue that this curse is imposed externally by the nature of uneven development, that is, inequitable terms of trade. Some workers seek to overcome this external divide through migration to countries with better standards of pay. Joseph Nevins (2007), for example, has provided a grim study of deaths of would-be migrants in the Mexican desert, carefully demonstrating how workers sought to escape to North America due to a massive decline in coffee prices in their area of origin.

Marxism still faces the problem of providing a 'useful' explanation of the North–South divide in international relations while leaving other problems untouched (Halliday, 1994). An attempt to overcome this marginalization was undertaken by Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) who developed World System Theory, seeking to explain this divide within an international system that had developed over centuries. Under his theory, the world is divided into three economic systems (core, periphery, and semi-periphery) and patrolled geopolitically by the main powers. First, the *core* imports raw materials, exports high-tech manufactured goods, and finances capitalism globally. The core has high cost labour and assumes responsibility, economically and militarily, of maintaining the world system. Second, the *periphery* exports raw material, imports manufactured goods and is dependent on global finance. The periphery exists as a result of high extraction of surplus from impoverished labour. Finally, the *semi-periphery* plays an intermediary role, having some characteristics of the core and periphery, and mollifies the workings of the world system. Classical Marxist notions such as crises of under-consumption and over-consumption are accepted by Wallerstein but this theory has been criticized for matching trade with labour, and both with power (Brenner, 1977: 30). Other claims made in World Systems Theory are geopolitical in nature and discuss Britain as a major power in the 19th Century, American power in the 20th century and the potential of Chinese power (Arrighi, 2007) in the 21st. Wallerstein (2003 a, b) claims that the

US is in terminal decline because of its over-commitment to this system, economically and politically.

An alternative viewpoint was developed by Robert Cox (1981, 1999) who used the concepts that Antonio Gramsci developed domestically and framed them within international relations. Cox (1981: 128) wrote that 'Theory is always for some one, and for some purpose'; thus knowledge and understanding cannot be objective and timeless. Importantly, this article linked socio-economic forces, locally and internationally, to the role of nation states and world order. For example, the US has established dominant ideas within the world economy, the acceptance of which reflects their hegemony in the world system. As Cox writes:

> Hegemony is a structure of values and understandings about the nature of order that permeates a whole system of states and non-state entities. In a hegemonic order these values and understandings are relatively stable and unquestioned. They appear to most actors as the natural order. Such a structure of meanings is underpinned by a structure of power, in which most probably one state is dominant but that state's dominance is not sufficient to create hegemony. (Cited in Gill 1993: 42)

However, counter-hegemony is linked to international hegemony through political resistance. For example, it might be argued that the hegemony of the US in Latin America is challenged by social forces and political institutions currently prevalent in Venezuela and Bolivia. Counter hegemonic manoeuvres against US hegemony are widespread within states and civil society (see Persaud, 2001), with the struggle over hegemony involving political calculations by the actors involved.

Insights from contemporary Marxist analysis

Marxist analysis of the war in Iraq, 2003

Which of the Marxist approaches to international relations above can be best used to explain the underlying motivations for the US-led war in Iraq in 2003? A neo-Gramscian approach might examine how the US tried to use world sympathy over the September 11th attack to challenge Iraq directly. The social forces behind this attack may have included the material demand for oil, popular pressure on state institutions for revenge against any Arab state, and the desire by elites to enforce hegemony through the war on terror. Counter hegemony, on the other hand, emerged not only with the national resistance of Iraq but through an

international movement against the war. One author (Paul, 2007) uses a neo-Gramscian analysis to explain the outbreak of this war in terms of opportunities taken up by neoconservatives after 9/11 arguing that oil played no role in terms of motivation.

The approach of Wallerstein (2003b) essentially adopts a geopolitical position around the role of America in this war. He argues that oil is already under the global control of the US and there was no need to further this dominance by launching a war on Iraq. Instead, this move was taken to intimidate rising nuclear powers and to facilitate military bases in this area. Wallerstein uses geopolitics to discuss issues such as Iraq free from his theory about the inner workings of The World System. Thus despite chants from protestors of 'No Blood for Oil', we should note that two Marxist theories here presented, do not see this equation as a necessary stimulant for war.

According to the traditional Marxist explanation, the war in Iraq was fought by monopoly capital, using national (and private) armies, to ensure vital oil supplies while reordering the hierarchy of finance among nations. This latter point is supported by the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, who wrote in 2007: 'I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil' (cited in Michael Klare, 2008). Dependency theorists would claim that Greenspan should know since he advised the White House to get rid of Sadaam Hussein purely on economic grounds. This theory of imperialism provides certainly the most parsimonious explanation of this war but that does not mean it is the most accurate.

Explaining events like the Iraq War using existing Marxist approaches to international relations operates at a higher level of abstraction. Left unaddressed are questions about the history of the Iraqi state, its role with other states in the region and possible outcomes after invasion. Examining class politics within specific states usefully corrects generic theories of the state and civil society but linking comparative analysis to the international arena has also been an important task for Marxists. Specific states and social forces cannot be explained historically without reference to their particular role in global production and exchange and it is doubtful that Iraq would have been invaded if it were not in an oil rich area. At the same time, the war in Iraq heightened ethnic violence with long term consequences not only for that state but also other states nearby. By analyzing these subsequent events, contemporary Marxism challenges the ahistorical basis of mainstream international relations that tends to diminish the value of comparative inquiry (see Tetchke, 2003). Contemporary Marxism takes on the difficult task of combining international relations and comparative politics into a single area of study.

The financial crisis, 2008–2009: comparative or international?

Marxists might start their explanation of the financial crisis that started to be observed in 2008 as characteristic of the proneness of capitalism to shocks and crises. Naomi Klein's book on disaster capitalism (*The Shock Doctrine,* 2008) captures the idea that capitalism and spectacular failures go hand in hand. Further, she suggests that some of the original architects of neoliberalism, such as Milton Friedman within the Chicago School, have produced hyper-capitalist reforms through shocks such as the coup in Chile, the downfall of the Soviet Union, and Iraq through literal 'shock and awe'. American control over how other states distributed surplus is a function of geopolitical shock, accidental or induced, with the involvement of advisors from the Chicago School to insist on neoliberalism as the solution. She writes:

> By 1999, the Chicago School international alumni include more than twenty-five government ministers and more than a dozen central bank presidents from Israel to Costa Rica, an extraordinary level of influence for one university department. In Argentina, as in so many other countries, the Chicago Boys formed a kind of ideological pincer around the government, one group squeezing from within, another exerting its pressure on Washington … A book published in Argentina about the effects of this global economic fraternity is aptly titled *Buenos Muchachos*, a reference to Martin Scorsese's mafia classic, *Goodfellas*. (Klein, 2008: 166)

From 2008, the US financial system itself has been subject to 'shock therapy', not necessarily to the advantage of neoliberalism: in fact, there has been a mini-revival of Keynesianism through nationalization and state subsidies.

Explaining the outbreak of the financial crisis, Panitch and Gindin (2008) maintain that first of all, we must understand the relationship between capitalist states and finance: that is, 'the guarantee the state provides to property, above all in the form of the promise not to default on its bonds – which are themselves the foundation of financial markets' role in capitalist accumulation'. As a result, it is not surprising that banks and investment companies obtain state finance during crises, with some banks being nationalized, at least temporarily. According to Panitch and Gindin (2008), these steps are taken in order to avoid 'a run on the dollar', in terms of backing given to the system from Chinese and Japanese banks. They then make this important theoretical point on the issue of whether America can be seen in national terms or global terms:

The American state cannot act in the interests of American capitalism without also reflecting the logic of American capitalism's integration with global capitalism both economically and politically. This is why it is always misleading to portray the American state as merely representing its 'national interest' while ignoring the structural role it plays in the making and reproduction of global capitalism. (Panitch and Gindin, 2008)

From this perspective, one nation is portrayed as being enveloped within a global system and, therefore, its politics and policies defy separate analysis. Yet this financial crisis has also lead Marxist theorists to emphasise the City of London, as it plays a greater role in currency exchange than the US (Bryan, 2008). These points of comparison regarding the US and other areas are important, even within a supposedly global system of finance. Furthermore, theorists will use this crisis to measure whether US hegemony is in decline overall. Dick Bryan (2008) has calculated, for example, whether US owned companies are in deficit or surplus. His finding is that while 'the US [territorial] space is in deficit, US companies globally are in surplus' and therefore those who argue in favour of US decline need to be careful. If the attributes of US hegemony are measured by comparing company performance in territorial space as opposed to global space, the contribution of Marxist geographers must be considered.

Developing Marxism: nations, states, spaces and cultures

This section examines Marxist approaches to comparing nations, states, spaces and cultures.

Nations and states

Bringing nationhood and statehood together is problematic due to the initial fact that there are more nations than nation states. Also, when we compare the role of classes in state formation, political regimes forged by class alliances emerge which balance the interest of capital against the long term interest of sovereignty (Harvey, 2006). These issues are negotiated at the level of spatial relations between global capital and nation states. And the comparison of political cultures not only highlights the abstract nature of that term but also the difficulty in separating comparative analysis from international relations with the broader ontological and epistemological impact on Marxism as a general theory.

In his work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson (2008: 10) has argued that it is difficult to imagine 'the Tomb for the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen liberals'. This, he claims, is testimony to the cultural strength of nationalism and its popular challenge to both Marxism and liberalism. The strength of nationalism has been demonstrated across the world, from European nation states to Indonesia, but also within nations formerly run by communist parties. Anderson utilises a Marxist approach by arguing that 'imagined communities' are established through print capitalism, allowing for the introduction of books and texts that allow people in one location to empathise with a narrative about fellow nationals in another location. He writes:

> What … made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and fatality of human linguistic diversity. (Anderson, 2008: 42–3)

Anderson uses the diversity of nations to compare national narratives and how international ideologies weave within particular national contexts.

The formation of nation states has been analyzed as a result of *internal* class struggle with very different outcomes nationally. Barrington Moore Jnr (Moore, 1966) challenged the Marxist global paradigm by using comparison to explain groups of states that adopted dictatorship or democracy. Through the comparison of class politics at *both* the agrarian and industrial levels, Moore was able to explain why various states went through the violence of democracy, fascism or communism. A simple version of this model is: that Britain ended up with democracy due to agrarian capitalism and the triumph of the industrial bourgeoisie over agrarian landlords; Germany experienced an unsuccessful bourgeois revolution, beginning in 1848, and the dominance of the agrarian landlords facilitated the rise of fascism in 1933; Russia encountered neither a successful bourgeoisie nor successful reaction from agrarian landlords, thus producing an alliance of peasants and workers and communism in 1917.

By comparing class struggle in specific historical situations, Moore is able to develop state formation in this threefold pattern. 'Who says bourgeois says democracy' states Moore, and this study led to later studies such as Wolf's (1999) which characterized communist revolutions as peasant revolts. This is a direct challenge to Marx's prediction that only the most industrialized nations with a strong proletariat would achieve revolution. These insights are important as industrial capitalism has only reached new parts of the globe, most notably in China, while areas like sub-Saharan Africa are subject to agrarian subsistence. Moore's theories

about the political effects of agrarian interests may still be useful, but perhaps only to a declining part of the world economy.

However, the central question of relating nationalism and state building into international relations still remains. Firstly, it is important to understand the relationship between global and comparative politics as they become more complex, in a national system subject to global forces of production and of politics, and a global system subject to national forces of production and of politics. Wood (1991) contends that the world of nation states is still important to the capitalist world system. She argues: 'Corrective pressures, from the state in particular, have been required to push capital beyond its limited, short-sighted and often self-defeating "rationality"' (Wood, 1991: 165). Wood further argues:

> The new imperialism, by contrast to older forms of empire, depends more than ever on a system of multiple and more or less sovereign national states. The very fact that 'globalisation' has extended capital's purely economic powers far beyond the range of any single nation state means that global capital requires *many* nation states to perform the administrative and coercive functions that sustain the system of property and provide the day-to-day regularity, predictability, and legal order that capitalism needs more than any other social form. (2003: 114)

This argument has been taken further by an acceptance that there are many forms of capital and that capital itself is subject to competitive pressure. Through these lines of inquiry, at least at the economic level, international and comparative studies cannot be separated.

Spatial politics

Political science began with considering the conduct of the state; now it faces the challenge on the continuing relevance of sovereignty. What does it mean to claim sovereign control over a particular territory at the social, economic and political levels? In addition, if these forms of control decay through the growth of the global market, does this signify the decline of all forms of territorial exploitation? From the perspective of Marxist geography, state sovereignty represents a *claim* to all activities within territorial space. Sovereign states own territorial space and their powers are based on their capacity to produce, distribute and exchange that space. Even if a state does not engage directly in economic production, something difficult to imagine, it still controls space. The value of this intangible 'product' is difficult to calculate, and it assumes different values depending on how exchange is managed.

To various extents, states control existing 'real estate' even under a system of private property, as Henri Lefebvre (1991: 378) put it: 'Nothing that happens within the nation's borders remains outside the scope of the state and its "services".' Permission is granted to multinationals to set up shop and the value of that space is negotiated by the state with other actors; thus, through the production and exchange of space, the state is an economic actor in its own right. If sovereignty means the control, production and exchange of territorial space, then attempts within the social sciences to strictly separate the political from the economic is without value or meaning. The state plays an economic role through its production and exchange of space but states are subject to resistance spatially by population. Social movements grab onto the temporary boundaries between state and civil society by mobilizing protestors within established public space as a result of past protests, but always threatened by a state not only using batons but also CCTV. Marxist geographers contend that capitalism seeks to (re)capture 'pre-existing space' (Lefebvre, 1991: 326) and there is a contest between state sovereignty and capitalism as well as cooperation. Harvey (2006: 107) asserts that the short-term needs of capitalism are opposed to the long-term territorial logic of states yet both are entrenched within a system run by capitalist states.

Marxists employ the territorial and the material not just at the level of state but also between regions or cities. The study of cities goes back to Engels's study of Manchester and this approach is now part of a rich vein of contemporary Marxist urban studies. Economically, cities are depicted as playing a crucial role in global chains and networks of production. Politically, cities are increasingly local sites of control and resistance that is expressed through the ballot box or protest activity on the streets. Socially, cities are marked by global slums but also play a leading role in promoting cosmopolitan culture through restaurants, art and music. Viewing the world from a city perspective offers great possibilities to Marxism, as seen in Davis' work, *The Planet of Slums* (2007).

Leading American political scientist, Ira Katznelson (1981: 1993) analyzed the role of cities in American life in order to explain American exceptionalism – that is, its failure to produce a socialist party like the parties that arose within Europe. Katznelson (1981) studied a working class community north of Manhattan to develop his answer. The first thing that Katznelson noticed is how communities differentiate between workplace and homes in Europe and America. In Europe, working class homes were established near workplaces, thus consolidating working class demands through mobilization within capitalist democracy. In America, residencies were separated on the basis of race, introducing a disjuncture between workplace and residence, taking into account early

working class enfranchise. This disjuncture allowed local politicians to construct coalitions based on race while trade unions represented the workers in the workplace. Therefore, workplace politics and residence politics resided in different geographical and political zones, thwarting the rise of socialism in America. This use of Marxist geography is highly suggestive and demonstrates the power of analysing issues using different geographical settings. Following in this tradition, Mike Davis (2006) has written a classic work called *City of Quartz* on Los Angeles which examines the politics of gated communities for the upper class and urban decay which is racially defined for the lower classes.

Political culture

Definitions of culture are wide and varied. Tracing the etymological nature of this term has led Raymond Williams (1983: 87) to conclude that it is 'one of the two or three most complicated terms in the English language'. As a result, culture is often left out of most political dictionaries (McLean and McMillan, 2003) even though it is relied on by political scientists to explain related theories. One dictionary, written for political scientists in Australia, is an honourable exception to this trend (Smith, Vromen and Cook, 2006). Generally, political science definitions of political culture are either ambiguous or absent, with this term used residually to explain untidy theoretical outcomes.

A narrow definition defines political culture as practices and reflections developed through the forms of music, film, art, literature. A broader definition is more inclusive, analyzing the practices and reflections of ordinary people with the aforementioned forms of culture but also adds an examination of how people converse, dress, eat and reflect on their lives. Marxist analysis has dealt with both these definitions through developments within culture and by considering how classes (Thompson, 1980) or nations are *made* (Anderson, 2008) in terms of everyday activity.

In terms of the narrow definition, some Marxists focus on culture as a product for global and national markets. Literature is produced, circulated and exchanged. Cinema, television, music, and art play a vital role in the world market. Despite widespread internet piracy and software, culture is not free. The World Bank estimated that seven percent of the world's GDP is made up of the 'creative industries' (UNCTAD, 2004) and is set to grow. But this figure increases when you include not just the 'creative industries' but also products that allow for creativity (such as cameras or computers). Walter Benjamin was a Marxist writer who died in the 1930s and began his work on Art by considering it in terms of (re)production. In his essay. *The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical*

Reproduction (1933), he wrote about how everyone has the potential of an artist, especially through the mass production of cameras, allowing people to take and appear in photographs. Benjamin also noted the mass appropriation of paintings through picture postcards, and music through the gramophone. The latest impact of new technology with email, blogs and YouTube has opened up new channels of communication, but also culture. Blogging, in particular, opens new cultural space to citizens and follows the 19th century pattern of '"when the daily press [opened] to its readers space for "letters to the editor" ' (see Benjamin on www.wbenjamin. org/walter-benjamin.html). YouTube is also one of the latest sites of 'mechanical reproduction' with film used for self-expression.

Benjamin advanced Marxist investigations by his theoretical approach to 'the image' and 'consciousness': there is a disjuncture, he argued, between the reproduction of film and its reception by 'the unarmed eye'. Attempts to achieve optical and script awareness of this form inspired other Marxists who later studied television in society and film. For example, *The Godfather* portrays the American mafia as it substitutes 'crime for big business', unreceptive to legal control (Jameson, 1992: 42). Jameson argues that the essence of this film is around American business. The film shows how attempts by the Italian mafia to become legitimate businessmen are simply not possible within American society. Ultimately this situation is resolved by 'crime fighters' committed to a notion of social and political honesty. Using this Marxist reading of *The Godfather* allows debate on how American business sees itself within society. Reassuringly, 'good business' exists within the film, free from using hitmen, bribery, and fraud. In this way, the film, consciously or not, highlights the symbolic distinction between essence (the pretence of American business) and appearance (the behaviour of the Italian mafia).

Franco Moretti (2000) adapted World System Theory to political culture, claiming that we have entered a global period of world literature alongside national literatures. An early example of this transformation can be found in the works of James Joyce who wrote about Dublin within a cosmopolitan framework. James Joyce, who had an anarcho-Marxist sensibility in politics, wrote *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* to criticize Ireland for being managed not only by the British crown but also by Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church. In the first part of the 20th century, there were few other political actors in Ireland: Protestant nationalists dominated the industrial north, the Catholic south was largely agrarian, and the British until the 1920s occupied the entire nation. Joyce sought to escape this political reality through fiction, an important site of passive resistance to any established order. Joyce's fictional *alter ego*, Stephen Hero, put it: 'History is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake.'

Box 7.2   Connecting theory and practice

Consider three (empirical) examples from your country of origin:

1. Do the forces of global capital and the anti-corporate globalization movement signify the end of the antagonism between nation and class?
2. What is the relationship between voting behaviour in your city or town and areas of production, wealth and poverty?
3. Does the 'mechanical reproduction' of culture enable protest to keep delinquent corporations and dictatorial states in check (for example through documentaries, fictional accounts, YouTube and the internet)?

What does Marxist grand theory expect? What do you actually find? How do you manage apparent or interesting exceptions?

In his novels, Joyce imagined Ireland gaining its freedom through common people awakening and embracing internationalism. *Ulysses* had the rare honour of being condemned by the Catholic Church but also by the First Congress of Soviet Writers because it was deemed too 'subjective' (Goldmann, 2006) and therefore failed to meet the standards of 'socialist realism'. Yet by exploring the subjective nature of reality, the fiction of Joyce 'predicted' the future of Ireland in the 21st century (albeit without the Irish working class playing a determinant role). Ireland is no longer dependent on Britain, by virtue of being a member of the European Union. Nationalisms, north and south, are being slowly eliminated and there is greater engagement with cultures beyond Ireland's shores.

Conclusions

Contemporary Marxism examines abstract universal theory using concrete empirical findings, offering students the facility to examine recent debates within political science (see Box 7.2). International labour should unite yet it is divided by nations, forged in struggle through states, and allied with other social classes. State sovereignty is founded by the long-term logic of the state clashing with the short-term logic of capital (Harvey, 2006) and the geopolitical ambitions of the state are not founded necessarily in the interests of short-term capital. Taking political culture seriously allows us to see how classes are formed through tradition and ritual (Thompson, 1980), while the subjectivity of the individual artist leaves an impasse for structural theorists.

As a result of these trends it would seem reasonable to suggest a call for a plurality of approaches upon encountering the reality of different

economies, nations, states, spaces and political cultures (Sim, 2000; Zizek, 2008). The disjuncture between grand theory and different lived experiences can partially be explained by the failure in traditional Marxism to deal with the issue of structure and agency. There is promise in Bob Jessop's (2002, 2008) strategic-relational theory that moves beyond Marx's simple dictum that 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past'. Jessop links the problems of the state to those of capital, and provides an opening for political scientists whose primary interest is in the state.

Marxism begins from its approach to class relations, the understanding of production and exploitation, and the normative commitment to equality. Marxists develop theories to comprehend the world of the past and the present, with reflexivity about alternative futures. The different schools of Marxism have developed from disciplines that are concerned with economic, international, comparative, spatial, and political culture. Of necessity, it is important that contemporary Marxists take an interdisciplinary perspective as has been attempted here. Whether different approaches end up being categorized as 'neo-Marxist' or 'post-Marxist' is less important than appreciating how these categories are formed in the first place: they all revolve around how Marxism deals with practical problems and initial concepts. It is argued here that Marxism has created a rich research programme around the dynamics among political, economic and social factors at different levels of analysis. The theoretical task of pursuing this grand theory is worthwhile, despite seeming exceptions and inconsistencies, because it reveals insights into the modern world not available from other perspectives.

Further reading

- For an introduction to theories of Marx, see Jon Elster (ed.)(1986)
- For nationalism applied within Marxist framework, see Tom Nairn (2003)
- Antonio Gramsci (1971) remains essential reading
- Useful works on anti-corporate global movement are Callinicos (2003) and Louise Amoore (ed.) (2005).
- For an example of Marxism and geography, see David Harvey (2006)
- For a cultural perspective, see Franco Moretti (1998)
- Useful journals include: *Historical Materialism*; *Rethinking Marxism*; *New Left Review*; *Monthly Review*; *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*.

Chapter 8

Normative Theory

STEVE BUCKLER

What is the best way to live? This is the question at the heart of normative theory, a discipline with roots stretching back to ancient times and concerned with thinking about the world not only as it is but also as we might think it ought to be. Given that this question bears upon us not just as individuals but also collectively, it is one that has been the concern of political philosophers. Normative thinking typically invokes principles with respect to how we should conduct and organize ourselves; as such, it seeks to provide 'norms' that prescribe appropriate ways of acting individually and collectively. It has generally been held that if they are to be persuasive, norms of this kind need to be based upon an appeal to some 'ultimate' conceptions that are beyond question and which supply non-negotiable standards for judgement. Historically, these ultimate appeals have taken different forms – to a natural cosmic order, to the will of God, to the essentials of human nature. In this chapter, we shall mainly be concerned with how normative theory has developed in the modern period, where answers to the question of 'the best way to live' have been mediated by a concern with free choice, and where, as we shall see, some have wanted to doubt that the substantive principles by which we might think we ought to live are really ultimate or objective.

In the ancient world, there was generally assumed to be an ultimate order to the universe, such that the cosmos worked according to principles encapsulating its universal harmony. It was the task of the philosopher, through reflection and the application of reason, to come to an understanding of this fundamental order of things. Human beings, and the communities that they inhabit, were accordingly seen as part of this broader whole; they had, as it were, a natural place in the cosmic order. To live well was to realize our nature and occupy our natural place. This picture had all kinds of implications with respect to how, as individuals, we should conduct ourselves. But equally, and importantly from a political point of view, it implied that we have a natural role to play as members of communities and, correspondingly, that a properly ordered community was a crucial element in the setting within which we could realize our nature.

Space does not permit an analysis of the more substantive conclusions (many and varied) that philosophers drew from this general picture. But these kinds of assumptions can be seen, broadly, to have persisted though the medieval period, albeit in a manner shaped by theological concerns, where the community was understood as part of a universe created by God, with individuals playing the parts allotted them by divine will. We all had a duty to occupy our place in an ordered hierarchy. It is against this backdrop that we can see, with the onset of the modern period, the emergence of a very different and iconoclastic way of thinking about politics; one which sought to incorporate new liberal themes concerning individual freedom and moral egalitarianism – themes summed up in the famous slogan of the French revolution of 1789: 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. And as we shall see, these are ways of thinking that continue to be a central influence in contemporary normative debate.

The rise of liberalism

A key figure in the development of liberal thought was the English philosopher John Locke. In his famous work *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1690, Locke argued that the old 'patriarchal' vision of politics – based on a supposed natural hierarchy, ordained by God, with the monarch at its head as the father of the commonwealth – was fundamentally unpersuasive (Locke, 1993). It embodied, he argued, a set of assumptions that had no rational basis and for which there was no real evidence. Once we reject this vision, we can begin to think more rationally about politics. Locke was impressed by the approach embodied in the emerging disciplines of modern natural science and in particular, the claim that a rational understanding of things must proceed not from ambitious speculative propositions but from clear reasoning based upon concrete evidence. This view had led, in scientific thinking, to an emphasis upon particular observations as the raw data that ground our accounts. This emphasis implied an analytical method where the explanations that we produce concerning the general reality we confront, if they were to be persuasive, must have a basis in the simplest, most easily understood elements that make up that reality. For Locke, this approach could find application to politics, and in a way that also resonated with the emerging preoccupation with the nature and behaviour of the individual. The scientific method, when applied to the study of human communities, implied that a proper understanding of the nature and purposes of those communities required a basis in an understanding of their most basic elemental unit – the individual. This was a radical claim in relation to the older ortho-

doxies, and one that has echoed consistently through much political thought since.

Accordingly, it became central to classical liberal thought to focus upon the nature of the autonomous individual. This introduced two related and fundamental themes. First, if we consider the individual as primary, we begin to move away from earlier views about the naturalness of politics and toward a sense that political communities are artificial structures laid over the natural character of individuals – structures that therefore stand in need of justification. Second, and related to this, if we see individuals, in terms of their essential nature, as independent of any collective structures, then a political concern with freedom becomes decisive. And the concern here must be with the freedom of *all* individuals: as we are all possessed of natural autonomy, there is a basic moral equality between us. With these themes in mind, it becomes the case that if we wish to find any legitimacy in political institutions, we have to find reasons why they may respond to the requirements of all persons who, by nature, are unburdened by any such impositions. We will see later how these themes and their implications developed historically but first we can look in more detail at the classical, Lockean version.

When considering human beings in their essence, Locke, in common with other early liberal theorists, made reference to what he termed a 'state of nature' – a condition where persons exist in their natural state, possessed of complete freedom, unconstrained by artificial laws, institutions or hierarchies and able to pursue their personal aims and satisfactions without collectively imposed limitations. If we consider individuals in this condition, we may be able to find reasons why they would want to come to an agreement of some sort on the need for common recognition of a central authority. It is important to note that Locke did not believe that the state of nature was a matter of actual historical fact. It was a hypothetical device, but an important one nevertheless. If we can think of reasons why individuals in a condition of complete freedom might have good reasons to agree to an authoritative common framework, then we have a persuasive account of why that framework is legitimate, in that it answers to our nature and to our reason. Further, if, when thinking about what we would want in a state of nature, we can draw conclusions about the *kind* of common authority we would be prepared to agree to, then we have a moral standard by reference to which we can appraise our actual political arrangements and decide whether they are acceptable or not. So the scenario is hypothetical but it provides the central criterion for justice: a just arrangement is one that we would agree to if we were given the option in a condition where no arrangement exists.

Locke argued that in a state of nature, individuals would indeed have

good reasons to make an arrangement – to enter into a 'social contract' that would establish a common authority. By nature, for Locke, individuals are rational and self-interested. Our priority is to pursue our own wants and satisfactions and we use our powers of instrumental reason in that pursuit. As a result, life in a state of nature would be unacceptable. Individuals left entirely free to pursue their interests would inevitably come into conflict with one another – serious and potentially violent conflict. Locke did think that human beings were naturally possessed of a moral sense – we are aware of what he termed 'natural law', which in essence means a recognition of that basic moral equality conferred upon us in that we all possess autonomy and have an equal right to pursue our interests. However, we are not by nature well-equipped to act properly on that moral sense. In the course of the pursuit of interest, we are not good at recognizing in an impartial way the requirement that we respect one another's rights. As a result, the inconvenience caused by the conflict that we would experience in a state of nature would be considerable, to the point of undermining our ability to realize our wants and enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

So, we can suppose that rational persons in a state of nature would wish to enter into a contract – a mutual agreement establishing a common authority, a state that would enforce common rules to ensure peaceful co-existence. Equally, not just any sort of state would be acceptable. Two criteria, in particular, would condition our sense of an acceptable arrangement: we would want a state that operates through settled and known law and we would also want that law to protect basic liberties. To accept a state that ruled arbitrarily, or that did not respect our liberties, would be to accept conditions that might be as bad, or perhaps worse, than those in a state of nature; and to do this would be wholly irrational.

On the basis of this contractual account, classical liberalism provided an argument for a state that responds to human nature and reason in so far as it enforces, in a social context, mutual respect of basic liberties and so protects our fundamental rights, as Locke saw them, to life, liberty and property. In this sense, it embodies a demand for the recognition of moral equality between human beings. This argument equally implied that basic rights should be respected without qualification or compromise. In this respect, classical liberalism has been characterized as a 'deontological' doctrine – meaning, broadly, that it asserts certain principles as applicable, regardless of context and regardless also of the consequences of applying them. Basic rights are seen as universal, independent of time and place, and as absolute in that they cannot be compromised, however worthy the cause may be. Rights cannot be 'traded off' against other kinds of benefits, however great these may be perceived to be.

The classical version of liberalism, as we shall see, continues to be influential. However, a contrasting and also influential strand of liberal thought subsequently emerged grounded in a different kind of moral argument. Associated principally with the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, utilitarianism emerged as a prominent moral theory in the nineteenth century (Bentham, 1996). In brief, Bentham argued that, when properly analyzed, our moral commitments and judgements are explicable in terms of our desire for satisfaction or well-being. When we describe actions or commitments as 'good', this judgement is grounded in a belief that they contribute to our well-being, that they increase what Bentham termed 'pleasure'. In this way, he sought to rationalize and clarify our moral thinking. This influential moral theory had social and political implications as well. The utilitarian conception implies that when thinking about political actions, policies or arrangements, we are obliged to pursue that which will maximize general levels of well-being; that we should seek to secure, in a well-worn phrase, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

In its original form, utilitarianism did not seem necessarily to imply liberal politics. As critics of the doctrine have often pointed out, there could be circumstances in which a policy that denied the possibility of well-being, or even basic rights and liberties, to *some* might serve to increase the well-being of the *majority*. Illiberal policies might therefore be justified on the basis of the 'greatest happiness' principle. However, an argument relating utilitarianism more closely to liberalism came in the work of Bentham's protégée, John Stuart Mill, most notably in his essay *On Liberty*, one of the most famous works in liberal theory (Mill, 1998). Mill was aware of the potentially illiberal implications of Benthamite utilitarianism. He also came to the related view that Bentham's original formulation was too crude. His reference to 'pleasure' as the standard for utilitarian judgement, Mill thought, was sufficiently undiscriminating as to miss the element of self-development that is central to human well-being. Pleasure and happiness are not, for Mill, the same thing: those things that bring immediate pleasure may not in the longer term bring happiness and indeed may actually undermine the possibility of a happy life. It is for this reason that Mill thought in terms of 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures. Lower pleasures may bring us immediate gratification (and are, for Mill, defined in this way) but they are not sources of deeper and sustained satisfaction. This only comes through the experience of higher pleasures, to be found in those activities that engage our intelligence, our reason, and our creativity. It is in and through the application and development of resources of this kind that long-term happiness is possible. It was in this context that Mill drew out a direct connection between the maximization of happiness and liberal politics. It is under conditions

where individual freedom is maximized that we have the best chance to engage the resources which, when applied, make for a satisfying life. Authoritarian states may potentially be effective in making available immediate comforts and lower pleasures; but those of the higher sort require individual liberty because they require the free application of our own resources and cannot simply be delivered to us by a higher authority.

Human well-being, then, is secured through self-development and this requires freedom. This argument is the source of Mill's famous 'harm principle': whilst the community, through the agency of the state, might legitimately intervene to prevent or punish those acts that harm others, above and beyond this, we should respect the liberty of the individual. One implication that Mill drew from this principle, and an important one for the development of liberal thought, was a need for the protection of what might be termed 'lifestyle liberties'. One of Mill's central concerns was the potential threat posed to our freedom by the dominance of established, moralistic beliefs: public opinion, he thought, could be tyrannical, severely curtailing our ability to live life according to our own principles. It is the duty of the liberal state to protect the freedom of individuals to live a freely chosen kind of life (providing that it does not harm others). The threat posed by majority public opinion is all the greater should the state become an instrument for articulating and enforcing that one dominant view. It is therefore doubly important that the state should remain an agent of liberal neutrality. The best way to ensure this, Mill believed, was through democratic mechanisms that give all groups and viewpoints a voice.

So the requirements of liberty were, in Mill's view, justified by reference to utilitarian principles. A condition of liberty gives us the best chance of living a happy life. On this developmental view, then, well-being replaces reference to natural law and fundamental rights as the basis of liberalism. Bentham famously described talk of natural rights as 'nonsense' and talk of imprescriptible (that is, absolute) natural rights as 'nonsense upon stilts' (Bentham, 1987: 53). So the type of liberalism afforded by utilitarianism involved a significant move away from the deontological thinking, we looked at earlier, and towards the consideration of consequences, of outcomes in respect of human happiness, as the principal reference point for political justification. It was also an approach that chimed strongly with the progressive currents of thinking that were influential in the later 19th century. Mill himself argued in support of a number of progressive causes in the name of liberty, including state sponsored education, limited economic redistribution and equal rights for women.

The influence of utilitarian thinking was also evident in the increasingly socially-minded form of liberalism that emerged in the early part of the 20th century, termed 'new liberalism'. Associated with writers such as

L.T. Hobhouse and J.A. Hobson, this way of thinking found a role for the liberal state not only in securing personal freedoms and political rights but also in promoting the conditions for human well-being through material social provision (Hobhouse, 1922; Hobson, 1891). Whilst maintaining an emphasis upon individual freedom, the new liberals argued that if well-being is the principal aim, then the state should play a role in securing for people the material resources required in order to be able to make free choices and to take opportunities for self-development. Further, they adopted a rather more 'organic' social picture: the autonomous individual is to be seen as existing in the context of an integrated society that defines substantial mutual rights and duties and where individual and social progress are all interdependent. In view of this, they advocated, as a matter of collective duty, forms of social provision that were radical at the time but many of which later became commonplace features of modern liberal societies: for example, progressive taxation, public ownership of key areas of the economy and publicly funded welfare provision.

Whilst liberal principles have consistently remained central to Western democracies, it is fair to say that in terms of academic theory, liberalism became decidedly less fashionable in the mid-20th century. This changed, however, in the later part of the century in large measure due to the work of the American philosopher John Rawls, without doubt the most influential theorist of recent times. In his landmark book *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, Rawls seeks to revive liberal theory by rethinking its basis (Rawls, 1973). The kind of liberalism that Rawls offers is socially-minded, combining guarantees of liberty with a redistributive welfare state. Interestingly, however, the arguments he uses draw not upon the utilitarian tradition (which he rejects for the kinds of reasons we looked at earlier) but rather upon a more deontological way of thinking, and one which revives, in modified form, contract theory.

Rawls poses anew – and in a form particularly pertinent to modern, highly diverse societies – the question of how can we arrive at a consensus about the way we organize ourselves in a context of pluralism, where we have radically different views about what is important and about how we wish to live. We are never going to agree upon these deeper questions about the best kind of life and will always differ with respect to our 'conceptions of the good'. However, it may still be possible to agree upon a conception of the 'right', that is, upon a more minimal set of principles governing the basic design of our institutions, principles minimal enough to be acceptable to all regardless of our differing conceptions of the good. Such principles constitute a conception of justice.

In order to establish these principles, Rawls draws upon the earlier contract tradition, whereby a particular political arrangement is justified

by showing that rational individuals, given the choice, would choose *that* arrangement; and he symbolizes this in a rational choice model. He invokes a hypothetical 'original position', where persons are asked to select principles of justice to govern the basic institutional structure. The choice is constrained only by the requirement that people are not biased in their own favour, a requirement represented in the rational choice model by the absence of personal information about one's own particular interests, talents and commitments. This constraint is justified, Rawls argues, because it embodies recognition of the fact that all individuals are alike in that they are capable of rational autonomy: others, like oneself, possess the potential to formulate and pursue independent plans of life and act autonomously upon them, and consequently, others merit the same respect that one wishes for oneself. This answers our most basic moral intuition about what is fair between persons possessed of a basic moral equality, the one moral intuition we can safely say that all people have. When we are thinking about the basic structure of society, this implies that what I want for myself, I should want for others too; the lack of knowledge of our particular interests, talents or commitments in the 'original position' ensures this.

Rawls deduces the principles that would be chosen in this situation, and they have strong normative implications. People would choose principles that require the maximization of basic liberties, combined with a redistributive state that would ensure that everyone, and particularly the less well off, benefits from the system. For Rawls, these principles encapsulate true social justice and they are, he believes, *necessarily* the ones that rational people would choose. This is so because we all share the capacity for rational autonomy and this confers upon us the same sense of what is it that we want, at the most *general* level, out of society, regardless of how we differ in terms of our wants and beliefs at a more *particular* level. What we all want from society is the best possible provision of the most basic conditions allowing us to pursue our own chosen aspirations in life, whatever these happen to be. A society governed by these principles could legitimately demand obedience from its citizenry because its principles are ones that all (rational) citizens would choose for themselves should they be asked to make an (unbiased) choice.

Rawls's work has been profoundly influential in modern political thought and many theorists, even if they do not agree with the details of Rawls's argument or with the prescriptions he draws from it, nevertheless work within the general parameters set by the kind of deontological liberalism that he develops. This said, liberal theory has not been without its critics in the modern context and we shall now look at some standpoints from which criticisms have been launched and at how (and how far) they imply a departure from liberal principles.

Challenges to liberalism

(a) Critical theory

The term critical theory is associated with a strand of thinking developed in the mid-20th century and tied originally to the work of the Institute for Social Research established in Frankfurt in 1923 (which is why critical theorists are sometimes collectively referred to as the Frankfurt School). It was an approach strongly influenced, at least in its inception, by Marxism and prompted in large part by the need to rethink Marx's analysis in the light of the fact that the predicted overthrow of capitalism by a proletarian revolution had failed to materialize.

Marx's predictions had been based upon a 'dialectical' analysis of change: the view that significant social and political change arises as a result of insurmountable contradictions within the existing system, rather than as a result of any forces external to it; there is, in Marx's view, nothing, material or intellectual, independent of the existing system. To assume that there is some ultimate blueprint or possible way of life that can be affirmed independently of circumstance or history generates, for Marx, merely 'utopian' thinking. The contradictions that Marx identified were material ones. Capitalism, he thought, creates and depends upon a mass industrial workforce but is ultimately incapable of meeting even the most basic material needs of that majority group. The result would be a proletarian revolution: capitalism, in this sense, creates its own 'gravediggers'. However, by the early 20th century, it seemed that the industrial working class had become, if anything, more reconciled to the existing system. At least part of the reason for this, as the early critical theorists saw it, was the strong ideological hold that the system had proved capable of exercising. Marx had concentrated his historical analysis at the level of material socio-economic factors, seeing the ideological as a 'superstructure' that merely reflected the requirements and dynamics of the material 'base' of society. Critical theorists sought to give greater attention to the ideological level and to liberalism, which they regarded as a central element in the ideological edifice of capitalism.

In a notable early work of critical theory, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno sought to show that liberalism constitutes an ideology in so far as it presents certain conceptions and self-conceptions, specific to a particular socio-historic formation, as being natural and universal (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973). The emphasis placed upon the autonomous, instrumental-rational pursuit of self-interest as the essential human characteristic answers, they argued, to the specific perspective of capitalist society. It serves, in this sense, to naturalize and legitimate a system of market exploitation. In doing so, liberalism has been extremely

effective; but it has also proved to be a highly disempowering outlook. It had promised originally the possibility of a more rational and liberated world, where individuals, freed from archaic superstitions, and from the hierarchies that such superstitions supported, would be able freely to determine and pursue their own conception of the good life. However, for Horkheimer and Adorno, this promise proved hollow. The liberal standpoint has actually reconciled people to a system in which the choices we make are routine and conformist, where our aspirations are materialistic and unimaginative, and where our lives lack the edification that comes from adherence to cultural values above and beyond the imperatives to produce and consume.

This kind of analysis prompted critical theorists to seek new points of dialectical critique placing more emphasis upon ideology. Some, and notably the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, highlighted the psychological effects of a life tied to the values and imperatives of liberal capitalism (Marcuse, 2002). Liberalism, Marcuse argued, establishes a 'one-dimensional' way of conceiving of ourselves – as rational producers and consumers. This is a conception suitable to a socio-economic system where production and consumption are the chief imperatives but it also legitimates a highly repressed form of life, one that requires us to repress the instincts toward non-instrumental forms of gratification central to our psychological make-up – instincts for sensual, aesthetic and erotic gratification that are always with us but which modern culture, in the name of an efficient and productive society, requires us to marginalise, educating us into believing that they are unproductive, indulgent or even immoral. However, such instincts do not go away, and form the basis, for Marcuse, of a new social critique that retains the dialectical form – meeting the requirement that critical alternatives derive from contradictions within the existing system that point to change rather than relying on utopian principles. Marcuse argued that modern capitalist societies, in providing ever increasing material comfort, leisure time and relief from arduous labour, provide us also with the space to concern ourselves with our spiritual and aesthetic well-being. At the same time, the system that has delivered these benefits, supported by the liberal ideology it espouses, has required us to repress, in the name of efficiency, those very non-material instincts that we now have the opportunity to explore. It is this contradiction, for Marcuse, that sets the terms for a new radical agenda centred upon what he termed the 'return of the repressed' – a reassertion of our instinctual need for sensuous and aesthetic gratification. This in turn provides a basis for a radical anti-capitalist politics based on a rejection of traditional liberal values, which, rejecting also the 'old' radical politics of material class interests, would take its form and its content from a demand for instinctual self-realization.

This form of critical theory was influential in the 1960s and 1970s and chimed with the radical protest movements and countercultural themes of the time. It subsequently became less fashionable; but critical theory did not disappear and has found more recent expressions, most notably in the work of the German theorist Jürgen Habermas (1979, 1991). Whilst he shares the suspicion that earlier critical theorists harboured of the liberal emphasis upon instrumental rationality, Habermas nevertheless believes that we can find non-instrumental but nevertheless rational criteria by reference to which we may formulate a social critique. Such criteria, he argues, provide the basis for a critical assessment of our shared beliefs and values and of the institutions in which these find embodiment, such as our legal and political arrangements. These beliefs and institutions make up what Habermas refers to as the 'lifeworld' and it will tend to be the case that the form of the lifeworld will be influenced, or 'colonized' by the requirements of what he calls the 'system' – the relations and imperatives deriving from the material sphere of production. We can, however, open up the lifeworld to rational scrutiny and criticism and, in turn, show how its failings are explicable in terms of socio-economic imperatives and relations of power.

In order to establish rational standards for this critique, Habermas looks to the form of rationality he sees embodied in the human capacity for communication, for language use. Such standards are appealing because they are genuinely universal, deriving from the logic of language use itself and transcending the particular, and potentially flawed, beliefs and values that we have established in our actual social communication. In brief, Habermas argues that, whenever we use language, we implicitly commit ourselves to certain key criteria. These consist of truth, sincerity, moral appropriateness and intelligibility. They are built into the very nature of language; without them, all language use would lose its point. Thus, for example, even if one is telling a lie, one implicitly commits oneself to the criterion of truth since, without a general commitment to truth, all attempts at linguistic communication, even lies, would be pointless. Further, people committed to criteria of this sort are equally committed to the possibility of genuinely free, open and rational communication, by means of which our adherence to those criteria is best examined and ensured.

Habermas encapsulates this in the image of the *ideal speech situation*. In this situation, communication is free from 'distortions' in the sense of being free from any subterfuge, hidden agendas, biases or arbitrary closure; the discussion is genuinely rational, guided by the force of the better argument alone. By the same token, it is a situation where all participants have an equal chance to speak, to make an argument or express a point of view. The guiding principle of such communication is the goal of

rational consensus. For Habermas, this ideal is not an arbitrary or speculative one: again, it is built in to the very logic of language use and all communication both presupposes and anticipates it.

Of course, much of our communication will, to some extent, contain distortions that remove it from the ideal. More important, for Habermas, is the fact that some communication may be *systematically* distorted. Here, he elevates the model of a particular discussion to a more general level, invoking what we might think of as the 'social conversation', in which political principles or prevailing moral norms are articulated and reproduced. At this level, we can identify systematic distortions; where, for example, discussion is consistently repressive, curtailing the acknowledgement of certain forms of experience and self-understanding, or is consistently exclusionary, marginaliszing some voices or points of view. This identification of systematic distortions allows us to expose ideological biases, which in turn can be linked to prevailing configurations of power and to the structural impact of dominant socio-economic interests. A sharp critique can be made, on this basis, of modern liberal capitalist societies. Further, whilst this approach does not tell us what moral decisions a society should make, it does lay down requirements as to how such things should be debated, establishing the moral necessity for requirements such as constitutional guarantees of rights, participatory democratic procedures, collective control of elites and so forth: requirements that are not currently adequately met.

Whilst Habermas's analysis implies that there is considerable room for improvement in modern societies, the above recommendations sit relatively comfortably with liberal values. Equally, his version of critical theory takes a large step away from Marxism and also from more recent critical theorists like Marcuse, replacing the Marxian emphasis upon historical dialectics with a reference to universal rational standards. In this sense, it is arguable that Habermas's work answers most closely to the tradition of deontological liberalism.

(b) Communitarianism

A second alternative to liberalism has emerged in recent communitarian thinking. On this view, theories of justice such as that developed by Rawls fail on two related counts. First, in delivering authoritative principles that are minimal, governing only the 'impersonal' terms of institutional interaction, such theories assume that human societies embody no shared substantial conceptions of the good or forms of ethical solidarity. Such a view, it is argued, is erroneous and may even be dangerous in so far as it perpetuates a corrosive belief that individuals are 'strangers', with nothing profound binding them together as a community. This is related to a

second, deeper problem. Theorists like Rawls miss elements of ethical solidarity because they are looking in the wrong place: they still harbour the desire to ground their deontological principles in 'foundational' knowledge, in some universalistic claims about the human condition. But recognising that grand, substantive claims of this sort (such as those stemming from theological or natural law theories) are now unconvincing, they resort to a much more minimal account of what persons have in common as a basis for normative principles. They see the universal characteristics of human beings as reducible simply to rational self-interest and nothing more substantial. If, communitarians argue, we abandoned the search for universal foundations, and looked instead more closely at the role communities play in constituting the common identity of individuals and conferring upon them common beliefs, we would arrive at a more convincing account of human societies and of the normative principles that particular societies embody.

In a notable critique of Rawls, Michael Sandel argues that the emphasis upon the 'unencumbered self' – the individual shorn of a social context – as a source of foundational claims about human beings, is misplaced and, further, that it does not provide a sound basis upon which to make claims about social obligations (Sandel, 1982). The sorts of social principles that Rawls wishes to affirm such as, for example, redistribution to the less well-off, are hard to justify if one starts from the premise of the self-interested individual with no intrinsic social ties: one is always likely to be vulnerable to more libertarian critics who will argue that if individual autonomy is the axiomatic principle then forcing people to contribute to collective welfare is unacceptable (Nozick, 1974). In this sense, more ambitious moral claims can be made about social obligations if one is less ambitious in seeking universal principles of human nature and concentrates instead upon the particular consensual norms and shared obligations that help constitute our identity.

Communitarians, then, accept that it is certainly possible to theorize forms of moral consensus that ground authoritative normative principles. But these forms of consensus are based not upon claims about the universal nature of the human individual. They are based instead upon a recognition that how individuals construe themselves, and so what is normatively compelling for them, depends upon the norms and conventions of the community to which they belong.

The debate between deontological liberalism and communitarianism has been subtle and sustained but in recent times, some have sought more of an accommodation between the two. The communitarian philosopher Michael Walzer, for example, has argued that liberal values and institutions can indeed be justified in contractual manner, on the basis of a hypothetical choice that people would make; however, he disagrees with liberal

thinkers in that he does not believe that even the most impartial choice is 'unsituated', made regardless of prior assumptions (Walzer, 1983). People making impartial or unbiased choices as to social principles inevitably do so in the light of shared conventional assumptions: this is inevitable because the kinds of concepts, embedded in our language, through which we understand the world, structure our experience and order our values and priorities, are inescapable. If we accept this, we also have to accept that different cultures, in different times and places, develop their own set of meanings and priorities. The problem with liberal theory is that it ignores this fact and appeals to supposedly universal rational principles. The implication here is not that human beings are non-rational: they are perfectly capable of rational reflection. It is just that reflection of this sort will always take place in a cultural and linguistic context, invested with shared senses of meaning. Correspondingly, Walzer's quarrel with Rawls's brand of liberalism is not that Rawls asks us to imagine stepping back and making a rational unbiased decision about justice but rather that he seems to expect that such a decision would not be informed by any culturally inscribed sense of meaning and value.

Walzer's argument has more specific implications. Once we pay more attention in our normative thinking to the shared values and meanings that we inevitably harbour, we (in modern Western societies) find reasons for asserting a commitment to liberal arrangements – to institutions that protect the liberties of individuals, operated through the rule of law, and ensuring mutual tolerance. Equally, when we consider our shared sense of responsibility with respect to the basic welfare of our fellow citizens, we have a basis for asserting the justice of a welfare state. In this sense, whilst the form of justification that Walzer employs differs from that adopted by Rawls, the kind of socially informed liberalism that his argument implies is, at a general level, similar in important ways.

On the other side of the debate, some liberal theorists have taken an approach that gives greater credence to themes associated with communitarianism. Joseph Raz, for example, adopts a fundamentally liberal position, arguing that the autonomy of the individual is a foundational moral and political principle (Raz, 1986). However, and unlike Rawls, he takes the view that the principle of autonomy is a 'perfectionist' one. For Raz, the idea of autonomy has more specific implications beyond that of simple choice. In a way that marks a (limited) comparison with the view of John Stuart Mill, Raz claims that there are good and bad ways of using our freedom, and that the bad ways of using it can be damaging to our authentic autonomy. True autonomy is secured through those engagements which confirm or enhance our dignity and self-respect. A truly autonomous life is one orientated toward self-development and flourishing. It can be understood in a range of different ways but is likely to be a

life that is more morally edifying, personally challenging, creative and healthy. The promotion of the liberal value of autonomy implies the promotion of opportunities for this kind of life. We have a collective understanding of the value of this way of living, even if we are not good at realising it: the state as our collective agent correspondingly has a role, and a duty, to create opportunities for an autonomous life and to encourage us to take them. From the point of view of autonomy, of course, it would be self-defeating to advocate a state that would coerce us into making the right decisions. However, to the extent that we prize autonomy, we can see the justification for a state that employs collective resources in order to enable and encourage people to lead a better and more fulfilling life. In this way, Raz's approach employs liberal principles in a manner that accommodates the communitarian acknowledgement of shared senses of the good life that go beyond a simple matter of personal choice.

These examples show how, in recent political theory, a greater accommodation has been reached between liberalism and communitarianism. Whilst there remain differences as to how best to justify social and political principles (and as to how, more substantively, they are to be operationalized), there appears to be an increasing consensus around liberal principles broadly conceived.

(c) Postmodernism

One further mode of questioning liberal thought comes from a postmodern position. Taking his lead from structuralist thinking, the French theorist Michel Foucault argues that our language, and all the assumptions and self-conceptions that it contains, constitutes a structure that is independent of individual decisions and which shapes our outlooks and interactions (Foucault, 2001a, 2001b). In this sense, we live within dominant 'discourses' – linguistic structures that condition not only our views of the world but also our self-understandings, how we see our place in the world and what we see to be the opportunities and choices available to us. The structuralist view calls into question the liberal assumption as to the fundamental autonomy of the individual and the priority it gives to the idea of free choice. The liberal 'subject', the free rational chooser, who is in control and who shapes their own identity through freely adopted commitments, is a myth. And it is a myth against which Foucault poses the image of the 'decentred' subject, whose identity is not essentially freely chosen but which is given, inscribed in the structures within which we operate and though which we see the world.

There is a further aspect to Foucault's thinking that challenges liberalism and also reflects a move he makes beyond structuralist theory. For

Foucault, structuralism tended to work with a 'static' picture of society and of the discursive structures that shape social life. In contrast, through a more historically orientated analysis, Foucault seeks to show how successive discourses have arisen and have contended for dominance. Through what he terms a 'genealogical' investigation, involving detailed documentary study, we can recover a sense of these discursive contexts, how certain discourses emerged as dominant and how others were lost or suppressed in the course of our often chaotic and fragmentary discursive history. This deliberately 'subversive' kind of account, challenging the 'official' history, simultaneously challenges the progressivism that liberals have tended to harbour – the idea that through the increasingly realization of individual autonomy and the corresponding application of reason, we move over time toward a more liberated, rationalized and (through resulting technological innovation) more comfortable world. The genealogical method can help us to see that liberal assumptions have been the latest dominant discourse, the latest set of discursive constructions through which we live and by which we conceive of ourselves. Furthermore, and like all dominant discourses, it contains or implies its own forms of discipline and constraint, often institutionally embodied, that serve to maintain its dominance.

Foucault undertook a number of studies that sought to show how our modern discourse has carried with it intellectual and practical ways of circumscribing the human subject, albeit in ways that embody an apparently humanistic liberal standpoint. For example, dominant discourses characteristically legitimate ways of disciplining people through punishment; modern liberal societies are no exception and our current system cannot be seen as 'superior' in this respect. We have, for the most part, moved away from the use of physical violence and torture toward imprisonment as a tool of social discipline, and, correspondingly, away from revenge as a rationale for punishment toward notions of reform and rehabilitation. For Foucault, however, whilst this constitutes a 'gentler' system, it nevertheless remains a limiting and exclusionary one, and is perhaps in some ways a more effective disciplinary system. We have moved (rather than progressed) away from the spectacle of public punishment, in the form of the stocks or the scaffold, to a prison system where offenders are hidden away, removed from the sight of mainstream or 'respectable' society and subject to a routinized, observed regime, designed to re-instill habits of appropriate social discipline.

This illustrates the sense in which our modern liberal sentiments form part of one amongst many historically evident discourses; and all such discourses, for Foucault, constitute expressions of power. Dominant discourses make claims to universal truth – truth about human nature, about how the world works, about what makes sense and what doesn't.

No claims of this kind can be proven by reference to some ultimate criteria and so they constitute exercises in power, imposing conceptions and self-conceptions upon persons. Liberalism embodies the latest of these 'regimes of truth'. Ultimately, for Foucault, it may be intrinsic to our condition to live with and through dominant discourses. So he does not develop a blueprint for an alternative, 'truly' liberated condition; and in any case, such a blueprint would risk constituting one more set of truth-claims (claims to power). However, he does urge the pursuit of causes that mitigate human suffering, promote lifestyle liberties and mount resistance to the more extreme exercises in discipline. Foucault himself campaigned for causes such as prison reform and the rights of refugees – causes which might be thought quite liberal in character. And he said that he maintained a commitment to the spirit of liberal thinking, albeit in a form that resisted narratives of human progress or perfectibility.

Another political application of the postmodern standpoint is supplied by the American political theorist Richard Rorty, who shares Foucault's suspicion of universal truth-claims (Rorty, 1989). Accordingly, he rejects the foundations to which liberals have often appealed. In fact, Rorty argues, conceptions of the individual are always products of a particular culture and should be understood as such. Our shared cultural framework generates an idea of the self – and the idea that we have developed in modern Western societies is a liberal one. It is often thought, Rorty argues, that if one adopts a particular social or political theory, one must be able to defend it through reference to reasons and arguments by which anyone should be persuaded; but he rejects this inclination. Different belief systems are like incommensurable languages – not only in terms of what they say but right down to the assumptions they contain about what makes sense and what doesn't, to what counts as truth and falsehood. The fact that we don't have ultimate theoretical reference points by which to assert the universal validity of our own viewpoint is no reason to reject that viewpoint. The modernist approach, associated with traditional liberalism, has tended to make this assumption and to search for truths that demonstrate some ultimate 'correspondence' with a fundamental reality. But this assumption is itself historically and culturally specific. It is nonetheless perfectly possible to remain committed to liberal principles and institutions without having to assert their universal validity.

There is a further implication here and one that to an extent distinguishes Rorty's position from the communitarian standpoint to which it bears comparison. The recognition that our belief in liberal values and institutions is not ultimately grounded in universal truth and does not correspond with some ultimate reality does not stop us holding these beliefs but it does change the manner in which we hold them. In a postmodern context, for Rorty, we cleave to the values and institutions of

liberalism not because they constitute universal truth but because they are a point of solidarity and value in our society. We adhere to them, then, in the context of an acknowledgement that they are contingent; that we *could* hold other kinds of beliefs. This is, for Rorty, a disposition or form of commitment that releases us from the demand for certainty and is appropriate to a postmodern world where the hope of a fundamental account or a grand narrative no longer troubles us. The very recognition of contingency, however, may actually strengthen our commitments as points of solidarity.

Conclusion: the victory of liberalism?

Our survey of alternatives to deontological liberalism shows that there is a continuing and healthy debate over approaches in political theory. At the same time, it also shows up a marked tendency toward broad agreement over the basic principles of liberalism. The contemporary debate, in this sense, appears to be concerned more with how best to justify liberal principles than with the validity of those principles themselves. Of course, disagreements about how best to justify political principles are likely to generate differing views as to what those principles imply more specifically and how best they may be realized institutionally.

For example, there have been recent contributions to political theory associated with a 'republican' standpoint that shares much with liberalism but which nevertheless takes issue with some traditional liberal ideas and their implications (Pettit, 1997; Maynor, 2003). Republicans share the central liberal contention that individual freedom is a principal moral value and that political liberty must be the foundation of a just arrangement. However, they argue, the traditional liberal conception of freedom defined 'negatively' – in terms simply of non-interference, such that individuals are free as long as they are, in the relevant senses, left alone – is too thin. Instead, republicans assert a conception of freedom defined as 'non-domination'. This sounds similar to the liberal construal but in fact has some significantly different implications. Non-domination is understood in terms of the requirement that individuals are free from dependence with respect to the arbitrary power of others. When taken seriously, it is argued, this requirement makes the liberal 'non-interference' principle look complacent. Measured against the demand for non-domination, the traditional liberal confidence in basic negative liberties – those basic rights to life, liberty and property – seems inadequate. There are, after all, ways in which people can be rendered dependent, and so bound, that are not ameliorated by such guarantees. Particularly, there are forms of socio-economic disadvantage that may render certain social groups dependent

regardless of the legally guaranteed rights that they might possess. And this, from the point of view of social justice, may be a problem that a morally responsible state should take steps to address.

By way of example, it is arguably the case that although for some time, in Western liberal societies, women have been afforded equal rights, a systematic economic disparity exists between men and women; and that this, combined with a sexist culture both domestically and in the workplace, renders women dependent. If this is the case, then the state has a duty to intervene in positive ways, above and beyond the simple guarantee of equal rights, through social measures designed to secure authentic freedom for women. A similar kind of argument might apply more generally where entrenched disparities in terms of wealth and income exist. There is a case, in the republican view, therefore, for a state that is more interventionist than has traditionally been sanctioned by deontological liberalism. Further, there may be legitimate concerns about the state itself that need addressing and here, again, republicans argue that liberalism may be too complacent. Whilst there are reasons to argue for a more interventionist state, republicans have also recognized that the state itself might be a powerful creator of dependency. Although we might want a state that is enabling, in order to secure our freedom, it would clearly be self-defeating should the state, whatever its motives, become overly directive. The safeguard here, in the republican view, lies in a more authentic form of democracy – an arrangement that seeks to maximize opportunities for debate over matters of principle and policy and that opens up as many forums as possible within which citizens can render the state accountable.

There remains, therefore, room for vigorous theoretical debate within societies where there is a consensus around broad liberal principles. That such a consensus exists in Western societies is evident not only in terms of the kinds of theoretical preoccupations that we have examined but also in the fact that many of the particular questions with which liberal theorists concern themselves are familiar elements in the general moral architecture of modern societies. We shall end this chapter by summarizing briefly some of these questions.

To what extent should liberal states adopt policies geared to material redistribution?

It is arguable that if we respect the basic moral equality of persons then we have an obligation collectively to ensure that all have real opportunities to realize their goals and to live a fruitful life. This in turn might be thought to imply that the state should redistribute resources in order to ensure equality of opportunity. But how far does this obligation extend, and how

far can the state go in redistributing before its actions become unacceptable on the grounds that it is violating individuals' rights to keep what they have legitimately acquired? Some liberals have argued that even minimal redistributive measures are unjust while others have been in favour of high levels of redistribution on the grounds that individuals are not responsible for the material conditions into which they happen to have been born, and if we are serious about treating people with equal respect then we have a duty to intervene in order to ensure higher levels of material equality.

Should the state legislate for morals?

Liberals have traditionally demanded that we respect individuals' choices in terms of how they live their lives, so long as they do not harm others or violate their rights. But this apparently straightforward principle is more difficult to apply than it might initially seem. If someone makes the choice to live a life centred around the use of hard drugs, we might say that this is their own decision and it is no-one else's business. However, there may be a question here as to whether this kind of life really incorporates free choice – are addicts really free choosers? Further, there is an issue about the implications for others – friends and family for example, and especially perhaps dependent children. In most Western societies we do, of course, have laws against the use of hard drugs, which might be thought to deal with the problem. Equally, however, similar issues arguably arise in respect of the persistent or excessive use of alcohol and tobacco and yet we do not deal with these activities in the same way. The general issue here also goes beyond cases where the 'harm principle' might be invoked. Although liberal societies practice toleration, most have laws against certain practices – for example suicide or multiple marriages – and these laws, in principle at least, apply regardless of whether such actions are undertaken with the consent of those who might be affected by them. So there are continuing issues about how we balance individual liberty against, on the one hand, questions of harm and, on the other, the need for society to maintain fundamental moral standards.

How should liberals respond to illiberal beliefs?

Whilst tolerance is a central liberal principle, difficult questions arise about its limits. We may respect, and even celebrate, diversity of belief, but there remain issues about how we respond, for example, to extreme political convictions which themselves involve no respect for freedom. Should those who espouse views of this sort be allowed a platform, even if, given power, they would deny such a platform to others? And how do

we balance the principle of free speech here against the potential effects of what is said if, for example, it involves racist sentiments? A further case here involves the expression of fundamentalist religious convictions. Freedom of religious belief and worship has long been a central commitment of liberalism and is inscribed in the moral traditions of liberal societies. But what do we do when religious beliefs are espoused that are themselves illiberal and which advocate practices that most would regard as unacceptable – for example in relation to the treatment of women? This sort of issue extends beyond the domestic political sphere. Liberal societies necessarily interact in the international arena with states that espouse very different beliefs. Questions arise here as to whether liberal states should seek to spread liberal values and, if so, what forms of action are legitimate in pursuing this aim. There are also, of course, issues here about whether, or how far, liberal states should be prepared to cooperate with regimes that themselves offend liberal principles.

These are all familiar and potent questions that arise in the political discourse of Western societies. They are distinctively liberal concerns and they demonstrate the extent to which the liberal perspective is dominant and sets the terms for the way we now seek to answer questions about the best way to live. They are not necessarily questions to which definitive answers are likely to be given, but are questions that we live with constantly. The normative theoretical debate around liberal principles, and how best to justify and apply them, provides us with the resources for a continuing and vigorous discussion of these central questions.

Further reading

- Some general works on themes in recent political philosophy are Kymlicka (1990), Plant (1991), Ashe *et al.* (1999) and Farrelly (2004). In more historical perspective, see Hampsher-Monk (1992). A useful anthology is Goodin and Pettit (2006). Important feminist contributions to recent debate include Pateman (1988), Okin (1989) and Young (1990). A useful collection on multiculturalism is Gutmann (1994)
- Classic texts in liberal thought are Locke (1993) and Mill (1998). Along with Rawls (1973 and 1996), some important contributions to contemporary liberalism are Raz (1986) and Dworkin (1981a, 1981b). Critical collections on the work of Rawls are Kukathas and Pettit (1990) and Daniels (1978). Nozick (1974) is a critique of the Rawlsian approach from a libertarian point of view.
- Seminal works in critical theory are Horkheimer and Adorno (1979), Marcuse (2002); Habermas (1996) is a useful anthology of his work. Jay (1973) is a comprehensive history of the Institute for Social Research and useful introductions to critical theory are Held (1980) and How (2003).

Introductions to the work of Habermas are McCarthy (1984), White (1988) and Outhwaite (1994). Collections of critical literature around Habermas's work can be found in Thompson and Held (1982) and Dews (1999). See also Meehan (1995).

- Notable communitarian works are Sandel (1982), Walzer (1983) and Taylor (1989). Important contributions to the liberal-communitarian debate are collected in Sandel (1984) and in Avineri and de Shalit (1992). See also Gutmann (1985). The debate is analyzed by Mulhall and Swift (1996) and a feminist perspective is provided in Frazer (1993).
- Foucault (1991) is a useful anthology of his work. Other key postmodernist works are Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1980). More specifically on questions of identity in relation to political theory see Connolly (1991), Mouffe (1993) and Phillips (1995).
- Significant contributions to republican political thought are Pettit (1997) and Maynor (2003). Useful assessments can be found in Honohan and Jennings (2005).

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PART 2

Methods and Research Design

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Introduction to Part 2

GERRY STOKER

There is a considerable variety of methods available to political science researchers. The chapters in Part 2 show there is a process of development and thinking about the methods used in political science as researchers try to refine and improve their ways of discovering the political world. We do not regard that diversity as something to be alarmed about but rather illustrative of the challenge involved in understanding the human condition. It makes it a lively and thought-provoking discipline in that deep questions about how we understand our world are never out of the frame.

Some of the deepest issues and most thought-provoking issues are presented in Chapters 9 and 10. Furlong and Marsh argue in Chapter 9 that ontological and epistemological positions are crucial because they shape what we think we are doing as political scientists, how we do it and what we think we can claim about the results we find. Secondly, there are clear, if not always uncontested, links between the researchers' ontological position; epistemological position; conception of theory; research design; and methodology. An ontological position and the related epistemological position is not something that is merely on the surface of an approach. It is ingrained. The discussion of epistemological and ontological issues is itself an area of dispute and controversy within political science. Not all of our authors, let alone the wider world of political science, would share all of the interpretation provided in Chapter 9 and in particular the idea that ontological and epistemological are fixed. Some would argue that dividing the approaches to social science into these crude positions in neither enlightening nor helpful and that within the positions there are so many points of disagreement that it makes any attempt at categorization problematic. With that 'health warning' having been stated we do think that the chapter raises some crucial issues and helps to explain why approaches to political science are necessarily diverse.

In Chapter 10 Marsh reviews a range of meta-theoretical issues in the way that researchers approach their understanding of politics. He explores how researchers try to understand the relationship between structure and agency. What we do can involve active choice and agency on

our part but those choices are structured by the context and the environment that we are in, or even constrained by certain ingrained ways of thinking that we have. The chapter also examines the balance between material factors and ideas that in the different ways researchers use to explain the driving forces in politics. Finally, the chapter looks at understandings of change embedded within different ways of doing political science. Is the political world seen as relatively stable or always in a process of change? Marsh argues that different broad ontological and epistemological positions tend to balance out the issues of structure and agency, the influence of material factors and ideas and the nature of change differently.

Alongside major questions about how to understand the world around us, researchers also face a series of other challenges of a practical and focused nature. The process of developing a research design is more like trying to resolve a puzzle that undertaking a set of clearly sequence and preordained steps. How to think through the puzzles of research design is the focus of the discussion by Hancké in Chapter 11. The crucial thing is to be able to explain the logic of the research design that you have followed and what makes it fit for purpose. To some extent this is a matter of learning but also it is a matter of practice. There is a craft element to doing research. It is not about the rigid application of rules but an exploratory journey of discovery that you can become better equipped to undertake over time.

On that journey of research you are likely to need to master both qualitative and quantitative skills. There is broad distinction that can be drawn between qualitative and quantitative methods. The former stretches from observation, through interviews to focus group discussion as ways to find out about politics. The latter involves the collection of data on a repeated incidence of a political phenomenon and using statistical techniques to analyze that data. Chapters 12 and 13 on respectively qualitative and quantitative methods provide an introduction to the debates and current best practice in political science in each of these broad areas. Both chapters are at pains to point out the range and subtlety of the methods available under their broad headings.

Chapter 14 addresses another key methodological issue, namely the role of comparative work. The comparative method takes advantage of the position that in the world there is mix of political systems, institutions and actors. Comparing provides the opportunity to test ideas about the way that politics works by looking at issues in the context of the 'natural laboratory' of the mixed systems of the world. There are a number of difficult issues to be addressed in using the comparative method as Hopkin points out in Chapter 14 but it is hard to think of a political science that could do without it.

Chapter 15 offers insights into a growing area of interest in political science, the use of experiments to investigate political phenomenon. The logic of the experimental enables powerful claims to be made about establishing causality but raises significant problems of practicality. The chapter by Margetts and Stoker shows how political scientists have been using laboratory-based work, internet experiments and full-blown field experiments to a greater degree. They argue that the experimental method as a way of doing political science will increase in importance and that in any case all students of politics will benefit from thinking about understanding political situations through the perspective of experimental design.

There are some that hold the view that the job of political scientists begins and ends with their description and analysis of politics. It is probably true to say that much political science is written in such a way that it would be difficult for those involved in politics to gain much from the work or the understanding that is presented. Does that matter? Some may feel there is no issue to be addressed. Why should political science care if its work is useful or used? Others might take the view that a discipline that studied politics but had nothing to say to those involved in politics or who might be involved, if politics was constructed in a different way, was somehow was failing. The question of the relevance of political science is the focus of the final chapter of the book.

Chapter 9

A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science

PAUL FURLONG AND DAVID MARSH

A number of chapters in this book contain references to ontology and epistemology, some of them relatively lengthy (see for example, Chapters 1, 4 and 8). Perhaps more often, positions on these issues are implicit, but no less significant (see Chapters 2 and 5). Each social scientist's orientation to his or her subject is shaped by his/her ontological and epistemological position. Even if these positions are unacknowledged, they shape the approach to theory and the methods which the social scientist uses. At first the questions raised seem difficult, but they are not issues that can be avoided. Because they shape our approach, they are like a skin not a sweater; they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the researcher sees fit. In our view, all students of political science should recognize their own ontological and epistemological positions and be able to defend them. This means they need to understand the alternative positions on these fundamental questions. As such, this chapter aims to introduce these ontological and epistemological questions in as accessible a way as possible for readers who are new to these issues.

The chapter is divided into three major sections. In the first section, we introduce the concepts of 'ontology' and 'epistemology' and consider how they relate. The second section then outlines different positions on ontology and epistemology and the arguments which have been put forward for and against these positions. Finally, we illustrate how these different positions shape the approaches that researchers take to their research by focusing on research in two broad areas: globalization, and multi-level governance.

Ontology and epistemology introduced

As we have emphasized, ontology and epistemology are contested issues.

So, while there is general agreement about what the terms mean, there is much less agreement about either the ontological and epistemological positions that researchers adopt or the relationship between ontology and epistemology. We begin this section by outlining the meaning of the terms ontology and epistemology before discussing the relationship between the two, which, as we shall see, is a particularly contested issue.

The meaning of ontology and epistemology (and methodology)

Ontological questions focus on the very nature of 'being'; literally, an ontology is a theory of 'being' (the word derives from the Greek for 'existence'). This sounds difficult, but it really isn't. The key ontological question is: What is the form and nature of reality and, consequently, what is there that can be known about it? To put it another way, the main issue is whether there is a 'real' world 'out there' that is, in an important sense, independent of our knowledge of it. As we shall see below, there are two broad ontological positions, although the nomenclature changes: foundationalism/ objectivism/realism, which posits a 'real' world, 'out there', independent of our knowledge of it; and anti-foundationalism/constructivism/relativism, which sees the world as socially constructed.

If an ontological position reflects the researcher's view about the nature of the world, his or her epistemological position reflects his/her view of what we can know about the world it; literally, an epistemology is a theory of knowledge. As such, the key epistemological question is: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known? Again, this sounds difficult, but the basic concerns are not too difficult, as we shall see below.

There are two key questions in relation to epistemology. Can an observer identify 'real' or 'objective' relations between social phenomena? If so, how? The first question itself subsumes two issues. Initially, it takes us back to ontology; an anti-foundationalist ontology (see below for a discussion) argues that there is not a 'real' world, which exists independently of the meaning which actors attach to their action. This entails an interpretivist theory of knowledge: it would be illogical to argue for our capacity for independent knowledge of an external world we do not believe exists.

At the same time, such an anti-foundationalist would also suggest that no observer can be 'objective' because s/he lives in the social world and is affected by the social constructions of 'reality'. This evokes what is sometimes called the double hermeneutic; the world is interpreted by the actors (one hermeneutic level) and their interpretation is interpreted by the observer (a second hermeneutic level).

The second question raises another important, and clearly related, issue. To the extent that we can establish 'real' relationships between social phenomena, can we do this simply through direct observation, or are there some relationships which 'exist', but are not directly observable. The answers one gives to these questions shape one's epistemological position and, in particular, how one understands the concepts of causality and explanation (see Craig Parson's discussion of these in Chapter 4). As such, our argument here is that ontology and epistemology are related. A foundationalist ontology leads to either a positivist or a realist epistemology, while an anti-foundationalist ontology leads to an interpretivist epistemology. However, we acknowledge that this is a contested position, which would not be accepted by post-structuralists, and this is an issue discussed in the next section. In addition, it also needs emphasizing that one's epistemological position has clear methodological implications, an issue to which we return throughout this chapter. So, positivists tend to privilege quantitative methods, while interpretivists privilege qualitative methods (see Figure 9.1).

The relationship between ontology and epistemology

Ontological and epistemological issues are inevitably related given that epistemology is concerned with how human agents can inquire about and make sense of ontology. However, the relationship between ontology and epistemology is a contested issue. Indeed, Hay (2007a) argues that we cannot prove an ontological position, or indeed the relationship between ontology and epistemology. Rather, we should adopt a position which makes sense to us and use it consistently, while acknowledging that it is contested.

Figure 9.1   *Connecting ontology, epistemology and methodology*
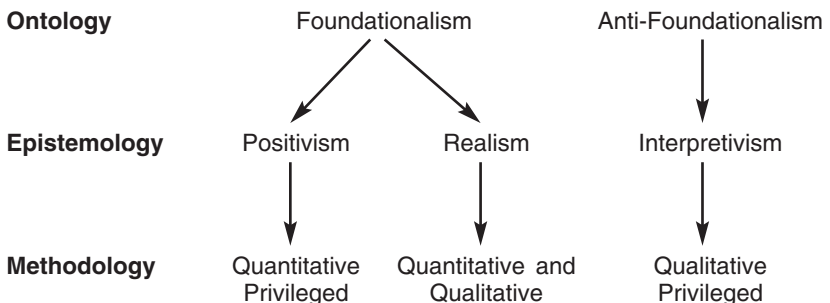
Hay contends that ontology precedes epistemology:

> Ontology 'relates to the nature of the social and political world' and epistemology 'to what we can know about it', [so] ontology is logically prior in the sense that the 'it' in the second term [the definition of epistemology] is, and can only be, specified by the first [the definition of ontology]. This, I contend, is a point of logic, not of meta-theory. (Hay, 2007: 117)

However, post-structuralists do not agree. So Dixon and Paul Jones III claim (quoted in Bates and Jenkins, 2007: 60):

> Ontological assumptions put the cart before the horse, for ontology is itself grounded in epistemology about how we *know* 'what the world is like'; in other words, the analysis of ontology invariably shows it to rest upon epistemological priors that enable claims about the structure of the real world. For example, the ontological divisions between physical and social phenomena, or between individual agency and sociospatial structure … [are] the result of epistemology that segments reality and experience in order to comprehend them both.

Spencer (2000) accuses this post-structuralist line of argument of reducing questions of ontology to questions of epistemology (what is usually termed the 'epistemic fallacy'). He continues:

> There is no escaping having a theory of ontology, it is only a question of whether or not it is consciously acknowledged and studied or whether it is left as an implicit presupposition of one's theory of epistemology. In the case of postmodernists, the dilemma of relativism always auto-subverts their philosophical position. Whilst they deny that there is such a thing as truth (clinging to the realm of epistemology and denying that ontology is even a legitimate subject) any argument they make must surely be making an assertion about the way things are (hence having a theory, albeit implicit and contradictory, of ontology).

For Spencer, ontology cannot, and should not, be reduced to epistemology, because, if it is, everything becomes thought and discourse and social structures/the material world have no causal power (see Chapter 10 for examples of how these philosophical issues work out when dealing with meta-theoretical issues, like structure/agency, the material and the ideational and stability and change). As he puts it (2000: 15):

> (Post-Structuralists refuse) to countenance the idea that knowledge stands in a causal relationship to both society and to the entities of which

it is knowledge. Knowledge is influenced, and indeed is dependent upon, society through received ideas and through the provision of the very apparatus of thought, in particular through language. This makes history … But knowledge is also knowledge *of* something – of nature or society. This makes science itself a legitimate field of study, studying knowledge not as a social product but as a reflection of the entities of which it is knowledge. Hence, it is possible that knowledge is a social phenomenon but that the entities that it studies are not, that is, that they exist independently of society.

Here, Spencer is not claiming that ideas or discourses do not affect how the 'real world' impacts on agents/groups, but only that these are ideas/discourses about 'real', that is extra-discursive, social phenomena.

It is clear then that the relationship between ontology and epistemology is strongly contested. Post-structuralists see the two as co-constitutive. As Smith (1996) puts it:

Ontological claims … without an epistemological warrant is dogma … epistemology matters because it determines of what we can have knowledge; moreover, it is not possible to wish it away, or undermine its importance, by arguing, as is fashionably the case … that ontology is prior to epistemology … I see neither ontology nor epistemology as prior to the other, but instead see the two of them as mutually and inextricably interrelated. (Cited in Bates and Jenkins, 2007: 60)

Indeed, even Bates and Jenkins (2007: 60) acknowledge that post-structuralism can 'consciously conflate ontology and epistemology'.

In contrast, Spencer (2000: 2) poses an important question: how can we have a theory about what knowledge is, without some presupposition about the nature of the world? There is no uncontentious way to resolve this issue. We side with Spencer, while you may side with Smith (1996) or Bates and Jenkins (2007). It is your choice. However, it is crucial that you recognize the consequence of adopting different ontological and epistemological positions and different views on the relationship between the two. In the next section, we outline various positions on first ontology and the epistemology, which will make some of the issues discussed to date clearer.

Ontological and epistemological positions

Here we begin by distinguishing between broad ontological and epistemological positions, before considering the various epistemological posi-

tions, and the contestations between them, in more depth. Finally, in this section we identify why such debates, and the positions researchers adopt, are important. Our broad argument is that they shape what we study as social scientists, how we study it and what we think we can claim as a result of that study. In this section, we distinguish between broad positions, although ones which have been given a variety of names. We also need to recognize that not everyone, indeed not even all contributors to this volume would accept our classification; to emphasize the point again, this is a very contested area.

One contestation is particularly important and that concerns how we should categorize post-structuralist approaches. As we saw, they deny the utility, or possibility, of a distinction between ontology and epistemology and are strongly idealist in Spencer's (2000) terms. Consequently, we could locate them in our anti-foundationalist ontological category and our interpretivist epistemological category. However, as Parsons (Chapter 4) emphasizes, if post-structuralism is a variant of constructivism, it is a particular one and he sees modern constructivism (discussed briefly below) in epistemological terms as interested in explanation and engaging with more mainstream political science approaches.

This paragraph immediately raises another issue. Even if we establish broad categories to classify ontological and, particularly epistemological, positions, there will be different strands within each of these broad positions and the boundaries between them may be blurred. Two examples will suffice here. First, to return to Parsons's point above, there are significant epistemological differences between different strands of constructivism. Second, increasingly the boundary between realism, more specifically critical realism, and interpretivism as epistemological positions are being blurred, as is clear in the work of Hay discussed below and in Chapter 10. Here we distinguish between two broad ontological positions, subject to the health warnings above: foundationalism, more commonly seen as objectivism or realism; and anti-foundationalism, more commonly seen as constructivism or relativism. As we have already emphasized, post-structuralists deny any separation between ontology an epistemology. Such researchers would clearly deny that they have an ontological position and, as such, many would put them into a separate category and the reader needs to recognize that qualification when considering what follows. We classify them as anti-foundationalists, because they deny the existence of any extra-discursive 'reality'.

Foundationalism/objectivism/realism

Foundationalism is commonly termed either objectivism or realism. The key point here however is that the different terminology refers to the same

position. From this perspective, the world is viewed as composed of discrete objects which possess properties that are independent of the observer/researcher. As such, all researchers should view and understand these objects in the same way if they have the necessary skills and good judgement. So, to put it another way, there is a real world which exists independently of our knowledge of it. As such, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 159) argue that those adopting this position, whom they term objectivists, posit the existence of objective, absolute and unconditional truths.

There are significant differences within this position, notably between epistemological positivists and epistemological realists (see below). In this vein, epistemological realists emphasize the role that theory plays in any interpretation of the causal power of any structure/institution in that real world; so the real world effect on actions is mediated by ideas. Similarly, realists would recognize the partialities of researchers who interpret the world and have a more limited understanding of truth than positivists. However, they share the crucial feature of a foundationalist position – that there is a real world out there with independent causal powers (essentially the position defended by Spencer above).

Anti-foundationalism/ constructivism/relativism

In contrast, anti-foundationalism/constructivism/relativism, the other broad ontological perspective, is less easy to classify; there is more variety, as one would expect, given the constructivist position. However, the position has some common features. Guba and Lincoln identify three (1994: 110):

1.   In this perspective, realities are local and specific; they vary between individuals/groups. As such, constructions are ontological elements of reality. They are not true, but rather more informed or more consistent. Consequently, although all constructions are meaningful, some are flawed because they are inconsistent or incomplete.
2.   At the same time, reality is not discovered, as it is from the other ontological position, rather it is actively constructed. As we saw above, this means that the distinction between ontology and epistemology is blurred. To put it another way, it is the actor (and the values he holds) who decides what is rational. Given this perspective no actor can be objective or value-free actor.
3.   Overall, reality is socially constructed, but, while it is individual who construct that world and reflect on it, there views are shaped by social, political and cultural processes.

It is important to emphasize one point here. Our claim that anti-foundationalists argue that there is not a real world out there independent of our knowledge of it is a limited one. We are not claiming that such researchers do not acknowledge that there are tables/mountains/institutions and so on. Rather, they contend that this 'reality' has no social role/causal power independent of the agent's/group's/society's understanding of it.

Distinguishing broad epistemological positions

With regard to epistemological positions, there are different ways of classifying them and even less agreement as to the best way of doing so. Probably, the most common classification, used elsewhere in this book, distinguishes between scientific (sometimes positivist) and hermeneutic (or interpretivist) positions. We begin with a brief review of that distinction, before proposing an alternative, which distinguishes between positivist, realist and interpretivist positions.

   The development of social science, as it name implies, was influenced by ideas about the nature of scientific understanding. In particular, the *empiricist* tradition played a crucial role in the development of social science. David Hume argued that knowledge starts from our senses. On the basis of such direct experience we could develop generalizations about the relationship between physical phenomena. The aim was to develop causal statements which specified that, under a given set of conditions, there would be regular and predictable outcomes (on this see Hollis and Smith, 1991, Chapter 3). The adherents of the scientific tradition saw social science as analogous to natural science. In ontological terms they were foundationalists; they thought there was a real world 'out there' which was external to agents. Their focus was upon identifying the *causes* of social behaviour and their emphasis upon *explanation* and, initially, many felt that the use of rigorous 'scientific' methods would allow social scientists to develop laws, similar in status to scientific laws, which would hold across time and space.

   In methodological terms, the scientific tradition was very influenced by logical positivism which utilised a very straightforward characterisation of the form of scientific investigation (see Chapter 1). As Hollis and Smith put it (1991: 50):

   To detect the regularities in nature, propose a generalisation, deduce what it implies for the next case and observe whether the prediction succeeds. If it does, no consequent action is needed; if it does not, then either discard the generalisation or amend it and [test the] fresh [predictions].

In contrast, there is an alternative, hermeneutic (the word derives from the Greek for 'to interpret') or interpretivist tradition. The adherents of this position are anti-foundationalists, believing that the world is socially-constructed. They focus upon the *meaning* of behaviour. The emphasis is upon *understanding*, rather than *explanation* (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of this important distinction). Understanding relates to human reasoning and intentions as grounds for social action. In this tradition, it is not possible to establish causal relationships between phenomena that hold across time and space, since social phenomena are not subject to the same kind of observation as natural science phenomena.

We prefer another classification because the scientific tradition identified by Hollis and Smith conflates two distinct positions, positivism and realism. Positivists adhere to a foundationalist ontology and are concerned to establish causal relationships between social phenemema, thus developing explanatory, and indeed predictive, models. The realist shares the same broad ontological position, although with the difference identified above. However, realists, unlike positivists, do not privilege direct observation. The realist believes that there are deep structural relationships between social phenomena which can't be directly observed, but which are crucial for any explanation of behaviour. So, as an example, a realist might argue that patriarchy as a structure cannot be directly observed, although we can see many of the consequences of it; we return to this example later.

The distinction between positivist, realist and interpretivist approaches (see Figure 9.1) is examined in more depth in the next section. The categories we are using would be disputed by other social scientists. We use these distinctions to avoid the conflation of positivism and realism involved in the first distinction. This relates to the argument we made earlier about the need to keep theory of being and theory of knowledge analytically separate. Some social scientists such as Bevir and Rhodes (see below) would want to make further distinctions within the interpretivist tradition (as indeed does Parsons). We deal with this and other criticisms when we look at the variants within the three positions we identify.

In our view, ontological and epistemological concerns cannot, and shouldn't, be ignored or downgraded. Two points are important here. First, ontological and epistemological positions shouldn't be treated like a sweater which can be 'put on' when we are addressing such philosophical issues and 'taken off' when we are doing research. In our view, the dominance of a fairly crude positivist epistemology throughout much of the post-war period encouraged many social scientists to dismiss ontological questions and regard epistemological issues as more or less resolved, with only the details left to be decided by those interested in such

matters. Such social scientists have tended to acknowledge the importance of epistemology without considering it necessary to deal with it in detail; positivism has been regarded as a comforting pullover that can be put on where necessary. In contrast, for us epistemology, to say nothing of ontology, is far from being a closed debate.

Secondly, researchers cannot adopt one position at one time for one project and another on another occasion for a different project. These positions are not interchangeable because they reflect fundamental different approaches to what social science is and how we do it. A researcher's epistemological position is reflected in what is studied, how it is studied and the status the researcher gives to his/her findings. So, a positivist looks for causal relationships, tends to prefer quantitative analysis and wants to produce 'objective' and generalizable findings. A researcher from within the interpretivist tradition is concerned with understanding, not explanation, focuses on the meaning that actions have for agents, tends to use qualitative evidence and offers his/her results as one interpretation of the relationship between the social phenomena studied. Realism is less easy to classify in this way. The realists are looking for causal relationships, but argue that many important relationships between social phenomena can't be observed. This means they may use quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data will only be appropriate for those relationships that are directly observable. In contrast, the unobservable relationships can only be established indirectly; we can observe other relationships which, our theory tells us, are the result of those unobservable pre-relationships. We return to these issues in the next section.

Interrogating different approaches to ontology and epistemology

Here we outline the positivist, the interpretivist and the realist positions in more detail. We focus on: the major criticisms of the positions; the variations within these positions; and the way the positions have changed over time.

Positivism

The core of positivism is fairly straightforward, although of course there are variants within it:

- Positivism is based upon a foundationalist ontology. So, to the positivist, like the realist, but, unlike many in the interpretivist position, the world exists independently of our knowledge of it.

- To the positivist, natural science and social science are broadly analogous. We can establish regular relationship between social phenomenon; using theory to generate hypotheses which can be tested by direct observation. In this view, and in clear contrast to the realist, there are no deep structures that can't be directly observed. Traditionally, positivism contended that there is no appearance/reality dichotomy and that the world is real and not socially constructed. So, direct observation can serve as an independent test of the validity of a theory. Crucially, an observer can be objective in the way s/he undertakes such observations. Researchers from the interpretivist tradition rarely accept any notion of objectivity. Realists accept that all observation is mediated by theory; to the realist, theory plays the crucial role in allowing the researcher to distinguish between those social phenomena which are directly observable and those which are not.
- To positivists the aim of social science is to make causal statements; in their view it is possible to, and we should attempt to, establish causal relationships between social phenomena. They share this aim with realists, while interpretivists deny the possibility of such statements.
- Positivists also argue that it is possible to separate completely empirical questions, questions about what is, from normative questions, questions about what should be. Traditionally, positivists thought that the goal of social science was to pursue empirical questions, while philosophy, meta-physics or religion pursued the normative questions. If we can separate empirical and normative research questions, then it is possible for social science to be objective and value free. Realists and, especially, those from within the interpretivist tradition, would reject that proposition.

Many social scientists are positivists, although much of the positivism is implicit rather than explicit. The behavioural revolution in the social sciences in the 1960s, dealt with by David Sanders in Chapter 1, was an attempt to introduce scientific method into the study of society. It was an explicit reaction to political theory, which it saw as concerned with normative questions, and traditional institutionalism, which it saw as lacking theoretical and methodological rigour. In contrast, it was based upon an objectivist/realist/foundationalist ontology and, most often, a quantitative methodology. The view was that a social 'science' was possible if we followed the scientific method; deriving hypotheses from theory and then testing them in an attempt to falsify them. We needed 'objective' measures of our social phenomena, our variables; so we would focus upon 'hard' data – from government statistics, election results –and so on – rather than 'soft' data – from interviews or participant observation. So, for example, if a positivist was studying political participation, s/he

would be interested in measuring the level of voting, party or pressure group membership, direct action and so on, and relating it to demographic variables such as class, gender, race and education. The aim would be to establish the precise nature of the relationship between these variables and participation in order to produce causal models. We shall return to this example later. As is now widely acknowledged, the ontological and epistemological position adopted had clear methodological implications that the scientific aspirations and confidence of the behavioural revolution tended to mask.

The criticism of positivism takes two broad forms. The first line of criticism broadly argues that, in following the methods of science, positivists misinterpret how science really proceeds. Two lines of argument have been particularly important here. First, there is the pragmatist position of Quine (1961) who develops two crucial critiques of positivism (for a fuller exposition see Hollis and Smith, 1991: 55–7):

1. Quine argues that any knowledge we derive from the five senses is mediated by the concepts we use to analyze it, so there is no way of classifying, or even describing, experience without interpreting it.
2. This means that theory and experiment are not simply separable, rather theory affects both the facts we focus on and how we interpret them. This, in turn, may affect the conclusions we draw if the facts appear to falsify the theory. If we observe 'facts' which are inconsistent with the theory, we might decide that the facts are wrong rather than that the theory is wrong. Of course, this undermines the notion that observation alone can serve to falsify a theory.

Second, there is Kuhn's view (1970) that, at any given time, science tends to be dominated by a particular paradigm that is unquestioned and which affects the questions scientists ask and how they interpret what they observe (for a fuller discussion, see Hollis and Smith, 1991: 57–61). Consequently, scientific investigation is not 'open', as positivism implies, rather particular arguments are excluded in advance. There is a paradigm shift when a lot of empirical observation leads certain brave scientists to question the dominant paradigm, but until that time, and for the most part, scientists discard observations which don't fit (obviously this fits well with the second of Quine's criticisms above) and embrace the results which confirm the paradigm.

The second main line of criticism of positivism is more particular to social science. It argues that there are obvious differences between social and physical or natural phenomena that make social 'science' impossible. Three differences are particularly important. Firstly, social structures, unlike natural structures, don't exist independently of the activities they

shape. So, for example, marriage is a social institution or structure, but it is also a lived experience, particularly, although not exclusively, for those who are married. This lived experience affects agents understanding of the institution and also helps change it. Secondly, and relatedly, social structures, unlike natural structures, don't exist independently of agents' views of what they are doing in the activity. People are reflexive; they reflect on what they are doing and often change their actions in the light of that reflection. This leads us to the third difference. Social structures, unlike natural structures, change as a result of the actions of agents; in most senses the social world varies across time and space. Some positivist social scientists minimize these differences, but, to the extent they are accepted, they point towards a more interpretivist epistemological position.

Many positivists avoid these critiques which are put in the 'toohard basket'; they merely get on with their empirical work, solving puzzles from within a positive paradigm. When they do acknowledge other perspectives that acknowledgement can be perfunctory, an assertion easily demonstrated by a brief consideration of King, Keohane and Verba's (1994) treatment of interpretive (for them this appears to subsume realist) approaches. Essentially, King, Keohane and Verba argue that interpretivist approaches, by which the actually mean interpretivist methods, have utility as long as they are integrated into a positivist, or scientific as they term it, position. In this vein, they assert:

> In our view, however, science … and interpretation are *not* fundamentally different endeavors aimed at divergent goals. Both rely on preparing careful descriptions, gain deep understanding of the world, asking good questions, formulating falsifiable hypothesis on the basis of more general theories, and collecting the evidence needed to evaluated those hypotheses. (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 37)

They continue:

> Yet once hypotheses have been formulated, demonstrating their correctness … requires valid scientific inferences. The procedure for inference followed by interpretivist social scientists, furthermore, must incorporate the same standards as those followed by other qualitative and quantitative researchers. (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 38)

As we emphasized, King, Keohane and Verba see interpretivism as a methodological orientation, which may have utility, rather than an epistemological position. So, they view interpretivism as a means of generating better questions to be utilized within a positivist framework. Indeed,

it almost seems that they are advocating a major/minor methodological mix (see Marsh and Read, 2002), in which qualitative, interpretivist, methods are used to generate better questions for survey research designed to test, and attempt to falsify, hypotheses.

It also bears repetition that King, Keohane and Verba seem to conflate realism and interpretivism. So, in their section on interpretivism, they assert the usual positivist critique of epistemological realism: 'social scientists who focus on only overt, *observable*, behaviors are missing a lot, but how are we to know if we cannot see?' (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 41).

Although King, Keohane and Verba are among the foremost US political scientists, there are much more sophisticated positivists, among them Sanders and John who write in this volume, who are more willing to acknowledge and respond to criticisms of the position. It is particularly worth examining David Sanders's view in a little more detail because it represents an excellent example of the modern, more sophisticated, positivist position. Sanders accepts he has been strongly influenced by the positivist position, but acknowledges the 'ferocious philosophical criticism' to which it was subjected. He argues that modern behaviouralists who might also be called 'post-positivists' acknowledge the interdependence of theory and observation, recognize that normative questions are important and not always easy to separate from empirical questions, and accept that other traditions have a key role to play in political and social analysis. As such, this post-positivism has moved a significant way from more traditional positivism, largely as a result of the type of criticisms outlined here.

However, the ontological and epistemological problems haven't gone away, rather they have been elided. Two quotes from Sanders illustrate the point. First, he asserts in this volume (see p. 29):

> Modern behaviouralists simply prefer to subject their own theoretical claims to empirical test. They also suspect that scholars working in non-empirical traditions are never able to provide a satisfactory answer to the crucial question: 'How would you know if you were wrong?'

Later he continues (p. 40):

> [M]odern behaviouralists accept that theory must play a central role in social analysis, they also recognize the possibility that different theoretical perspectives might generate different observations. Obviously, this possibility renders the task of subjecting rival theories to empirical testing rather more complicated. According to contemporary behaviouralists,

however, it does not render the task any less significant. Whatever observations a theory may engender, if it is to be considered a truly explanatory theory, it must generate falsifiable predictions that are not contradicted by the available empirical evidence. A social enquiry is, by definition, about what people do, think or say. There is, ultimately, nothing else other than people doing, thinking and saying things – whatever fancy concepts analysts might use in order to characterize 'reality'. Behaviouralism allows all theories to make whatever characterization of 'reality' they like. However, if they are to be considered explanatory, they must make statements about what people will do, think or say, given certain conditions. There is no reason why each theory should not be evaluated on its own observational terms. But unless a theory can be evaluated – that is, tested empirically – on its own observational terms, behaviouralists are not prepared to grant it the status of explanatory theory in the first place.

This is a sophisticated statement of a positivist epistemological position, but it is still essentially positivist. Again, like King, Keohane and Verba, the aim is to use observation (of whatever type) to test hypothesized relationships between the social phenomena studied. Research from within other traditions must still be judged against the positivists' criteria: 'observation must be used in order to conduct a systematic empirical test of the theory that is being posited'. Yet, that is not a standard most researchers from within an interpretivist tradition could accept, because they do not believe that direct observation can be objective and used as a test of 'reality'. Most realists would also have a problem with Sanders's position because they would see many of the key relationships as unobservable.

One other aspect of Sanders's position is important here. He accepts that interpretation and meaning are important, which might suggest that the differences between positivist and interpretivist traditions are beginning to dissolve. So, Sanders (see p. 31) in criticizing previous studies of voting behaviour: 'There are other areas – relating to the way in which individuals reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, upon themselves – here behavioural electoral research has simply not dared to tread.' He recognizes that such factors might, or might not, be important, but emphasizes that they would be difficult to study empirically. However, the crucial point is that Sanders wants to treat interpretation and meaning as intervening variables. In this view, how a voter understands the parties and his/her position may affect his/her voting behaviour. At best this acknowledges only one aspect of the double hermeneutic; the interpretivist tradition would argue that we also need to acknowledge the dependence of the observer on socially-constructed filters affecting frameworks of knowledge.

So, positivism has changed in response to criticism. Post-positivism is

much less assertive that there is only way of doing social science. However, positivists like King, Keohane and Verba still fail to acknowledge that ontological and epistemological differences can't be solved by methodological integration. Positivism still privileges explanation, rather than understanding, and the primacy of direct observation. In our terms, it is still objectivist/realist/foundationalist and firmly located in the scientific tradition.

The interpretivist position

The interpretivist (often called a constructivist) position is clearly the most varied, as Parsons (Chapter 4) demonstrates. Parsons distinguishes very clearly between postmodern interpretivists and what he terms 'modern' constructivists, although he recognizes that other lines could be drawn. We return to these distinctions below, but begin by outlining what we see as the core of the position.

The interpretivist tradition is the obvious 'other' of positivism. However, it is a much broader church than positivism, as Parsons demonstrates. Nevertheless, it is useful to begin with an outline of the core of the position.

- In the interpretivist tradition, researchers contend that the world is socially or discursively constructed; a distinctive feature of all interpretivist approaches therefore is that that they are based on to a greater or lesser extent on an anti-foundationalist ontology.
- This means that for researchers working within this tradition, social phenomena cannot be understood independently of our interpretation of them; rather it is these interpretations/understandings of social phenomena that directly affect outcomes. It is the interpretations/meanings of social phenomena that are crucial; interpretations/meanings that can only be established and understood within discourses, contexts or traditions. Consequently, we should focus on identifying those discourses or traditions and establishing the interpretations and meanings they attach to social phenomena.
- This approach acknowledges that 'objective' analysis of the kind aspired to in the natural sciences is unattainable. Social 'scientists' (interpretivists would not use this term) are not privileged, but themselves operate within discourses or traditions. Knowledge is theoretically or discursively laden. As such, this position acknowledges the double hermeneutic.

This position has clear methodological implications. It argues that there is no objective truth, that the world is socially constructed and that the

role of social 'science' is to study those social constructions. Quantitative methods can be blunt instruments and may produce misleading data. In contrast, we need to utilize qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups and vignettes to help us establish how people understand their world. So, for example, someone operating from within this tradition studying political participation would start by trying to establish how people understand 'the political' and 'political' participation. In addition, the position puts a premium on the reflexivity of the researcher. She must be as aware as possible of her partialities and, as far as possible, take those into account when interpreting her respondent's interpretation of their experiences/actions. Consequently, from this perspective quantitative methods are again blunt instruments.

Yet some, maybe an increasing number of interpretivists would want to explain, not merely understand. Parsons is an excellent case in point. He argues (see pp. 90–1 in this volume):

> 'Modern' constructivists… think that we can posit social construction among actors but still manage to make some acceptable (if modestly tentative) claims about how the socially-constructed world 'really' works. The core of their position is usually quite simple (and is also a standard position in non-constructivist scholarship): just being aware of our inclination to interpretive bias helps us to solve the problem. If we set up careful research designs, and submit our arguments to open debate among a wide range of people with different views, then we can arrive at pragmatically acceptable claims about how the world really works. In short, for modern constructivists – like for other 'modern' scholars – how much the world is socially constructed is something we can document.

Here, the emphasis is upon a systematic study of the respondents' social constructions and clear and effective reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Even so, the claims that could be made for explanation on the basis of such research would not satisfy many behaviouralists, as Parsons himself acknowledges.

The major criticism of the interpretivist tradition comes, unsurprisingly, from positivists, though some realists would agree with elements of that critique. To positivists, the interpretivist tradition merely offers opinions or subjective judgements about the world (that, of course, is the core of King, Keohane and Verba's implicit critique of interpretivism). As such, to a positivist, there is no basis on which to judge the validity of an interpetivist's knowledge claims. One person's view of the world, and of the relationship between social phenomena within it, is as good as another's view. To the positivist this means that such research is akin to history, or

even fiction, whereas they aspire to a science of society. It is difficult for someone in the interpretivist tradition to answer this accusation, because it is based on a totally different ontological view and reflects a different epistemology and, thus, a different view of what social science is about. However, as we shall see, most researchers do believe that it is possible to generalize, if only in a limited sense. Perhaps more interestingly, even Bevir and Rhodes (2002; 2003), whom Parsons might not see as modern constructivists, attempt to defend their approach against this positivist critique by establishing a basis on which they can make knowledge claims; on which they can claim that one interpretation, or narrative, is superior to another. We shall return to their argument below.

Bevir and Rhodes (2002, Ch. 2) distinguish between the hermeneutic and postmodern, or post-structuralist, strands in the interpretivist position (see also Spencer, 2000, on this distinction). In essence, the hermeneutic tradition is idealist; it argues that we need to understand the meanings people attach to social behaviour. So, hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts and actions. This involves the use of ethnographic techniques (participant observation, transcribing texts, keeping diaries, etc. to produce what Geertz (1973) calls 'thick description'. As Bevir and Rhodes put it (2003: 22), quoting Geertz, the aim is to establish: 'our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to'. However, ethnographers do generalize. They develop a narrative about the past based upon the meanings which the actions had for social actors. Then, on the basis of this 'thick description', they offer an interpretation of what this tells us about the society. The point is that these interpretations are always partial, in both senses of the world, and provisional; they are not 'true'.

Bevir and Rhodes (2002) emphasize that post-structuralism and postmodernism have provided a powerful challenge to foundationalism in both philosophy and social science. Yet, as they also point out, this variant of the interpretivist tradition is itself so diverse that it is difficult, if not impossible, to characterize. They overcome this problem by focusing on the work of Michael Foucault, who is perhaps the best known writer in this broad tradition. He, like most post-structuralists, is a strong opponent of foundationalism, and indeed would deny any separation between ontology and epistemology, and the modernisation project associated with the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thought contended that: the basis of human knowledge is direct experience; as such, it is possible to develop an 'objective' view of the 'real' world (thus, it denies both elements of the double hermeneutic); language is transparent or neutral; and that human history is inevitably progressive, with present knowledge building on past knowledge to improve our information about the world and our ability to control it.

In contrast, Foucault argues that experience is acquired within a prior discourse. As such, language is crucial because institutions and actions only acquire a meaning through language. Thus, as Bevir and Rhodes argue (2003: 23), to Foucault: 'to understand an object or action, political scientists have to interpret it in the wider discourse of which it is part'. This means that, as Bevir and Rhodes stress, it is the social discourse, rather than the beliefs of individuals, which are crucial to Foucault's version of the interpretivist position. The identification of that discourse, and the role it plays in structuring meanings, is thus the key concern of those adopting this approach (for an example of this broad approach in use, see Howarth, 1995).

Bevir and Rhodes develop their own take on the interpretivist tradition. It is particularly interesting because it directly addresses the key issue raised in the positivist critique of this tradition. They argue that social science is about the development of narratives, not theories. As such, they stress the importance of understanding and the impossibility of absolute knowledge claims, but they want to explain and they defend a limited notion of objectivity. Broadly, Bevir and Rhodes are within the hermeneutic, rather than the postmodern, or post-structuralist, stream of the interpretivist tradition. As such, they follow Geertz and others in arguing that it is possible to produce explanations within the interpretivist tradition. However, their understanding of explanation is very different from that of a positivist. In their view, the researcher can produce an explanation of an event or of the relationship between social phenomena. But this explanation is built upon their interpretation of the meanings the actors involved gave to their actions. What is produced is a narrative which is particular, to that time and space, and partial, being based on a subjective interpretation of the views of, most likely, only some of the actors involved. Consequently, any such narrative must be provisional; there are no absolute truth claims.

However, Bevir and Rhodes do wish to make some, more limited, knowledge claims. They contend: 'Although, we do not have access to pure facts that we can use to declare particular interpretations to be true or false, we can still hang on to the idea of objectivity.' They follow Reed (1993) and argue (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 38) that a field of study 'is a co-operative intellectual *practice*, with a *tradition* of historically produced norms, rules, conventions and standards of excellence that remain subject to critical debate, and with a *narrative* content that gives meaning to it'. They continue, quoting Reed (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 38):

[Practice, tradition and narrative provide] for a negotiated and dynamic set of standards through which rational debate and argumen-

tation between proponents of rival perspectives or approaches is possible [where] these standards are historically embedded within social practices, traditions and narratives which provide 'embedded reasons' ... for judging an argument true or false or an action right or wrong .

Such criteria are not universal or objective, rather, in Reed's (1993: 177) words, they are: 'shared criteria for assessing ... knowledge claims'. To Bevir and Rhodes, like Reed, postmodernism errs in failing to acknowledge 'significant, grounded rationality' that is to be found in these practices and traditions (Reed, 1993: 177).

In Bevir and Rhodes' view (2003: 39), such knowledge claims are not self-referential because they can be 'reconfirmed' at three distinct points:

The first is when we translate our concepts for fieldwork: that is, are they meaningful to practitioners and users and if not, why not? The second is when we reconstruct narratives from the conversations: that is, is the story logical and consistent with the data? And the third is when we redefine and translate our concepts because of the academic community's judgement on the narratives: that is, does the story meet the agreed knowledge criteria?

Overall, they argue (2003: 39):

To overcome this difficulty, we should conceive of objective knowledge, less as what our community happens to agree on, and more as a normative standard embedded in a practice of criticising and comparing rival accounts of 'agreed facts'. The anti-foundational nature of this practice lies in its appeal, not to given facts, but to those agreed in a particular community or conversation. In addition, and of key importance, the normative, critical bite of our approach lies in conducting the comparison by the rules of intellectual honesty. These rules originate in anti-foundationalism and not in a straightforward acceptance of the norms of the relevant community or conversation.

As we can see then, there are a number of variants within the interpretivist tradition. However, they are all anti-foundationalist and critical of positivism. These approaches have become much more common in political science over the last few decades for a number of reasons. First, increasingly philosophical critiques have led to the questioning of positivism. Second, the post-structuralist turn in social science has had an affect on political science, although much less so than in sociology. Third, normative political theory has changed fundamentally. Historically, it was foundationalist; the

aim was to establish some absolute notion of the good or of justice. As Buckler argues in Chapter 8, that is no longer the case. Some normative political theorists have been influence by postmodernism, again variously defined, and more by the work of Quine and others. Now, most political theorists are anti-foundationalists or, at the very least, have a very limited conception of any universal foundations. Fourth, as Randall shows in Chapter 6, much, but by no means all, feminist thought has been strongly influenced by post-structuralism; it is anti-foundationalist and operates within the interpretivist tradition. As such, we can see the influence of this interpretivist tradition very broadly across political science.

Realism

Realism shares an ontological position with positivism, but, in epistemological terms, modern realism has a great more in common with interpretivism. The core views of classical realism are again fairly clear and owe much to Marx's work:

- To realists, the world exists independently of our knowledge of it. In ontological terms they, like positivists, are foundationalists.
- Again like positivists, realists contend that social phenomena/structures do have causal powers, so we can make causal statements.
- However, unlike positivists, realists contend that not all social phenomena, and the relationships between them, are directly observable. There are deep structures that cannot be observed and what can be observed may offer a false picture of those phenomena/structures and their effects (for an excellent exposition of this position see Smith, in Hollis and Smith, 1991: 205–8; see also Sayer, 2000, and Elder Vass, 2007). However, as Smith puts it, although we cannot observe those structures: 'positing their existence gives us the best explanation of social action. To use a phrase familiar to the philosophy of science, we are involved in 'inference to the best explanation' (Hollis and Smith, 1991: 207). As such, to a realist there is often a dichotomy between reality and appearance. This is a very important issue because it has clear methodological implications. It means that realists do not accept that what appears to be so, or, perhaps more significantly, what actors say is so, is necessarily so. As an example, classical Marxism, and Marxism is the archetypal classical realism, argued that there was a difference between 'real' interests, which reflect material reality, and perceived interests, which may be manipulated by the powerful forces in society. Given this view, we cannot merely ask people what their interests are, because we would merely be identifying their manipulated interests, not their 'real' interests.

The criticisms of classical realism were of two sorts, which reflect different epistemological positions. The positivists denied the existence of unobservable structures (for example, see the quote from King, Keohane and Verba above). More importantly, positing them makes the knowledge claims of realism untestable and thus unfalsifiable. As such, realist claims that rely on the effect of unobservable structures have the same status to positivists as the claims of scholars from within the interpretivist tradition. In contrast, authors from the interpretivist tradition criticize the ontological claims of realism. In their view, there are no structures that are independent of social action and no 'objective' basis on which to observe the actions or infer the deep structures. So, realist claims that structures cause social action are rejected on both ontological and epistemological grounds.

In our view, contemporary realism has been significantly influenced by the interpretivist critique. In particular, this modern critical realism acknowledges two points. First, while social phenomena exist independently of our interpretation of them, our interpretation/understanding of them affects outcomes. So, structures don't determine, rather they constrain and facilitate. Social science involves the study of reflexive agents who interpret and change structures. Second, our knowledge of the world is fallible; it is theory-laden. We need to identify and understand both the external 'reality' and the social construction of that 'reality' if we are to explain the relationship between social phenomena.

Realism also has clear methodological implications. It suggests that there is a real world 'out there', but emphasizes that outcomes are shaped by the way in which that world is socially constructed. As such, it would acknowledge the utility of both quantitative and qualitative data. So, for example, they might use quantitative methods to identify the extent to which financial markets are 'globalized'. However, they would also want to analyze qualitatively how globalization is perceived, or discursively constructed, by governments, because the realist argument would be that both the 'reality' and the discursive construction affects what government does in response to global pressures. We shall return to this example later.

Modern realism then attempts to acknowledge much of the interpretivist critique, while retaining a commitment to causal explanation and, specifically, the causal powers of unobservable structures. The key problem here of course it that it is not easy, indeed many would see it as impossible, to combine scientific and interpretivist positions because they have such fundamentally different ontological and epistemological underpinnings, one focusing on explanation and the other on understanding (on this point, see Hollis and Smith, 1991: 212). Having considered how these categories relate to some important issues in the social sciences, we can now move on to apply the arguments to particular cases so as to illustrate their use and their limits.

Ontology and epistemology in political science: a case study of globalization

The aim in this section is to examine how a researcher's ontological and epistemological position affects the way s/he approaches empirical questions in political science using one example, the literature on globalization. The literature on globalization has mushroomed in the last two decades. It has been common to distinguish between processes or aspects of globalization; so many authors have distinguished between economic, political and cultural processes, while acknowledging that they are interrelated. In this vein, many have argued that economic globalization has grown apace and that this process has significantly restricted the autonomy of the nation state. Indeed, Ohmae (1996) went as far as to claim that only two economic forces, global financial markets and trans-national corporations, would play any role in the politics of the future. In his view, the future role of states will be analogous to the current role of parish or town councils. At the same time, other authors have focused on cultural globalization, suggesting that world culture is being increasingly homogeneous, in the view of most reflecting a growing US hegemony. Certainly, there is little doubt that the issue of globalization is a crucial one for those interested in questions of contemporary political economy and governance.

Political scientists have probably been most concerned with economic globalization and the way in which it restricts the autonomy of the state and have, most often, utilized an objectivist/realist/foundationalist ontology and a positivist epistemology, although, as we shall see below, significant more recent work is realist. In contrast, sociologists and, especially, cultural studies academics, concentrate upon cultural globalization, operating from a constructivist, relativist/anti-foundationalist and interpretivist position.

The main debate about economic globalization has concerned the extent to which it has increased. There are two main positions. Some authors, like Ohmae (1990), who are christened hyperglobalists by Held *et al.* (1999) and seen as first wave theorists by Hay and Marsh (2000), argue that there has been a massive increase in various indicators of economic globalization: direct foreign investment; international bank lending; trans-national production; international trade, etc. In contrast, authors such as Hirst and Thompson (1999), christened sceptics by Held *et al.* (1999) and seen by Hay and Marsh (2000) as second wave theorists, argue that the process is more limited. More specifically, they suggest that: globalization is not a new phenomenon; regionalization, rather than globalization, is a better description of the changes that have occurred; and the only area in which there has been significant globalization is in relation to financial markets. We are not concerned here with the detail of

this argument. Our point is that both sets of authors agree about what constitutes evidence of globalization and how we can go about studying that evidence. Here, globalization is an economic process that can be measured quantitatively, indeed there is large agreement as to the appropriate measures, and which, to the extent that it exists, has an effect on patterns of governance.

More recently, other authors have been, in most cases implicitly rather than explicitly, critical of this ontological and epistemological approach. The point is easily made if we return to two ways of classifying the literature on globalization to which we have already referred. Held *et al.* contrast hyperglobalist and sceptical approaches to globalization with a third approach to which they adhere; the transformationalist thesis. In contrast, Hay and Marsh (2000) identify a third wave of the globalization literature that builds upon a critique of the first two waves. These two 'third ways' share something in common, but they differ significantly in a manner that reflects ontological and epistemological debates.

The transformationalists differ significantly from the sceptics in that they share

> a conviction that, at the dawn of a new millennium, globalisation is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order … In this respect, globalisation is conceived as a powerful transformative force which is responsible for a massive shake out of societies, economies, institutions of governance and world order. (Held *et al.*, 1999: 7)

Held *et al.* also emphasize the major way in which the transformationalist account parts company with both the other two positions (1999: 7):

> The transformationalists make no claims about the future trajectory of globalisation … Rather [they] emphasise globalisation as a long-term historical process which is inscribed with contradictions and which is significantly shaped by conjunctural factors.

So, they argue that: there are 'real' social, political and economic changes occurring in the world; globalization is a cause of these changes, a transformative force; but there is no inevitable process of globalization which, as social scientists, we can identify. This last point is especially important here. The putative development of globalization is dependent on the actions of agents, whether individuals, companies, institutions or states; as such, it is a socially constructed process. It seems clear then that the transformative position is a realist one.

This position has methodological consequences. It points strongly to comparative analysis, because the emphasis is upon how different countries, and indeed different companies and markets, are affected by, and respond to, this process of globalization in different ways. If globalization is not an inevitable, or universal, process, then we need to focus on how it is differently experienced in different contexts.

This point is even clearer if we turn to what Hay and Marsh call the third wave literature on globalization. Hay and Marsh (2000: 6) follow Held *et al*. in arguing that we: 'shouldn't make essentialising and reifying assumptions about the effects, consequences, or even the very existence, of globalisation'. Rather, globalization is a series of contradictory and contingent processes. More specifically, they suggest that, for many authors, especially the hyperglobalists, globalization is a process without a subject. In contrast, they argue that it is agents who construct globalization and, as such, the researcher should identify the actors involved and how they perceive and discursively construct globalizing tendencies.

However, Hay and Marsh go further to contend that these discursive constructions have significant effects on outcomes. So, they suggest that it is the discursive construction of globalization that affects government economic policies, rather than the 'real' processes of globalization. As such, and taking the UK as an example, their argument would run along the following lines:

- While there has been a significant increase in regionalism in patterns of trading and a globalization of financial markets, there is limited evidence that Britain is locked into a globalized political economy which determines the economic policy which the British government can adopt.
- However, British governments, and especially the Blair government, argued that it was constrained in that way. To them, the extent of globalization is such that the pursuit of neoliberal policies is inevitable; there is no alternative.
- The dominant discursive construction of globalization has a crucial effect on what governments do; for example predisposing these governments to purse neoliberal, active labour market policies.

We are not concerned here about the validity or otherwise of this argument. The crucial point here is that this view clearly marks a break with the positivism that underpins most work on globalization. To Hay and Marsh, there may be 'real' processes at work, but the way they affect outcomes is mediated by the discursive construction(s) of these processes. This argument has both realist and interpretivist elements. There is an appeal to a real world, but the emphasis is on the discursive construction

of that world. This position illustrates how realist and interpretivist positions interface. In our view, this position is a realist one if it recognizes that there is an interactive or dialectical relationship between the 'real' world and the discourses. A realist would acknowledge not only that discourses have real effects, in this case that the dominant discourse of globalization shapes economic policy, but also that the 'real' processes of globalization constrain the resonance of different discourses. So, if the dominant discourse is at odds with the 'reality', alternative discourses can appeal to that 'reality deficit'. However, if it is merely the discourses that have the causal power, then, in our view, it is an interpretivist position (see Chapter 10 for a more extended discussion of this issue).

There are other approaches to globalization which are clearly located in an interpretivist tradition. As we emphasized above, most of these approaches stress cultural globalization. Of course, as Held *et al*. point out (1999: 328), the concept of culture has a long and complex history but: 'normally refers to the social construction, articulation and reception of meaning'. This definition immediately suggests an anti-foundationalist ontology and, most often, an interpretivist epistemology.

It is obviously possible to approach the issue of cultural globalization utilizing a positivist epistemology. So, one could focus empirically on the extent to which certain cultural icons, for example, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Madonna, have become universal, or whether colonialism was associated with a similar global culture (see Held *et al.*, 1999: Chapter 7). However, the focus of a cultural studies approach to globalization is much more likely to be on 'difference'; a crucial value to post-structuralists. Two points are important here. First, the argument would be that there are various discourses about globalization, none of which is 'true', although at any time one discourse may be dominant. Second, while one discourse may dominate, it can be, and will always be, resisted; different agents – citizens and researchers – will offer different narrations of globalization and its effects. In this way, this alternative 'cultural studies' approach reflects an anti-foundationalist ontological and an interpretivist epistemological position.

Conclusion

It is not possible to resolve ontological and epistemological disputes in a way that all would accept. Rather, we have sought to introduce the reader to these complex issues in a way designed to make them intelligible to a non-philosopher. In our view, a number of points are crucial:

- Ontological and epistemological positions are better viewed as a skin,

not a sweater. It may be tempting to attempt to find a synthesis of all the available positions, in the hope that, at some level of analysis, agreement is possible over these fundamental issues. Unfortunately, experience and logic combine to warn against this temptation. They continue because they reflect disagreements not just about logic or technicalities but about the proper scope of human action in society. In other words, they are questions which relate to deep-rooted moral positions. These moral positions may be internally coherent, but they seem incompatible with one another, except in so far as they all include some appeal to intellectual and ethical tolerance of diversity.

- In the face of these difficulties, another strategy, alluring at least to risk-averse researchers, is to avoid the issue. Far from being safe, this position is actually the opposite, since it does not enable one to distinguish between good and bad research and between good and bad arguments. The least one can say about these issues is that they are of sufficient importance to warrant a genuine commitment to come to terms with them. Coming to terms with the issues requires one to think through the different arguments separately, to compare them and to evaluate them. As we emphasize at the beginning of this chapter, this means that all researchers should identify and acknowledge their epistemological and ontological underpinnings and how these affect their research design and research method and, most importantly, the claims the make on the basis of what their research reveals.

The purpose of this chapter has been to encourage this and to attempt to provide an introduction to some of the main ideas and methods involved. Like everyone else, we have an ontological and epistemological position, and a position on the relationship between ontology and epistemology, which we acknowledge. However, our aim has been to introduce readers to the variety of positions; it is up to you do decide where you stand.

Further reading

- See all the debates stimulated by the version of this chapter in the second edition of this volume (Bates and Jenkins, 2007; Hay, 2007a; Marsh and Furlong, 2007).
- The best introductions to the philosophy of science and social science are Chalmers (1986, 1990) and Winch (1958).
- For an accessible overview of ontology and epistemology see Hay (2002) and Della Porta and Keating (2008).

- On the positivist approach see Kuhn (1970), Hempel (1965, 1966); or Halfpenny (1982).
- On the interpretive approach see Bevir and Rhodes (2003), especially Chapter 2.
- On realism see Sayer (2000) and McAnulla (2006).
- On the relationship between ontology and epistemology see Spencer (2000).

Meta-Theoretical Issues

DAVID MARSH

This chapter deals with some of the key problems in social science. It is focused on the relationships between structure and agency, the material and the ideational and stability and change. These issues, here termed meta-theoretical issues, are clearly related for two reasons. Firstly, discussions about/positions on structure/agency and the material and the ideational are invariably invoked to explain stability and change, surely the most fundamental issue in social science. Secondly, positions on all these meta-theoretical issues are clearly related and, as I shall argue below, influenced by the particular author's ontological and epistemological starting point. This chapter is divided into four sections: initially I take up the second point above, examining how positions on structure and agency and the material and the ideational are related; and subsequently, I deal with each of the meta-theoretical issues in turn, outlining the key positions and crucial debates in the area.

The connectedness of meta-theoretical issues

Most reviews of either the structure/agency debate (see, for example, Hay, 1995 and McAnulla, 2002) or the material/ideational debate (see, for example, Hay, 2002) utilize a three-way classification of the existing literature. In the case of the structure/agency debate they distinguish between structural, intentional and dialectical approaches, while in relation to the material/ideational debate they distinguish between materialist, idealist and dialectical approaches. I begin here by outlining these distinctions in relation to both debates, before suggesting two more categories which are, in my view, common in the literature: an additive approach; and a post-structuralist approach. Finally, I briefly outline the links between positions on the two meta-theoretical issues.

Both structuralism and intentionalism, and materialism and idealism treat the relevant meta-theoretical issue as a dualism, that is an either/or issue. So, structuralism privileges structure and downplays the role of

agents, while intentionalism privileges the role of agents and downplays the role of structure. Similarly, materialism focuses on material factors, while idealism stresses the role of ideas. It is common to view classical Marxism as an example of a structuralist position and rational choice theory as an example of an intentionalist position, although some theorists view rational choice theory as structuralist, because, given it assumes that, if we know an individual's preferences and the decision making situation in which she is acting, we can predict her action, thus allowing that individual no agency (see Ward, 2002). This is an elegant argument, but it is a different one from that taken in most structuralist thought, where the focus is on the way in which structures like class or gender shape/determine preferences/attitudes/actions.

A materialist, and here Hay (2002) includes classical Marxists, rational choice theorists (see below) and international relations realists, sees the material as shaping, perhaps even determining, both ideas and outcomes. In contrast, an idealist would give little, if any, causative powers to the material world, rather ideas shape outcomes. In contrast, the dialectical position treats structure/agency and the material/ideational as a duality, seeing the relationship between the two elements of each pair as interactive and iterative. So, the argument would proceed along the following lines:

- Structures provide the context within which agents act but agents interpret structures and in acting change them, with these 'new' structures becoming the context within which agents act.
- Material relations provide the context within which ideas develop and operate, but ideas are what are used to interpret those material relations and these interpretations help change the material relations. These 'new' material relations become the context within which ideas develop.

The dialectical position provides the focus of most of this chapter, because, in my view, it is where the cutting edge of the debates are at present.

In my view, it is useful to recognize two other approaches in these sets of literature which have received much less attention: an additive approach, and a post-structuralist approach. The additive approach is common in political science and probably most associated with positivist and empiricist positions. For example, the literature on voting behaviour evokes both structural/material variables, like class, gender or education, and agential/ideational variables, like the policy preference of voters and how far they correspond to the parties' policies, to explain voting outcomes. In essence, the argument is that both structural (or material)

and intentional (or ideational) factors cause voting decisions. The relative causal power of each of these sets of factors in a particular case is an empirical question. Of course, that does not mean that no voting behaviour researchers want to theorize the relationship/interaction between the sets of factors (indeed, that is what regression analysis entails) or generalize their results (provided their samples are representative), but there is no attempt to theorize the relationship as iterative. To put it another way, this approach can see the relationship between structure and agency and between the material and the ideational as interactive, but it doesn't view it as iterative.

The post-structuralist position is also common, but barely integrated into the discussions about these meta-theoretical issues in political science. It is, of course, a fundamental critique of the way in which most social science is conducted, rooted as it is in a constructivist position (see Chapter 9). From this position, structures do not exist independent of agents; rather, they are co-constitutive in and through discourse. As McAnulla (2002: 282) puts it, for the post-structuralist: 'there is no point in attempting to establish the "real" relationship between structure and agency. Any understanding we have of the issue is viewed as one constructed in the language and discourse we use.' As such, the distinction between structure and agency is not an ontological one (an issue discussed at more length below), neither does it have much, if any, analytical utility.

Two points are worth emphasizing here about the post-structuralist position. The first follows obviously from the last paragraph. Any focus on the two meta-theoretical issues considered here is of limited utility at best, because there is no extra-discursive realm. Rather, the role of structures, material relations, agents and ideas, exist within, are shaped by and understood in terms of, discursive formations. As such, from this perspective, we need to focus on discursive formations and how they develop and change. This is not the approach explored here, but it needs to be recognized as a fundamental critique of the dialectical position.

Second, with the increased focus on ideas in the comparative politics and international political economy literature, a number of authors have taken a clear constructivist turn. So, for example, as we shall see at some length below, Hay adopts a constructivist institutionalist position and argues that the distinctions between structure and agency and the material and the ideational are analytical, not ontological. As such, he is clearly closer to the post-structuralist position than authors like Archer (1995, 2000), McAnulla (2002) or myself, a point I return to below.

It is worth emphasizing a fairly obvious point here. In most cases, the position that a researcher takes on one of these two meta-theoretical issues parallels the position she takes on the other:

- Structuralists are usually materialists; here, classical Marxism provides an obvious example.
- Those committed to an additive position usually take it in relation to both issues; here the voting behaviour literature provides an example.
- Those who adopt a dialectical approach do so for both issues, as is clear in the discussion in the next three sections.
- Post-structuralists believe both distinctions can only be understood in the context of a particular discursive formation, or narrative in the terminology of Bevir and Rhodes (2003).

Perhaps the relationship between intentionalism and idealism is the most problematic. Here, again, rational choice theory presents an interesting case and the debate is not easy to resolve. Hay (2002), like Ward and others, views rational choice theory as a structuralist position, for reasons discussed earlier. He also sees it as a materialist position. As such, we could see structuralism and materialism as linked here, as in the case of classical Marxism. However, just as it is questionable whether rational choice theory is a structuralist position, so it is doubtful whether it is a materialist position. It does not see preference as rooted in material interests, as a materialist would, although it is fair to say that it is a common criticism of the position that it assumes, rather than explaining, preferences.

   In the next two sections I focus on dialectical approaches to structure/agency and the material/ideational, before turning in the final substantive section to the relation between stability and change. I focus on the work of Hay for four main reasons. First, he is concerned to look systematically at the relationship between the three meta-theoretical issues in a way which is uncommon in the literature. Second, he relates the different positions back to the ontological and epistemological issues which underpin them, another important issue here. Third, his work reflects a major trend in political science, the move to treat ideas more seriously, which has become very important in recent years. Fourth, in my view, if one does not adopt a post-structuralist position, then the most important issues in the literature on these meta-theoretical issues revolve around the debates within the dialectical position and particular between those who, to use Hay's phrase discussed below, adopt a thin constructivist or a thick constructivist position.

Structure and agency: the dialectical approaches

Both Hay (1995 and 2002) and McAnulla (2002) distinguish between three dialectical approaches: Gidden's structuration theory; Archer's

morphogenetic approach; and Jessop and Hay's structural relational approach. Here, I look at each in turn, paying most attention to Hay's work, but, in critiquing Hay's position, I examine the position of Bourdieu which has rarely been utilized in discussions of structure/agency in political science.

Structuration theory

Giddens' argument is that structure/agency is a duality, not a dualism; they are interdependent and internally related. Structures constrain and enable agents, agents interpret structures and in doing so change them. Giddens uses a coin as an analogy to evoke the relationship between the two, arguing that one cannot see the effect of both structure and agency at one time, just as one cannot see both sides of the coin at once. So, methodologically, at any given time one can only study either structure or agency. while holding the other constant, or 'bracketing it off' (Giddens 1984: 289). Hay (1995: 193–5; and 2002: 118–21) and McAnulla (2002: 278–80) criticize Giddens in broadly the same way, emphasizing that the approach is not dialectical because it does not allow us to study the interaction between the two and, in empirical terms, tends to privilege agency, because, in his empirical work, Giddens 'brackets off' structure. I return to Giddens' treatment of agency below.

The morphogenetic approach

This is the approach developed by Archer (1995; see also McAnulla, 2002). Archer argues that there is an ontological and an analytical distinction between structure and agency, while Giddens and, particularly, Jessop and Hay see the distinction as only analytical. To Archer structure and agency operate in different ways; in her analogy they are two strands that entwine with one another. As such, the temporal dimension is crucial for Archer and she identifies what she terms a morphogenetic cycle, a three-phase cycle of change over time (see Figure 10. 1). At T1 there is structural conditioning from a pre-existing context within which action occurs and which affects agents' interests. Social interaction occurs at T2 and T3. Here, agents are influenced by the structural conditions at T1, but can also affect outcomes using their abilities to forward their interests, often through a process of negotiation with other agents. At T4, as a result of the actions at T2 and T3, the structural conditions are either changed (this is morphogenisis) or, much less likely, not changed (morphostasis). T4 then provides the starting point of the next cycle.

Hay is highly critical of Archer (Hay, 2002: 122–126) arguing that structure and agents are only analytically, not ontologically, separate, an

Figure 10.1 *Archer's three-phase cycle of change*

Structural conditioning

T1 ⟶

Social interaction

T2 ⟶ **T3**

Structural elaboration

⟶ **T4**
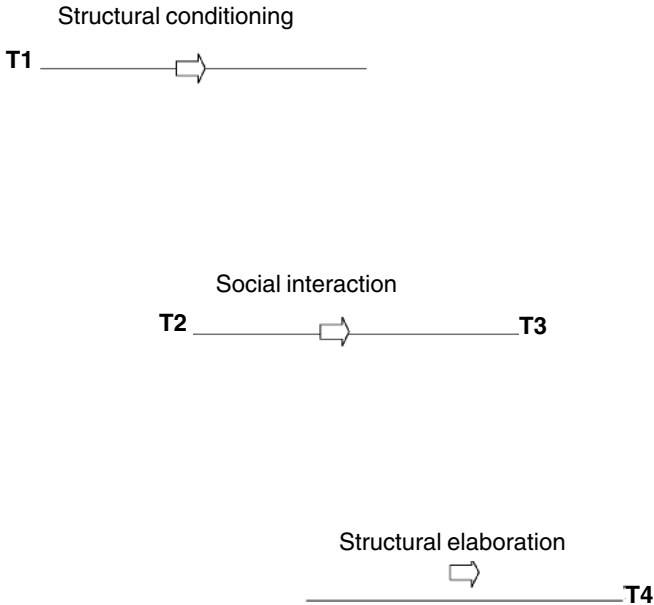
Source: McAnulla (2002); adapted from Archer (1996).

issue I return to below. More specifically, he takes issue with what he sees as a temporal separation of structure and agency in Archer and, particularly, her view that structure pre-dates agency. As such, he argues (2002: 125) that, in the end, Archer, like Giddens, presents an 'agent-centred and individualistic view of morphogenisis'.

The strategic-relational approach

Hay (2002: 89–134) adopts a strategic relational approach. I spend more time on this position because it raises the questions that are at the forefront of the contemporary structure/agency debate. Here, the distinction between structure and agency is seen merely as an analytical one and, as such, structure and agency co-exist, and indeed are co-constitutive; they are not, and cannot be temporally separated (see Figure 10. 2). As Hay puts it (2002: 127): 'Stated most simply, then, neither agents nor structures are real, since neither has an existence in isolation from the other – their existence is relational (structure and agency are mutually constituted).' This

Figure 10.2   *Structure, strategy and agency in the strategic-relational approach*
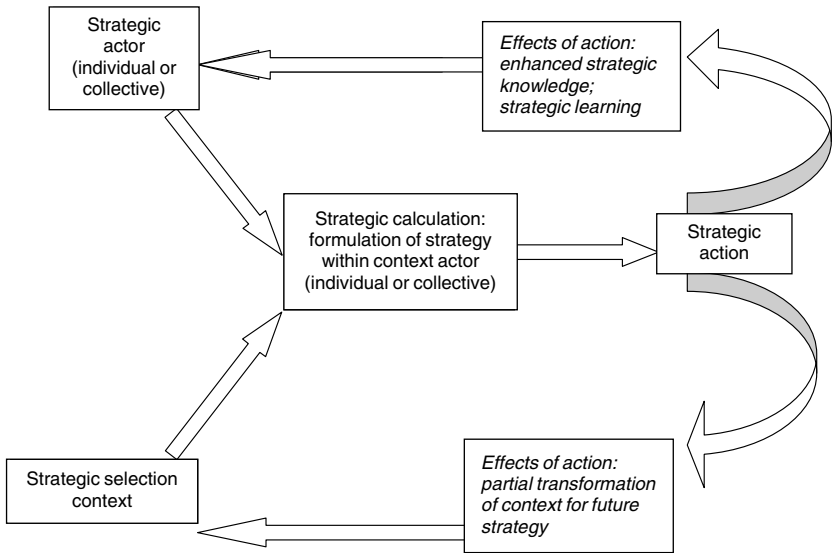
Source: Adapted and developed from Hay (1995: 202)

approach is reflected in Hay's development of Gidden's coin analogy. Structure and agency to Hay are better seen not as two sides of the same coin, but rather as 'two metals in the alloy from which the coin is moulded' (Hay, 1995: 200).

As such, the core of the strategic-relational approach is 'the interaction between strategic actors and the strategic context within which they find themselves' (Hay, 2002, 128). Agents are viewed as 'conscious, reflexive and strategic' and, in reflecting on their behaviour and preferences can change them. The agent's strategic action both changes the structured context and contributes to the agent's strategic learning which changes her preferences and her view of her interests. Crucially, in this position structure has no independent causal power.

There are two crucial issues about the strategic relational approach. First, if structure (or indeed agency) has no independent causal power, then it is hard to see how the relationship between structure and agency can be dialectical. In fact, in this position there is an inevitable privileging of agents and, indeed, ideas, which has clear methodological consequences. It is agents' choices which are important and structures (which don't exist independently anyway) only affect agents to the extent that

they recognize them and purposefully *choose* to be influenced by them. As such, in order to identify the agent's preferences, their perceptions of the strategic context, the reasons for their strategic choices and their reflections on the outcomes of their actions, we need to ask them.

For Hay, the other key element in any explanation of outcomes is the strategic context. He defines strategy as 'intentional conduct orientated to the environment within which it is to occur. It is the intention to realize certain outcomes and objectives which motivates action. Yet, for that action to have any chance of realizing such intentions, it must be informed by a strategic assessment of the relevant context in which strategy occurs and upon which it subsequently impinges' (Hay, 2002: 129). Here, it is clear that the explanatory power lies with the consciousness of agents and the relevant strategic, that is to a large extent discursive, context. As such, we need to identify the contesting, and particularly the dominant, discourse(s), which shape, but of course don't determine, the context and therefore the outcome.

In contrast, if one conceptualizes structure and agency as ontologically, not just analytically, separable, then the relationship between structure and agency would be viewed as dialectical in the following sense.

- Structures provide the context within which agents act; these structures are both material and ideational.
- Agents have preferences/objectives which they attempt to forward.
- Agents interpret the context within which they act, a context which is both structural and strategic.
- However, structures, both material and ideational, can have an effect on agents of which they are not necessarily conscious.
- In acting agents change the structures.
- These structures then provide the context within which agents act in the next iteration.

This formulation differs from that of Hay in three main ways. First, because it's rooted in an ontological, not merely an analytical, separation between structure and agency, it sees both as having causal powers, although not independently of one another, given that there is a dialectical relationship between the two. Second, this formulation, unlike Hay's, emphasizes that the relationship is dialectical in the sense that it is both interactive and iterative, so structure constrains or facilitates agents, who in acting change structures, which, in turn, constrain or facilitate agents etc. Third, and this is by far the most important point, it suggests that structures can have an effect on agents of which the agents are not conscious; a position rejected by Hay. In fact, this latter point is so important that it needs developing. Here, the work of Bourdieu, and particu-

larly his concept of habitus, offers a way of conceptualizing how structures can affect agents without their being conscious of that influence.

Bourdieu and habitus

Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a potentially useful way of conceptualizing an understanding of the way structure affects agents in a prereflexive, or pre-conscious, way (for an extended treatment of this issue, see Akram and Marsh, 2009). Habitus refers to socially acquired and culturally embodied systems of predispositions, tendencies or inclinations. These are 'deep structural' propensities, involving both classification and assessment and they are embodied in all aspects of our life – including the way we walk, talk, sit and eat. To Bourdieu, the social construction of reality is structured because all our cognitive structures have social origins which are inscribed in the habitus.

So Bourdieu (1977) uses habitus as a conceptual mechanism to explain the way in which social norms become embedded in agents as 'durable dispositions', with a disposition seen as 'a pre-disposition, a tendency, propensity or inclination' (1977: 214), of which the agent is not conscious (1977: 72). An individual's habitus develops in response to the social sphere in which s/he lives and acts: a space that Bourdieu (1977) terms a 'field.' Bourdieu defines a field as: 'a system of objective relations that is constituted by various species of capital' (Bourdieu: 1977: 201). Thus, we might speak of the 'education field' or the 'family field'. The positions in a field are related to one another, not directly through interactions or connections, but in terms of exterior relations of difference, especially in regards to forms of power [capital] (Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus is thus both a 'structured structure,' as it is affected by external structures, and a 'structuring structure,' given that it impacts directly on agents. This leads Bourdieu to suggest that: 'habitus is generative' (1977: 73).

Of course, any notion of the habitus raises crucial methodological issues. If habitus operates on a pre-conscious or unconscious level, then, by definition, it is difficult to access. So, if we ask people about their class and how it influences them, they may, usually do, deny they think or act in class terms, but, in Bourdieu's terms they may be influenced in ways of which they are unaware; so, the effect of class may be pre-reflexive. There is no place here to explore these issues (see Akram and Marsh, 2009), but the issue of whether structure is ontologically separate from agency and whether and how we can develop a concept of the sub-conscious/pre-conscious, perhaps rooted in Bourdieu's concept of habitus, to show how structures can have independent causal power, is at the core of the contemporary structure/agency debate. This is a debate which will continue to generate a lot of interest, but it is a crucial one for explaining stability and change.

The material and the ideational: thin and thick constructivism

Here, the contemporary debate revolves around a distinction between thick and thin constructivism (Hay, 2002: 206, table 6.1). In Hay's view, both positions see the relationship between the material and the ideational as dialectical, but thick constructivism prioritizes ideational factors and constitutive logics and thin constructivism prioritizes material factors and causal logics. This issue lies at the core of the contemporary debate about the relationship between the material and the ideational and deserves further consideration. It also clearly relates to the structure/ agency debate. Hay adopts what he terms a constructivist institutionalist position as a response to the limitations of historical institutionalism, a position associated with thick constructivists. As such, he shares with Blyth (2002a and 2002b) the view that historical institutionalism has major problems with explaining change and that, in the hands of many historical institutionalists, the concept of path dependency becomes an almost determinist one (see Hay 2006a and 2006b). Once again, Hay argues that the distinction between the material and the ideational is an analytical, not an ontological, one.

The core features of constructivist institutionalism are (Hay, 2006a and 2006b):

- Actors are strategic.
- They seek to achieve complex seeking to realize certain complex, contingent and changing goals .
- They act within contexts that favour some strategies over others.
- Ideas are in the form of perception matter in that they provide the guide.
- Interests are social constructs; they are not rooted in material differences.
- The functionality/dysfunctionality of institutions/structures is an open question both in empirical and historical terms.
- There is a focus on ideational as well institutional path dependence.
- The aim is to 'identify, detail and interrogate the extent to which – through processes of normalisation and institutional-embedding – established ideas become codified, serving as cognitive filters through which actors come to interpret environmental signals' (Hay 2006a: 65).

Hay (2006a:65) acknowledges that, for constructive institutionalism, change occurs:

in the context which is structured (not least by institutions and ideas about institutions) in constantly changing ways which facilitate certain forms of intervention whilst militating against others. Moreover, access to strategic resources and, indeed, to knowledge of the institutional environment is unevenly distributed. This in turn affects the ability of actors to transform the contexts (institutional and otherwise) in which they find themselves.

He notes that 'it is important to emphasise the crucial space granted to ideas' (Hay 2006a:65) within such a formulation.

This passage reveals clearly where Hay is positioned. First, he emphasizes the role that ideas play in shaping the structural and discursive context within which agents act. Secondly, he recognizes that the context is strategically selective; that it favours some strategies over others. These positions would be shared by both thin and thick constructivists. However, what is missing in Hay's conceptualization is any idea that there are material, as well as ideational, constraints on the actions of agents. This is clear in Hay's work on globalization.

Hay has written extensively on globalization both individually and with a series of co-authors (Hay, 2004, 2005; Hay and Rosamond, 2002; Hay and Marsh, 2000; Hay and Smith, 2005; Smith and Hay, 2006). In Hay's view, globalization plays a powerful role in ideational, rather than material, terms. If policy-makers believe in globalization, then this is likely to shape their approach, whether or not globalization actually exists. In other words, neoliberal ideas are creating neoliberal policies. In turn, this process undermines the nation-state, with governments adopting policies that, in turn, affect their power and sovereignty. For example, in joining Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), states have signed up to the Stability and Growth Pact, which affects how much they can spend.

In this sense, globalization may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. By behaving as if it were a reality, policy-makers may actually be making it a reality. Consequently, for Hay, globalization is best understood as a (political) consequence, rather than as an (economic) cause. This 'ideational' approach to globalization is clearly important because it recognizes that discourses have real effects in two ways. First, if policy-makers believe, wrongly in Hay's view, that globalization gives them no alternative but to pursue neoliberal economic policies, and perhaps especially active labour market policies, then they will adopt these policies; this is the logic of no alternative. Second, if states and other actors believe that there are high levels of globalization then they will act as if that was so and, in doing so, by increasingly competing in that global marketplace, bring about more globalization.

A thin constructivist would have no problems accepting that discourses about globalization have had real effects (see, for example, Marsh, Smith and Holti, 2006). However, they would contend that is only part of the picture. From their perspective, the relationship between the material and the ideational is dialectical and this means that the material reality has an effect on the discourse; in other words, a dialectical relationship cannot be unidirectional. One way to think about this is to invoke a concept of resonance, which Hay alludes to, but does not develop (see also Marsh, Smith and Holti, 2006). Here, the argument would be that, while any narration of the processes of globalization is possible, the real economic processes associated with globalization will constrain the effectiveness and longevity of that discourse (for a similar approach and argument see Jessop, 2004; Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum, 2001 and 2006).

Indeed, at the time of writing (June 2009) we are living through a period in which the dialectical relationship between the 'real' economic processes of globalization and discourses of globalization seems very evident and, in my view, demonstrates the utility of a thin constructivist position, rather than the thick constructivist position advocated by Hay. It seems to me hard to argue at a time when the world economy is deep into a recession that there aren't real economic processes, albeit ones not necessarily best understood as globalization, which affect policy outcomes. As Wade (2008: 26) emphasizes, the world economy, led by the US, is in a perilous state (for an interesting attempt to compare the current crisis with previous ones, see Reinhart and Rogoff, 2008).

Not only were trends in US house prices, equities and the external deficit worse in the run-up to the crisis than in previous industrial economy banking crises, other indicators were also flashing red. Average household debt relative to income was at record levels, and over a quarter of households were in 'net asset poverty' with insufficient assets (including houses) to sustain current expenditure for more than three months in the absence of employment.

The key point here is that the world economy has transformed in the last twenty to thirty years; in particular it has become 'financialised' as a consequence of the changes in the nature and size of capital markets (Wade, 2008). Wade emphasizes (2008: 29) that there has been a 'vast increase in the global credit pool … and downward pressure on consumer price inflation' and little, and largely ineffective, regulation. Overall, financial markets have become increasingly internationalized and risky, although the financial institutions attempt to disguise the risk. Consequently, banks made their profits by creating financial products which they sold to pension funds and local authorities around the world. Often, perhaps usually, risky loans were packaged with less risky ones

and, as Wade (2008: 31) argues, credit-rating agencies tended to over-rate the credit-worthiness of such packages.

As such, this rapid internationalization of financial market has had an influence on politics in all countries. Taking one example, cited by Wade, if a Norwegian local authority invests in a financial product sold by a US bank, which turns out to be more risky than they thought resulting in their investment becoming much devalued, then inevitably, that directly influences the lives of the citizens in that Norwegian municipality, because there is less money available for investment in infrastructure and so on.

The key point to emphasize is that, while to talk of economic globalization as a constraint on, or to some people a determinant of, public policy is misguided and what Smith (2004: 505) calls a 'default explanation', that doesn't mean that international economic processes don't constrain, or indeed facilitate, government policy. Smith's discussion of 'globalization' in Ireland is also relevant here. Smith argues that globalization has been used as an umbrella term in Ireland, as elsewhere, to refer to such different, if related, processes as trade openness, FDI (Forward direct investment) and European integration. However, she asserts (2004: 509) that 'To claim that Ireland is not being globalised is not to suggest that economic factors do not serve to shape policy change.' So, she emphasizes the effect of the exposure to international trade, the impact of FDI and EU membership on public policy in the Republic, while also stressing that the first of these has been an important factor in Ireland since the 1930s.

Stability and change

As Colin Hay argues (2002: 138): 'For any *normative* and *critical political* analyst, the question of change is far from a complicating distraction – it is, in essence, the very *raison d'être* of political enquiry' (his emphasis). In addition, as Hay emphasizes: 'political analysts have increasingly turned to the question of structure, and agency derives in no small part from concerns about the capacity of existing approaches to deal with the complex issues of social and political change'. Of course, positions on the relationship between stability and change are rooted in different conceptualizations of time. As such, I initially address this issue focusing on three conceptualizations: the linear position adopted by Hay (2002); the non-linear approach favoured by Tonkiss (1998; see also Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 2006), which, of course, problematizes the whole idea of a distinction between stability and change; and the circadian model proposed by Bates (2006). Subsequently, I look critically at Hay's punctuated evolution model of change, which, while interesting, raises a number of questions crucial to any discussion of stability and change.

Hay: a linear conception of time

Hay concentrates upon diachronic, linear conceptualizations of time, and thus of change. He begins by acknowledging (Hay, 2002: 150) that: 'even among those who engage in (diachronic analysis) there is little agreement as to the temporality and resulting shape or pattern of social and political change over time'. He begins by criticizing revolutionary and evolutionary theories of change, before focusing on the idea of the punctuated equilibrium (later punctuated evolution) model. He sees this model as associated with two ideas: that i) a significant amount of institutional change occurs in short bursts of time; but ii) there are extended periods of relative stasis after bursts. So, as Hay puts it (2002: 161): 'As the term would itself suggest, punctuated equilibrium [evolution] refers to a discontinuous conception of time in which periods of comparative modest institutional change are interrupted by more rapid and intense moments of transformation.'

He illustrates the argument with reference to the contemporary state (2002: 161): '[the model] points to the ability of the liberal democratic state to respond successfully to societal demands and to disarm opposition, but also to its proneness to periodic moments of crisis in which the ability is compromised and in which the pace of change accelerates significantly'. In this way he suggests (2002: 161) that, in the UK, the dual crises of Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state, after a long period of postwar consensus, led to the triumph of monetarist and neoliberal paradigm in the 1980s. However, Hay argues (2002: 163) that the concept of punctuated equilibrium does not afford enough attention to the periods of stability. As such, he prefers the concept of punctuated evolution to that of punctuated equilibrium.

Tonkiss: a non-linear conception of time

In contrast, Tonkiss (1998: 34–5), a post-structuralist, advocates a non-linear conception of time. He draws on Foucault's work which highlights the discontinuity of social change, emphasizing (1998: 45) that it represents a serious challenge to the notion of historical explanation in social science. Indeed, Tonkiss argues (1998: 45) that, to Foucault, change is: 'arbitrary, accidental or unpredictable'. So, Tonkiss contends (1998: 46) that a non-linear approach is superior because 'An interest in the local effects of social change, in the diverse connection between different factors, places and agents, offers a descriptive richness which can be missed by broad-brush theories of change.' For Tonkiss, change is both ubiquitous and untheorizable, at least in any way a positivist or critical realist might understand. As such, his position is based on an ontological and epistemological claim, which I, like Hay and Bates, would reject.

Bates: A circadian conception of time

Finally, Bates (2006) advocates a circadian conception, strongly associated with the work of Adam (1990; 1995; 1998). He argues (2006: 154–6) that to transcend the dualism between stability and change we need to adopt a circadian conception of time. To Bates, the big advantage of this conceptualization is that it acknowledges the dialectical relationship between cyclical and linear conceptions of time and between stability and change. Adam (1990: 74) emphasizes that a 'circadian' conceptualization indicates an openness to variation rather than sameness, invariant repetition, and fixed accuracy. Fine tuning, adaptation, and context-based, projective and retrospective changes are only possible on the basis of such fundamental openness.

Crucially, the repetition is asymmetrical. Thus, natural time is characterized in terms of a series (Adam, 1990: 87) 'of many intersecting spirals, where linear, irreversible, processes fold back on themselves in multiple feedback cycles'. As such, change is ubiquitous, in the sense that these processes never merely reproduce. However, the degree of change varies depending on the context, so we need a much more nuanced study of the relationship between the two and, in my view, change occurs in the context of stability; a point I return to below.

More on punctuated evolution

Here, I focus on two issues around the punctuated evolution model: the argument that long periods of relative stasis are followed by a period of rapid change as a response to crisis; and the absence of any spatial dimension in the analysis.

Relative stasis and rapid change

Given Hay's position, the key question almost inevitably becomes: what causes the rapid change? Hay's response is clear, it is crisis, and particularly how that crisis is narrated, that leads to radical change. As such, Hay distinguishes (2002: 161–3) between normal periods of policy making and radical or exceptional institutional innovation that results from a successful crisis narrative. So, in the normal periods, the response to a policy problem occurs largely among elite policy makers who operate with a given set of values and a particular definition of the problem, although there is always strategic learning involved. In this context, and given those perceptions/values, the outcome will be policy evolution within existing parameters. In contrast, in a period of crisis the elite cannot retain control of the definition of the problems, and indeed their perceptions of the problem may change; rather, the problem is clearly visible and broadly aired. In that context, if a successful crisis narrative is

developed and 'believed', then there will be a paradigm shift (the idea of a paradigm shift used by Hay was adapted from Kuhn, 1962, by Peter Hall, 1993) and significant policy change.

The argument becomes clearer if we examine how Hay uses it to understand/explain post-war British politics. Hay suggests, following Hall's (1993) earlier analysis, that a new paradigm was established/emerged after 1945, the post-war consensus, rooted in social democracy, the mixed economy and the Keynesian welfare state. However, this consensus was increasingly questioned in the 1970s, as a result of a crisis of Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state. What Hay adds to Hall's analysis is the idea that a transformation occurred because this crisis was successfully narrated by the Conservatives and their allies in the 'winter of discontent'. The winter of discontent in the UK in 1978–9 involved a series of public sector strikes which had a major effect on most of the population, so, to take two, perhaps especially important, examples: a strike among local authority workers meant that the 'dead were not buried'; and a strike among petrol-tanker drivers meant that there was little petrol and long queues at the pumps. Hay is particularly interested in the media narratives of this crisis. To Hay, the result of this crisis was another paradigm shift and the emergence of neoliberalism as a new consensus which, while it evolved, remained dominant and shaped policy options.

In my view, the punctuated evolution model has two main problems. First, Hay treats stability and change as a dualism and focuses too heavily on change. To Hay, from 1945 to date in the UK there were extended periods of relative stasis, followed by rapid change, resulting from the successful narration of crisis by 'change-agents'. It almost inevitably follows that the focus is much more on change, which may be regarded as more interesting, than on stability. Second, and this is perhaps unsurprising given our previous discussion, his empirical analyses appear to privilege agency over structure and the ideational over the material. In my view, both these problems can be overcome if we develop a more adequate temporal and a spatial understanding of the relationship between stability and change, and it is to that issue I now turn.

On the spatial dimension

Bates and Smith (2006: 2) argue that, even when there is some consideration of the spatial in political science, usually in the form of a comparison between polities, there is: 'little accompanying ontological reflection on the nature of space and spatial relations.' More specifically, they are critical of Hay's conceptualization of change, arguing (Bates and Smith, 2008: 3–4), 'it seems odd that Hay explicitly argues that we should treat change as an open and empirical question and yet (on the very same page) goes on to provide a rather neat theoretical model'. Consequently, they

advocate empirical mapping, rather than theoretical modelling; in effect emphasizing the complexity of the relationship between stability and change and suggesting, particularly, that change has a spatial dimension. In their view, Hay's punctuated evolutionary model is uni-dimensional and seems to imply that there is either continuity, or change, in different ideological, cultural and discursive areas, in all jurisdictions within the UK, and in all policy areas. So, Hay's work has a major flaw because it is cast in terms of a dualism; there is either gradual evolution or rapid change. In my view, the relationship is much more complex and much better viewed as a duality. Let us return to the empirical case which informs much of Hay's work, contemporary politics in the UK.

The first point to emphasize is that change and stability often coexist in different spheres/policy areas; there is an important spatial dimension here. Of course, it might be possible to argue that change occurs, as a response to crisis, in the more fundamental areas, while elsewhere there is stasis. However, if we return to the case of the 1970s in the UK, which both Hay and Hall use as an example, then, while there may have been major changes in economic policy and a move to monetarism, there was much less change in other areas. Indeed, Marsh and Tant argue (1989) that Mrs Thatcher, far from being a break with the past, was a perfect embodiment of crucial aspects of the British political system, and especially what they term the British political tradition (see also Marsh and Hall, 2007).

In my view, it is much more useful to view the relationship between stability and change as interactive and iterative, given that stability inevitably provides the context within which change occurs. In particular, the balance between stability and change may affect outcomes in a number of ways. So, it seems plausible to argue that the persistence of the British political tradition and its discourse of limited democracy (Marsh and Hall, 2007) made it easier for the Conservatives under Mrs Thatcher, as a strong leader, to introduce radical legislative change. Similarly, the continued commitment to the defence of sterling that marked British economic policy throughout the 20th century fitted very well with many elements of the emerging neoliberal discourse; the financial sector wanted the Conservative government both to free up capital markets and to use interest rate policy to ensure the strength of sterling.

However, there can also be areas where the old paradigm, to use Hay's term, and the new paradigm conflict. An obvious example of this from the Thatcher period is provided by agricultural policy; traditionally, policy had been protectionist (high production/high subsidies; see Smith, 1990), but that fitted poorly with the neoliberal paradigm. In such areas, where there are contradictions between the two paradigms, then outcomes are unclear – in the case of agriculture, protection remained in place, partly

shored up by the EU common agricultural policy, until well into the 1990s. At the same time, the institutions, processes and ideas shaped by one paradigm form the context within which another paradigm emerges and becomes, or does not become, dominant. This point is clear if we look at the UK (Blair) Government's constitutional changes. Their initial proposals were very radical and, if enacted, would have transformed the nature of British democracy, undermined the British political tradition and marked a paradigm shift in the constitutional field moving the UK towards a more participatory democracy. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Marsh and Hall, 2007), these proposals, which together would have changed the very nature of British democracy, were mostly de-radicalized because the attempts at reform occurred within the framework of institutions and processes that were underpinned by the old paradigm.

Of course, there are other spatial dimensions, notably geographic space. The constitutional change case also offers a good example of how this spatial dimension can affect stability and change. Scottish devolution was one area in which New Labour introduced a radical constitutional reform with speed and without any attempt to de-radicalize the original proposal, to a large extent for electoral reasons (see Marsh and Hall, 2007). However, the Scotland Act merely established an outline structure for the operation of the Scottish Parliament; the Parliament itself was expected to devise its own Standing Orders, that is, its operating procedures. As such, the Parliament established a Consultative Steering Group (CSG) that drew up the standing orders. Crucially, the CSG didn't see the Westminster system as something to emulate, rather it was something to reject and improve on. In particular, four failings of the Westminster system were identified: its working practices were archaic; it was not open and inclusive, in particular, but not exclusively, in relation to gender; it was unnecessarily confrontational, with parties opposing one another automatically and Prime Minister's Question Time a disgrace; and, particularly, it was ineffective in acting as a check on the legislature. All are important criticisms, but the last is most important in this context. The CSG recommended, and the Parliament adopted, the establishment of a powerful committee system, which, particularly given that the electoral system meant that one party government was less likely, would act as a check on executive power. So, a different, more participatory, discourse of democracy underpins the institutional structures of the Scottish Parliament.

Conclusion

Here I have looked at three key meta-theoretical issues: structure/agency; material/ideational; and stability and change. In my view, these are crucial

questions which any student of politics needs to address. In a sense, almost all we do as political scientists relates to the question of stability and change. At the same time, in attempting to explain why there has, or has not, been change, we invoke positions on the relationship between structure and agency and the material and the ideational. With regard to these latter two issues, I have argued that there are essentially five positions in the literature and that positions on the two issues are related. So, in both cases, historically at least, certain authors have favoured one or other element/side of the dualism; they have been structuralist (materialist) *or* intentionalists/idealists. At the same time, many empirical researchers have taken what I have termed an additive position, explaining a particular outcome by invoking both structural and intentional or material and ideational factors, but not attempting to theorize the relationship between the two which are still treated as a binary. All these positions are most likely to be underpinned by a foundationalist/ realist ontology and a positivist epistemology (see Table 10.3) .

In the more recent period, the constructivist/cultural turn in social science, most associated with post-structuralism, has grown in importance and this position takes a very different view on the relationship between structure and agency and the material and the ideational. Here, the argument is that the distinctions are essentially meaningless outside particular discourses; so, our understanding of them is shaped by our language and discourse. From this position, this chapter would be viewed as a better, or worse, exposition of a thin constructivist position on these meta-theoretical issues.

This chapter contends that structure and agency, and the material and

Table 10.3   *Relating ontological and epistemological positions to meta-theoretical issues*

Ontological positions	Foundationalism	Anti-foundationalism	Post-structuralism
Epistemological positions	Positivism/ realism	Interpretivism	Post-structualism
Structure/ agency	Mainly intentionalist/ dialectical	Agency	Agency
Material/ ideational	Material or ideational/ dialectical	Ideational	Ideational
Stability/change	Stability or change/ dialectical	Change ubiquitous	Change ubiquitous

the ideational, should be treated as a duality and the relationships between them should be viewed as dialectical, that is interactive and iterative. However, as we have seen, there is not one dialectical position on either structure and agency or the material and the ideational. Rather, I would argue here that this is where the most interesting arguments are and it is up to the reader to develop and defend her position; all I will contend is that these are not issues which can be avoided. On the issue of stability and change the problems are different, if related. Here, the post-structuralist would again take issue with the argument taken here, suggesting instead that change is ubiquitous and untheorizable and, again, that any distinction between stability and change can only exist within a particular discourse. If we move beyond that position, then, in my view, the debate revolves around whether we should embrace the punctuated evolution model, and see stability and change as cyclical, and thus in essence as a dualism, or accept that stability and change, like the other meta-theoretical issues here, is best seen as a duality, with relationship between them also viewed as dialectical.

Further reading

- Hay (2002) provides an important take on some of these issues.
- Valuable contributions have come from Blyth (2002a and 2002b).
- For an alternative perspective see Elster (1989 and 2007).

Chapter 11

The Challenge of Research Design

BOB HANCKÉ

In a funny way, academic research is somewhat similar to sports such as sailing and rock-climbing – although admittedly yielding a more modest adrenaline rush. As with those sports – or, closer to home, artisanal work done by skilled craftsmen and women – the process whereby you reach your ultimate destination or produce a piece of furniture is just as important as getting there. What academic research shares with these activities is that everything depends on how principles are applied which have been learned in situations in which they have not been used yet, and how each stage in the process is something that was constructed in the mind of the sailor, climber or carpenter before it was executed. Doing research is constructing research, and research design is the toolbox that allows us to do that professionally. Constructing research, in turn, means that you construct *your research question*, and present *your version* of the debate surrounding that question. It also means that *you collect and construct data and cases* so that they speak to the question and debate that you identify. Finally, you should know how to distinguish between *producing* your research – constructing it – and *reproducing* it – writing up.

Starting out on a research project, especially in the form of an undergraduate, MA or PhD thesis, can be quite daunting. If all goes well, it becomes a project that aims at understanding parts of the world in a way that disagrees with – but also builds on – what previous generations of scholars have done. In addition, the result ought to reflect a significant amount of time spent on sustained empirical research and critical thinking – usually minimum several months for an undergraduate or Master's thesis, often four, five or more years for a doctorate. And everyone expects it to be written in a way that the main contribution of the research is presented both with vigour and modesty. Combining these different requirements of a thesis is a delicate balancing act, for which few are ready when they start, and which unfortunately does not lead to a happy ending for everyone. The key to minimizing the chances that things go deeply wrong somewhere along the road is to take on a project that you strongly identify with, and which provides the passion that is necessary to

bring the project to a conclusion which is at least intellectually satisfying and hopefully a lot more.

In this chapter, I will go over what I consider the crucial components of research design and discuss them critically, in the hope that some of this is useful for advanced undergraduate and doctoral researchers. I start out with a short discussion of the philosophical basis of research and how this feeds into research design, and then move on to address several relevant considerations when thinking about how data and cases speak to a question. The concluding section wraps up. Note that there are absolutely crucial issues that I do not address in this chapter: the nature of statistical versus configurational analysis, for example, different approaches to comparative work, or the practical and conceptual limitations that data might impose. Most of these points are treated in other chapters in this volume; make sure you read them.

Setting the stage: the philosophical foundations of research design

In the broadest possible sense, the aim of the social sciences is to understand the world as it is made by human beings, the structures and institutions they produce and the actions they take within those structures. For a long time, we have tried to understand this world by identifying the deep structures that made society and politics what they are. Think of the founders: Adam Smith's invisible hand in the market, Marx's discovery of the laws of motion of history, or Durkheim's idea that the essence of industrial society was related to a new division of labour. What connects these authors, and the many that came after them, was the notion that all of them were convinced that they were 'discovering' something about how the social world really operated, much in the same way that Newton discovered gravity, Watson and Crick DNA, and Stanley put parts of the then largely unknown continent of Africa on the map. Yet this structuralist form of logical positivism never had a complete hold on the social sciences. Max Weber was probably the first to raise the possibility that it was not the 'objective' world that influenced what we did, but that our subjective understanding of that world was at the basis of what the world looked like (and what we did in it), an approach which later was echoed in Parsons' sociology of action and in contemporary constructivism as well as in the intriguing insight that 'if men [*sic*] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927). In these versions of social science, human beings were not the objects of blind historical forces, but subjects that shaped institutions, structures and, therefore, the social and political world as we know it.

Since its early days, social science has had within it competing visions of both how the social and political world is constituted, what its driving forces and their effects are (its ontology), and how we can develop empirical knowledge about that (its methodology) (Hall, 2003). When doing their work, social scientists always implicitly or explicitly started from what some of their predecessors had said. The basic architecture of the (social) sciences is therefore that of a *debate*, in which authors try to show each other wrong by coming up with better logical constructions of arguments, more accurate data, or a combination of the two.

But science in general, and social science in particular, is a special type of debate. It is not just about disagreeing with an existing argument or theory, but about *solving puzzles*. Puzzles are research questions of a special nature: since they raise a question that should have been answered by the existing theories but was not, they have the potential to shake the foundations of the answers that have been given before. They can take the shape of a single fact that is aberrant in the light of the predictions of that particular theory, or of a paradox: in two cases (A and B) the opposite happened from what the theories suggested would happen (X in A and Y in B), and the outcomes appear, as it were, misaligned. Puzzles are, as it were, located in two universes – one in which they falsify an existing theory, and another in which they allow for and often lead to a new understanding of the world.

Research in the social sciences thus has three crucial components. Social science *engages an existing debate* (and is not about finding a hidden law of society), through the *construction of puzzles* that engage a theory on its own terrain (and does not just disagree and come up with an alternative answer), and about finding the *most convincing solution* to the puzzle (relying on a combination of logic and data).

This view of social science as resolving puzzles has important implications for how to approach research. Many beginning social scientists want to show an established theory 'right' and set out to find facts that prove that theory right. If they succeed in this, what have they contributed to our understanding of the world? In the old positivist model, they have contributed quite a lot: they have shown, after all, that a theory – a set of understandings of the world which are logically connected – explained the facts that they searched for. The theory is verified. For a 'puzzler', however, nothing has happened: the researcher has simply contributed a data point which confirms an existing theory, and since we already knew that this theory could handle those facts, we do not know much new. If, say, the prevailing theory is that economic development leads to democratic consolidation, then finding a case in which economic development leads to democratic consolidation is, in these terms, exactly the same as not having done anything at all. Science, remember, does not operate on

the model of elections, where a majority carries the argument – where, *mutatis mutandis*, an additional data point strengthens a theory – but works on logical grounds. The only way you can 'push the boundaries of human knowledge', supposedly what research is all about, is by coming up with a set of facts that no one else has come up with, and thus *falsifying* (demonstrating the falseness of) an existing theory. Take the example above: if you came up with a country that had been poor for a while yet had a democratic political system, or a country that was rich and not democratic, you have produced a puzzle for the standard theory, which we can then re-examine.

Not all forms of falsification are equally valid, however. Facts on their own never settle debates; for a theory (or 'argument') to be proven wrong, we need more than facts: we need a new theory that makes sense of these contradictory facts. In the now well-known words of Lakatos (1970), (social) science is not engaged in two-cornered fights between a theory and an aberrant fact, but in three-cornered fights between an old theory, a new fact, and a new theory. Take the example above: finding a poor but democratic country raises an interesting puzzle and yields a potentially exciting research question. But unless you can explain why that country is a democracy, you do not yet have a viable research project. That requires that you produce an alternative statement of the relation between development and democracy, ideally one which is equally good at handling the facts that made sense under the old theory that stated that development and democracy are causally related, and can help us understand the specific case of a poor yet democratic country.

The balance of this chapter will explore different dimensions of this approach to the problem. How do you get from sophisticated falsificationism to research? That transition requires you to think about the social and political world as a world that has to be constructed by the researcher. It may well be that you think that the entire social world is only understandable through the perceptions of actors; fine, add yourself into it. Or it may be that you think that people live in a world that imposes itself on them. Equally fine – but even in that instance you need to construct that world as a research problem. In both instances, the research problem does not exist before you intervene in it.

From philosophy to research design

Research design is a crucial ingredient of all scientific work. Assessing the effects of a drug requires clinical trials, possibly experiments, and definitely some form of inferential statistics to quantify the effect of the drug. Finding out if smoking is bad for you requires a random sample of smokers and

non-smokers to see whose health is better, if possible controlling for all other factors that may produce bad health. If the goal of a project is to find out how women are treated in the workplace, compare women and men in several professions on a relevant scale and check for the effects of sex, occupation, and possible interactions between the two – it is possible, for instance, that women are treated considerably worse at the bottom of the occupational scale than at the top: think of cleaners versus lawyers. In all these instances, systematic empirical observations about questions are linked to arguments – that is the core of research design.

Think of research design as a craftsman's toolbox, not a rigid set of prescriptive rules: what you do with it, is ultimately up to you. You ask your question, and organize the debate around it; the link between your question, your answer and your data and cases, are all in your hands. Research, therefore, has a large inherently subjective component. But that does not mean that anything goes: there are principles of research design, which help you distinguish between strong and weak research questions, structuring and presenting debates, making logical arguments, selecting data and/or cases, and building and using comparisons to make better arguments.

Research starts with a question

Research does not start with a literature review, or with data in search of an explanation, but ultimately with a question that sheds new light on answers that others have given before. The research process is answering that question. A good way of getting this right is to think about research that you are doing not as a topic or theme, but as a question – when someone asks you what you are doing, avoid answering that question by saying 'I work on …', but say 'I am asking the question why…' or 'I am trying to understand how…'

Research questions have to fulfil some criteria. Probably the most important one is that it needs to be asked in such a way that you can be wrong. There must be a chance that reliable data you will find tell you that the answer that you were thinking of giving to the question you are asking is not the right answer. Simplicity is a second crucial characteristic of research questions. You can think of this in two ways. If you find yourself in an elevator with someone important in your field who asks you about your work, you need to have a straightforward version of the question and your ideas on it that can be captured in the length of time it takes to get from the first to the tenth floor. Or imagine a party with graduate students from other departments, and try to explain to them what you are trying to find out, but without using the sometimes hermetic jargon that prevails in your discipline. And a question should be researchable: do you

know which empirical material you would need? Can you actually find and use it? Does the question have a logical start and finish?

A question implies answers

You are never the first to think about a problem, and your literature review should reflect that. At its most basic level, a literature review identifies a handful of broad positions on your question as well as the debate that followed it. The literature review is, in other words, your construction of the competing answers to your question, the theories that you consider yourself up against. Avoid cutting corners by building a straw man that you can blow down with just one gasp of air.

Engage the debate

Research consists of engaging a debate: it builds on existing research by contradicting it. If the function of the literature review was to construct that debate, and show where the weaknesses lie in the sense that existing positions are unable to come to terms with the (aberrant) data you present, this is the point where you take the reins and delineate your argument from that of the others in the debate.

Contributions to such debates follow a few principles. Parsimony – saying as much as possible with as few explanatory tools as possible – is crucial. An argument that you make which explains more variation than the one you are up against is a stronger argument and *vice versa*. Simple arguments are, therefore, usually also better arguments. Note that this implies that 'realism' is not necessarily a key ingredient of a good argument: you may capture reality better than others do, but that is really already clear from the puzzle underlying your question, which raised empirical instances that were not covered by the debate. Finally, if your argument is complex and has many different dimensions, it becomes hard to read, digest and understand. Too often such arguments show up as lists of unrelated things which seem to matter in some way. If you find yourself producing lists, think again about how you could reorganize the argument in the light of a broader organizing principle (a typology, say, or a hierarchically stronger 'driver' such as interests) that connects the different points on the list.

From debate to empirics

Once you have established what your question is, what the answers are that you are trying to come to terms with – both yours and theirs – and have thought through how yours differs from what has been said up until

now, the biggest and arguably the most difficult step in research design follows. You have to think of how to build these alternative views on the question into the empirical research you will be doing: from now on, your research starts to move between an explicit and an implicit engagement of those other positions. The way to do that is to search for data and cases which simultaneously address your hypothesis *and* the others in the debate.

This is the point where you have become a researcher, because you are asking a simple question that few other people ask: 'if I am right and others are wrong, what would I have to find, and if I am wrong and others are right, what would I have to find?' This way of thinking, in terms of *observable implications*, distinguishes your good initial idea from the research project you are engaged in now. Since our ideas are usually quite abstract, parsimonious, and couched in conceptual terms, they need to be operationalized in a way that allows us to think through how the argument relates to and is different from other arguments in the debate.

Let us try and put this all in one logically coherent model. Figure 11.1, which borrows some ideas from Philippe Schmitter's recent research 'clock' (Schmitter, 2008: 264), may be helpful from here on. Imagine you start at 12 noon – with a question – and end at 12 midnight – with an answer that prepares the world for the next generation of questions. Getting to 3 o'clock involves finding aberrant data that throw a new light on existing answers: the question is rephrased as a puzzle. The debate that you then (re-)construct is crucial for what follows, since the answers that others have given to this new version of the question tells you what your empirical material would have to look like for it to increase leverage over other and your arguments – the 6 o'clock position. The material you analyze – cases or statistical data – then allow you to infer causalities beyond the immediate data at hand; the better your material addresses the different answers in the debate, the farther your reach. If all went well, two things have happened. One is that you have shown the limitations of existing arguments – you have falsified them (9 o'clock) – and the other is that you have a more plausible argument that covers the same universe as before, plus the new aberrant fact(s) that informed your puzzle (at about 10:30 pm). And what happens at midnight? Simple: someone will disagree with you, find material that you should have been able to understand or explain systematically, without falling prey to *ad hoc* explanations (but cannot), and the cycle starts again.

The following sections fill in some of the details in this clock – the crucial issues of how to think about your material in logical terms. What do my cases or data say about what's really going on and how would I know? And, since most of what people do takes place over time, how do we make sense of that? In the final section, I go over the other 'social' in

Figure 11.1 *The research cycle*
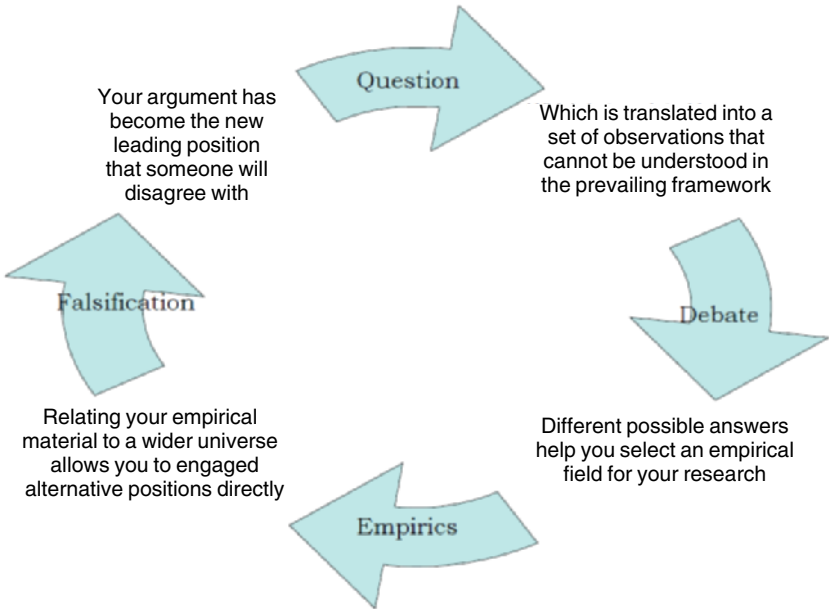
social science: ethics and audience. Throughout this chapter I will empha-sise that doing research involves making choices, which require argu-ments that explain them. Nothing is cast in stone: constructing research means permanently constructing arguments for your choices.

The relevant universe

Research always has the ambition to say something about a world that is larger than the little slice that we study. We can have a representative sample on which we perform strong statistical techniques, draw far-reaching conclusions on the basis of the single or handful of cases we study, or are convinced that the causal mechanisms we identified help us understand other cases that we did not study. But making such inferences is possible only with a good sense of the relevant universe of which these cases are a part. Consider the following questions. Are the data or cases that you rely on randomly selected or not? If not, what were the criteria for selection? Is the case you are studying a typical case, an outlier on the side of the distribution of cases where things you are interested in are very likely to happen, or on the opposite side where the unlikely cases cluster?

If you think it is a typical case, how can you prove that without relying on a 'trust me' argument? What does this say about cases that are not 'typical'? And is the distribution such that a typical case (say, an average or modal case) also coincides more or less with the median case which has roughly equal numbers of cases on both sides? Without some information on these questions, a case is, and remains, a single data point with few other implications than informed speculation.

This general problem can be broken down into several separate problems. The first is the *nature of the empirical material* that you are relying on. Many of us, infused with a statistical bias, go for collecting as many data as possible, on the assumption that if a causal mechanism holds for five instead of two cases, it is more valid (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 24). More instances that can be explained is certainly better than fewer; the question is, however, if that is not something better to explore after you have finished the research rather than before. Your case will, in a statistical sense, never be representative, even if it is a typical case, so criteria borrowed from statistics may be misleading. But if you keep in mind that research requires an active intervention from you to structure question and cases, things become easier. Since you selected cases and universe in light of the question you are asking and the type of answer you want to give, you can use the way you have set up your question as a tool to help you find out which cases to select and which ones to ignore. The criteria you relied on to select observations are critical: since others may, and almost certainly will, disagree with you on those, you have to make explicit what good criteria for case selection would be.

Universes also need to have a *logical ending*, both in time and space. Which period will you study – why that particular beginning and ending? – and which geographic area is relevant? For a student in European studies, it might seem logical to study contemporary 'Europe'. But it really is not: many people are not interested in 'Europe' *per se*. You need to show that there is a broader issue that you can tackle through a study of something that is happening in Europe today. One of the standard ways of closing a research question is by stating that your data included the last year for which observations were available. This sounds reasonable but is not generally a good way to close your research for the simple reason that you did not choose that year on any logical basis but on the basis of nothing more than convenience. You have to construct the period you study as a closed period on the basis of a substantive point. If you are interested in the political economy of Central Europe, and the data stop in 2005, you still need to argue what makes 2005 a reasonable time to stop your research. Something must have come to a close in Central Europe by 2005, and that is what you are interested in: the rate of structural change may have slowed to a 'normal' (compared with OECD economies) rate,

economic policy has become slow-moving and continuous by then, or big shifts in economic policy from the early 1990s have had the time to work their way through the system.

Comparability is the third point to keep in mind. If you are trying to understand the different effects of a policy in two countries, and since no two countries are perfectly similar, always make explicit what you think this particular comparison will tell you. There are *a priori* no comparisons which are 'right' or 'wrong', so it all depends on how you construct that comparison through argument. In an enlightening article, Locke and Thelen (1995) argue that comparability may even imply that you sometimes have to compare two different things, because those that look the same may play a different role in different settings and *vice versa*. Working time, as they point out, is a politically highly salient issue in Germany, but not at all in the US, because of how the labour unions have politicized it in Germany and not in the US. Conversely, job classifications are the core of labour politics in the US and not at all in Germany: the labour unions in the US are built upon the rule of clear job classifications and demarcations, whereas in Germany workplace institutions that represent workers are trusted by all and job demarcations do not matter nearly as much. They argue that we should compare issues with the same salience in different countries, so that apples (but which may be disguised as oranges) are compared with other apples.

One of the final things that matter is in *how many dimensions* the relevant universe is structured. If the outcome you are interested in can be meaningfully understood along one dimension (high–low, say, or present–absent), then two cases are both necessary and sufficient for your analysis. If, however, your argument involves more than one dimension (and assuming that you can capture each of these in dichotomous terms), you will need a minimum of four (2 x 2) cases to answer the question you are asking. The number of necessary cases rises exponentially with the number of dimensions: the formula is 2^x, where 'x' stands for the number of dimensions.

Take the different modes of privatization in the former Soviet Union and Central Europe as a hypothetical example. When you compare Russia and the Visegrad-4 countries (V4: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), you realize that privatization in Russia often followed an 'insider' model in which assets were sold to existing management and workers, and an 'outsider' model in the V4, where companies were sold or handed over to the population at large or to foreign investors (King, 2007). You then claim that companies in the second case perform better: foreign owners import new organization and technology, and care more about profit than about high wages and stable jobs. A glance at Slovenia, however, suggests that this is probably not correct: Slovenian

companies were sold to insiders, yet they perform very well. Introducing a second dimension – something along the lines of 'was decision-making in the pre-capitalist political economy highly centralized or highly decentralized?' – allows you to resolve the problem that you found a well-performing case of insider privatization. In Slovenia, as in other pre-1991 Yugoslav republics, local workers councils played a large role in company management. In Soviet Russia, in contrast, many micro-economic decisions were made centrally. Insider privatization, you could argue, fell on very different soil in the two instances, with different consequences. Your problem may be resolved, but you now have a new one, since you have three cases and implicitly two dimensions along which you selected cases: insider/outsider mode of privatization, and centralized/decentralized pre-capitalist political economy. Make these dimensions explicit, and think through what your universe looks like now, and where interesting cases lie within that.

Time and history in the social sciences

The relevant universe operates along a second, related but distinct axis: all social and political events and processes take place in history. Most of the standard ways of analyzing social and political phenomena, however, do not really give us tools to deal with that, since they unfortunately assume some form of 'time-lessness'. Schmitter (2008) therefore quite rightly argues that carefully constructed narratives remain key in understanding processes that have a strong temporal dimension (cf. Pierson, 2004 for a sustained analysis of these issues). Time matters because it is a critical element in practically every question you could imagine asking, but the standard tools we have for including time in our analysis are at best very weak. Think of the following temporal dimensions: sequence, timing, context, asymmetries and change.

Sequence

Does it matter that B takes place after A? The simplest but possibly most important reason why this matters is that sequence is necessary to establish causality: A can cause B only if it precedes B. But there is a second, more complicated problem associated with sequence. If we think of a problem, and we think of it in terms of a set of necessary conditions, we sometimes ignore the possibility that these conditions have to appear in a particular sequence for the outcome that we are interested in to be produced. In other words, we need to think not only in terms of the collection of conditions, but also in terms of their mutual inter-relation in time.

It matters, for example, that property rights are clearly established and that they are constitutionally enshrined before vast amounts of assets are privatised (Stiglitz, 1999). In Central Europe, governments got that more or less right. But in places such as Russia, privatizations often happened before property rights were clear, and the effect has been an oligarchic outcome, in which party *apparatchiks* control companies which are private in name rather than substance. Introducing policies in the correct sequence, as Stiglitz (1999) suggested, is therefore as important as the substance of the policies themselves.

Timing

Does it matter when something takes place? The same process or event may have different effects, depending on when it happens. Dependency theory's critique of modernization was built on this idea: industrializing in the 19th century is a very different thing from doing so in the 20th century, because the world economy looks very different in 1960 than it did in 1860, and late developers have to play by rules established by early industrializers.

Context

Do large-scale universals such as technological development or shifts in the international system matter for your analysis? Take the internet – possibly the most important technological shock of the last two decades and so ubiquitous that we now write it in lowercase as if it is a generic noun. Being a dictator in the 1970s or 1980s was a relatively easy job, which required a large and loyal army and police force, a muzzled press, and a secret police organization or a few death squads to identify and neutralize opponents to your rule. Running a decent dictatorship today is considerably harder. Even if you still have the army, police forces and death squads, it is much more difficult to control the flow of information in and out of the country.

Asymmetry

Was something a necessary condition for the growth of a phenomenon, but played no role in the decline of that phenomenon? Such asymmetries may indeed be important, but the conventional ways of thinking in the social sciences do not always know how to handle them very well. If a rise in X caused an increase in Y, then it is quite sensible to think that a fall in X is likely to cause a drop in Y. In many instances where we do research, this may undoubtedly be a plausible assumption. In some, however, it

may not be, and discovering this is often a good start for developing research questions which exploit such asymmetries. You may inadvertently be onto something considerably more interesting than you thought at the start. Take the growth and retrenchment of the welfare state as an example (Pierson, 1994). Assume that the welfare state grew as a result of how organized labour and social-democratic parties used their power in the post-war era to make workers less dependent on market income (Korpi, 1983; Esping-Andersen, 1990). With the shift in the balance of political power from labour to business and away from social-democratic ideas over the last three decades, a plausible prediction would be that welfare spending will be reduced. If this were the case, then the US under Reagan and Bush (Senior) or the UK under Thatcher would be among the first places where you could witness such a retrenchment: organized labour was eliminated from the political scene, and for over a decade conservative parties advocating neoliberal economic and welfare policies were in office in those countries. But Pierson demonstrated that retrenchment follows a very different logic from growth, since a growing welfare state produces its own supporting coalitions, which make cuts for those groups in the population very difficult (in large part for electoral reasons).

Change

How much change is going on? Our current era seems to have a justifiable claim to being an era of tremendous change. But consider – and this covers only the West – three periods: 1400–1600, which saw the Hundred Years' War, the Italian Renaissance, the emergence of the modern Westphalian state, and the Reformation and Inquisition; 1770–1850, which witnessed the American and French Revolutions, the Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of modern industrial capitalism; or 1910–1950, with two world wars, the rise of Nazism and communism, ultimately the triumph of social democracy, and the sharpest rise in living standards and life expectancy in the history of the West. Is the initial claim still valid?

We also face the problem of how to recognize change and its effects. An interesting debate has emerged in political economy over the last few years between proponents of relatively stable different systems of capitalism in the OECD (Hall and Soskice, 2001) and those who claim that cosmetic stability hides profound processes of change in substance (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). The argument of the first Varieties of Capitalism school is that different capitalist systems may come under pressure and adapt, but that functionally they still operate along lines that reflect the previously existing arrangements. Where everyone asserts

change, these authors say, we see remarkable stability. They point out, for example, that the rise of business and the internationalization of finance has done little to undermine Germany's organized form of capitalism. The illusion of change is there because we confuse changes in form with changes in function. (A declaration of interest: I am one of the authors in the Hall and Soskice edited book.) The others writing in the Streeck and Thelen book disagree: something may look like stability, but really is not. Old institutions can be reconfigured, for example, new elements can be introduced that change the way existing elements worked, and the way central actors make use of frameworks can lead to outcomes that were not a part of the initial blueprint. Small changes which look insignificant, their general claim is, can have big effects. Everything may look and feel the same, but the interactions between all the constituent elements may make the system as a whole quite different from what it was in the past.

Understanding 'change' requires a clear metric which distinguishes 'large', 'important' from 'small', 'inconsequential' changes. Often, of course, these metrics are contested, as the example above suggests. However, as long as the metric proposed is reasonable, that is not a problem in itself – but, as with everything that involves research design, it has to be transparent to other readers so that they can question it if they think it is wrong.

The 'social' in social science

Research in the social sciences, thus the basic message of this chapter, involves making choices, and for many of those, there is no clear guide on how to make them. In large measure, that's because good social science explores dimensions of social and political life that are relatively new, and many of us are and remain beginning researchers trying to feel their way around a subject. Your colleagues and teachers are possibly your best resource in this regard, so do rely on them. Even the most brilliant economist or sociologist in the world needs colleagues who walk him or her through problems with the argument and the empirical material. Science in general, and therefore social science as well, is ultimately a social activity, done with and for others.

This social world of yours has two problematic sides. The first has to do with the ethics of our work; the second with our audiences. Always remember that gathering information by asking people about their lives, either in the structured interview settings that are normal in survey research, or when relying on open questions in semi-structured interviews, often involves serious ethical issues. If you are interested in such

heavily emotionally laden subjects as child abuse or rape, you may face the horrible dilemma of asking very hurting questions and obtain (let us assume) excellent data, or have a more tactful way of dealing with your interviewees at the risk of lowering the quality of the material. No one knows if the supposed good that you may do with your research outweighs the pain you may cause, but do not ignore the choices. Often you can rely on your supervisors, doctoral programme representatives or a university code on ethics in research to help you think through if and how your research may have problematic ethical facets. Find out what they say, and then see how your research measures up against that. You may think that closing your eyes to these issues may get you a strong reputation – however, it may not be the one that you want to grow old with.

Remember also that you are saying things about other people when you are engaged in political science (even if that may not always seem to be the case when you are examining regression coefficients). And at some point you may want to think about telling the rest of the world of the work that you have done. Three golden rules should help you on the way. The first: do not use expensive words if simple words will do. Not only do these words of Latin origin impose an unnecessarily irritating cadence on the reader; they can also literally be impenetrable. Take the following two versions of a question: (i) 'Does socio-economic development require the prior democratic consolidation of the extant political arrangements?'; (ii) 'Does democracy make nations wealthier?' Both say exactly the same thing. For some obscure reason, students often think that the first is the better version because it sounds more like 'acad-emese'. But it is not: it is ugly and unnecessarily complicated. The second version is by far the easier of the two. If in doubt, read George Orwell's *Politics and the English Language* on how to write for normal human beings – and these include your colleagues and teachers (Orwell, 1946)

The second rule: be direct. Ideally, you should come to the point as soon as you can without looking like a bull in a china shop. That means making sure that the topic of the sentence and paragraph appears early on, using active constructions, and throwing out all unnecessary material. A literature review, for example, is necessary to tell the reader where you disagree with what others have said about your question. But do not spend too much time reviewing the literature. Your paper, dissertation or thesis should reflect your research, and what others have done should be used instrumentally to get you there. You should give that kind of information on a *need to know* basis (Dunleavy, 2003): what does the reader absolutely need to know to understand where you stand on an issue and what the contribution is that you are making? All else is potentially distracting material.

The third rule is to write with an audience in mind. Many, possibly most, students write just for their teachers and supervisors. That is a big mistake: yes, you need to convince her or him of the importance of what you are doing, but they are not the ultimate yardstick – and it's too bad for them if they don't know that. You should really have a broader, mostly sympathetic, audience in mind when you write, and should probably also diversify your imaginary audience a bit. One group that should be in there, beside your teachers, are your fellow students, *especially* those who are not in the thick of your subject. Then think of people who are not used to academic jargon – your parents, say, or your partner, perhaps. And then, somewhat counter-intuitively, write with the people that you disagree with in mind: if you think you have made a point that X or Y would agree with as a serious point, who else would have a problem with that? Relying on these three rules will help you a long way along when you want to tell others, especially those outside universities, what you have done and why it might matter for them.

Conclusion

This chapter raised the key dimensions of research design: issues of falsifiability, the relation between cases and universe, causality and method, and temporality. The message that linked the treatment of these different issues was that you need to think carefully about every single one of these steps because none of these questions are resolvable without you actively constructing your research project. Your research is truly yours – in the sense that you make it what it is by asking your question, giving your answer against your version of the literature, with data and cases that you argue for, and that you write up in a way that reflects the logic of the research design and not the 'chronologic' of what you did.

Good research design follows principles which you learn over the years in your studies, often by understanding what others have done in similar situations and adapting their solutions, and by discussing your solutions with colleagues and supervisors. But in a fundamental way there is no book that lays down the rules of research design: you do not become an excellent researcher by blindly following rules in the same way that you do not become an excellent cook by following recipes to the letter. Learning to cook is understanding ingredients, how they interact, and what they will produce, and usually requires a few years of intensive training, often with excellent cooks, in an apprenticeship. Learning to think critically about research so that it improves your project works in the same way. Enjoy it while it lasts – it is one of those things that you only learn once.

Further reading

- You may like to read Hancké, *Intelligent Research Design* (2009), on which this chapter draws.
- On the practice of writing, see Becker (1986) and Dunleavy (2003).
- On wider issues of research methods, see Brady and Collier (2004); Della Porta, and Keating (2008); King *et al.* (1994); Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003); Przeworski and Teune (1970); Ragin (1987).

Chapter 12

Debating Methods: Rediscovering Qualitative Approaches

ARIADNE VROMEN

When we seek to understand or explain how and why a political insti-tution, event, issue, or process came about, we are necessarily asking questions that can be answered through using qualitative methods. That is, research questions and answers using qualitative methods can be differentiated from quantitative or statistical methods that focus on questions of 'how many' to infer causality. The focus of qualitative methods in political science is on detailed, text-based answers that are often historical or include personal reflection from participants in polit-ical institutions, events, issues or processes. This is often characterized as the use of 'thick' description and analysis rather than broad, numer-ical generalizations. This chapter will show that while there has been a recent emphasis on the use of mixed methods in political science research design, there are still some essential features of qualitative methods that need to be understood. Qualitative methods tend to be used within particular sub-disciplines of political science (for example those who study political institutions rather than those who study polit-ical behaviour and use quantitative methods), by those committed to a particular approach (such as feminists), and by those coming from a non-positivist epistemological position (such as interpretivists and crit-ical realists). As this chapter will show, however, these divides are far from straightforward and qualitative methods can be used by those with both a positivist and non-positivist epistemological position, and the difference is based on claims made about explanation, purpose and goals of research itself.

The chapter is structured around two main themes: an overview of the debates between qualitative and quantitative methods in political science; and an introduction to the main types of qualitative research techniques, with research examples that focus on both design and analysis.

The rediscovery of qualitative methods

Historically, political science was built on a descriptive qualitative approach, as until the 1950s, the discipline predominantly studied political theory and the development of legal and political institutions (see Chapter 3). It was not until this time that advocates for the study of the role of individuals in the political world, that is behaviouralists, challenged the dominant qualitative institutionalist tradition. Political science has also been shaped by its relationship to other disciplines within the social sciences, such as sociology, history, and economics, as well as law, psychology and geography. Thus the methodological distinctions between political science and other social sciences are often not clear. This openness to other disciplinary perspectives can enrich the discipline, but also leaves it open to the accusation that political science lacks a distinctive theoretical and methodological core. Indeed, at times, the differences between political scientists in the one department can be quite stark. We often have different influences, have read different books, publish in very different journals and often would seem to speak a different political language. Therefore, there is now an increasing tendency for political scientists to specialize in their sub-fields of the discipline, and it is here that either a qualitative or quantitative approach can be seen to dominate.

This tendency is reflected in a recent survey of the methods used by political scientists publishing in eminent scholarly journals (Bennett *et al.,* 2003). The study coded 1,000 articles published over twenty-five years in ten political science journals that claim to be multi-method, differentiating between three main types of methods used:

1. quantitative methods: included statistics, survey research, and content analysis
2. qualitative methods: included case studies, in-depth interviews, text/discourse analysis, historical analysis
3. formal models: included game theory and complex mathematical/economic models

Overall, the results showed that 49 per cent of all articles used quantitative methods, 46 per cent used qualitative methods, and 23 per cent used formal modelling. This demonstrates that while quantitative and formal approaches (which both rely on some form of statistics or econometrics) make up a sizable proportion of articles published in top journals, qualitative methods are being broadly used by many political scientists. The methods used were also compared among three major sub-disciplines of political science: international relations, comparative politics and US politics. The researchers found that statistical approaches were dominant

in all three (shown here as the % ratio of quantitative: qualitative: formal modelling): international relations (48:46:20), comparative politics (65:40:18), and US politics (90:1:28) (Bennett *et al.,* 2003: 375). This alerts us to two factors: international relations as a sub-discipline is the most pluralist in its methodological choices, domestic oriented US politics is by far the least so with only 1 per cent of articles published using qualitative, case study oriented approaches. This tendency of positivist quantitative political science dominating publications in top journals has also been found in other surveys (see Pierson, 2007). Marsh and Savigny (2004) compared approaches taken within two US-based journals and two UK-based journals and found that behaviouralism and rational choice approaches (those most associated with positivist quantitative research) were dominant in the US while UK political science is more pluralist through having a strong tradition of normative theory as well as non-positivist, qualitative research. Overall, qualitative methods are most likely to be used outside US-based political science and within sub-disciplines such as international relations.

Bennett *et al.* (2003) attribute the situation of the small part qualitative methods play in political science in the US to the way methodology is taught. That is, there are very few opportunities for graduate students to be properly trained in the use of qualitative methods and their survey of 30 political science departments (covering 236 methodology courses) found only 16 per cent focused on qualitative methods. There has been an ongoing debate that has examined how political science research methods textbooks also promote the ongoing dominance of quantitative methods (see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2002). There is a particular focus on books such as *Designing Social Inquiry* by King *et al.* (1995) that is charged with reducing a qualitative approach to solely positivist and 'scientific' indicators of rigorous research (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 20; see also Brady and Collier, 2004 and discussion in Chapter 9). That is, there is little recognition in many texts of both the distinctiveness of qualitative methods, and that they are used by researchers from a range of epistemological positions beyond positivism.

Does this then mean that the answers to how and why questions, and thick description offered by taking a qualitative approach, simply do not exist or offer a rigorous challenge to quantitative approaches? No. Of course qualitative methods continue to be used, but it is because of epistemological differences that they tend to be marginalized in some sub-disciplines within political science. It is important now to reflect on the arguments that have been made to support the use of qualitative methods in political science.

The distinct emergence of feminist approaches in political science in the 1970s and early 1980s arguably heralded and pioneered the use of

qualitative methods in primary research through the use of in-depth inter-
viewing, ethnographic work and life histories. Qualitative methods were
important for emerging feminist methodologies as they prioritized
women's voices and experiences that otherwise may have been ignored
through the use of quantitative methods (see Ezzy, 2002: 46). For exam-
ple, Shulamit Reinharz's book *Feminist Methods in Social Research*
(1992: 126–44) argues that feminist oral history which uses qualitative
and in-depth interviews and biographical work can highlight women's
particular stories. Sara Evans's 1979 book *Personal Politics: The Roots of
Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*
(Evans, 1979) is mentioned as her use of the oral history method enabled
her to discover completely undocumented material on women's networks
in the history of new left social movements of the 1960s (Reinharz, 1992:
134). More recently, scholars within feminist international relations have
dwelt on the question of method and shown how the use of qualitative
approaches such as oral history, ethnography, interviews, archival
research, participant observation and discourse analysis can further femi-
nists' overall challenge to the research agenda of conventional security
studies (see Ackerley *et al.*, 2006).

While, as acknowledged in Vicky Randall's Chapter 6, not all feminists
now use qualitative methods, the recognition of feminism's initial chal-
lenge to mainstream political science through the use of qualitative meth-
ods is now diluted. Most books that advocate a resurgence of qualitative
or pluralistic political science (for example, Schram and Caterino, 2006;
Della Porta and Keating, 2008) pay little attention to the influence of
feminism on the shift towards individual case-based interpretation and
meaning in social research, and away from a fixation on variables and
generalization of concepts.

Instead, in recent years there has been a renewed focus on the use of
qualitative methods in political science through the 'new political science'
or 'Perestroika' debates. One book that sums up this debate is Schram and
Caterino's 2006 edited collection, *Making Political Science Matter:
Debating Knowledge, Research and Method*. This book takes a political
science specific position on arguments made by Danish scholar Bent
Flyvbjerg in his 2001 book *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social
Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*. To summarize briefly,
Flyvbjerg essentially argues that social science never has been, and prob-
ably never will be, able to develop the type of explanatory and predictive
theories that are at the base of the natural sciences. Instead, the social
sciences ought to re-orient the focus of inquiry and play to its strengths.
This, in Flyvbjerg's view, will 'restore social and political science to its
classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the
problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at

contributing to social and political praxis' (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 68)**.** He calls his approach a social science based on 'phronesis', derived from Aristotle. What this means is that political science should not be merely a technical exercise in positing and answering research questions through scientific and technical expertise but that it should also take into account what we know from everyday practices of politics and ethics. That is, the 'real-world' of politics needs to feature more in our political analyses, and our analyses need to more readily influence and connect with this 'realworld' of politics. Political scientists have a role to play in deliberating on and questioning values and interests at the centre of their own research (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 71) but also in terms of praxis – the idea that we ought to demonstrate how theory can affect actual practices. In summary, Flyvbjerg argues that for phronesis to work in political science, three things need to occur:

1. drop all emulation of the natural sciences as the production of cumulative or predictive theory in social and political sciences does not work;
2. address problems that matter to and are identified by groups in the local, national and global communities in which we live, and in ways that matter by focusing on context, values and power;
3. effectively communicate the results of our research to our fellow citizens and engage in a dialogue with them, taking on board their feedback. (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 84–5)

The implications of developing a relevant political science are explored further in Chapter 16. But what does this all mean for the use of qualitative methods in political science? An essential dimension of Flyvbjerg's vision is to foster a new political science that does not rely on sophisticated quantitative modelling alone but also uses qualitative approaches found more in the study of historical context, interviews based on people's experiences of politics and the attention to political and social meaning of text-based discourse analysis. Thus, a phronetic approach calls for more methodological pluralism in political science, to create a political science that is responsive to real world problems.

   At around the same time as Flyvbjerg's book was being prepared for publication, a debate started within the powerful American Political Studies Association that signalled dissatisfaction with the mainstream and dominant quantitative approaches in political science. The movement is referred to as 'Perestroika' taken from the pseudonym used by an email writer, Mr Perestroika, who in October 2000 questioned the continuing dominance of positivist, quantitative methods within the most powerful journals, editorial boards and associations in the discipline. The

aims of the movement and Flyvbjerg's phronesis eventually converged around the need for methodological pluralism and political science research that was relevant to the real world (Schram, 2006: 18–19). While Tarrow (2008: 531) charts the broad successes of 'incremental reforms' from the Perestroika movement, such as democratizing the leadership of APSA and its main journal, the American Political Science Review, it still remains to be seen whether a new respect and/or better publication outcomes are being achieved for qualitative political science.

From the example above, we also learn that methodological pluralism must already exist within political science in US universities to be able to start this debate in the first place. But what about non-US-based centres of political science? Has this debate resonated in the UK or Europe or Australia, for example? From a brief survey it seems the debate was not as important in other places. Within the UK and Australia, the more institutional-focused, qualitative tradition at the core of political science has been re-emphasized as an enduring point of difference from the dominance of quantitative methods in the US (Dryzek, 2002: 6). However, other dimensions of the debate such as the need for methodological pluralism to be taught, and the engagement of political science with applied, realworld problems were raised, albeit indirectly. For example, Aspinwall (2006: 6) claims that insufficient reflection is given to epistemology and methodological choices by British political scientists, writing that: 'British academia can seem pre-Enlightenment – embracing an "aristocratic method", where an argument is carried by an authoritative style of delivery, bolstered by position, institution and other badges of prestige (including peerages).' Others have argued that political science in the UK's 'turn towards scientism and theoretical abstraction, rather than the dominance of particular methods or modes of analysis, limits the stock of 'usable' political science which can inform those engaged in practical politics' (Donovan and Larkin, 2006: 12). This suggests that there will be increased discussion about methods and on the role of qualitative research in particular, in political science teaching and research in the UK in the coming years, especially on the introduction of compulsory methods courses within postgraduate research degrees (see Marsh and Savigny, 2004: 156).

One other notable response to the debate on increasing the recognition and use of qualitative methods started by the Perestroika movement in the US came from Australian-based political theorist Dryzek (2002). He suggests that methodological pluralism is an insufficient claim and, instead, political science needs to re-orient around critical pluralism. This

> necessitates engagement across research traditions, not just more tolerance of different approaches, not just communication of findings. It is

only in their engagement with one another that the shortcomings or indeed strengths of particular approaches and styles of inquiry can be explored. (Dryzek, 2002: 13)

This suggests that different epistemologies and different choice of methods – be they qualitative and text and history based, or quantitative and statistical or formal modelling based – need to more deliberately engage with one another in creating a more nuanced and useful political science.

What is distinctive about qualitative methods and analysis?

The debate above demonstrates that much of qualitative method's challenge or offering to dominant non-qualitative strands of political science lies in the centrality of meaning, context and history. Pierson (2007) writes of 'periphery' research specializations in the field of US politics, such as the American political development (focused on historical understandings) and public policy sub-fields, that pay in-depth and substantive qualitative attention to both historical context and long-term dynamic processes in explaining political institutions.

Researchers also tend to focus on a single or very few cases or examples when they use qualitative analysis to be able to gain an in-depth understanding of their research subject. Thus, generalizability over many cases is rarely a goal of qualitative analysis. Mahoney and Goertz (2006: 230) contrast qualitative and quantitative methods by suggesting that qualitative research seeks to explain the outcomes in individual cases. For example, we could look at a major event such as a revolution and work backwards to *explain* how and why that event, in that place, at that particular time, occurred. They call this the 'causes-of-effects' form of explanation, and contrast it with the 'effects-of-causes' approach taken by quantitative researchers where an explanation of causality is akin to an experiment and seeks to estimate the average effect of one or more causes across a population of cases. Thus they would, for example, study many cases where revolution had occurred and try to estimate what is the 'average' cause across all the cases. Mahoney and Goertz further contrast these approaches to explanation through the illustration of vastly different initial research questions taken by qualitative and quantitative researchers. Their example is that quantitative researchers formulate questions such as 'What is the effect of economic development on democracy?' rather than questions that a qualitative researcher may ask such as 'Was economic crisis necessary for democratisation in the Southern Cone of Latin America?' The contrast is emphasized by whether a researcher is

'interested in finding some general law-like statements or in explaining a particular event' (Beck cited in Mahoney and Goertz, 2006: 231). Thus the trade-off here is between generalization and particularity, with qualitative researchers preferring to focus on the in-depth distinctiveness of particular cases.

It should be noted at this point that not all qualitative researchers prioritize causality in their research, even if it is understood as process tracing 'involving the mechanisms and capacities that lead from cause to an effect' (or outcome or event) rather than a quantitative oriented focus on measuring causal effects (Bennett and Elman, 2006: 457–8). Instead, as will be highlighted in the next section, some interpretivist qualitative researchers reject causal analysis based on observation and process tracing as a positivist exercise, instead seeing the main goal of research as interpretation of meaning and to provide understanding, rather than explanation (Caterino and Schram, 2006: 5; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2002: 461).

In focusing on just a few cases, qualitative researchers clearly do not view all possible cases as equal but that a chosen case is 'substantively important' (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006: 242) that is, worth studying and examining in detail. Case studies tend to involve the in-depth qualitative study of lived human experiences by means of on-site fieldwork and some combination of observation, interviews, and/or document analysis (Yanow *et al.*, 2009). But even if it is classified as a single site case study, the qualitative researcher is not just studying a single phenomenon as the case study generates a 'multitude of qualitative-interpretive, within-case "observations" reflecting patterns of interaction, organisational practices, social relations, routines, actions, and so on' (Yanow *et al.,* 2009: 4). These authors are also strong defenders of interpretive analysis in the use of qualitative methods and are resistant to and concerned with the positivist orientation of the work of authors referred to above that focus on causality, process tracing and path dependence.

In contemplating the distinctiveness of qualitative methods in political science, it has become obvious that not all qualitative methods can be understood as having the same epistemological background. Some researchers who use qualitative methods are committed to 'small-N' research but also have become adaptive to standards of observation, objectivity and causality more common to positivism (for example, Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). While other researchers are keen to focus on the interpretive side of using qualitative methods (for example, Yanow *et al.,* 2009), it has also been suggested that further differentiation should be made between qualitative approaches in design (accessing data) and analysis (analyzing data) and that this reveals most starkly the positivist and non-positivist divide in use of qualitative methods (see Schwartz-Shea

and Yanow, 2002: 460). The remainder of this chapter offers a brief survey of how researchers actually use qualitative methods in research, but it will be mindful of distinguishing between these epistemological contrasts in both design and analysis. I will also look at qualitative methods found in both first-hand primary research (such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation) and in secondary analysis of existing texts (such as historical documentary analysis and discourse analysis).

Qualitative research techniques

For the qualitative researcher, explanation and understanding of human social and political behaviour cannot be independent of context. Therefore, the qualitative researcher tries to convey the full picture and this is often referred to as 'thick' description. The idea is that as researchers, we cannot provide the full picture unless we have collected the full picture from undertaking detailed in-depth research to answer our research questions. There are four core attributes often ascribed to a more qualitative approach to doing political science research (see Pierce, 2008: 43):

1. Inductive analysis that is premised on discovering categories and being exploratory with open questions, rather than *only* testing theoretically derived hypotheses through deduction.
2. Holistic perspective that seeks to understand all of the phenomenon and the complex interdependence in issues of interest, rather than reducing analysis to a few discrete variables. This also demonstrates sensitivity to context as analysis is located in the social, historical and temporal context from which data has been gathered.
3. Qualitative and adaptive data collection based on detailed thick description and depth, for example analysis uses direct quotation to capture unique perspectives and experiences. Further, the research process is not locked into rigid designs but is adaptable to changing situations and has the ability to pursue new paths of discovery as they emerge.
4. Empathetic neutrality in doing research is important as most qualitative researchers believe complete objectivity is impossible. The researcher's agenda is to understand the complex social world with empathy, while also attempting to be non-judgemental.

Table 12.1 summarizes the kinds of research techniques that qualitative researchers might choose to use and contrasts this with quantitative research techniques that are widely used within political science.

Table 12.1   *Contrasting qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques*

Techniques more oriented to producing qualitative data	*Techniques more oriented to producing quantitative data*
1. Case study, narrative approach, historiography	1. Survey or comparative statistical data analysis
2. Interview, focus groups, life history	2. Questionnaire
3. Textual and discourse analysis, ethnographic observation	3. Content analysis

Interviews and group discussion

Interviews conducted in-depth rather than through formal survey mechanisms tend to be exploratory and qualitative, concentrating on the distinctive features of situations and events, and upon the beliefs and personal experiences of individuals. Interviews provide information on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like. They are often used by political scientists to study political behaviour inside and outside political institutions, and are used within most political science approaches especially institutionalism, post-positivist behaviouralism, interpretivism and feminism. Each of these approaches often utilizes interview data in different ways. For example, institutionalists may use interviews with political elites in combination with other case study data such as documentary evidence to be able to reconstruct a narrative of an event; while post-positivist behaviouralists may focus on a select sample of interviewees to compare and contrast their experiences, such as in the study with Australian Green Party parliamentarians described below.

There is now an extensive literature within political science on the practice of 'elite' interviewing, that is interviews with individuals prominent in politics, public service, business, or who are activists or commentators in the public sphere (see Pierce, 2008: 117–27; Burnham *et al.*, 2008). These individuals are often willing to participate in research, although this may often be dependent on guaranteed anonymity, and are relatively easy to identify and locate. This can be contrasted with interviews with non-publicly identifiable people who may have specific characteristics of interest to a researcher (such as they vote for a particular party, are unemployed, or engage in protests). In this case other methods for interview recruitment will be needed such as advertising, or accessing

client or member lists of organizations. It is necessary to keep in mind that qualitative interview based researchers do not attempt to make general-izations to a broader population based on the small sub-section they study. Instead, there is an emphasis on the distinctive nature of their sample populations and a detailed criteria-based explanation of purpo-sive (rather than random) sampling used to select interviewees.

For a study of the Australian Green party, semi-structured elite inter-views were conducted with all 16 sitting federal and State Green Party parliamentarians (see Vromen and Gauja, 2009). All interviewees were asked similar questions on the internal and democratic processes of their party, and their views on their own legislative roles. The interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed using the NVivo qualitative software program. The coding in NVivo was based on paragraphs of the transcript and was used to iden-tify where the interviewee spoke about their experiences within parlia-ment and society and how this related to their approach to representation.

MPs were not assigned to pre-defined categories based on theoretical conceptions of representation. Rather, they were broadly asked about their political roles and experiences, and on the basis of their responses their diverse attitudes to representation and parliamentary activity were analyzed. In our analysis, we attempted to be as transparent as possible in our categorization of MPs within tables that summarize their approach to representation. We also, as is characteristic of a qualitative research approach, used a generous number of quotations from the interviews to illustrate the categorizations and to incorporate the voice of the interview subjects (Vromen and Gauja, 2009: 91). This approach to qualitative analysis uses theme analysis and is based on the idea that codes or themes emerge from studying the interview transcript data holistically, and makes it possible to explore the resonance of themes over different inter-views. This type of qualitative analysis where theoretical ideas (such as 'representation') are explored in data, coded and then the theoretical idea is expanded based on the data, thus a 'to and fro' process between data and theory, is also called 'grounded theory' and is associated with the theorist Anselm Strauss (see Ezzy, 2002: 86–95). This is not an interpre-tivist approach to qualitative analysis as it tends to focus on looking for patterns and causal links within interview data, similar to a positivist approach (see Grbich, 2007: 80–1).

Political scientists also increasingly use focus groups or group based discussion as a specialized form of interviewing. These are common in the professional worlds of market research and political opinion polling where qualitative group discussion is used to understand the 'mood' of the elec-torate and are a regular feature of background research for election campaigns. The key feature of focus groups is 'the explicit use of the group's

interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (Morgan cited in Van Willigen, 2002: 148). Size and composition of the group are very important, and a size of about eight participants in a group is most common. Composition particularly needs to be thought of in terms of research questions and practicalities of using this method; researchers do not necessarily need a homogenous group if what they want to study is debate, but if they want to understand shared attitudes they would establish a group with some commonalities. Thus, it is about what discussion on a topic or issue produces that could not be found through other qualitative information collection approaches, such as one-on-one in-depth interviews or observation. This research technique has also been used to study group processes.

For example, a recent study used focus groups to understand the construction of European identity and attachment. Antonsich (2008) used this approach as a way of capturing the meanings associated with this particular form of territorial attachment, making it possible to understand 'European' attachment in relation to three different notions of Europe: cultural-national, cultural-transnational, and functional-utilitarian (2008: 706). The qualitative information used to explore the meanings was collected in four European regions: Lombardia (Italy), Pirkanmaa (Finland), North-East of England (United Kingdom), and Languedoc-Roussillon (France). These places were chosen because they reflected different socio-economic, political, and geographical conditions of the EU-15. The study used both in-depth interviews with political elites and four focus groups, with four to five participants in each group, males and females, aged 18 to 26. Antonsich (2008) explains that his qualitative data was coded following an inductive approach, whereby codes were not generated on the basis of an *a priori* theory, but on the observation of recurring patterns. Data analysis, however, was not based on a quantitative positivist approach but 'on "analytic induction" approach which, echoing the grounded theory method, relies on the iterative process of going back and forth between original data and theoretical concepts in order to reach successively more abstract categorisations' (2008: 697).

In Antonsich's analysis he uses quotes from interviews and focus group participants to demonstrate his categorizations. One Italian focus group participant is quoted to demonstrate the cultural-national interpretation of identity:

Language still remains something which differentiates, in terms of belonging, those who speak your language from those who don't. Then, if a person is able to speak English and to communicate with others, it's ok. However, your language. I mean there is a greater belonging with those who speak your language. (2008: 699)

A sense of identification associated with Europe, narrated as a functional-utilitarian space, was shown by a quote from an English focus group participant:

> Europe to me is it's a bit like the GB, UK thing to me, they're kind of, not so much to do with culture and identity, they're political things, they're to do with money and economy and managing people and Europe has recently just incorporated a whole lot of new countries … I don't actually feel European, I just want to reap the benefits from being a European citizen. (2008: 704)

Through using in-depth qualitative methods and inductive analysis Antonsich *interprets* his focus groups discussions to show how we can better *understand* the variation in identification with the *idea* of the European Union.

One other technique of primary research used by political scientists is worth mentioning here. Ethnography that uses both participant and non-participant observation within 'natural' political and social contexts has unfortunately had limited use in political science. Bray (2008) suggests that this particular imbalance ought to be redressed if we are to understand both macrostructures and stratification processes such as race and gender, and micro-level processes such as interactions within organizations and socialization processes. Ethnographic methods provide an approach to recording and analysing data 'in a flexible fashion' and importantly, can be used to explore the dynamics and power relationships between people (Bray, 2008: 298). For example, Rhodes (2002) argued for the usefulness of ethnographic methods in understanding policy networks by making sure all voices are heard, not just those of elites such as departmental secretaries but also other actors such as social workers and service consumers. He suggests that the 'thick description' of ethnographic observation demonstrates how different individuals within the network give it meaning and understand it in quite different ways through both their actions and what they say in interviews (Rhodes, 2002: 412–13).

Text/document based techniques

Many political scientists study existing documents or texts as part of their research. Most are primary sources which are original documents produced by political actors ranging from executive, parliamentary or judicial arms of governments, policy-making agencies or non-government organizations. Primary sources can also be archival material such as photos, diaries, meeting notes and memoirs. Strictly speaking, primary

sources are generally considered to be documents that reflect a position of an actor and do not have analysis in them (such as a secondary source like a scholarly journal article); however, there are clear exceptions to this, such as newspaper articles and organizational research reports (for example, a World Bank report) which contain analysis but can also become the object of text analysis by studying the meaning they give to the political context they originated from. This also emphasizes that the qualitative use of texts and documentary primary sources is to make meaning from them by using them to 'tell the story' or recreate a historical sequencing of events. This is substantively different from the systematic study of primary texts via quantitative content analysis which looks for patterns and seeks to make generalizations. Two main traditions within political science of analyzing documents and texts are introduced here: the historiography approach and interpretivist discourse analysis. These approaches of historical and discourse analysis are predominantly used within the sub-disciplines of political institutions/public policy, comparative politics and international relations.

The use of historiography in political science has a substantial lineage through the study of political institutions. It can be understood as the 'writing of history based on a selective, critical reading of sources that synthesizes particular bits of information into a narrative description or analysis of a subject' (Thies, 2002: 351). Selecting primary source materials for a historiography is not straightforward as the selection process tends to prioritize some sources over others for reasons of accessibility (for example, many government documents are not available until 30 years after the event they record) and requires that the researcher is aware of their existence (for example, researchers may not always be aware that a particular political actor has lodged their personal documents with an archive or elsewhere). This kind of 'selection bias' is somewhat inevitable and instead Thies suggests that researchers can do reputable historical research through *justification* of selection of research materials (2002: 356). It should also be noted here that the capacity to identify and analyze primary sources created by official institutions has dramatically increased since the advent of the internet increased accessibility.

Others have written at length about judgements that need to be made about sources before they are incorporated into analysis. For example, John Scott's book *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* is cited (Scott, 1990) as the authoritative source in several texts. He highlights four criteria in approaching and utilizing a document:

1. Authenticity: to identify whether a document is genuine, look for factors such as internal consistency of presentation and style, soundness of the origins of the document and recognized authorship.

2. Credibility: to identify whether the document is accurate, and is a reliable relaying of events.
3. Representativeness: to find whether the document is typical of its genre or, if it is 'untypical', to understand how a particular interpretation of an event sits among or excludes others.
4. Meaning: this refers to the document's clarity and comprehensibility, and what its meaning is in the social and political context within which it was produced. (See May, 2001: 189–90)

Many of the leading political science uses of historiography are found within the school, or approach, of historical institutionalism, defined as scholars 'specifically interested in explaining real-world outcomes, using history as an analytic tool, and they are strongly interested in the ways in which institutions shaped political outcomes' (Steinmo, 2008: 122). Researchers working in this field place the explanation of political events, issues and processes into context through their use of historiography. They are less interested in making predictions, but are still committed to positivist (or critical realist) concerns with process tracing and causality (Steinmo, 2008: 134). Tilly (2006: 420) states that any 'sound explanation of political processes' necessarily involves history as an essential element. However, he also argues that a focus on explanation within historical analyses does not mean a commitment to a teleological (that is, a predetermined) view but, instead, encompasses a recognition that all political processes occur within history and thus need knowledge of the historical context, and 'also where and when political processes occur, influence *how* they occur'.

For example, in his detailed history of social movements Tilly points out that the means of claim-making, or repertoires of action, available to social movements depend on what has gone before in history. His examples of actions used by 'ordinary people' in Great Britain of the 1750s include: attacks on coercive authorities (resisting police); attacks on popularly-designated offenders (collective invasion of land and destroying fences); celebration at both popular or official gatherings (marches using partisan symbols); and workers' sanctions (trade unions marches). These historical antecedents help us to reflect on the means available for movements to make claims on the state in contemporary politics (2006: 426–7). Thus, historical explanations and understandings rely especially on context, but can also be contingent, developing over time with the collection of more evidence and the advancement of theoretical ideas.

The influence of interpretivism on political science has already been outlined in Chapter 4 by Parsons; here we will reflect on the methodological influence it has had, predominantly through the introduction of discourse analysis. Ezzy (2002: 101–9) describes how an interpretive

approach locates the interpretation of texts within an analysis of broader social, political and cultural processes. This means that qualitative analysis does not just focus on the texts, or data, alone but interprets how the data relates to or is emblematic of broader social, political and cultural frameworks. Further, interpretivists 'problematise the politics of the interpretive process, asking from whose perspective, and for whose benefit, the interpretation has been conducted' (Ezzy, 2002: 107).

Discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with the analysis of language, and offers a qualitative method of 'uncovering some of the ways in which people or groups (or actors or agents as they are often termed in discourse analysis) seek to represent their actions in texts and language' (Jacobs, 2006: 138). Fairclough (cited in Jacobs 2006: 141) is an influential proponent of discourse analysis and his analytical framework is based on:

- *The micro concern evident in linguistics.* Here, analysis is centred on vocabulary and structure of texts to look at how alternative usage of words is developed over time. For example, looking for the political meanings and symbolism attached to words such as refugee, asylum seeker, boat people, illegals and so on. Analysts could also focus on discursive practices used in the text, such as rhetoric or irony, to reinforce arguments.
- *The meso interpretation on the social production of texts.* Here, social practices are examined in terms of hegemony and power, and how language reflects a broader ideological or political context.
- *Macro analysis associated with social theory.* Here, analysis is connected to broader themes in the social sciences.

Other discourse analysts prioritize the framework provided by French social theorist Michel Foucault. He posited that power was developed and exercised though the *control* of knowledge and that powerful interests created and maintained particular discourses to minimize any challenge from others also interested in these forms of knowledge (Grbich, 2007: 147). Discourse analysts using this approach start from a similar place to the Fairclough approach mentioned above, but also look for disunity, discontinuity and limits to discourse, especially in terms of locating and following challenges to dominant discourses (Grbich, 2007: 149).

A recent example of detailed research using a Foucault inspired discourse analysis can be found in Charlotte Epstein's (2008) book *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an anti-whaling discourse.* This book intrinsically brings together both theoretical questions about the use of discourse in studying international relations and an

empirical approach for interpreting how whaling discourse has changed over time, to end up in a place where anti-whaling has become the dominant discourse. In her words:

> the book is concerned with the discourses about whales, that is, ways of knowing, envisaging, and talking about whales that determine what we do to them. In effect, it in concerned with two discourses, one geared towards killing whales and the other towards saving them. And with how the latter superseded the former in the second half of the twentieth century. Schematically, studying, perceiving, and writing about whales as an oil resource or as a raw material makes no sense in a society that no longer whales and that sees whales as endangered species. Discourses are inherently social phenomena. A powerful discourse is, quite simply, one that makes a difference. The rise of the anti-whaling discourse de-legitimised a hitherto normal and widespread practice at the global level. (2008: 2)

Epstein (2008) uses her case study to demonstrate the power, and provide an *understanding,* of discourse and while she predominantly uses written texts as her base, her study also includes analysis of interviews with whalers in Norway, policy-makers in attendance at the International Whaling Commission annual conferences and activists from non-government organizations such as WWF. The types of primary source texts that she uses to explore the importantly *historical* shift in discourse include speeches made at and, scientific and environmentalist position papers written for, International Whaling Commission conferences, newspaper and magazine periodical articles, NGO campaign advertisements, cartoons, and World Council of Whalers publications.

Conclusions

This chapter has introduced some of the major debates on contemporary use and development of qualitative methods in political science. It has suggested that while qualitative methods remain marginalized by the dominance of quantitative methods within many sub-disciplines such as comparative politics, there are notable exceptions such as in the crucial field of international relations. A critical approach to methodological pluralism asks us to consider more deeply the contribution qualitative methods can make to understanding the social and political world. Therefore, it is likely that the debate will continue and new uses for qualitative methods in political science research will both emerge and become accepted into the mainstream. Furthermore, some sub-disciplines of

political science, such as policy studies and historical institutionalism, provide a new and self-conscious exploration of epistemology and methodology with an overall increase in rigorous qualitative approaches. This includes both positivist process tracing and path dependence analyses, as well as interpretive discourse analysis. These contemporary methodological debates will also continue to reinvigorate and develop the key qualitative research techniques of interviewing and historiography.

Further reading

- For a statement of how to approach issues of inference and understanding using primarily qualitative techniques see Brady and Collier (eds) (2004) which in turn is a response to King *et al.* (1994).
- Ezzy (2002) and Pierce (2008) for an wider introduction to some qualitative research practices.
- Grbich (2007) provides an account of key epistemological issues and a practical guide to a range of research approaches.

Quantitative Methods

PETER JOHN

In spite of many valiant attempts to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods, the divide between the two remains. Many researchers still tend to use one approach, but not the other. Not only is the divide personal, it often sorts out researchers into topics of study. As a result, many academics assume that quantitative investigation only concerns elections, voting systems, party manifestoes and political attitudes rather than having a more general application. The division becomes manifest in the descriptors researchers apply to themselves and to others: quantitative researchers are known as political scientists; the rest often have the labels of students of politics, area specialists, biographers and public policy specialists. Not only do different topics, skills and networks help create the divide; it is sustained by apparently clashing conceptions of the purpose and practice of social science. Some qualitative researchers think that quantitative work is underpinned by a crude version of positivism. Instead, qualitative work describes complex realities, acknowledges that researchers cannot separate their values from the political world, engages with and seeks to understand the beliefs and aspirations of those who are being researched and rejects the idea that there are universal rules of human behaviour. In this context, a review of quantitative methods cannot just be a description of the different techniques on offer. Such an account would reinforce the idea that quantitative research is a set of techniques rather than a practice. Instead, this chapter aims to persuade sceptics of the depth and subtlety of quantitative work. For much of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research is shallow and rests on stereotypes of the research process.

The argument develops that of King, Keohane and Verba in their influential book, *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994). Writing with the tools of quantitative analysis in mind, they argue that both fields apply a 'unified logic of inference with differences mainly of style and specific technique' (1994: 1). They recommend qualitative inferences could be improved by the adoption of a few straightforward procedures. Whilst the book should be compulsory reading for every research student, experienced

researchers often feel uncomfortable with the clean and tidy nature of their programme, which seems to squeeze out the messy, problem-solving and practical way in which most qualitative researchers actually do the job. Often, investigators respect their hunches; they discover bits of new data accidentally, they carry out detective work and follow up leads. Sometimes they start with the wrong research question and, after many blind alleys, come to a moment of revelation. It is sometimes quite late in the project that the student or even experienced academic knows how to frame the research problem and can test alternative hypotheses. This chapter claims that quantitative researchers also engage in unplanned and unpredictable data analysis; they solve problems incrementally and follow their intuitions just like their qualitative counterparts. They discuss their strategies with their colleagues and seek the advice of others in the research community. The message is that all researchers should design their projects to be capable of testing hypotheses, but they should also use their practical knowledge to carry out exciting and imaginative pieces of work.

Quantitative researchers sometimes help their critics because convention requires them not to report the interpretive aspects to their craft. They report complex statistical analysis as though they had run their data through a black box, making knowledge of the technique a necessary prerequisite to understanding the article. This chapter aims to demystify both the theory and presentation of quantitative research. The idea is not to knock down quantitative work in politics, but to show that much of its practice coheres with the rich traditions of social science. The chapter also reports recently established conventions and rules of scholarly journals that encourage or require political scientists to present as much information as possible about how they gather their data, choose their models and ensure that others can replicate their results (King, 1995). Moreover, in spite of rapid advances in statistical techniques, the use of programming and new software, the leading political methodologists argue that researchers should make further efforts to present their data more effectively so the ordinary reader can understand how the research shows the relationships between the variables of interest (King *et al.*, 2000).

The collection and management of data

Quantitative work rests on the observation and measurement of repeated incidences of a political phenomenon, such as voting for a political party, an allocation of resources by a government agency or citizen attitudes toward taxation and public spending. By observing variables over a large number of cases, it is possible to make inferences about a class of political

behaviour, such as who votes for a political party, which area gets resources from governments and what is the distribution of attitudes to public spending in the adult population. With large numbers, social scientists can confidently make generalizations about the empirical world. Statistical theory shows that the larger the number of cases (or the greater number in proportion to the whole population), the surer data analysts can be that what they observe is not a random occurrence. Moreover, political scientists often want to analyze whole populations, such as the voting record of all Members of Parliament or all electoral systems in the world, which involves large numbers.

Some qualitative researchers are often suspicious about the way in which their quantitative colleagues generate observations, particularly when what they measure is attitudinal or behavioural, such as opinions drawn from large-scale surveys using standardized questions. These measures appear to ignore social and political contexts (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Even official statistics that government departments produce may reflect political decisions about what kinds of data to collect. In the end, official information is what politicians and bureaucrats wish to make public. Some techniques, such as content analysis (the classification and counting of data drawn from the texts of media or political debates), appear to strip out the context of the language and render it meaningless or sterile. Quantitative researchers appear to be blind to the relationship between the observer and observed that makes each act of collecting data unique. Critics claim that quantitative researchers ignore the complexity of the world in their quest to turn politics into a series of repeated and identical experiences or events (Ragin, 2000).

But the practice of quantitative research does not live up this stereotype. Quantitative researchers are acutely aware that complex social realities may not always be captured by repeated observations. In certain situations, quantification is not appropriate as what is being measured could be made either meaningless or biased by ignoring the social construction of the data. There is usually a long discussion as to whether measures are valid or not. For example, research that depends on standardized questions may not be replicated across countries because of differences in culture and language. In the qualitative prelude to most surveys and in pilots, questions are bandied about, interviewers evaluate interviews and respondents fill in an additional questionnaire about their experience of completing questions. For example, survey researchers have frequent discussions about the effect of question wording and order on the responses to their questions. Quantitative researchers also pay a lot of attention to reliability (that data are produced independently of the activity of measurement) and seek to improve it where possible. Content analysis researchers, who seek to extract key terms from documents like

newspapers, use inter-coder reliability scores to find out whether two different researchers coded an item in the same way (Krippendorff, 1980: 129–154). Such problems do not just occur in surveys and the analysis of texts. Statisticians who use data from government departments frequently investigate how the data is collected. They consider the possible biases in the results and think of ways to correct for them. There is even discussion about the extent to which research instruments, such as survey questions, reflect biases within social science, such as in favour of class-based explanations in voting behaviour (Catt, 1996: 67–9 , 92).

Quantitative researchers spend much time and effort thinking about their data. Choosing data or sampling appears an easy task but it contains many hidden pitfalls. The sample must allow the investigator to make inferences, but often it is not clear what constitutes the population. If the topic of study is about change over time, which years should the researcher choose to analyze? Surveys pose many dilemmas, such as how to define a household. Surveys may need to be re-weighted because of the stratification of the sample (Skinner *et al.,* 1989). There are also choices about how to measure variables. No perfect set of data exists; for example, response rates to surveys may be low and archives may contain missing years. Although the electronic storage of data gives the impression of permanence, and has massively improved from the expansion of the internet, files sometimes become corrupted and data get lost.

The collection and manipulation of data invite errors. Interviewers, research assistants or survey companies sometimes input responses to questionnaires incorrectly; researchers accidentally delete cases and variables; the transfer of files between software packages and across the internet can create dirt in the data; and researchers can even accidentally work on the wrong or old dataset because they did not label it correctly. They may even forget how they created their variables because they did not note what they did at each stage or failed to save the command file correctly, when using a statistical software package such as a 'Stata do' file. One of the problems is that the speed and efficiency of modern computers encourage researchers to think that their data are clean. But most political scientists learn to be careful after making silly errors when their concentration lapses. As mistakes are so easy to make, researchers spend a large amount of their time carefully collecting data, checking and re-checking how they or the research assistant entered the information. Even with this culture of paranoia, mistakes still occur in published work, sometimes in the best quality journals (see, for example, the correction of Garrett (1998) by King *et al.,* 2000: 356).

Data collection and management requires attention to practical issues and to theory about what is the best data for the study. No solution is ideal, but researchers pick up practical knowledge from their colleagues

and friends about how to solve these problems and learn about the pitfalls of particular choices. A few words in an internet search engine can produce all sorts of useful information, some of it posted by political methodologists. Debates also occur in footnotes and appendices, in list-serv discussions and in emails between colleagues; they become part of the common stock of knowledge that members of the research community acquire. These critical activities show that quantitative researchers do the same things as their qualitative colleagues: they use a variety of strategies to find the best data to answer their research questions.

The power of description

One of the advantages of descriptive measures is that they allow the observer to split the observations and to examine the proportions, such as the percentage of a group who support a political party. Judgements about these proportions form an essential part of the interpretation of data. In journalism and other forms of commentary, there are debates about whether a percentage is too big or too small, and descriptive polit-ical science is no exception. Consider an imaginary statistic showing that five per cent of the electorate believes in repatriation. Commentators can either interpret it as evidence of alarming racism or of tolerance of the bulk of the population. To resolve this dilemma, social scientists would place the statistic in its proper context, taking into account arguments about what defines a liberal society and existing empirical knowledge. The interpretation of the 5 per cent would differ with the additional infor-mation that, for example, 10 per cent of the population believed in it twenty years previously.

Summary statistics are useful to understand the data, such as measures of central points so that researchers can know the average or typical point for a variable. The most common is the mean or average, but there is also the median (middle observation) and mode (the most frequent value). Equally important are measures of dispersion. Observers find it useful to know whether the observations converge on the average value or are widely distributed. For example, if the interest is in response times of fire brigades in different locations, researchers and residents may be inter-ested in finding out which area has the lowest average response time. But they should also be interested in the dispersion around the average as resi-dents would like to know how likely the fire engines will arrive close to the mean time. As with central points, there are a number of measures, such as the inter-quartile range (the distance between the upper and lower quartiles) and the standard deviation (the square root of the variance). When deciding which measure to use, researchers need to think carefully

about their data and decide whether they are nominal (with categories that are just different to each other, such as male or female), ordinal (with measures that involve ranking), and ratio/interval (with values that have equal intervals between categories). Investigators may wish to look at the shape of the distribution, such as whether it is unimodal (spread evenly around one point) or bimodal or multimodal (having a number of peaks), which can inform much about what the data reveals. Alternatively the data may be skewed or symmetrical, leptotkurtotic (bunched around the mean) or normal. The normal is particularly interesting because it shows the distribution is random.

When technical terms appear, like the ones in the paragraph above, qualitative researchers and students start to think that quantitative topics are not for them, but often merely formalize what people do in everyday life. Imagine a person walking into a room full of people. The person would immediately size up the gathering by asking how many people are there, how many are of a certain type or how many old or young people there are. When coming to these judgements, people make approximate proportions, averages and distributions. Descriptive statistics standardize these common-sense ideas (or common-sense ideas make sense of the statistics). Moreover, such statistics appear regularly in newspapers and in qualitative research.

Paradoxically, quantitative researchers do not use descriptive statistics enough, often only reporting them as the prelude to applying sophisticated tests and models. But much can be gained by their careful and imaginative use. To obtain the best results, quantitative researchers must first immerse themselves in their data and explore the myriad of possible ways of cutting and representing the information. Familiarity with descriptive measures assists an understanding of the topic and can help researchers interpret the output from more complex statistical models. Much can be gained by representing descriptive data pictorially in the form of bar charts, pies and plots – most software packages easily provide these. In short, quantitative researchers should be as intimate with their research materials as their qualitative colleagues. As Jenkins writes, 'The statistician should fall in love with his data' (cited by Franzosi, 1994: 45).

Tables and inferential statistics

Social scientists often want to infer or deduce models of causation that they wish to test. Such models often hypothesize a strong relationship between two variables (either positive or negative). Social scientists assume that the values of one variable cause or influence variation in another. The explaining terms are called independent variables and what

is being explained is known as the dependent variable. For example, consider a project on what causes people to volunteer, which is an important topic in the literature on social capital (see, for example Verba *et al.,* 1995). Theory – in the form of the socio-economic status (SES) model of political behaviour – may suggest that those from wealthy families are more likely to join organizations. This suggests finding the variables of wealth and social capital to see if the former leads to the latter.

One of the simplest ways to find out if one variable determines or is associated with another is tables or cross-tabulations. Tables show how the values or categories of one variable are expressed as the categories of another. Researchers frequently use tables in survey research. If the volunteering project had been carried out in the days before computers, researchers would have sorted all the cards containing the records of the interviews into the piles of wealthy volunteers, non-wealthy volunteers, wealthy non-volunteers and non-wealthy non-volunteers. Then they would have counted the numbers of cards of each category, worked out their percentages as a proportion of each variable and represented the results in a two by two table. A table is usually titled in the following way: 'Table N: dependent variable by independent variable' or in the example, 'Table N: volunteering by wealth'. If the tables are set up to display column percentages, with totals of 100 per cent at the bottom of the table, the dependent variable (volunteering) is shown in the rows with the columns displaying the independent variable (wealth). The researcher can compare the proportion of the independent variable taken up by the dependent variable, the numbers of wealthy and non-wealthy who volunteer – the eye can look across the table to compare the proportion of volunteers in the wealthy and non-wealthy groups. But it is just as respectable for the independent variables to be the column and to compare row per cents. In the end, the analyst learns to read the table by comparing the amount of influence the independent variable has on the response or dependent term.

Now that the records of surveys can be stored as data matrixes in software packages, such as Stata 11.0 (StataCorp, 2009) or in free open source software, such as R (R Development Core Team, 2008), researchers can create such a table in seconds. But their construction is surprisingly tricky. Often variables need to be re-coded, such as by transforming the individual ages of respondents into bands of age groups. Working out which measure to use requires knowledge of the data and attention to theory to select the appropriate units. There is an art in creating a table that is attractive to look at and is formatted professionally, which is surprisingly difficult to do. Researchers should not paste across the output from a software package like SPSS, as the result is awkward to look at and is often hard to understand. Report or paper writers need to

spend time ensuring all the required information is present, such as a clear labelling of the variables and the totals of each column or row. Rounding up the percentages to a number or to one decimal place helps too.

Researchers who use tables from surveys also need to run tests to show that the associations could not have happened just by chance. Because surveys are samples from larger populations, associations in the data could appear because the data have an unusual selection of people. Statisticians conventionally argue that researchers should have ninety-five per cent confidence that the association is not random. The humped shape of the normal distribution indicates that the mean value of the variable in the sample is going to be close to the population mean whereas the chance that it is far from the mean is much less. The ninety-five per cent confidence level is convenient because it is just under two standard deviations (typical deviations) from the mean or average level and also is the point at which the normal distribution becomes flatter. Survey researchers calculate the probability and most computer packages routinely produce a figure. If the figure was 0.04, for example, researchers would believe that the association had not occurred by chance. But the ease with which computers run these tests sometimes makes researchers forget to examine the strength of the associations, which show how much one variable affects another. In large samples, such as those in excess of 4,000 respondents, it is easy to find statistically significant but meaningless or imperceptible relationships.

One common objection to testing hypotheses from using correlations presented in tables and regressions is that they do not establish causation but only show associations. Unlike natural scientists, the claim is that political ones rarely carry out experiments, so they have no way of knowing whether the relationships they observe in their data are accidental, spurious or causal. Theory comes to the aid of the social scientist because a relationship between two variables needs to be logical and consistent as well as following from existing empirical studies. The association between wealth and volunteering is not a correlation found by what is called dredging the data, but derives from sociological theory that argues that as some people have more resources and advantages than others, so they are more able to engage with public life. The relationship is logical in the sense that social background can affect political participation. Logically, it would not be possible for volunteering to affect social background (at least in one generation). Such research can only test whether background affects voluntary activity or not, but not the other way round. It is plausible because investigators compare the SES with other models, such as the rational choice model of participation or models that emphasize contextual factors, such as friendship networks or the neighbourhood. As always, theory, rather than the computer or technique,

should specify the direction of the causal arrow, but as long as the independent variable is genuinely thought to be prior to the dependent variables and where each independent variable is independent from each other, it is possible to make an inference.

When researchers appraise hypotheses they are not satisfied with just observing relationships in the data. To support their case they would look for other relationships to make a set of plausible arguments. They might be interested in change over time; they could run multivariate models as indicated below. Just like detectives on a case, quantitative researchers gradually piece together the evidence. At all times they are aware of academic communities of reviewers and conference participants who are likely to be sceptical about the results. They think of the likely criticisms and devise strategies about how to convince the sceptics. Rarely do quantitative researchers claim that an association in the data proves causation, but that correlation has importance only when applied by theory and used alongside other evidence.

Multivariate analysis

The social and political worlds are multi-causal, which makes it hard to identify one specific relationship. For example, there may be no relationship between wealth and volunteering because wealthy volunteers tend to go to schools which encourage voluntary activity. The causal relationship between schooling and volunteering makes the correlation between wealth and volunteering spurious because wealthy people go to a certain type of school which also produces volunteering as well as good examination results. So it would be entirely possible for poor people to have as high a level of volunteering as rich people if they had been to a school that encouraged it. So how is it possible to know how much each one influences the response variable? Sometimes it is possible to overcome this problem by using multiple regression to examine all the determinants. This technique allows a test as to whether other factors, rather than wealth, affect voluntary activity. Researchers do not aim to show that *X* causes *Y*, but that *X* causes *Y* alongside or allowing for or controlling for *Z* or *W*. Analysts become more confident of testing hypotheses because they have allowed for all the possible causes of behaviour or attitudes. They can run one model against another and carry out robust tests of each one. However, multivariate analysis carries more risks than descriptive statistics because the regression models that social scientists commonly use make restrictive assumptions about the data.

The most common multivariate model is ordinary least squares (OLS). The intuitive idea is that a plot of the points between two interval

variables, *X* and *Y*, may contain a relationship. If the points are not randomly distributed, it may be possible to plot a line that minimizes the distance between it and the data points. It is then fairly easy to see the relationship in data by moving the eye along the bunch of data points in the scatter plot of *X* and *Y*. This line would have a gradient or slope that indicates the constant relationship between the two variables. Rather than eyeballing the data, OLS uses a formula to estimate the slope of the line from the mean or average value of the independent variable and from the data points. In addition, OLS estimates the distances between the regression line and the data points – what are called the residuals or errors. OLS calculates the overall explanatory power of the model offers which is a statistic, the r-square, which falls between 0 and 1. The same mathematics governs models with more than one independent term. This neat extension allows the estimation of the effects of each of the independent terms upon the dependent variable. OLS allows researchers to test hypotheses in the knowledge that they are controlling for all the known hypothesized effects and that these are independent of each other.

Because OLS assumes the data is a sample from the population of possible data points, everything that the model does not explain is random. For each variable there is a standard error or measure of spread that indicates the probability that the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is there by chance or not. Political scientists have been happy to run hypothesis tests based on the 95 per cent confidence level. If the probability is equal to or greater than 95 per cent, researchers accept that an independent variable has an effect on the dependent one; if it is less then they reject the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship. The procedure easily tests models that derive from social science theory. This procedure appears to correspond to the scientific method because investigators allow the variable of interest to pass or fail a test.

The other advantage of OLS is that it is a standard: it is very comprehensible across the profession, indeed most of social science. Most political scientists know how to read an OLS table or output as they can look at a column of coefficients and see if an effect is big or not (either by comparing standardized measures or thinking about the units of measurement). They will also know that they can divide the coefficient by the standard error to create a t-statistic, which they know must exceed 1.96 to meet the standard five per cent probability test. Most tables display stars next to the coefficients, which people often glance at when looking for the statistically significant relationships. The eye is naturally drawn to a star and can conclude that one star is good at 0.05 probability, two stars are better at 0.01, and three stars may even deserve the popping open of some champagne at 0.001! They can also look at the r-square statistic to see if

it is big or not. This knowledge can allow non-technical researchers to know a little about what is going on rather than skipping the middle sections of quantitative papers.

For the bulk of the post-war period the OLS model held sway, particularly as it was taught as the central component of most political science methods courses. Most well-trained political scientists understand its output. In spite of its ease of comprehension, OLS has disadvantages. It is worth recalling that the model depends on ten assumptions that are frequently breached in most contexts. For example, one assumption is that the variables are constant and linear over time and space (Wood, 2000). Also, in many research situations the number of cases is too small, for example with studies that use the developed or OECD countries as the units of analysis.

In recent years, political scientists have moved away from OLS, partly because they know more about the properties of the variables they wish to explain. Some variables may be dichotomous, so requiring a logit or a probit model; other variables may be ordered rather than interval, which would require an ordered logit or probit model; other variables may be censored, with a cut-off point at one or both ends of the distribution, requiring a censored or tobit model; and other data may be count or event data, like wars, requiring a poisson model. Just as OLS was standard fare for a previous generation of political scientists, these different estimators are now part of a familiar menu of choices for today's, easily implemented by commands in most software packages. Most regression output has the same format to OLS, so it is possible to read them in the same way, transposing the R-coefficient to another measure of fit and searching out for the ubiquitous stars. Another change is that statistical theory and its applications have advanced massively in recent years. This means it is possible to estimate relationships with different statistical assumptions (see Box 13.1 on non-parametric estimation).

Although the multiple regression model is the workhorse of empirical political science, it is worth knowing that the structure of causal relationships may be more complex than it often implies. For example, the existence of marginal Westminster seats causes governments to direct public resources to them (Ward and John, 1999), but the receipt of those resources will affect which areas are going to be marginal seats in the following election. Over time, how can a researcher know what level of resources it takes to win marginal seats? This is the problem of endogeneity or selection. It can be partly overcome by more sophisticated use of statistics, such as two-stage models, or more recently, selection models (Heckman, 1979). These models depend on restrictive assumptions, such as finding a perfect variable with which to instrument the data, something that rarely occurs. Structural equation models (SEM) (Schumacker and

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> ### Box 13.1   Non-parametric models
>
> Monte Carlo simulation allows the investigator to estimate a variable and to make inferences to the population. It needs vast amounts of computer memory to generate data from an artificially created population that resembles the process being investigated. Then the researcher estimates a statistical model from this population and assesses its performance. Political scientists use bootstrapping models that are similar to Monte Carlo simulation and relax the restrictive assumptions of the OLS model (Mooney and Duval, 1993; Mooney, 1996; Mooney and Krause, 1997), arguing that the OLS model only developed because of the limitations of computational capacity and now the microchip revolution makes other forms of estimation possible. Bootstrapped estimators are available on statistical packages, such as STATA, and articles in journals now appear with reports of both OLS and bootstrapped estimates.

Lomax, 1996; Maruyama, 1998) available in software packages, such as LISREL, MPLUS and AMOS, can estimate more complicated sets of relationships when there are many measures of the same underlying concept. But the analyst should be careful: more complex statistics cannot cover up the difficulty of specifying a causal relationship. Sometimes it is better to be modest in describing the data rather than make too many claims about the direction of causation.

Testing and reporting models

When non-specialists read quantitative articles they may come away with the impression that political scientists only tested a model that derived from theory. But even with a small number of independent variables, there are many choices about which ones to exclude or include in the final model. These choices should be driven by theory, but sometimes theory provides arguments and counter-arguments for a number of models. For example, researchers could include all or some of the independent variables in the final model irrespective of whether they reach the 95 per cent confidence level or not. Alternatively, they could include only those variables that reach the required significance level. Moreover, the number of choices increases if researchers include interaction effects. These are terms created by multiplying two variables to indicate a joint impact on the dependent variable and they may be included along with the original independent terms (Friedrich, 1982). In many situations, it does not matter which model to run as all of them show the same kinds of relationships and levels of probability. But competing models can show the hypothesized variables to be

sometimes significant and sometimes not. Moreover, the profusion of new techniques of estimation means that researchers face many choices over the estimator. Then there are different ways in which the data may be presented, such as whether to have clustered or robust standard errors, which can affect the statistical significance of a variable. Or it can be a multilevel model to take account of the different levels in data, so the individual's behaviour or values is affected by his or her individual chacteristics, but also by the community context in which he or she is located or nested.

Researchers may be tempted to present the model that shows the hypothesized variable to be outside the ninety-five per cent confidence level. With the speed of current computers and the easy manipulation of software packages, modellers can engage in the much despised practice of significance hunting, which involves running many hundreds of equations until the preferred one emerges. Because journal editors cannot require researchers to report every model they run, it is hard to detect this practice. Gerber and Malhotra (2006) show that reported papers in political science journals cluster just over the 0.05 probability level at the same time as they show a gap on the non-significant side of this cut, something that would not be expected in the real world. Basically, political scientists select and present results that meet the 0.05 arbitrary cut-off point and reject models that do not.

The incentive to present the most favourable model exists because few journals publish papers containing negative results. Most journal editors and reviewers find these papers to be less interesting and less publishable than those that reach positive conclusions; alternatively, there is self-selection at work whereby researchers only send off papers to journals when they have positive results. The alternative explanation is that political scientists choose to carry out and research councils usually fund research projects that are likely to yield new findings. In the natural sciences the bias has been studied and is called the file drawer problem (Rotton *et al.,* 1995; Csada *et al.,* 1996; Bradley and Gupta, 1997).

Qualitative researchers may become suspicious that advanced statistics creates a screen behind which the modeller seems to cook the results. When practice breaches the stereotype of the pure model of scientific investigation, the effect is something of a fall from grace. Rather than a devious manipulation of data, the art of building models involves the assessment of different possibilities or pathways, each of which is trailed with theory. Researchers think about what is going on in their models and go back and forth between theory and the results they produce. Along the way is much dialogue – often internal, but also with colleagues along the department corridor or across the internet. Such conversations show that quantitative research is above all problem-centred. Problems and solutions are continually traded amongst the research community to overcome the many

pitfalls. And if the entrant to the profession does not know anyone, the many specialist courses on the theory and practice of quantitative political science can fill the gap. These courses are as much about finding out about the hidden knowledge and getting tips on shortcuts as they are about formal tuition and instruction on statistical theory. A folklore of practices emerges and complex networks link together researchers. Researchers engage with their data. They neither test pure models, nor do they dredge for significant results; but they carefully consider each one and come up with plausible explanations of the routes they have chosen.

The dialogue becomes hidden by the time investigators submit their articles to learned journals. But after the publication of research, the discursive aspect to the production of knowledge starts again. Researchers discuss results of papers with varying degrees of scepticism or respect that draws upon their knowledge about their data and about the people involved. Members of the research community often detect cooked models because they cannot understand how researchers arrived at their results. When researchers find they cannot replicate the results of a paper, this knowledge gradually diffuses to affect the reputation of the investigator. The informal control may become formal when one academic questions the findings of another by publishing a comment, to which there may be replies and rejoinders.

A more recent approach has been to call for greater transparency and accountability in the research process. Transparency may be aided by the advance publication of an analysis plan, which is a document where the researcher commits to a scheme of data analysis in advance of getting the data. The researcher emails this plan to a nominated and independent third party. This is designed as a self-denying ordinance to incentivize researchers to keep to what they promised rather than to select good results from their data. It is very hard to keep to these plans, however, as new ideas emerge about how to analyze the data. But they could form a good record about what the researchers intended and how they have departed from their original plans. This information could be posted on the researcher's website, along with the original data and the programme code or Stata do file, so that those who are interested can see how the researchers got their results and allow them to play with the data to generate their own, which would be much less cumbersome than downloading it from a data archive. When authors submit their papers to academic journals, they should also send their original analysis plans, data and command files. They should also compose a note of how they implemented their plans so the journal's reviewers can re-run the data to see if minor changes to the commands change the results or whether there are alternative specifications.

King (1995) has campaigned for a standard of replication, whereby

any person may repeat other scholars' work using the same dataset and coding of the variables. Such a standard has now been adopted by the main US journals. The ability to replicate not only guards against the false presentation of data, which is in any case rare, but it ensures that researchers carefully check their data for mistakes. Replication encourages researchers to consider the steps toward the presentations of their final results and to check the health of their models, such as for breaches of the assumptions of OLS. It is good to teach replication workshops to demystify data analysis. I got smiles even out of unconfident students when I showed them that changing the month when the Falklands war was assumed to start alters the Sanders *et al.* (1987) findings that the war did not help prime minister Thatcher win the UK's General Election of 1983. The choice is whether to use the month when hostilities started as opposed to the one where troops were sent to the islands (see Clarke *et al.,* 2000).

As a result, standards of reporting in political science have improved and most articles in good journals convey at least some of the vast range of diagnostic statistics, rather than just r-squares and probability values. This caution is wise as King (1986) shows that the r-square statistic can be misleading, making 'macho' comparisons of its size rather meaningless. For example, the r-square can increase by including more variables in the model rather than because of any real improvement in explanation. Similarly, stepwise regression has now fallen into disuse. Stepwise is a facility on some of the more popular software programmes, such as SPSS, which allows the researchers to select their variables by automatically discounting non-significant terms or including significant ones in each equation.

The current wave of reforms could go further as there is a range of tests that researchers can apply to the interior of their regression models (Franzosi, 1994). For example, it is common that one case in a model can cause a variable to be significant, and researchers need to find out why this is (sometimes it is caused by a data entry error). There are tests of the contribution each case makes to the final model, which help the researcher to understand what is going on inside the model. Moreover, political scientists could consider abandoning some of the shibboleths of their art. The most sacred is the 0.05 and 0.01 significance tests (or 95 and 99 per cent confidence levels) that can lead researchers to reject or accept a hypothesis because the probability exceeds or does not reach the required level only by a small margin. But there is no theoretical reason why these rules should exist. Tanenbaum and Scarbrough (1998:15) remind us they derived from the period before computers automatically calculated the probability values and researchers had to look up the values in printed tables, which had limited space so they summarized cut-off points. Now no one uses tables, so researchers should be forbidden from adding asterisks to the

variables in models they publish to indicate that a variable has passed a significance test. They should only report the standard errors and the probability levels and discuss them in the text. Such a practice would not be so satisfying for the researcher, but it would lessen the file drawer problem and lead to a more balanced and nuanced discussion of the research. Psychologists have already conceived of life beyond significance tests (Harlow and Mulaik, 1997) and a discussion has begun in political science (Gill, 1999). Along with analysis plans and the replication standard, such a practice would reduce the incentive for researchers to fiddle their results; but at the same time it would not interfere with the inspirational and creative aspects of quantitative work.

Recent developments

Political methodology is a fast-moving field, which is responding to new statistical theories, new applications (such as new R packages), and developments from econometrics. It is not possible to be just to these in the space here. They are listed with some references or weblinks for enthusiasts to follow up.

- *Visualization of regression findings*: The graphing of predicted values or probabilities from a regression can show in a simple and attractive way the influence of a variable on another controlling for other factors in the regression. Although they were always possible to implement, new software makes this much easier, such as Gary King's 'Clarify' programme, which uses simulation (gking.harvard. edu/clarify/docs/clarify.html).
- *New forms of content analysis*: Software and analytic developments have produced a cottage industry of different programs and methods to collect text-based data. Particularly influential has been *Wordscores*, developed by Ken Benoit, which is suitable for coding left-right scores (wordscores.com/). One that does not have so many assumptions built in is Yoshikoder www.yoshikoder.org/.
- *Advances in panel data analysis:* Panel data is where there are repeated observations of a cross-section, which are particularly useful in political science which wishes to compare changes across countries and other large units. The main impetus and source of innovation is from economics (for example, Arellano, 2003).
- *Increasing use of Bayesian statistics*: Bayesian models use an updating model of human behaviour, which generates a more flexible approach to estimation, which acknowledges the bounded nature of human behaviour (Gill, 2007).

- *Field experimental methods*: There is a growing band of political scientists who have been carrying out real world experiments on topics such as voting behaviour, deliberation, political participation, collective action, and media impacts (see Chapter 15).
- *Natural experiments*: This is where a feature of the political world resembles an experiment, such as an accidental division of the population in two differently treated groups, which have made an appearance in political science (Dunning, 2008).
- *Renewed interest in quasi-experiments*: These seek to look at different features of the data to gain leverage or use a technique called matching to select cases that are very similar to each other bar that one has the causal variable of interest (see review by Sekhon, 2008).
- *Greater attention to interaction models*: With the expansion of visualization of the results of data analysis (see above), there has been greater attention to what interaction models actually show us and improved visualization of the relationships they show (Kam and Franzese, 2007)
- *Spatial models:* Politics varies across space and what happens in one place may affect what happens elsewhere. Spatial econometrics seeks to model these processes. Their application to political science has been modest so far (Darmofal, 2006).

Conclusions

This chapter shows the complexity and subtlety of quantitative work. Far from being mindless number crunchers testing unrealistic models, researchers who use large numbers of observations are acutely aware of the context and character of their data and the assumptions that underlie statistical models. Whether through descriptive statistics, tabulations, OLS or more advanced statistical models, quantitative researchers immerse themselves as much in their data as their qualitative counterparts. Imagination and intuition have their rightful place in the craft of quantitative analysis. Moreover, a highly critical research community exists to appraise and scrutinise the methods that investigators deploy.

In the spirit of a subtle defence, this chapter criticizes some of the practice of quantitative work, such as the tendency to present results too cleanly and to hide much of the messiness of data analysis. More improvements can still be made. A cultural shift would acknowledge the importance of exploratory data analysis. As Tanenbaum and Scarbrough (1998) argue, the revolution in the speed of computers and the ease of using software packages help researchers and students utilize the benefits of exploratory data analysis as they can flexibly handle and present data.

However, the space in journals is a constraint on the possibilities for elaboration. It is also tedious to read articles that recount how the researchers did the research with tales of blind alleys and mistakes (though the internet can help here). But much has already been achieved through the campaign for a replication standard and the new culture of resistance against cookbook data analysis. Rapid advances in statistical techniques, made possible by the speed of today's computers, have transformed the field. Quantitative researchers today now seek to be both more advanced in their methods and more comprehensible to a non-technical audience.

Further reading

- A textbook for beginners in statistics is Wonnacott and Wonnacott (1990).
- *How to Lie With Statistics* (Huff 1991) provides an accessible approach to the topic.
- For introductions to quantitative methods in political science, see Miller's (1995) chapter in the first edition of *Theory and Methods in Political Science*; the classic book by Tufte (1974); and introductions and reviews (for example, Pennings *et al.,* 2006; Burnham *et al*., 2008 (Chs 5 and 6) and Jackson, 1996).
- More advanced readers could read the volume edited by Scarbrough and Tanenbaum (1998) and the quantitative sections of *The Oxford Handbook on Political Methodology* (2008), edited by Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier.
- Econometrics books are essential once you have got beyond the basics: for example, Gujarati (2003), then Greene (2007).

Chapter 14

The Comparative Method

JONATHAN HOPKIN

The role of comparison in political science is widely misunderstood, probably because of the entrenched use of the term 'comparative politics' to describe research into 'foreign' countries (in the United States, empirical political scientists work in either 'American politics' or 'comparative politics'). Apart from the obvious paradox that a US scholar working on American politics thus becomes a comparativist once she crosses the Atlantic, this definition also misleadingly restricts the domain of comparative political analysis. In fact, comparison of some form is present wherever political scientists make claims about causality, whether they are studying one country, two countries, 192 countries, or indeed cases from some other unit of analysis. This chapter will present an introductory picture of the uses of the comparative method, describe its logic and some of its techniques, assess its strengths and limitations, and discuss the problems involved in designing comparative research.

Theory and the comparative method

Comparison and the comparative method are used implicitly or explicitly across political science and the social sciences in general. Comparison serves several purposes in political analysis. Observation of the ways in which political problems are addressed in different contexts provides valuable opportunities for policy learning and exposure to new ideas and perspectives. Comparison across several cases (usually countries) enables the researcher to assess whether a particular political phenomenon is simply a local issue or a broader trend. But perhaps the principal function of comparison in political science is that of developing, testing and refining theories about causal relationships, and all political research – even purely descriptive narratives – involves causal claims of some kind. The comparative method is 'one of the primary means for establishing social scientific generalizations' (Ragin *et al.*, 1996: 749).

Ironically, a lot of research in the disciplinary subfield of 'comparative

politics' is not explicitly comparative at all, consisting instead of 'idiographic' studies (studies which are limited to particular cases or events), often of individual countries. This kind of research sometimes has the ambition to generate broad generalizations about politics, but comparison has a role to play even in the absence of such ambition. Historical accounts of single countries or periods can amass evidence and produce a plausible explanation for the course of events, but there may be alternative, and equally plausible, explanations available. Comparative checking offers the possibility of settling the dispute. Case studies aiming to contribute to the development of theory – 'law-like' descriptions of social and political phenomena – must be complemented by comparative analyses if their theoretical implications are to have any value.

Testing theories

The comparative method offers the most obvious route to testing theoretical propositions in political science, for the simple reason that controlled experiments are usually impossible. In the natural sciences, the 'replication' of results is the key form of control of theoretical statements: if a dependent variable Y is claimed to be caused by a combination of independent variables X and Z, then experiments can be carried out to test whether the presence of Y is always accompanied by X and Z, and whether X and Z are always accompanied by Y. If these results are replicable, even under a variety of conditions, the theory receives strong empirical support. If instead, Y is always present along with X irrespective of whether Z is present, then the hypothesis that Y is caused by both independent variables must be revised. Controlled experiments in which the observer varies the parameters allow causal relationships to be properly tested. Unfortunately, using the experimental method in political science is rarely possible, since creating 'laboratory conditions' in order to test theories is impractical (for an interesting but rare example, see the controlled experiment on the effects of clientelism on voting behaviour in Wantchekon, 2003, and for a broader counter-argument see Chapter 15). Through comparison, 'natural experiments' can be run by exploiting the various combinations of political phenomena that are observable in different times and places. We may not be able to engineer the presence of X and Z in order to observe whether they result in Y or not, but we can look around to see where we observe X, Y and Z, and analyze how variations in the independent and dependent variables relate to each other in different cases. Ideally, this could involve finding a variety of cases where one independent variable remains constant and another is allowed to vary, and observe the effect on the dependent variable.

One neat example of this strategy comes from the political economy

literature on corruption. Much of the recent research on corruption by political scientists, economists and public administration scholars has focused on institutional variables, such as the type of legal system, the structure and remuneration of the civil service, or the type of electoral system as key factors explaining the prevalence of corrupt exchanges (see Shleifer and Vishny, 1993; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Persson, Tabellini and Trebbi, 2003). An older literature stressed instead the role of entrenched cultural traditions and norms in which corruption was part of the 'way of life' (Banfield, 1958; Leff, 1964). Adjudicating between these rival views is difficult because countries with a 'culture of corruption' also tend to have inappropriately designed institutions. Raymond Fisman and Eduardo Miguel (2006) saw an opportunity for disentangling these effects in the presence of large numbers of diplomats, from a range of different countries and cultural backgrounds, in New York City. New York parking regulations are relatively strictly and efficiently enforced, so the institutional design favours citizens behaving in a law-abiding manner. However, diplomats enjoy immunity, exempting them from paying fines, making for a good test of whether the cultural norms held by diplomats made any difference to their compliance with New York's parking regulations (the institutional design is held constant, the cultural norms are allowed to vary). Fisman and Miguel find that diplomats from countries which have high levels of corruption incur more parking fines, suggesting a role for normative understandings of duty and appropriate behaviour in explaining law-breaking (interestingly, diplomats from countries where popular opinion tends to be hostile to the United States also received more tickets than would have been predicted on the basis of their nationality, suggesting a role for moral legitimacy in rule violation).

Unfortunately, natural experiments of this kind are thin on the ground, since the kinds of variables we might be interested in controlling for will usually not remain constant, and may often co-vary with other relevant variables in the available cases.

To take an example, there is a long-running debate in political science on democratization – how societies become democratic, and the conditions under which democratic regimes are likely to emerge. A key controversy in this debate revolves around the relationship between economic development and democratic political institutions. 'Modernization theorists' argued that economic development was a precondition of stable democracy, observing that richer countries with 'modern' social behaviour (higher levels of education and newspaper readership, for example) were far more likely to be democracies (see Lipset, 1959; Huntington, 1968). Of course, this claim falls foul of a basic rule of quantitative political science: correlation does not have to mean causation. The economic development/democracy relationship could imply that economic progress

causes democracy, that democracy causes economic progress, or indeed that both are caused by something else. One way to disentangle this complex relationship would be to take a sample of countries with non-democratic institutions on varied paths of economic development, and observe the extent to which successful development is accompanied by a process of democratization whilst failed development is accompanied by the survival of dictatorship. Since this sample cannot be created in the laboratory, the researcher must make imaginative use of observations of the state of the world as it is to test the theory.

The economic development/democratization debate offers some useful illustrations of the possibilities and limitations of this kind of comparative analysis. Lipset's classic *Political Man* (1959) took a large number of indicators of economic development and social modernization, and assessed scores on these indicators for a large number of countries, democratic and not. He found that modernization was strongly correlated with democracy: countries with high modernization scores were mostly democracies, those with low scores mostly dictatorships. But his was a static analysis of the state of development and democracy in various countries at a particular point in time, which said little about the dynamics of how modernization could cause democratic institutions to emerge. Subsequent studies have used more advanced quantitative techniques to assess the relationship between economic development and democracy. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) used time series regression to test the relationship between the two variables for the period 1950–90: measures of democracy and dictatorship, and measures of economic development, were taken for each year in the series from a large sample of countries in order to see whether an increase in GDP per capita was followed temporally by the establishment of democratic institutions, or whether democratization preceded increases in living standards. This study found that the modernization thesis ('endogenous' democratization) was not supported by the evidence, as countries did not become more likely to democratize as they became richer. However, they also found that democracy was more likely to survive in richer countries, leading them to propose a theory of 'exogenous' democratization: democracy results from other causes, but wealth helps it consolidate once it has been achieved. Boix and Stokes (2003) contested this finding, extending their data set much further back to include 19th century and early 20th century democratization events, and finding that economic development promotes democracy both exogenously and endogenously. By including in their analysis the democratization process of a number of western countries which were already democracies in 1950, their results reveal a bias against the 'endogenous' theory in Przeworksi and Limongi's empirical research.

What these studies have in common is their reliance on quantitative

measures of the relevant variables for a large number of cases, seeking to create 'laboratory conditions' from historical observation. What they also have in common is the neglect of detailed qualitative or historical accounts of democratization episodes in individual countries. Other authors have adopted a rather different approach, using qualitative historical analysis of just a few cases to assess the origins of democratic regimes. Here the aim is to control for different explanatory variables by the careful choice of cases which are then subjected to close analysis. A classic example in this tradition is Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), which studies in great detail the historical paths to democratic or non-democratic regimes in a relatively small number of countries. Unlike the rather simple theoretical claim which emerges from the quantitative literature – economic development causes democracy – Moore's explanation of democratization is more complex, considering a larger number of independent variables, such as social class, economic structure and state power, and looking at the way in which these variables interact with each other as well as their direct impact on the dependent variable. Much of the literature on the so-called 'Third Wave' of democratization since the 1970s takes this more qualitative approach, carrying out comparisons of more limited scope across particular sets of rather similar countries (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Why compare?

This distinction between these two types of comparison – often referred to respectively as 'large-N' (many cases) and 'small-N' (few cases) research – highlights the different ways in which political scientists can confront the problem of how best to test theories ('replicate results') in the absence of our own 'laboratory'. As this chapter will show, there are formidable problems in properly testing political science generalizations in a stubbornly complex world. However, there are two reasons why these problems cannot be avoided. First, if political science is to generate general propositions about political life, there is no alternative to comparison. Here the discipline is divided between those who believe that universal 'covering laws' governing political behaviour exist, and can in time be identified, and those who believe that social phenomena are either too unpredictable and contingent to be explained in terms of such laws, or too complex and immeasurable for such laws to be identified were they to exist. The former position has gained ground over the past two decades, with a growth in the use of formal modelling and advanced econometrics in leading political science departments, although evidence of significant predictive progress remain contested (Green and Shapiro, 1994; Shapiro, 2005).

A second and less obvious reason for comparison is that it is necessary to assess the validity of our interpretations of specific or even unique political phenomena (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). There may be any number of different explanations of a single phenomenon, and choosing between them requires the theoretical underpinnings of each explanation to be assessed, and if possible, tested comparatively. For example, Paul Krugman's study (2007) of the political underpinnings of neoliberal politics in the United States since the 1970s stresses the politics of race, and the ways in which ethnic tensions prevented some American voters from supporting the party most likely to defend their economic interests. For Krugman, Ronald Reagan and his Republican successors used white working-class fears about racial equality to persuade low paid voters to support inegalitarian economic policies (see also Alesina and Glaeser, 2004 for a similar argument). This clever political strategy can indeed account for a large part of the dramatic rise in income inequality in the US over the past three decades, but how can we be sure that there was not some other, more important cause? In fact, comparative checking suggests a sceptical response to this question: the UK, where race politics is qualitatively different and quantitatively less electorally important than in the US, saw an equally rapid rise in inequality over the same period (most other English-speaking countries had similar experiences, whilst Western Europe on the whole kept inequality at bay). This comparative check suggests that some other factor common to the English-speaking democracies may be the fundamental cause of these developments, for example a generally greater receptiveness to the liberal-individualist ideas which inspired the pro-market reforms of the late 20th century (see Hall, 1992; Blyth, 2002). The politics of race may be a proximate cause of rising inequality in the United States, but the absence of this factor in other cases of similarly rapid growth of inequality suggests we should look elsewhere for our explanation. A possible defence of the 'race politics' thesis could argue that this specific cause of rising inequality is valid for the United States and that its absence in the other Anglo-Saxon cases of high inequality does not matter: once the US had chosen to adopt neoliberal policies, other English-speaking democracies adopted them too, because of the influence of US policy leadership. The existence of this kind of 'diffusion' can undermine the effectiveness of the comparative method as a means of empirical verification.

Even when we are aiming to provide explanations of specific phenomena, comparison is essential if the theoretical foundations of these explanations are to come under adequate scrutiny. In other words, the validity of 'idiographic' studies cannot be established unless they are complemented by 'nomothetic' studies which can test their theoretical predictions amongst a larger population (Sartori, 1994; Gerring, 2007). The

rest of this chapter will outline the most common types of comparative analysis.

Basic forms of comparative explanation

Comparative explanation takes different forms (Mill, 1875; see also Ragin, 1987).

(a) The 'method of difference'

The 'method of difference' involves studying two very similar cases, which differ only in respect of the variables whose relationship to each other one is studying. To use Mill's example (1875: 472) if we were interested in establishing the beneficial effect of commercial protectionism on national prosperity (a debate that rumbles on even today), then we would have to find two cases similar in all respects except that one was rich and had protective tariffs, and the other was poor and espoused free trade. As Mill pointed out, even if such a clear causal relationship did exist, finding two cases similar in every respect except these two variables would be impossible. Alternatively, the 'indirect method of difference' would require a third case (or more) to be sought out, similar to the first in a number of respects, and to the second in others. If this third case was also open to trade and poor, the theory would receive further support; if, however, it was open to trade and rich, the theory would have to be revised.

(b) The 'method of agreement'

The 'method of agreement' is the opposite of the 'method of difference': the two cases should differ in every respect except the variables being studied. So to use the same example, the two cases should be completely different in every circumstance, except that they are both protectionist and both rich, in order to confirm the theory.

(c) The 'method of concomitant variations'

Finally, the 'method of concomitant variations' seeks to identify variables which seem to move more or less contemporaneously in the hypothesized direction; so if a protectionist country began to open up its borders to trade, and soon after entered into economic decline, then trade openness could be seen to have an effect on prosperity, all other things being equal.

This phrase, 'all other things being equal' (sometimes referred to in its

Latin form *ceteris paribus*), is at the heart of the difficulties Mill saw in the use of these various methods of comparison. In political and social life, all else does not remain equal when two variables change, and it is usually empirically difficult to pin causes on to a particular effect. For example, it could be the case that our hypothetical protectionist country adopted free trade in response to political pressures from an emerging commercial rival, and that its decline in prosperity was the result of this new rival gaining an advantage in key international markets. If this was the case, then free trade in itself would not be the cause of the economic decline; instead free trade and economic decline could *both* have been caused by the third variable: the emergence of a new commercial rival. To argue that free trade caused economic decline would therefore be 'spurious' and the correct explanation 'exogenous' to the relationship between these two variables.

This problem of 'extraneous variance' – variance caused by factors outside the theoretical proposition being examined – is a serious obstacle in comparative research. In part, this is because social and political life in modern, mass societies is so complex, and any attempt to develop a reasonably parsimonious theory will neglect potentially important explanatory factors. Moreover, in the example used in the previous paragraph, variables such as countries' trade policies cannot be easily separated from other variables, such as the balance of power between the various productive groups in society, the nature of political interaction in that society, or its position in the world and the rise and fall of other trading nations. Finally, as Mill clearly understood, the world is unlikely to provide political scientists with sets of cases which are the same in all respects except those we wish to study, or different in all respects except those we wish to study. Empirical reality is instead rather messy, and political scientists can only limit, rather than eliminate, extraneous variance through careful research design.

(d) 'Most similar' and 'most different'

One influential response to these problems was provided by Przeworski and Teune (1970), who distinguished between 'most similar systems' and 'most different systems' research designs. In the 'most similar systems' design, which they identified as being predominant at that time, the researcher chooses cases with many similar features, so that most variables will be 'held constant' and cannot be adduced as causes of any differences between them (this equates to Mill's method of difference). This narrows down the number of potential explanatory variables and facilitates the empirical checking of explanations. Like Mill, Przeworski and Teune argued that this design was not particularly helpful, as there will almost always be enough differences between cases to 'overdeter-

mine' the dependent variable, making it difficult to establish which differences are key and which are not. For example, Britain and the United States are often described as belonging to an 'Anglo-Saxon' category of countries, sharing such features as a liberal political tradition, two-party systems and first-past-the-post electoral laws, relatively less regulated markets, and so on. These shared characteristics clearly cannot explain any differences between the two, such as, for example, why a strong working-class party (Labour) emerged in Britain but not in America (Marks and Lipset, 2000). However, there are so many potentially relevant differences between the two countries – parliamentary *versus* presidential government, monarchy *versus* republic, medium-small population *versus* large population, relative ethnic homogeneity *versus* ethnic heterogeneity – that it is impossible to establish using a pair-wise comparison exactly which of these differences has causal significance, although some will be more plausible candidates than others. Neither can this problem be avoided simply by using more cases to eliminate potential explanatory variables. There are rarely enough cases to find the right combinations of similarities and differences to test theories, a difficulty often referred to as the 'too many variables, too few countries' problem (Lijphart, 1971).

For this reason Przeworski and Teune argued strongly that the 'most different systems' approach was preferable. This approach draws from Mill's 'method of agreement', and seeks out similarities between cases in spite of the potentially confounding differences between them. The understanding behind this approach is that if a hypothesized relationship between two or more variables is replicated across a wide variety of different settings, than there are stronger grounds for arguing that there is a causal link between the variables. This implies that attention should be shifted from the 'intersystemic' level, where variables such as the type of political regime are often examined, to the 'intrasystemic' level, in the hope of eliminating system-level variables (such as the political regime) from the inquiry and establishing generalizations valid across different settings. If well educated individuals are shown to be more likely to vote in elections than the rest of the population in samples drawn from, say, Britain, Russia, Japan, Thailand and Madeira, then we can exclude variables such as the form of the state, the level of economic prosperity, religious tradition, population size and probably many more from a theory on the relationship between levels of education and political participation. Because the 'most different systems' approach requires a sample of cases from a wide variety of settings, the unit of analysis should be at the lowest possible level – individuals, rather than groups or countries. As a result, this approach implies a preference for large-N rather than small-N research, and for quantitative over qualitative data.

Large Ns: quantitative-comparative strategies

Large-N research using quantitative techniques (what Ragin (1987) calls a 'variable-oriented approach') has become the dominant form of empirical control in many peer-reviewed political science journals. A good basic definition is offered by Lieberman (2005: 434): 'a mode of analysis in which the primary causal inferences are derived from statistical analyses which ultimately lead to quantitative estimates of the robustness of a theoretical model'. The aim of most quantitative-comparative work is to assess the relationships between a given dependent variable and one or more independent variables across a large number of cases, using a fast-growing variety of statistical techniques. Context is not so much 'controlled for' as dismissed from the analysis, on the basis that if a given relationship holds across a variety of contexts, then context cannot be so important: irrelevant variables will 'wash out'. Instead, potentially relevant control variables are included in the analysis to test alternative hypotheses. The aim of large-N research is to establish robust and parsimonious generalizations about social and political life, focusing on communalities (concomitant variation) rather than (or in spite of) differences between cases. The implication – unpalatable to more historically-oriented researchers – is that social science generalizations can be identified which should work for any context. If modernization causes 'endogeneous' democratization, then Saudi Arabia will become democratic when the requisite degree of modernization is reached, just as was the case for many Western countries.

Quantitative research tends to focus, not surprisingly, on quantifiable variables: concepts that can be measured numerically, such as the number of citizens turning out to vote, the annual product of an economy, parliamentary votes, and so on. However, other more qualitative types of variables can be and are used in such analysis: dichotomous variables (such as whether a country is a democracy or not, whether an individual is male or female), ordinal variables (such as whether an individual is left-wing, centrist or right-wing), or nominal variables (such as the different ethnic categories individuals are sometimes placed in). The nature of statistical techniques does, however, tend to push researchers to focus on quantifiable variables, with the result that variables – dependent as well as independent – are sometimes chosen for their amenability to statistical analysis rather than any *a priori* relevance to the research problem being addressed. This tendency to study what can be studied with the preferred tools, is what Ian Shapiro condemns as 'method-driven' rather than 'problem-driven' research (2005), and could more satirically be equated to the drunk looking for his keys under the lamp-post because that is where the light is. However, used appropriately, quantitative analysis is an indispensable component of the comparativist's 'toolkit'.

The debate on the economic prerequisites of democratization discussed earlier illustrates the value of quantitative-comparative research. The findings of Lipset, Przeworksi and others cited earlier were all the more robust because they held across a large pool of countries. This ability to detect 'concomitant variation' across a large number of different contexts is an important benefit of using quantitative comparison. Either by including such a large number of cases that confounding variables will 'wash out', or by controlling for other potential explanatory variables, large-N quantitative studies have the potential to deliver reasonably valid generalizations. With growing availability of data and the development of more advanced statistical techniques the study of economic development and democracy has become increasingly sophisticated. For instance, Lipset's pioneering study attempted to hold some variables constant (the capitalist economy and a broadly 'Western' cultural heritage) by limiting his analysis to Europe, Latin America and the English-speaking world, and by distinguishing between Latin America and the rest on the dependent variable. Diamond (1992) tested the Lipset hypothesis with new data from 142 countries (compared to Lipset's 50), taking advantage of the improved data available in the 1990s. Diamond's research used different variables and different indicators. His explanatory variable was a measure of broad material wellbeing: the UN Development Programme's *Human Development Index*, a composite variable consisting of adult literacy, life expectancy, and per capita Gross Domestic Product. For the dependent variable, Diamond replaced Lipset's democracy/dictatorship dichotomy with an ordinal variable of 'democraticness' (measured on a 7-point scale) drawn from Freedom House's annual survey of political rights and freedoms in the world. Using regression analysis, Diamond concluded that around 50 per cent of the variation in the 'democraticness' of regimes can be predicted by the variation in their material quality of life (the results of the analysis providing a numerical 'estimate' of the degree of democracy that would expect to result from given levels of economic and social development).

These studies, and many others in the same tradition (including studies backed by game theoretic analysis, such as Acemoglu and Robinson, 2005), provide an insight into the advantages and drawbacks of the quantitative-comparative approach. On the one hand, they do provide strong empirical support, accumulated over a period of time and using a range of datasets and statistical techniques, for the generalization that economic development is related to democracy, most likely in some more or less direct causal relationship. That these findings can be replicated through comparative analysis of a large number of very different cases, following the advice of Przeworski and Teune, strongly suggests that the relationship holds irrespective of other conditions. Similar techniques have been

used to study, to name but a handful of examples, the impact of electoral systems on government partisanship and redistributive policies (Lijphart, 1994; Iversen and Soskice, 2006), the impact of globalization on the sustainability of generous welfare states (Garrett, 1998; Swank, 2002; Mahler, 2004), the formation of nation states of differing sizes (Alesina and Spolaore, 2003) and even the effect of training in different university economics departments on the decisions of economic policy-makers (Chwieroth, 2007). Making such generalizations on the basis of single case studies would not be feasible. However, the quantitative comparative literature in political science also reveals some important limitations of the large-N approach.

Limitations of the quantitative comparative approach

The growing status of quantitative methods in comparative politics, and its apparent dominance over qualitative research in the most prestigious political science journals, should not blind us to its limitations. Although a properly designed large-N study with accurate data can deliver robust findings explaining important political phenomena, quantitative work is also prone to weaknesses which can undermine the reliability of the results. Proper discussion of the various issues surrounding particular statistical tests is beyond the scope of this chapter and the abilities of the author; instead this section focuses principally on specific problems relating to the nature of political data and its relationship to theory.

Limited cases

One of the most obvious obstacles to useful quantitative analysis in comparative politics is the paucity of available cases of many phenomena, and the even greater paucity of available data on cases. Przeworski and Teune's recommendation to focus on individual-level data is difficult to apply to research on many of the concerns of political science, since such data is often impossible to collect (for example, the behaviour of individual politicians in high-level or sensitive decision-making is often hidden from public view) or simply irrelevant if the unit of analysis is an organization, community or nation state. Even where quantitative data is available, it may not provide us with sufficient numbers of cases. For example, if we want to study the impact of electoral systems on some other variable such as government formation, there are relatively few cases of electoral systems (for example, Cox (1997) takes 77 country cases) and of governments formed. This problem can be surmounted to some extent by using

periodization within each country to 'create' more cases (so each election in each country becomes a case). But even so, the results of statistical analysis are likely to be less reliable than in the cases of survey data, where samples will sometimes include thousands of individuals. Moreover, extending the number of cases by counting variable-years as separate cases does not necessarily deliver greater robustness: the advantages of a larger N may be outweighed by annual data obscuring medium and long-term effects, for instance when the lags between the independent variables and resulting changes in the dependent variable are incorrectly specified (Kenworthy, 2007: 348).

Limited data

A further problem is that the selection of cases is inevitably driven by the availability of data, so most quantitative analysis does not involve very large Ns at all. Some of the democratization studies cited earlier do include most countries in the world, but a large proportion of quantitative political science studies a limited number of advanced democracies whose governments or research institutions provide reasonably reliable data. For example, Duane Swank's research on welfare retrenchment and globalization (2002) uses a dataset for 18 countries (13 European, 4 English-speaking, and Japan), Iversen and Soskice's study of electoral systems and redistribution (2006) is limited to 17 countries (the same, minus Switzerland), whilst Mark Franklin's study of voter turnout (2004) draws on data for 22 democracies (adding Malta, Iceland, Luxembourg and Israel).

This tendency to compare the advanced economies is justifiable on practical grounds: these countries have the most reliable data, which facilitates statistical research, and indeed the most political scientists, which makes collaborative research possible. However, they are also very similar in a number of ways, and their relative similarity may make it difficult to make parsimonious causal statements about patterns between variables. The easy availability of data, rather than careful research design aimed at maximizing 'experimental variance' and either maximizing or minimizing extraneous variance, tends to drive case selection. This is questionable on a range of grounds. Established democracies, such as Greece, Portugal and Spain, are systematically excluded from most of these research programmes, introducing possible biases into the results. Moreover, the fact that these 20 or so countries constitute the entire population, rather than just a sample, of established democracies also has implications for the statistical tests used; in particular, the emphasis on finding statistical significance is probably inappropriate in this kind of research (Kenworthy, 2007: 349).

Data reliability

Moreover, even data produced by reputable sources may be unreliable. Research in the field of comparative political economy, as well as the democracy/development literature, frequently use per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of economic performance. Per capita GDP measures the market value of the total goods and services produced in a given economy over a given period (a year), and is widely used by economists, political scientists and indeed politicians as an indicator of wealth. However, its apparent quantitative precision is deceptive, for a number of reasons: for instance, it fails to capture economic production which is not monetarized (housework, the black economy, much agricultural work in some countries); it is often calculated in US dollars, and is therefore distorted by the fluctuations of foreign exchange markets; and, much more broadly, it may measure wealth, but it is not a good measure of welfare (Dogan, 1994: 44–5). Moreover, because it is an 'official' statistic calculated by governments, among others, GDP is perhaps afforded a reliability it may not deserve. By changing its estimates of the size of the black economy in the mid-1980s, the Italian government increased its calculation of GDP to such an extent that it shifted from being rather poorer than the UK to being rather richer overnight. Similarly, the unemployment statistics used in cross-national studies may take into account the differences between the way headline figures are calculated in different countries, but do not fully capture the extent to which different governments use various tricks to drive figures down (Western and Beckett, 1999; Howell *et al.,* 2007). In the 1980s, British governments made abundant changes to the ways in which unemployment figures are calculated, almost all of which reduced the total. In contrast, Spanish unemployment figures in the same period were universally recognized, even by the domestic opposition parties, as being artificially high. The risk of bias being introduced into analyses of unemployment – one of the most heated and ideologically charged debates in political economy since the 1980s, with important policy implications – has to be taken very seriously.

Another issue relating to data is the growing use of quantitative measures which are essentially qualitative in nature. One of the principal claims of quantitative analysis is that numbers can provide a more objective understanding of phenomena than anecdotal, one-off descriptions of events. However, much data used in quantitative political science is qualitative data, coded into numerical form. For example, analysis of political party positions increasingly draws on the data provided by the Comparative Manifestos Project, which used quantitative content analysis to generate measures of parties' positions on vari-

ous political issues (Budge *et al.,* 2001; Klingemann *et al.,* 2006). Some of the individual scores appear implausible, suggesting that the measure does not always capture the true policy position of a given party (Pelizzo, 2003). However, the technique used does not introduce systematic bias into the measures, so in a large-N study these inaccuracies may wash out. This is not so clear for some political economy data developing quantitative measures of qualitative phenomena such as labour legislation (such as the OECD's Employment Protection Legislation measures [OECD, 2004]). Ultimately, this data relies on a coding of a piece of legislation as more or less restrictive on the basis of the researcher's interpretation. If the subjectivity of this interpretation is not subject to systematic bias, again the problem may be insignificant; however given the high political profile of the debate and the popular stylized representations of different countries as 'flexible' or 'rigid' systematic bias may creep into the measurement process, undermining the results of quantitative analysis.

In sum, as well as the tendency for method to drive research rather than the other way around, researchers are often guilty of adopting inappropriate empirical indicators of a particular variable. If an indicator does not measure the variable it is meant to measure, then the results of statistical analysis are bound to be unreliable (Dogan, 1994: 48).

Careless conceptualization

Further problems (not restricted to quantitative analysis) are posed by careless conceptualization. To take, once again, the debate on economic development and democracy, conceptual vagueness and inconsistency pose a serious threat to the validity of empirical generalizations about the relationship between these two variables. Not only is economic development sometimes inaccurately measured (see the previous section), but also the very meaning of economic development remains unspecified. Are we talking simply about wealth, or about factors which create wealth? Wealthy countries have much in common, but are not identical: some have strong manufacturing sectors, others rely heavily on the service sector. These differences in economic structures have implications for social structure, and therefore for the impact of economic development on politics. Economic development could impact on politics through any number of different variables (for example, availability of material goods, levels of education, levels of property ownership, density of population, newspaper readership), and many studies have failed to define the concept carefully, thus risking the validity of their theoretical conclusions. Similarly, and even more problematically, democracy is not always carefully defined. So many varieties of

democracy have been identified that the concept has reached a level of generality which makes meaningful comparisons difficult. This poses the danger of 'conceptual stretching' (Sartori, 1970), where concepts are so inadequately defined that they fail to discriminate. Sartori (1994: 19) has used the amusing story of the 'cat-dog' to make this point (a hypothetical study of a furry quadruped mammal which in 50 per cent of cases makes the sound 'miaow' and in the other 50 per cent the sound 'woof'). The concept of democracy, if it is employed to describe, say, the United States, Sweden, Columbia and Russia, may become as useful as the concept of the 'cat-dog'.

In short, comparative politics is exposed to the dangers of what Dogan calls 'overquantification'. In the early 1990s, he argued that 'in the last two decades an important advance has been achieved in statistical methodology that has not been matched by equivalent progress in data collection and retrieval' and identified an 'increasing gulf between data and method' (1994: 37). This statement still appears valid well over a decade later. It remains true that 'good data do beat anecdotes' (Moore, 2001: xxiii), but in view of its limitations, there is a strong case for combining quantitative with qualitative analysis whenever possible. I return to this point in the conclusion.

Small Ns: qualitative-comparative strategies

Qualitative research of a smaller number of cases is often regarded as a methodologically 'soft' option, inherently less rigorous than quantitative analysis. The apparently greater reliability (all other things remaining equal) of findings resulting from 'large-N' analysis, and the rather descriptive and methodologically unsophisticated nature of some 'small-N' and case-oriented research, lend support to such a view. Small Ns run two significant risks: that the cases studied can be unrepresentative and findings specific to these particular cases, and that the heavy reliance on interpretation of unique events and processes exposes the analysis to the observer's bias. However, there is no *a priori* reason to regard case-oriented, qualitative-comparative research as methodologically 'soft', and indeed this approach can provide a far more rigorous and sophisticated response to some types of research questions. The long-running debate around Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), and the subsequent growth of the 'historical institutionalist' strand in comparative political economy in the 1990s, provide numerous examples of influential qualitative-comparative research based on small Ns (often only two or three cases).

Is quality more important than quantity?: The case for qualitative comparative research

It is useful to contrast the qualitative literature with the quantitative-comparative work assessed in the previous section. Qualitative-comparative research can be distinguished from quantitative-comparative research by its 'holism' (Ragin, 1987). Whereas quantitative studies are strongly analytic and produce probabilistic predictions, tending to abstract particular phenomena from their context in order to compare them across cases, qualitative studies look at the phenomena within their contexts, looking at the cases as 'wholes' (complex combinations or configurations of variables) and generating deterministic predictions (Lieberman, 2005). So for example, whilst in the quantitative studies of Diamond (1992 and 1993) and others, variables such as economic wealth (per capita GDP) are taken to be distinct features of societies whose effect on politics can be isolated in cross-national research, the more qualitative approach of authors such as Moore (1966) or Rueschemeyer, Huber and Stephens (1992) consider instead the multiple combinations of factors relating to economic development. In this view, democracy and dictatorship are best understood in terms of 'multiple conjunctural causation' (Ragin, 1987): particular combinations of circumstances at particular points in time can produce particular outcomes. So for example, a theory of democratization resting on a linear notion of economic development would find it difficult to explain why Germany, one of the most industrially developed European nations at the beginning of the 20th century, should have had so much more difficulty in establishing parliamentary democracy than its neighbour France, which industrialized much more slowly.

Qualitative-comparative analysis can contribute to resolving such paradoxes, as Barrington Moore's work has shown (1966). Moore studied the trajectories towards modernization of six major countries (Britain, America, France, India, Japan and China) and isolated the combinations of events and processes ('configurations') which accounted for their success or failure in establishing democracy by the early 20th century. He paid particular attention to the nature of rural social stratification, and the relationships between the landed nobility, the peasantry and the urban bourgeoisie during the process of economic modernization. His conclusions are often simplified into the shorthand 'no bourgeoisie, no democracy', but in fact Moore's study produces a rather more complex set of arguments. In its most rudimentary form, Moore's argument is that where the urban bourgeoisie is able to combine with landed interests sympathetic to commerce, then democracy is more likely to result (as in Britain, France and the United States), whereas coalitions between landed interests and

dynastic or state bureaucracies will hinder democratic developments, ultimately giving way to Fascism (Japan and Germany). Finally, where landed interests and bureaucracies were too weak to hold the peasantry at bay, communism resulted (as in China and Russia). This analysis provides a more sophisticated understanding of the impact of economic change on politics than the simplistic linear relationships discussed earlier. Moreover, Moore's attention to historical-empirical detail and concern for understanding his various cases as wholes leads to a large number of qualifying statements which refine this theoretical framework. For instance, the development of British democracy cannot be understood solely in terms of the emergence of an industrial bourgeoisie; the growth of a commercial-minded landowning class which took on a similar ideology and mentality to the bourgeoisie is equally important. This shows how qualitative-comparative work can negotiate the difficult relationship between empirical complexity and parsimonious theory.

One powerful illustration of this is the 'constructivist' or 'ideational' work in comparative political economy. This line of research is characterized by its sensitivity to cultural difference, the role of ideas, and the ways in which political experiences can be socially constructed. These phenomena are difficult to study through quantitative techniques (but not impossible, as Jeffrey Chwieroth's (2007) quantitative work on the ideological influences on economic policy-makers shows). However, they can be fruitfully analyzed through small-N approaches which can act as a valuable counterfactual control for ideational explanations of political outcomes, as well as for 'materialistic' ones (Blyth, 1997: 235–6). Here comparison can be used to 'test' ideas-centred explanations of unexpectedly different outcomes in apparently similar cases, rather than to establish the regularity of particular causal patterns across cases (Berman, 1998). Furthermore, there is plenty of room for theories resting on non-materialistic ontologies to make use of comparison, as a way of establishing the clear differences, or even the non-comparability, between cases. Thus the scholars Lichbach (1997) describes as 'culturalist comparativists' have yet to exploit the potential of the comparative case study as a means of getting to grips with 'value diversity and multiplicity', 'historical particularity, specificity and locality', and understanding 'individuality, singularity, uniqueness and distinctiveness' (1997: 254). Indeed, although the historical institutionalists could not be described as 'culturalist' in their approach, much of their work in comparative political economy has sought to emphasize the diversity of response to common pressures between different nationstates, a diversity stemming from deeply embedded institutional legacies which condition the choices available to political actors.

Qualitative-comparative work by 'historical institutionalist' political

economists has fundamentally challenged the notion of political science as the search for empirical regularities as the only sources of parsimonious general statements about political life. This work, which to an important extent draws on the tradition established by Moore, uses qualitative-comparative analysis to emphasize the particularities and specificities of individual cases, rather than to establish generalizations applicable across large numbers of cases (Steimno, Thelen and Longstreth, 1992; Thelen, 1999; Pierson, 2004). Reacting against the grand theorizing of the 'behavioural revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s, historical institutionalists often use comparison to show that large-scale social, economic and political forces can produce divergent outcomes in different countries as a result of the diversity of their institutional arrangements (representative examples of the work in this field include Hall, 1986; Steinmo, 1993; Pierson, 2001; Streeck and Thelen, 2005). This body of research has used comparative analysis to emphasize the complexity and contingency of political phenomena at the expense of parsimonious, deterministic general theory. By emphasizing processes as well as singular events or data points, this approach can capture causal mechanisms which are too subtle to be observed through quantitative analysis of large numbers of cases. The implication of this emphasis on 'process tracing' is that small numbers of cases – including single case studies – can tell us more about causal relationships than large Ns can (Pierson, 2004). However, this does not mean that the search for generalization is abandoned: many scholars in the tradition of comparative historical sociology see 'historical comparisons as the means to test more general propositions and causal hypotheses about large-scale change' (Katznelson, 1997: 92).

As argued earlier, this conflict between nomothetic and idiographic explanation is a characteristic of comparative politics as a field. However, qualitative-comparative research appears particularly prone to this 'tension between the generality of theory and explanatory accuracy' (Caporaso, 2000: 699). Charles Ragin has argued that qualitative research often involves 'complex, combinatorial explanations' which 'are very difficult to prove in a manner consistent with the norms of mainstream quantitative social science' (1987: 13). Qualitative-comparative research tends to explain political phenomena in terms of the combined effect of several factors, and there are usually insufficient cases in which these combinations occur to test such explanations statistically. The key strength of large-N analysis – that if a pattern is repeated often enough within a randomly selection population it is unlikely to be a coincidence – is denied to such qualitative small-N studies, and the reliability of their conclusions can be challenged on these grounds.

Two main strategies have been developed by qualitative political scientists to address this problem. Ragin has developed a particular method of

qualitative comparison based on Boolean algebra (1987). This 'Boolean approach' – usually referred to as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) seeks to explain political phenomena by identifying the combinations of causal conditions present in cases where the phenomenon is verified. Rather than searching for the frequency with which a particular causal relationship can be detected (as in quantitative research), QCA proceeds by identifying the conditions which are present in every available case of the phenomenon being investigated (*necessary conditions*). It then compares the cases in order to establish whether there is any one factor which produces the phenomenon on its own (a *sufficient condition*). An important difference between the Boolean approach and the statistical approach is that necessary and sufficient conditions can be identified, even when there are very few cases available for study, by using strict logic rather than frequency. It is therefore a useful way of systematically comparing infrequently occurring phenomena (such as revolutions, wars or currency crises, for example) without incurring the kind of descriptive particularism characteristic of some small-N studies. QCA has yet to fulfil its potential in political science, and as yet, few scholars use it. Exceptions include Alexander Hicks, whose work on the historical development of welfare states in advanced societies uses QCA to explain why some countries established substantial welfare regimes before others (1999), and in the same field, Segura-Ubiergo's study of welfare state development in Latin America (2007). The misleading nature of some quantitative indicators of welfare provision (such as crude measures of social spending) is an important motivation for this kind of research, which retains an N as high (17 countries) as most quantitative work in the field of comparative welfare states.

QCA, like its rivals, is not without its weaknesses. A significant disadvantage of the Boolean approach is that it requires all data to be presented in binary form, as dichotomous variables. Some data – for example continuous variables, like GDP per capita – are not particularly conducive to such treatment, and researchers have to rely on potentially arbitrary cut-off points in order to contrive a dichotomous variable, which could be manipulated in order to produce a better 'fit' between theory and data. One development addressing this problem is the 'fuzzy sets' (fs) approach (Ragin, 2000). Whereas the binary logic of the strictly Boolean approach requires 'crisp' sets, in which a case either is or is not a member of a set, 'fuzzy' sets allow 'degrees of membership'. Ragin gives the example of belonging to the Protestant religion (see www.u.arizona.edu/~cragin/fsQCA/). In fsQCA, an individual could be scored as 1.0 (fully Protestant), 0.90 (almost fully Protestant), 0.0 (fully non-Protestant) or gradations in between (for instance 0.5, neither Protestant nor non-Protestant). Here, too, the researcher determines the scores, but

compared to 'crisp' QCA the distinctions are less crude, and the choice of cut-off points less decisive for the results. This method can also be complemented by accompanying case studies, or indeed regression analysis (see Koenig-Archibugi, 2004).

The extensive and influential research within the qualitative-comparative tradition, and the usefulness of qualitative analysis in cases where data is not amenable to statistical treatment, provide abundant justification for qualitative scholars to challenge the current dominant position of quantitative analysis in political science. However, qualitative researchers are perhaps guilty of addressing too infrequently the appropriateness of their research design and the reliability and replicability of their results (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). One particular area in which greater care could be taken is the question of case selection: 'selection bias' (the selection of cases which fail to provide sufficient room to falsify hypotheses) and even the failure to justify case selection in methodological terms at all, are common features of qualitative-comparative studies (although once again the same accusation could be levelled at many quantitative analyses). For instance, the historical institutionalist literature in comparative political economy is replete with comparisons of Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and the US, but neglects the potentially interesting Southern European cases. Clearly, researchers will always be constrained by the availability of data and language skills, quite apart from the financial resources necessary to study far-away places. However, more careful case selection and research design can still be achieved within these constraints.

Conclusion: carry on comparing!

This chapter has described and examined the comparative method as a means of establishing social scientific generalizations. Mill's comparative logic drawn from the logic of the physical sciences, and the positions adopted in classic works in comparative politics, such as Przeworski and Teune's insistence (1970) that comparativists should aim to substitute the names of variables for proper names, point towards the use of comparison as a way of testing theories about causes and effects. However, the reality of comparative research is that reliable generalizations remain the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, pessimists argue that generalizations across social contexts are a practical impossibility: as Barnes has controversially claimed, 'despite a generation of effort, country remains the most common proper name/explanatory variable in comparative politics' (1997: 134). Despite the aspiration to detect theoretical relationships observable in a variety of contexts, often comparativists find that rigorous

use of the comparative method is more a means for falsifying grand theories and throwing scepticism at claims that social phenomena in different societies can successfully be compared. It is worth remembering that the search for law-like generalizations implies that a given set of conditions should produce the theorized result in any context, so that all else equal, economic development should be associated with democracy everywhere, irrespective of cultural or religious traditions. Most comparative research fails to meet this standard, generating instead 'middle-range' generalizations, often from the same pool of less than two dozen advanced democracies.

Are there signs of progress in overcoming the limitations of established comparative methods? Here there are three more optimistic points to be made. First, quantitative political science is showing some signs of progress, as more data is collected and more varied and sophisticated techniques are adopted. Although there is a risk that high-powered econometrics distracts us from rather basic issues such as proper conceptualization and measurement, and awareness of the limitations of econometrics applied to small populations, greater quantitative expertise should lead to improved results (all else equal!). Second, the slow but steady growth in qualitative comparative work using Ragin's QCA methods, and the conceptual sophistication of some recent research into institutional change, suggests that small-N research is less and less about telling more or less compelling stories, and increasingly designed to provide generalizable insights. Particularly interesting is the emergence of a field of scholarship using careful research design (both quantitative and qualitative) to develop constructivist and ideational explanations of political phenomena, challenging the dominant rationalist and materialist conceptions in comparative politics (Blyth, 2009).

The third area in which advances can be identified is in the joint use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Here, there has been increasing attention recently to the notion of using small-N and large-N analysis as a coordinated joint research strategy, in order to exploit the advantages of both in addressing a particular research question: this is often referred to as 'triangulation' or a 'mixed methods' approach. In this kind of research, case studies can be used to generate theory, by examining a variety of possible causal mechanisms, and to test theoretical propositions in greater detail and complexity than is possible in large-N studies. The findings from case studies can be used to inform subsequent quantitative analysis, thus generating more robust generalizations than would be possible from the case study alone (Tarrow, 1995). Evan Lieberman proposes a systematic and sequenced combination of small-N and large-N analysis which he calls 'nested analysis' (2005). Here, quantitative analysis is the starting point of hypothesis testing, followed by small-N

analysis which will have different objectives depending on the reliability of the results of the large-N analysis: if the results are weak, small-N study will be used to generate better theoretical propositions which can then be tested using quantitative methods, if the results are strong, the small-N study will serve the purpose of testing out the theory with qualitative analysis. The strength of Lieberman's approach is that it details a systematic ordering to the use of different research tools, specifying more clearly their rationale than has been the case for most previous claims of the value of 'triangulation'.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the successful application of these approaches is the tendency of political scientists to diverge towards two opposing poles: on the one hand those who – perhaps inspired by the purportedly greater prestige of economics and other quantitative disciplines – reject qualitative research *tout court*, and those whose hostility to over-quantification leads them to reject the notion that any generalizable insights can be gained in either quantitative or qualitative analysis. The so-far limited use of QCA and fsQCA, and the loose application of 'triangulation', are surprising given their obvious potential. Political science at present suffers from self-imposed limitations, as many scholars continue to favour methodological approaches borrowed from other disciplines. The varied methodological tools of comparative politics, used properly, offer an opportunity to overcome these limitations.

Further reading

- To capture recent developments in analysis, see Ragin (1987, 2000, 2008).
- Good overviews are provided by Landman (2008) and Peters (2010).
- Classic articles on the comparative method are provided by Lijphart (1971) and Sartori (1991).

The Experimental Method: Prospects for Laboratory and Field Studies

HELEN MARGETTS AND GERRY STOKER

In comparison with other academic disciplines, the potential for experiments as a research method has been downplayed and underestimated in political science. A former president of the American Political Science Association may have initiated this tendency when he announced in 1909 to the annual conference that 'we are limited by the impossibility of experiment. Politics is an observational, not an experimental science' (Lowell, 1910, cited in Druckman *et al.*, 2006). Sixty years later, Arendt Lijphart (1971) reiterated this gloomy view in a seminal article in the *American Political Science Review,* commenting: 'The experimental method is the most nearly ideal method for scientific explanation, but unfortunately it can only rarely be used in political science because of practical and ethical impediments' (Lijphart, 1971: 684–5). Comparative methods backed by statistical inference were for Lijphart the only way that political scientists could in practice make progress.

Since that time, however, there has been a 'drift' toward experimentation which has become 'dramatic' in recent years (Druckman *et al.*, 2006: 627). An increasing range of political scientists have been attempting to defy these dismissals of the experimental method in their work in both the laboratory and the field. This chapter is devoted to their work and the contribution it can make, as well as a careful analysis of the pitfalls and problems of the experimental method. Our conclusion is that political scientists need to get used to the idea that experimental evidence is increasingly going to play a pivotal role in theory testing and the enhancement of understanding of how politics works. Political scientists, therefore, need to devote the same thought and effort to developing the experimental approach, with appropriate norms and rules for designing and running experiments, as researchers have already done in other disciplines.

What is the experimental method?

Political scientists have taken an experimental turn primarily because of established academic concerns to generate evidence and theory that can establish causal connections. The most obvious reason for adopting the experimental method is that its design features deliver unrivalled claims for the making of causal inferences. An intervention, random allocation between groups and measuring outcomes are the three essential ingredients of the experimental method if it is to be practised in way that delivers unrivalled claims for causal inference. If the experiment is designed well and conducted effectively with these ingredients in place, then we are in a strong position to infer a causal relationship between the intervention and any group differences detected. If the trial is repeated we are in a stronger position again to make causal inferences (Torgerson and Torgerson, 2008). Let us look at the three ingredients of the experimental method – manipulation, control and random assignment – in a little more depth.

Intervention by the researcher in the process of generating data is the defining characteristic of experimental research. Morton and Williams (2008) describe it as 'playing god'. In observational research, all variance in data is outside the control of the researcher but in the case of the experimental approach the researcher actively creates variation. The logic of experimentation is driven by a situation where the researcher does not just observe but intervenes to observe the effect of that intervention. As McGraw *et al.* note:

> Experimentation … is intervening or manipulating a real environment in which behavior occurs, controlling the environment to test whether hypotheses about the relationships between variables are supported, and randomly assigning subjects … to control for extraneous factors that can influence the empirical results. (McGraw *et al.,* 2001: 13)

Control is important to experimentation, most usually in terms of dividing subjects into a treatment group, where they receive the intervention, and a control group, where they do not. But, as Morton and Williams (2008) note, it is important for political scientists to abandon the idea that all experiments must follow some ideal pattern of manipulating a variable by way of intervention, establishing a treatment and control group and randomly assigning the subjects to the treatment. Such a design may be appropriate in some circumstances, but just as in observational research, experiments can and should take different forms according to the research question at hand. Control does not need to come in the form of establishing a group to gather data from that has experienced no intervention. Particularly in laboratory settings, control can come through

careful management of the variables that are in play. In many respects, having a comparison group is the essential element in the experimental method so that different groups are making choices under different controlled circumstances. For example, Escher *et al.* (2006) divided subjects into three groups each of which looked for information about a different national government with no control group, enabling cross-country comparison.

In field but also in laboratory experiments it is the *random* allocation of research subjects (be they people, groups or institutions) to one or other group that is used to ensure that the groups are similar in ways relevant to the research questions. These groups are then treated the same in all ways except those which are the focus of the research. Often, observations are made on key variables for each member of the two groups both prior to and after the intervention. 'Pre' and 'post' intervention measurements are the minimum required; in practice many field research projects with an experimental design also monitor the implementation of the policy action using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. The strength of random allocation to different groups is that it can control for the influence of factors that are known to affect the outcome *and* the influence of factors that may affect the outcome of the trial but are *unknown* to researchers.

The rise of experimentation

So the experimental method appears to offer unique advantages in establishing causality but even while acknowledging such advantages, some of its critics doubt its practicality. Green and Gerber (2003: 102) comment:

> The most widely cited drawback … is the inability to manipulate key political variables of interest. It is difficult to imagine how one could randomly assign presidential and parliamentary regimes for the purpose of evaluating their relative strengths and weaknesses. Surely, world leaders cannot be persuaded to allow political scientists to randomise their foreign policies, systems of patronage, or prospects for retaining power?

The response of political scientists such as Green and Gerber to this challenge has been to argue that experiments have a much greater role to play than is commonly understood if the focus is moved to establishing causal connections between particular variables in order to build up a bigger picture answer. As they put it: 'there is more parity than is often realised between big unanswerable research questions and narrow tractable ones' (Gerber and Green, 2003: 103).

As in other areas of development, political scientists have been tempted by the extensive use of experimental work in other social science disciplines, particularly economics and social psychology, to which they may have been exposed though multi-disciplinary work. Through the 20th century, experiments in political science were sparse compared with other disciplines but not absent. One review of experiments published by established political scientists revealed a total of 105 articles between 1926 and 2000 (McDermott, 2002: 43). Experimental articles were concentrated in five journals: *Public Opinion Quarterly* and *American Political Science Review* (21 each), *Political Psychology*, the *American Journal of Political Science* and *Journal of Politics*. The articles revealed a bias towards voting behaviour as the primary concern of experimental work; this was the subject of over a quarter of the 105 articles. In the 1990s, Kinder and Palfrey (1993) managed to provide some twenty cases of previously published research using, primarily, laboratory-based experimental methods.

The next decade saw reports of experimental research or studies appearing in increased numbers in mainstream political science publications such as the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and the *Journal of Politics* (McGraw *et al.*, 2001; Druckman *et al.,* 2006; Morton and Williams, 2008). Morton and Williams (2008) found in those three mainstream journals that experimental methods were adopted in some 25 articles published in the decade of the 1980s, rising to nearly 50 in the 1990s while maintaining a healthy number into the 21st century. The number of laboratory-based studies outstrips field experiments by some considerable degree (Green and Gerber, 2003). Following on from the pioneering work of Green and Gerber (Gerber and Green, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Gerber *et al.,* 2003; Green and Gerber, 2004) it is possible to argue that the number of field experiments has increased but there remains a relative underprovision (for a rare parallel UK study see Brannan and John, 2006). Once experiments are conducted, they seem to receive greater than average attention; Druckman *et al.* (2006: 633) found that experimental articles are in fact cited with greater frequency than other contemporaneous articles: experimental articles had an expected citation rate approximately 47 per cent higher than their non-experimental counterparts.

There are other factors that help to explain the emergence of experiments in political science. The first reason is the failure of existing methods or traditional data sources to answer important research questions, especially causal questions. In short, some political scientists turned to experiments due to the inability of survey, archival and/or field data to answer causal questions – in other words, these existing data failed to enable researchers to establish any causal relationships especially in terms

of determining the influence of certain variables on political behaviour or attitudes and outcomes (McGraw *et al.*, 2001; Morton and Williams, 2006a; Kinder and Palfrey, 1993).The next reason is that there are new research questions that are of interest to political scientists. In the last two decades, political scientists have become more interested in testing or evaluating underlying assumptions or claims about observed political behaviour and also focused on the effects of institutions in understanding political behaviour. Thus, as the research questions of political scientists have changed and experiments enable researchers to study these new questions, experimental research has appeared in the discipline (McGraw *et al.,* 2001; Morton and Williams, 2006a).

Technological advances in terms of the invention of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) survey experiments and the availability of relevant computer software have also facilitated the adoption of experimental research methods in political science (Sniderman and Grob, 1996; Druckman *et al.*, 2006; Morton and Williams, 2006a). Miller *et al.* (2000) for example, use CATI methods in their survey of citizens to show how alternative wordings produce similar positive responses to both the need for more central control and local autonomy in the arrangements of British government, suggesting that public opinion on such matters is loosely formed and potentially confused. The use of some technologies requires laboratory conditions and these lend themselves to experimental techniques. Morton and Williams (2008) note that some social scientists are beginning to use fMRI equipment to measure brain activity as subjects make choices.

Increasingly widespread use of the internet from the early 2000s is also associated with more experimentation for two reasons. First, it facilitates further possibilities for experimental research design by making it easier to reach subjects remotely and, combined with associated digital technologies, providing new possibilities to control and vary the information provided to them, observing the effects on political behaviour. In an innovative experiment using the internet instrument of the *Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences* (a virtual laboratory for experimental research), Weaver (2003, 2005) investigated the effect of skin colour on people's willingness to vote for a political candidate, varying the race/ethnicity and skin colour of the candidates across experimental groups. To control for visual candidate differences, this study used a morphing technique, which digitally averaged several faces together to produce distinct candidates, equating all relevant characteristics, while altering the race and skin colour of the target candidate, thus allowing realistic variation in race and skin tone while controlling for other sources of variation such as attractiveness and facial expression that might affect the outcome of the experiment. Another more recent experiment tested

the effect on people's willingness to participate in collective action (signing a petition and donating money to a cause) of information about the numbers of other participants, by providing remote participants with a custom built interface via the internet (Margetts *et al.*, 2008).

Moreover, the shift of much of social and political life onto the internet raises new questions about online political behaviour that may be most easily answered with experimental research designs. In fact, given the great difficulty in obtaining data about how people use the internet, for privacy reasons and because of the wealth of data monopolized by search engines, laboratory-based experiments where subjects' internet use can be tracked, can be the only way to obtain data of this kind. So, for example, Margetts and Escher (2008) have conducted a range of experiments to investigate how citizens use the internet to find government-related information and the effects of official guidance, by tracking the online behaviour of subjects who have been asked to provide answers to government-related questions, varying the extent to which they are told to use the 'official' government portal or are left free to use open search (see also Escher *et al.,* 2006; NAO, 2007).

Learning from laboratory experiments

Experiments in political science have been differentiated according to various dimensions. In the discussion here we distinguish between laboratory and field experiments. In laboratory experiments, the researcher recruits subjects to a common location, where the experiment is conducted, and all the variables to be investigated in the environment are controlled within that location with the exception of subjects' behaviour. Field experiments, on the other hand, are not conducted in a common location and rely on an intervention into a real situation, with the advantage that a far greater sample size becomes possible. However, the distinction between laboratory and field experiments is getting blurred as combinations of both types of experimentation are now being carried out via the internet – the virtual laboratory. In sociology, but with strong potential application to a political environment, Salganik *et al.* (2006) used dedicated websites to replicate a field experiment online, where citizens' ratings of cultural artefacts were compared against different information environments in an artificial 'music market' in which 14,341 participants downloaded previously unknown songs, finding that citizens were more likely to rate highly songs that other people had also liked. Remote experiments of the kind carried out by Weaver (2005) and Margetts *et al.* (2008) noted above represent a half way stage between laboratory and field experiments, where the information environment is

controlled during the course of the experiment, yet a larger sample size becomes available.

Many laboratory-based experiments into political behaviour use designs and mechanisms borrowed from economics, where they are a well established methodology to investigate economic behaviour in games and bargaining. The most well known political science experiments of this kind have centred around collective action problems and the design of institutions in order to overcome such problems in the creation of public goods or the allocation of common pool resources. Early research explored which kind of mechanisms work best to overcome collective action problems – for example, money back guarantees in case of failure or enforced payments in case of success, with Dawes *et al.* (1986) using experiments to show that only the former affects collective action. He ascribes this difference to motivations from 'greed' rather than 'fear' of one's own loss. Ostrom and various colleagues have carried out extensive experimental research into trust and reciprocity and the consequences for institutional design (see for example, Ostrom and Walker, 2003; Ostrom, 2005; 2007). Laboratory experiments have also been used to show that many people are willing to contribute to public goods and to punish those who do not contribute, even when these activities are costly and when members of the group are anonymous (Fehr and Gachter, 2002; Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004), and Smirnov *et al.* (2007) used similar experiments to argue that these individuals underlie the capacity of political parties to organize.

The claims made about the value added of laboratory work are largely about the capacity it delivers to examine the aspects of political processes that could not be explored easily by other means. In his paper on laboratory experiments in political economy, Thomas Palfrey (2005) argues that researchers, particularly those who are theorists or with theoretical interests, turned to laboratory experiments in order to test the underlying assumptions of theories or hypotheses due to lack of adequate observational field data. Such laboratory experiments are conducted to study participants' behaviour under controlled conditions in order to understand political processes and outcomes – for example, committee decision-making, elections, and so on. In the case of committees, for example, laboratory experiments are designed to test and hence provide insights into how the policy choices or preferences (and shifts/changes in such preferences) of participants might influence not only the deliberations and proceedings but also the outcome in terms of the decisions reached on policy issues/areas. Laboratory experiments into committee decision-making help us to understand the dynamics of how committees operate in terms of their focus (often determined by agenda setting), deliberations and bargaining – ultimatums and/or concessions, how coalitions or alliances are formed around certain issues and how such coalitions/

alliances might or might not shift their allegiances depending on the ultimatums and/or incentives/concessions that are offered – and the issues that ultimately carry the day, that is the decisions or policy outcomes that are agreed upon (Palfrey, 1995; Fiorina and Plott, 1978; Eavey and Miller, 1984a, 1984b).

The argument for continued use of laboratory experiments, as well as field experiments, is made by Elinor Ostrom (2007), based on their value in developing the work she and colleagues have conducted on the effect of communication (direct and indirect), sanctions, fines and agreements on the behaviour and outcomes of users of common-pool resources. She makes a simple distinction between the two types of research 'To test theory adequately, we need to use methods that together combine external and internal validity. One gains external validity in doing field research, but internal validity in the laboratory' (Ostrom, 2007: 26–7). She goes on to argue that laboratory experiments enable researchers examining a particular social and political phenomenon to isolate and test specific variable(s) of interest – out of the several other factors involved – within repeated controlled settings in order to establish how they influence behaviour (choices and preferences) and the outcomes. The argument is that researchers studying social and political phenomena using only non-experimental field research or settings cannot clearly establish or ascertain causality or causal relationships especially in terms of the extent/magnitude to which the multiple factors involved impact on behaviour and thus contribute to an outcome. However, there is a call for a combination of experimental and non-experimental (field) research methods in order to overcome the limitations of both approaches and fully understand social and political phenomena.

Ostrom (2007: 26–7) concludes:

> solving common-pool resource dilemmas is non-trivial, but feasible for those directly involved if they can communicate with one another and agree on future actions … When they cannot change each others expectations, individuals behave as short-term, payoff maximisers … we have shown that groups that can communicate and design their own appropriation and sanctioning systems achieve substantial improvements – at times very close to optimal results. It is rarely feasible to observe such processes in the field but the findings are very important in regard to the importance of discourse and deliberation in a self-governing setting.

For Ostrom, laboratory experiments helped to highlight what it was in her field work that was, in particular, driving participants towards effective common-pool resource solutions.

The most widely cited experimental paper published in the *American Political Science Review* (Druckman *et al.*, 2006: 631) is that of Quattrone and Tversky (1988) which set out to explore whether as assumed in much formal political theory actors behave according to the basic axioms of rationality. They showed that actors made choices that reflected their greater sensitivity to loss rather than gain by offering actors in the experiment choices framed in different ways that would have led to the same objective outcome and found that actors choose differently depending on how the choice was framed. Information-processing difficulties, cognitive challenges and heurists frame actors' decision-making rather than assumed rationality favoured by modellers. This work and other experimental work that shows how behavioural assumptions are violated by 'real' actors has led to increased interest in the underpinning of political behaviour (Druckman *et al.*, 2006: 631). Frey and Meier (2004) explore how assumptions about instrumentality driving behaviour – another common feature of political science theorizing – can be violated by constructing experiments that show the conditions under which pro-social behaviour is likely to emerge.

Learning from field experiments

Various reviews identify the range and variety of experiments conducted by political scientists that stretch way beyond the fields of political psychology and policy evaluation (McDermott, 2002; Druckman *et al.*, 2006; Morton and Williams, 2008). We are only just beginning to be able to judge what might be susceptible to field experiments or not. Various quite common political occurrences open up opportunities for field experiments that might not yet be fully exploited. By expressing faith in the value of randomization, through developing imaginative research designs, and by working in close proximity with policy-makers and social actors, opportunities for creating experiments can be forged by political scientists. The implementation of new programmes, the diversity created through decentralized structures, even financial constraints that encourage piloting, rather the full throttle roll out, all provide a context in which experimentation can come to the fore. For Green and Gerber (2003) field experiments offer a way forward by focusing research into tractable questions and creating useable and tractable knowledge.

A variety of field experiments have examined the impact of mobilization techniques such as the use of text messaging, door-to-door canvassing and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) on voter turnout – including, for example, for youth and other population groups like ethnic minorities (Dale and Strauss, 2007; Gerber and Green,

2000, 2001ab; Gerber *et al.*, 2003; Michelson, 2006; Phillips, 2001; Suarez, 2005; Wong, 2005). Other studies have explored the effect of issues (for example, ballot measures or initiatives) on voter turnout (Barabas *et al.*, 2007); and the effect of political debates on voting decisions and the outcome of elections (Williams, 2007). Horiuchi *et al.* (2007) present an internet-based study on the role of information in voting turnout. Experiments using variable survey questions in controlled conditions can cast doubt on established theories by showing how effects central to the theory seem very sensitive to the wording of questions (Clarke *et al.*, 1999). Experiments appear to offer, in particular, a penchant for discovering evidence that has the capacity to trip up existing theories. One particular value of the experimental method is the ability it provides, in some instances, to check measurement instruments alongside substantive findings. These and other studies show experiments making a general contribution to study of subjects that are at the core of political science.

Field experiments have been increasingly useful in evaluating or predicting the effects of public policy interventions and testing new policy alternatives, and are more amenable to policy-makers who fear the artificiality of the laboratory environment. There is a long established tradition of using field experiments in the United States, in particular to test social policy measures (Greenberg *et al.*, 2003). Burtless (1995) notes the Health Insurance Experiment in the US, which gave convincing evidence about the price sensitivity of the demand for medical care and unprecedented information about the health consequences of variations in medical care that are caused by consumers facing different prices for medical treatment as a result of differences in their insurance coverage (Brook *et al.*, 1983; Manning *et al.*, 1987). More recently King *et al.*'s experiment to evaluate a major new health programme in Mexico, billed as 'what may be the largest randomised health policy experiment ever' (King *et al.*, 2007: 479), will when complete be able to make claims about the success or failure of a massively expensive and important policy, in terms of the extent to which it increases the use and availability of universal health services.

Pitfalls in the experimental method

Although political scientists seem to be surmounting some of the 'insurmountable' challenges to experimental research claimed by earlier researchers, a number of ethical and practical challenges remain. These pitfalls in the experimental method are explored further as follows.

Ethical challenges

First, one common but misplaced criticism often made of medical experiments in particular is that if we think that an intervention (for example, relating to health or education services) might work, how can a researcher justify providing that benefit to the treatment group but not the control group? For example, the huge randomized and controlled field experiment conducted by King *et al.* (2007) to evaluate the Universal Health Insurance programme in Mexico, noted above, involved people in treatment areas receiving free services while people in control areas did not, while a large education experiment designed to test the effects of class size involved providing some subjects with smaller class sizes (Krueger, 1999). In some experiments, ethical concerns may be answered with the argument that we do not know that a benefit will accrue to the treatment group and hence the need for the experiment. As in other forms of research, a variation of the harm principle could be used to judge the conduct of the experimenters in their work, so that experiments could be considered ethical unless they knowingly cause harm to others. However, for many experiments to test public policy interventions, there appear to be clear benefits to the treatment (free health services and smaller class sizes in the two noted above) and indeed the evaluation may only be assessing the extent or cost of the benefit. So even where experimental researchers are able to quieten their consciences, there will often be political and popular opposition to such experimental designs, and concerted attempts by participants to switch to the treatment group, which jeopardizes attempts to randomize (see King, 2007: 481).

Deception – that is, the misleading of participants – is another key ethical issue in experimental design. There is often a clear rationale for its use, either to save time or to test something that would be otherwise impossible. A seminal psychology experiment carried out by Milgram in 1963 is probably the most famous example of this latter kind of deception (and has done much to damage its ethical reputation). Milgram tested the willingness of participants to harm another person 'while only following orders'. Subjects were told to administer a series of electric shocks via what they believed to be an electronic shock generator to a participant behind a wall, who they were led to believe was another subject in the experiment. The subject was told that an electronic shock of increasing voltage was given each time they pressed a button and they were played various sounds of the other participants: screaming, complaining of a heart condition and eventually, silence. The results showed that 65 per cent of participants administered the full shock of 450 volts and all went to 300 volts, even though all expressed concern.

Several other experiments have replicated the results since then (and an experiment carried out by Sheridan and King in 1972 where subjects applied real electric shocks to a puppy, to test the hypothesis that Milgram's subjects had seen through the deception in his experiment, with similar results, cannot have done anything to improve the image of the social science experiment).

University ethics committees generally impose restrictions on deception in experiments and Milgram's experiment might not pass through an ethics committee today all that easily but its basic form has been replicated many times within the discipline of psychology. But even within what will pass through a university ethics committee, there are strong variations in norms for what is possible across disciplines. Economists are categorical in not allowing deception, even where subjects are debriefed afterwards. The objection is not really moral or ethical but more methodological. If a subject pool is 'contaminated', then in future experiments involving the same pool, subjects will be less likely to believe the information with which they are provided, and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Following the psychological tradition demonstrated so clearly by Milgram's experiment described above, social psychologists, on the other hand, argue that deception is vital to many of their experiments, even if not on the scale of Milgram's experiment.

Other experiments include interventions which do not involve deception but arouse ethical concerns because they involve participants (albeit knowingly) sacrificing some right or benefit in favour of financial reward, which they might later regret. Again, there is a seminal experiment of this kind which was an investigation into how much people valued their voting rights, by giving participants a chance to sell their right to vote in the 1994 German Bundestag election (Guth and Hannermann, 1997). The experiment found that most participants did not want to sell their voting right even for the top price of DM 200, while one quarter were willing to do so at substantial prices, but not at very low prices, which the experimentalist used as evidence that people do not see votes as worthless as rational choice arguments about pivotality might suggest. The experiment involved participants actually destroying their real voting card if they accepted a price. Many political scientists might like to replicate such an experiment which endeavours to answer a question so central to political science, and Guth himself dismisses moral objections to the design on the basis that 'Our experiment could be repeated with any group of participants where one only should take care to explain the optimality of truthful bidding in an appropriate way' (Guth and Hannermann, 1997: 40). But as before, it seems inconceivable that such an experiment would pass through a contemporary ethics committee.

Practical problems

Experiments are often 'bedevilled by practical problems of implementation' (Jowell, 2003: 17); the 'practical impediments' bemoaned by Lijphart in the introduction to this chapter. Lack of training among the staff involved in the intervention may create problems and for political scientists, it can be difficult to seek advice from colleagues who have experience of experiments given the lack of experiments in the mainstream of the discipline. Decisions made in the heat of the research may prove problematic to the experiment. Researchers in a study of deliberation seeking to contrast a decision mode driven by consensus, as opposed to moving to a decision by voting, found that pressures of time moved the consensus group to a more voting style of deciding, making the comparison less easy to maintain (Setala *et al.*, 2007). Greenberg *et al.* (2003) review the long history of experimental trials in the United States in the social field and provide examples of where experiments have had to be aborted or modified because of administrative and other problems. Equally, although problems exist they can be overcome in most instances.

These logistical problems vary across field and laboratory experiments. For laboratory experiments, running a laboratory requires ongoing management and administration and the maintenance of a subject pool, from which subjects can be rapidly recruited for individual experiments. Privacy of subjects must be protected, which means that an experimentalist may know very little about the subjects recruited for her experiment. Recruiting subjects, particularly non-students, can be a key challenge; economists are usually content to use students, but political scientists may view the distinctive characteristics of a student cohort (for example, young and inexperienced in voting and other types of political activity) unsatisfactory for observing political behaviour. Mintz *et al.* (2006), indeed, use experimental methods to show how students and military decision-makers differ and suggest that students can be assigned to experiments when they represent citizens but not elites. Theoretically the validity of an experiment rests on the difference between the performance of randomly allocated control and treatment groups, rather than the representativeness of the subject group. But policy-makers are often uncomfortable with results derived from student subjects – and they may be right, because socially homogenous subjects may fail to reveal behaviour distinctive to other groups (NAO 2007 revealed distinct differences across control and treatment groups for students and non-students). Finally, incentivization can be a logistical challenge, particularly for the remote internet-based experiments discussed above, with much larger numbers of subjects than conventional laboratory experiments (the collective action experiment carried out by Margetts *et al.* (2008)

involved paying 700 remote subjects using Amazon vouchers, with the value of each adjusted to account for variable small donations made by individual participants). Larger-scale laboratory experiments can also rapidly become expensive as incentivization costs mount up; the same applies to the remote internet-based experiments.

For field experiments, estimating the effects of system-wide reform can be particularly problematic using randomized trials because of contamination effects. Feedback mechanisms (networking between people, media coverage), perhaps in part caused by the intervention, may in turn make it difficult to maintain the purity of trial. There can be, for example, particular problems caused by the attrition of participants from programmes. A more significant problem for field experiments is that when it comes to implementing the intervention, multiple actors may also be not only involved but central to the effectiveness of any intervention. King *et al.* (2007: 480–6) discuss the challenges of political opposition to large scale long-term policy experiments, putting forward an approach for 'politically acceptable randomisation'. At the local level, junior officials and community groups, for example, may need to be persuaded to buy into the process and implement the intervention as required. Experiments can impose personal costs on administrators; Heckman and Smith (1995: 100, cited in King *et al.*, 2007) point out that over 90 per cent of administrators of training centres approached for the US Department of Labor's Job Training Partnership Act evaluation refused participation in the experiment, presumably worried about negative results casting doubts on their programme or their own performance. Achieving and sustaining buy-in is not always an easy task, yet failing to do so will cause problems with the internal validity of the experiment. The more sensitive the area of intervention, the more challenging the negotiations over the intervention are likely to be.

Conclusion

The experimental method requires the breaking down of big questions into tractable, manageable questions that can be investigated. In that sense the experimental method could provide a way forward for political science as a whole. At the very least all political scientists should understand the logic of experimental work. Those political scientists who use observational data need to understand how the logic of the experimental method enhances the application of their own favoured method. Many who use the comparative method or statistical analysis recognize this connection, but we go further and argue that those who use simple case studies might learn more from the experimental method.

It is possible to see the logic of experiments at work in four types of research design (see Gerring, 2007, Ch. 6). You can engage in a longitudinal comparison, along the lines of an experiment without controls. You could examine the impact of compulsory voting, or some other major change, on voting behaviour, by doing before and after comparisons. You could engage in a spatial comparison using the logic of an experiment to identify different treatments by, for example, looking for a variation in political practice following the devolution of decision-making power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the UK. You could combine both temporal and spatial comparison. Or you could follow the logic of an experiment in a counterfactual or thought experiment and then seek to test it out on your thoughts. You could, on reading Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) famous study of the implementation of a federal programme for depressed urban areas in the United States, hypothesize that it was the demand to link local, state and federal agencies that was the real problem in getting coordinated and effective action, rather than the sheer number of agencies. You might then go to a unitary state and see if you could find a multi-agency scheme to see if the road to implementation was indeed smoother. Developing your research or testing out your ideas often relies on constructing an 'experiment' with observational data rather than that provided by experimental intervention.

Of course the key aim in this chapter is not just to widen the appreciation of the experimental method but to get more researchers thinking about the idea of doing an experiment work. Although experiments as innovative and dramatic as Milgram (1963) and Guth and Hanneman (1997) remain rare in political science, there is a scattering of ardent experimentalists across the political science domain, who are enthused about and confident of, the experimental method. One point that does not come so clearly out of the literature but is well known to anyone who has been involved in designing or running an experiment is that experiments, in spite of all the logistical and ethical challenges discussed in this chapter, are exciting and fun. It is unclear whether the attraction of experiments comes from the comparative freshness of the approach, the simplicity of the methodology with the clear cut search for significance on the intervention, the sense of excitement in gambling on a particular research design, the potential for rich pay-offs in terms of identifying causality or perhaps the chance to 'play god', but it is immediately evident when experimentalists talk about or present their research.

It will be up to them and the researchers and students who work with them, through the running of experiments which clearly show their value and worth, to make the case for greater use of experiments. We are

nowhere near the limits of being sure what experiments can or cannot do (Green and Gerber, 2003). To present general arguments that clarify what the experimental method can do will help to persuade doubters, as will the demonstration of experiments in practice. But, in addition, experimenters need to be clearer about what the particular valueadded or benefit of the experimental method is to political science in particular. They will also need to avoid working in isolated pockets and networks, but forge a channel at the centre of political science.

The experimental method, in its field form in particular, demands a greater interaction between political science and society and in its other forms often lends itself to greater involvement of issues of policy and political practice. Given the subject matter of politics and the challenges that democratic systems in particular face, this greater engagement with society would seem both overdue and desirable for the discipline of political science. Achieving relevance in terms of influencing public policy may be more challenging than many experimenters recognize (see Stoker and John, 2009; Stoker, 2010) but as Chapter 16 in this book argues it is a laudable objective.

If, as the authors hope, experimentation in political science continues to increase, political scientists who favour the method will need to start developing the norms and guidelines that other disciplines have already established. Economists are clear about their own rules. Economics journals, for example, will not publish experiments that involve deception, so it is universally deplored. Social psychologists routinely practise deception and are comfortable with this norm. Currently, any political scientist running experiments must make their own decision on this issue, taking a punt that they will be able to persuade future experimentalists of the validity of their own course of action. In UK health research, the idea of incentivizing subjects is eschewed and indeed disallowed for NHS funded projects, whereas in economics subjects must be incentivized and there are strict guidelines for doing so. Again, there is no political science view on this issue. These points have methodological importance, because they affect the perceived validity of experiments. They also have logistical implications; economists will not share a laboratory with experimentalists who 'taint' the subject pool with deception, yet given the expense and difficulty involved in designing and running experiments, the need to keep subjects interested and signed up, and the fixed costs of running a laboratory, sharing a laboratory could be highly desirable for political scientists. With the arrival of organizations, rules and norms then we will know that the experimental method has become institutionalized in political science.

Further reading

- For an accessible introduction to experiments in practice in political science, see Green and Gerber (2004).
- Torgerson and Torgerson (2008) provide a good overview of experimental methods for those beginning their studies and Shadish *et al*. (2002) offers the bible for those working with experiments.
- More examples of political science experiments other than those given in the text can be found in Kinder and Palfrey (1993).
- A special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 2010, is worth examining.

The Relevance of Political Science

GUY PETERS, JON PIERRE AND GERRY STOKER

Introduction

So far in *Theories and Methods* the focus has been on judging political science according to factors that are vital but internal to the discipline. What are the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to political science? What are the best methods to use when studying politics? In this chapter we want to turn the focus to a more outward-looking criterion. We ask whether political science has anything of relevance to say to key concerns confronting today's society. Can political science give answers to important real-world problems and, in particular, can it make significant analytical observations that contribute to the identification of solutions to such social problems? As an academic discipline, with a lively practice in universities for about a hundred years, what contributions does political science have to offer in addressing key political problems and issues? The rationale of this chapter is to test the discipline, not against 'insider' criteria about coherence and sophistication of research approach, but to ask whether political science has anything relevant to say. After millions of published words in books and articles, underwritten by major research spending, can political science tell us anything valuable about a range of the major issues confronting global society today?

The heart of the chapter is an attempt to demonstrate the potential for, and barriers to, relevance in political science. We will debate the merits and demerits of relevance as an objective for political science but that debate needs to run alongside another inquiry: are there significant issues where it could be demonstrated that political science has delivered relevant knowledge and insight? We select three areas to investigate whether political science has examined a recognized problem, produced a careful and thorough analysis and identified solutions. The three areas are connected and go to the heart of operation of our polities in today's globalized world.

First, we note that political science has come to recognize that mass democracies face a major challenge because of the scale of discontent and

disengagement surrounding the formal political process, and more subtlely, the adoption of forms of activism by citizens that provide multiple but thin routes into the political process. We explore a growing literature that specifies the dimensions of the problem in an effective manner but note that political science is better at understanding the dynamics of the problem than offering workable solutions. The second and related arena where political scientists could be asked to meet the challenge of relevance is in a key area for all political change, namely the design and reform of political institutions. Institutional analysis shows the strong influence of institutions on political and social behaviour and it also demonstrates the problems associated with institutional design. But can political science offer a route to better designed political institutions? Finally, in today's global world, another vital question is: what is the role of international institutions in global governance? Students of international relations have devoted much time and energy to understanding the requirements of collective security. But what does international relations theory have to offer in terms of devising strategies for the UN and other institutions to engage in global governance and to foster collective security while at the same time enhancing its mandate to intervene in domestic conflict?

The case for relevance: objections and rebuttals

There are some that hold the view that the job of political scientists begins and ends with their description and analysis of politics. It is probably true to say that much political science is written in such a way that it would be difficult for those involved in politics to gain much from the work or the understanding that is presented. Many political scientists view the connection between the discipline and the world of politics as appropriately detached. They are neutral observers of the political world, not practitioners of politics. Many political scientists recognize that maintaining that divide is not always straightforward but it is what they aspire to. They are happy as experts for their thoughts to be taken up by the media, policy-makers and community groups, but otherwise they are not going to get engaged. Does that matter? Some may feel there is no issue to be addressed. Why should political science care if its work is useful or used?

We take the view that a discipline that studied politics but had nothing to say to those involved in politics or who might be involved is somehow failing. Our position is shared by others. With some calling for a different type of political science that abandons the attempt to make law-like generalizations about politics but instead offers to 'inform practical

reason or phronesis, that is the ability to make intelligent decisions in particular circumstances' (Caterino and Schram, 2006; see also Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006; Schram and Caterino, 2006). It is not necessary to take on board the full manifesto of the so-called Perestroika movement in political science to agree that making political science matter is a valuable objective. Mainstream political scientists such as Robert Putnam have indeed blazed a trail in the debate he had led about the declining civic capacity of citizens in the United States and potentially other countries and the founding of the Saguaro seminar to identify practical measures to provide a response to that decline (Putnam, 2000; Putnam and Feldstein, 2003).

There are three stages in our argument for a relevant political science. The first step is to recognize that there is no such thing as a neutral or value-free political science. There are always issues about the appropriate connection between empirical and normative theorizing that need to be considered. Because 'observation is inescapably theory laden … political scientists have an ongoing role to play in exhibiting what is at stake in accepted depictions of reality, and reinterpreting what is known so as to put new problems onto the research agenda' (Shapiro, 2004: 39). Political science in its everyday practice, therefore, has to be sensitive to the implications of its findings and arguments and the intersection of empirical analysis and normative judgement.

We are not suggesting that political scientists become moralists or constantly engage in normative arguments about the good polity. Nor do we think that political scientists do or should be expected to share a normative framing of political issues. In practice, rather like the rest of the population, political scientists have different views of political issues and values. That is as it should be; as individuals the political position of political scientists is a matter for them. But, equally, we do not think that the discipline should restrict itself to studying what is rather than examine what should be. Some engagement with normative issues is inevitable. A number of the concepts used by empirically-oriented political scientists, such as democracy or justice, are contested or disputed. You simply cannot avoid the challenge of relevance if you are studying an aspect of human society, as political scientists do.

Second, it is possible to go further and argue that the agenda of political science should be substantially set by the concerns raised in 'real' world politics. In short, at a more practical level there should be the relationship between the world of political analysis and the practice of politics in the world. Shapiro (2004: 40) refers to this stance as a commitment to adopt a problem-oriented approach to defining the research agenda for political scientists: 'unless problems are intelligible to outsiders, nothing they say about them is likely to persuade anyone who stands in need of

persuasion'. Political science should as part of its vocation seek not to pursue an agenda driven by its own theories or methods as if it was in a separate world, sealed off from the concern of its fellow citizens. Rather the problems of the political world as perceived, or at least as can be understood, by our fellow citizens should set the bulk of our agenda. We should be asking questions to which others outside the profession want to know the answer.

Finally, the case for relevance can be pushed still further by arguing that research can address not only the problems of 'real' world politics but offer solutions to some of the most pressing problems. We are interested in whether political science can identify solutions. We also note that one person's solution can be another's problem and we recognize that it is not easy to know what criteria are to be used in order to judge the 'adequacy' of what political science has to offer. But we are interested in whether political science has got pertinent things to say about issues that people care about and whether those insights command widespread support in the discipline. We suspect that we will often be in the world of choices and trade-offs when it comes to considering potential solutions to the questions we pose to political science. But can political science at least clarify what those trade-offs are and how they could be managed? We do not think that political scientists all agree with each other. So we are not looking for consensus. But a relevant political science would at least be able to offer a range of solutions to some of the most pressing problems faced by the world community of which it is a part.

So the case for relevance can be built but it is fair to identify a number of objections and offer some response to the often valid concerns that they raise. First, there are colleagues who hold that political science's first responsibility is to improve the reliability of its methods in order to be more certain about the quality of the answers it offers rather than simply chase whatever are the current issues of the day. If political scientists follow the political agenda of the day then all they will be able to offer is a version of what media reporters and commentators already provide and will not offer anything of additional value. Our response is to agree that following the shifting patterns of the daily news is not appropriate but that does not deny the case for political science to continually pick away at issues of concern in modern societies. Nor does a focus on problems mean a downplaying of developing the best means of investigating those problems. Indeed, methodological innovation is, if anything, likely to be stimulated rather than hindered by such dealing with the intractable and complex challenges thrown up by 'real world' politics. There is nothing as practical as good theory, and theory can find no tougher test than achieving effectiveness in the world of practice.

A second and related objection to relevance is that in many areas the

evidence may not be clear enough to allow for clear and workable solutions to be identified. Claims to be able to establish causality that could in turn guide a claim to provide solutions should be treated with scepticism. Piven (2004) argues that attempts to identify linear cause-and-effect dynamics when examining a problem lead to the attempt to build policy on fictitious grounds as realities are always more complex than any simple model can capture.

Again, our response is that – as this book has shown over and over again – causality is indeed difficult to establish and that events in human society are always influenced by elements of contingency. But that should not stop political scientists making probabilistic statements that such and such an intervention is likely to achieve some outcome or other. Moreover, it does not stop us developing accounts that allow scope for and understanding of the role of contingency. Solutions do not need to be cast in the nature of 'iron laws'. 'Do this and all your problems will be solved' is not a message that we should offer our fellow citizens and nor it likely to be believed by them. But it should be possible for us to intervene in public debates, offering tentative solutions to problems and, at the very least, help to frame public discussion about the scope and limitations of where solutions might be found.

We are convinced that methodological pluralism will aid the engaging of political science with society. The approach of political science to the problems confronting societies will be confounded by our over-reliance on using quantitative methods or simple causal models. While these methods can certainly tell us something about relationships among variables, they often say relatively little about the processes by which decisions are made and implemented, or about the social consequences of public action. We therefore argue for a more pluralist approach to methodology as well as greater emphasis on the practical issues of governing (see also Della Porter and Keating, 2008).

A third reason to object to relevance is that when political scientists have pursued relevance they have often ended up putting their research into the hands of established power holders and simply acted to provide so-called expert judgement to underwrite partisan policy making (Norton, 2004; Piven, 2004). Again, we are happy to concede that these are dangers when political science enters the real world of politics but we do not think that it is inevitable that relevant political science will only support current power-holders. We do not see how a political science that argues for certain democratic reforms to allow for a political system to become accessible to a wider set of interests (Stoker, 2006) or a political science that argues for an extension of rights to citizens on a global basis (Held, 2004) are about doing anything other than distributing power to the have-nots. A careful and detailed empirical study by a variety of

American academics (Macedo *et al.*, 2005) into the failings of the political system of the United States – a study under the auspices of the American Political Science Association – has produced a set of reform measures that are sufficiently radical not to be seen as a defence of the *status quo*. There are difficulties and challenges that social scientists have dealing with power and political scientists, in particular, should be sensitive to these issues. Studies can be mis-used by political interests, the media can over-simplify complex research and the political leaning of the researchers may inappropriately colour the findings of the research. But these faults can all be identified and challenged within the political science community. Witness the hot debate among social scientists of Robert Putnam's work on social capital where evidence, theory and inferred policy message have all been the subject of sustained discussion (Putnam, 2000; Baron *et al.*, 2000; Edwards *et al.*, 2001; Halpern, 2004; Putnam, 2004).

We do not deny the case for caution when political scientists pursue relevance but we hold that none of the caveats that colleagues raise are so undermining as to lead us to abandon the project. Indeed, we go further and argue that the best of political science should have a problem-solving attitude: identifying a question thrown up in the world, illuminating its dimensions through systematic study and seeking to ask what could be done to improve the situation in the service of humankind. The issue for us is more that of delivery. Can we see signs of such a political science in practice? We will present three brief cases of issues and debates in political science where there appears to be a strong potential for transforming research into practice in order to address societal problems. The first case is about political decay; the second case discusses institutional design and the third case, finally, is about the prospects of global governance. Thus, the three cases have, or should have, a strong utility potential. In each section we assess to what extent political science has delivered on that potential.

Political science and democratic decay

As Colin Hay (2007: 153) puts it, politics in today's understanding is 'synonymous with sleaze, corruption, and duplicity, greed, self-interest and self-importance, interference, inefficiency and intransigence. It is, at best, a necessary evil, at worst an entirely malevolent force that needs to be kept in check'. Popular political culture is deeply anti-politics and politicians in many advanced democracies (see Stoker, 2006). There are a number of lines of dominant explanation as to how politics in advanced industrial democracies has got into this state of affairs.

Hay's (2007) prime explanation is that we hate politics because politicians have spent much of the last decades telling us that we should have low expectations of them. Our political masters have shot themselves in the foot by swallowing wholesale the economic analysis of politics, coated in a neoliberal framing of the limits and failings of the state. Their problem which has become our problem is that we have come to interpret politics as a game where all players are instrumental and self-interested. The economic analysis of politics has become manifest in the way that politics is presented and sold to us. Politicians compete not for our souls but for our stomachs: debating with us not values but rather who can give us the best deal. Politics has been reduced to competing marketing campaigns. As voters we are not asked to make a political choice about different political values or programmes; rather we decide whether one lot of politicians is managerially more competent than another in delivering on their promises to deliver a better life for us.

David Beetham (2005) offers an erudite argument that politics has become tied too closely to big business and that such closeness makes the general public increasingly alienated from the political process because they are no longer in control of the process. A further branch of this style of argument is that the world of powerful economics and business has gone global and the political system and associated processes have remained national or local. Globalization, argues Manuel Castells (2005), has created a crisis of inadequate political institutions that feeds into and is then reinforced by a crisis of political legitimacy and a growing distance between citizens and their representatives. According to Meg Russell in her thoughtful pamphlet, we have failed to come to terms with mass democracy in our culture. She argues that 'the ways that our political culture has adapted itself to modern life have, over time, conspired to erode faith in political rule' (2005: 4). The adversarial style of our politics has, when combined with the sense that politicians must permanently campaign, fed distrust. The culture of consumerism has led politicians to offer promises to the public on which they struggle to deliver effectively. Single-issue pressure groups add to the demands made on the political system to deliver without aiding any understanding of the need to balance competing demands. Citizens are given a constant message that suggests that politics is failing and the cynical and simplistic approach of the modern media has also 'played a key part in feeding all these problems' (Russell, 2005: 5).

Stoker's *Why Politics Matters* adds some further factors (Stoker, 2006). The first is the emphasis on individual choice and consumerism in our societies that has created a challenging environment for the collective decision-making characteristic of politics. Other factors have also undermined people's faith in politics: its domination by professional activists

that means that most citizens are manipulated spectators in the process rather than critical citizens; the role of the mainstream media in promoting only surface understanding of issues and more generally supporting a culture of cynicism. The first means that people fail to appreciate the inherent collective characteristics of politics in an individualized world. The second suggests that politics is increasingly professionalized, leaving most of us in the position of being spectators rather than activists in any meaningful sense. The third factor encourages a culture of hopeless fatalism about politics.

But what about solutions? Hay's book (2007) is virtually devoid of anything looking like a solution, although it hints at an issue that may be important. We will return to this shortly. For now, let's take a brief tour of the solutions on offer. Some argue that we need to change the way that politicians do politics, but all these proposals suffer, to a degree, from an attempt to take the politics out of politics. Richard Ryder (2006) argues that politicians should be required to promote public policies by reference to moral objectives and through open moral argument. A different strategy for removing decision-makers from politics is suggested by Alex Rubner (2006), namely a return to more independence for Members of Parliament and less public scrutiny and lobbying so that legislators can respond to proposals with their considered views and not have to adopt strategies of benevolent lying. The problem of the current system in this analysis is that 'in order to do good, politicians are often compelled to be dishonest. They engage in benevolent lying for otherwise, because of the likely obstruction of stupid voters, they cannot advance the national interest as they see it' (Rubner, 2006: 3).

Meg Russell (2005: 55–8) offers a considerably more plausible view of the way forward. She proposes a new political charter in which they are more honest about their mistakes, the hard choices that need to be made and the constraints faced by decision-makers, and more generous to their opponents in not making exaggerated or unnecessary attacks and campaigning responsibly and in a way that does not exploit citizens' distrust. She adds that media coverage and citizens' attitudes to politics will also need to change. But her optimism that such a new political culture could take hold needs to be tempered by a recognition that when activists do their politics they do so with a mix of motives, from passion for a cause to self-interest. But above all they campaign, demonstrate, bargain, organize and do the mundane work of filling out envelopes and making phone calls in order to win. There are no neutrals in politics and to ask activists to forgo potentially winning strategies may be asking for too much.

Many argue that there may be ways of re-engaging people in politics and this was a central theme of Stoker's (2006) call for a new politics for

amateurs in *Why Politics Matters*. The 'Make Poverty History' (MPH) protest in the UK in the summer of 2005 could epitomize new politics of engagement. It connected campaigning with formal representative politics in a powerful way and did so in such a way that reached out to millions of people who were relative novices in the political process over an issue of high moral import. There are lessons that can be drawn from that campaign if we are interested in a re-energizing of politics and restoring trust in the political process (McNeill, 2006). The first is that hope sells rather than guilt. MPH convinced people that they could do something to make a difference to improve the lot of the world's poor. Second, it built very deliberately from the bottom up and then tried to link visionary leadership to that base, but the base was around the local schoolgate, bus stops and places of work rather than the elite institutions of politics. Finally, its message was one of rehabilitation and renewal as converts to the cause were welcomed from all quarters and not derided for making a U-turn or because they were latecomers.

Not all politics can be packaged in the same way as the MPH campaign but it stands out as a politics that successfully brought together the formal institutions of governance and the informal power of civil society. There are other examples from across the globe. Graham Smith (2009) shows how there has been innovation in forms of public engagement worldwide and shows how they have achieved degrees of success.

However, even if we did find ways of drawing in more citizens into decision-making, the bulk of citizens would still remain observers rather than practitioners of political practice. Moreover, the big unknown is how these observers come to understand politics and whether they could develop a complex and nuanced understanding of its practices. Even if we convince citizens that politics is not all about politicians narrowly pursuing their self-interests in a cycle of ineffectual games we still need them to understand that politics is an awkward and difficult process.

Politics is about collective choice and political science needs to offer our fellow citizens non-utopian visions of how it could work but a greater appreciation of it as a messy human process. We need a political culture that is able to live with and manage contradictory forces. Citizens should engage directly in politics and be engaged by the mainstream representative political process. Yet even if that occurs they will differ about what the outcomes of democratic politics could or should be. So, somehow, we citizens need to be willing to support the multifaceted expression of collective will that we call politics even when the outcomes may not be to their liking. Politics in a democratic context demands a complex moral universe. One that grants you the freedom to challenge authority, criticize all actors and actions and cajole others to support your views but at the same time demands from you a collective responsibility to uphold a

system that may produce outcomes that you may strongly object to or find morally dubious or even repugnant.

As Michael Walzer (2004: 103) puts it, political decisions are inherently and permanently conflictual. 'Very few political decisions are verdicts in the literal sense of that term. I don't mean that we can't sometimes insist that it is morally right and perhaps imperative to do X; but even people who agree on the necessity of doing X are likely to disagree about how to do it, or how soon, or at whose expense … Permanent settlements in politics are rare in political life because we have no way of reaching a verdict on contested issues.' Politics as a result often requires messy compromises that are presented through 'smoke and mirrors' to bridge conflicting interests and values. Deliberation and the open exchange of different ideas are part of politics but they do not capture the roundness of its practice. Politics is a sustained battle of interests and ideas and claims for influence, accountability and scrutiny. It is an inherent reflection of our plurality and difference as human beings. Its nobility is in its capacity to enable us to manage our mutual interdependence but its practice is often laboured, dull, and untidy, muddled, conflictual and occasionally dirty and it is these features that are off-putting to many citizens (Eliasoph, 1998)

All of the proposed additional strategies of reformers may help, but as Colin Hay helpfully suggests, we are slightly pitching in the dark. We don't know enough about the problem to know what the answer might be. As Hay (2007: 162) argues, in terms of the silent majority we 'know very little … about the cognitive process in and through which [they] come to attribute motivations to the behaviour [they] witness, or how [they] come to develop and revise assumptions about human nature [they] project on to others. If politics depends ultimately on our capacity to trust one another … then there can be no more important questions for political analysts than these.' So although we cannot claim that political scientists can offer cast-iron solutions to the problems of advanced democracies they can offer a subtle analysis of its dimensions and in the pursuit of relevance throw up a lacuna in the agenda of modern political science: its failure to really address how and what it is that the vast majority of citizens understand by politics.

What do we know about political institutions?

Political science has been involved with institutions for the entire history of the discipline, and for much of our existence institutions were the central focus of our inquiries. Historically, much of the study of institutions has been highly legalistic and focused on the formal aspects of insti-

tutions. More recently, we have begun to use institutions as variables to explain the behaviour of regimes or of the individuals who comprise them. However, after all these centuries of studying institutions, can political science say anything relevant and useful to the would-be designers of institutions?

The answer to the above question is certainly 'yes and no'. We do understand very clearly a (relatively small) set of relationships among institutional choices and the behaviour of actors within the political system. Unfortunately, however, those aspects of institutions and behaviour about which we have the most certain knowledge tend to be among the least significant for more designers of institutions. We seem to be much less capable of solving the big problems facing governments and citizens than we are of providing some useful advice about tinkering, and especially about tinkering that may influence the political fortunes of politicians.

One of the clearest examples of the capacity of institutional designers to manipulate is the ability to use electoral laws to produce a variety of outcomes. One of the fathers of the study of electoral systems, Maurice Duverger, expressed a rule that only plurality voting systems could maintain a two-party system. This condition is necessary but not sufficient. So, for example, in the 1990s New Zealand decided to shift from a plurality system to proportional representation and one of the most tightly constrained two-party systems became multi-party very quickly. The changes in the Italian electoral system were not so effective, but did have some of the same consequences. But as the case of the United Kingdom demonstrates, you can have a plurality system and still see a challenge to a two-party system.

Even beyond the relatively simple linkage between plurality voting systems and two-party systems, we do have relatively good information about how to influence the number of parties and to some extent their behaviour. There are any number of ways of manipulating electoral systems to produce roughly the number and perhaps even the types of parties that one wants. This information is very relevant for political leaders who wish to enhance their electoral chances, or as in the case of the Gaullists in France, designing an electoral system that might disadvantage their socialist opponents while enhancing their own opportunities for victory.

We know a good deal about how to manipulate party systems and how to shape aspects of political participation more generally, but we do not know a good deal about many other aspects of institutional design. We appear much less capable of designing effectively the institutions for governing than we are of designing institutions for selecting the governments. For example, although the past several decades have

been characterized by widespread expansion of democracy, we know relatively little about how to institutionalize those institutions and their procedures in an effective manner. Diamond and Morlino (2005), who have been among the leading scholars of democratization, have commented on the apparent inability to create democracy without also opening the systems in question to large corruption and kleptocracy.

As societies move towards institutionalizing democracy, one of the choices open to them is whether to choose presidential or parliamentary systems. These are well-established forms of governing and we would hope that political science should be able to make some definitive statements about the likely consequences of this choice, but that hope may be dashed. One school of thought (Linz and Valenzuela, 1994; Riggs, 1991) has argued vigorously about the 'perils of presidentialism'. The assumption is that presidential systems are more subject to irregular turnovers in governments than are parliamentary systems. The empirical evidence seems to support this point until the effects of economic development and ethnic divisions are taken into account, and then the relationship largely vanishes.

Lijphart (1999) and Schmidt (2002) have also made arguments about the superiority of 'consensual' forms of government, although again the evidence appears rather weak. Further, they fail to note that in many ways true presidential regimes have to be consensual, given that both the executive and the legislative branches, independent of one another, must agree before government can act. Indeed, except for a limited period in the late 1990s and early 21st century in United States – the quintessential presidential government – the regime was highly consensual (Peters, 2005). Thus, the institutional design of the political system *per se* may not have been as important as the behaviour of the individuals who were occupying the positions.

Within the study of democratic governments, our theories have not been able to provide much guidance on how coalition governments – the dominant pattern in democracies – will be formed. The dominant theories used in studying coalitions argue that coalitions should be either a minimum winning group (Riker, 1962), or should be formed from parties that are at least contiguous in ideological terms (Laver, 1998). There are strong theoretical grounds for making these arguments, but those arguments have difficulties confronting the increasing number of 'over-sized' and ideologically diverse coalitions in European democracies. There are good reasons for the formation of those coalitions, but unfortunately the rather parsimonious theories developed to explain this aspect of democracy are not of a great deal of use.

Federalism and unitary governments provide another major institutional question that has been the subject of political science research.

More recently this, rather basic, dichotomy has been further theorized and extended to cover numerous instances of 'multi-level governance' (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Skelcher, 2005). The question that arises from this is whether we know much of real relevance about how to manage the territorial dispersion of governing, and the complexities involved with multiple tiers of more or less independent governments all attempting to assert their political power and sovereignty.

Again, this literature does a very good job of describing the choices involved in selecting types of territorial government, but provides relatively little guidance for the would-be designer of such institutions. Perhaps the most useful advice comes in terms of questions of choosing between single purpose local authorities versus the usual device of full-service local governments (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Although that advice can be made with somewhat greater predictive capacity, it may not take into account the political complexities that condition the desirability of one or the other option.

Political scientists have done a great deal of interesting research on the institutions of government. As important as that work may have been academically, it has not always been as relevant to the design of real world institutions as we might expect. Building models for explaining the relationships among variables is very different from building institutions, and we often have not understood the difference. Perhaps worse, we have not always cared a great deal whether the analyses we were writing were particularly useful. Although political science is itself not necessarily an applied social science, the world of practice is a laboratory for testing the relevance of the research and that relevance often has been lacking.

Political science and global governance

The challenge of creating some form of global governance is not new. Following the peace treaty of almost every major international conflict there have been conferences aimed at creating a new model of world order, as happened after the two world wars. Notions of 'the war to end all wars' have been easy to sell to political leaders and peoples that have suffered the consequences of military conflict which, as the historical record shows, has destroyed civilians' lives and economic infrastructure much more than military personnel and investments.

That said, the political agenda during the 1990s and 2000s has seen a set of arguably new issues rapidly becoming more salient. Environmental protection has been on the agenda since the 1970s but had its definitive political breakthrough with the alarming news about global warming.

This was a truly global issue – no national measure, however far-reaching and effectively implemented, would significantly address the problem – and since previous international agreements like the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro or the Kyoto Protocol conference in 1997 had shown that widespread global agreements could indeed be reached, the global warming issue intensified the political work to develop a global regime that could enforce and implement policies which would reduce carbon dioxide emissions worldwide.

The political attention to international terrorism followed a similar path. The 1970s witnessed the initial wave of terrorist actions: Munich 1972, the Brigate Rossi in Italy, the Baader-Meinhof Group in Germany, the IRA in Northern Ireland and the UK. Terrorist attacks triggered a governmental response, security worldwide was stepped up and the issue seemingly lost some of its former salience until 11 September, 2001. Thus, for both the environmental protection issues and international terrorism the turn of the millennium saw a quantum leap in salience and the subsequent call for global strategies and institutions to respond to the new challenge.

The search for global governance has also been driven by increasing inequalities in wealth and life chances between the North and the South. Despite massive international aid these inequalities keep growing. There is today widespread belief that unless some global order is set in place to address this issue with some institutional force this pattern will persist. Needless to say, concrete proposals to this effect like the Tobin tax on global financial transactions have been met with fierce opposition from a variety of actors and interests.

Political science research and theory building on global governance would, *prima facie,* have plenty to offer towards designing regimes and institutions for global governance. On closer inspection, however, there are several aspects of the issues now most frequently identified as suitable for global governance that question the relevance of political science theory. One such problem is the multitude of agencies. The liberal and (neo) realist theories of international relations defined nation states as the key players, simply because the international scene was for long dominated by states along with corporate actors. Today, agencies can be defined in almost any number of ways, ranging from transnational organizations such as the EU, the WTO or the UN to *ad hoc* treaties like the Kyoto Protocol, regional instruments of economic governance like NAFTA and Mercosur to terrorist cells. It is intriguing to note that as the world system of nations could enjoy a rapidly decreasing level of armed conflict, domestic conflict began to increase. Today, most armed conflict is domestic, not international. Certainly, this pattern could be taken as proof that peacekeeping efforts now are more efficient than previously.

Another interpretation would be that the ethnic and economic cleavages that were concealed during the process of building nations such as Yugoslavia, several African states and most recently, Georgia, are now resurfacing. Thus, agency in the field of military conflict and international terrorism has seemingly become too diverse for any theory to accommodate. Or, as is the case in the global warming issue, agency is nowhere – or everywhere, depending on how you define the problem. Thus, the contemporary heterogeneity of agency in global governance poses a very real and significant problem which political scientists have problems in addressing.

In addition to these problems in defining or contextualizing agency, current political science also has problems with defining institutional arrangements for collective problem solving in the absence of formal authority. Where such authority exists, the obvious collective problem-solving institution is government. How do we, as Rhodes (1997) would say, design governance without government?

In part, this problem is related to the complexity that surrounds agency but there are other issues as well: the absence of legal authority and subsequently the complexity of imposing sanctions on defecting behaviour. The defining problem in global governance is the absence of formal authority and, therefore, there is a search for a regime which can impose order on sovereign actors. Models derived from rational choice theory would define this as either a collective action problem or a common pool resource problem. The collective action problem suggests that free riding is rational behaviour since it allows the actor to collect the benefits without carrying the costs of the collective action (Olson, 1965). The solution to this problem, in theory and in real life, is imposing a sanction on free riding. In global governance, such sanctions are extremely difficult to design and even more difficult to impose. If there is no authority controlling global governance, how is a sanction imposed? Exclusion, which might be an effective sanction in some forms of governance, is not an efficient instrument in global governance because the basic idea of such governance is that it is global. By conveying the idea that all actors swim or sink together, actors are more likely to commit themselves to the global governance regime.

If sanctions, then, are problematic in global governance, can incentives achieve the same commitment to the regime? Participating in, and contributing to, global governance, might offer incentives which may or may not be sufficient to commit an actor. Again, however, the free riding strategy poses a problem. A country can choose not to sign the Kyoto Protocol and to refrain from domestic regulation to reduce carbon dioxide emission. At the same time it will benefit from the restrictions imposed in other countries. How does a global governance arrangement prevent

that strategy, which incidentally was the choice of (in)action which the United States pursued at the beginning of the twenty-first century over global warming under the Bush presidency?

Common pool resource theory might be able to offer some assistance to solve this problem. Elinor Ostrom's (1990) work in this area suggests that a regime among sovereign, rational actors can be formed and sustained if they represent equilibriums among rational actors, that is, if the regime is Pareto-optimal and no actor can be better off without at least one being worse off. A Pareto-optimal regime is a situation in which actors find it more rational and goal-fulfilling to submit to the regime than to remain outside the collective arrangement because it allows for a sustained consumption of the collective resource. Thus, actors submit to the regime because it is in their interest to do so. The alternative strategy, doing it alone and maximizing consumption, is not an option because the resource is common. For the same reason, the only sanction which is available to the regime, reciprocity, becomes effective because the actor is committed to place; in Ostrom's model, the fishermen do not have much choice but to fish in that particular lake and in global governance exiting the system is not an option.

So, is common pool resource theory an appropriate and effective political science model to guide the design of global governance? Well, yes and no. Yes, because it tells us something about how to devise regimes for regulating the consumption of common resources without relying on formal, legal authority. No, because there is essentially very little to suggest that the equilibrium that would sustain such a regime would be effective or sufficient in resolving the collective problem. Indeed, the Kyoto Protocol has been criticized for not setting reduction targets that will significantly slow global warming. The price for getting all (or the vast majority) major players on board might well be a diluted and substantively speaking insufficient policy.

Another aspect of the global governance problem which contemporary theory has problems addressing, stems from within the political science community itself. Going through the first issues of the journal *Global Governance*, one cannot escape the impression that this is a scholarly field which is probably just as much concerned with devising theories and models as it is with studying real cases of global governance. The constructivist 'turn' in International Relations has made a distinct imprint on global governance as well, something which raises questions about the extent to which this is a research field which is likely to be able to make a contribution to the realworld struggle to create global governance. In fairness, it should be noted that research on global governance thus far has only been marginally concerned with designing models that would work on the ground. We must remind ourselves that the utility dimension of

political science which is the theme of this chapter defines a yardstick of assessing political science which has not been applied hitherto.

Conclusion

We started this chapter by looking at the many different problems that are inherent in the process of actually converting political science knowledge into political action in order to address salient societal problems. One is the logic of the academic enterprise where utility has never been a major concern. Another problem is related to the relationship between politicians and experts and the role that academics could play in the policy process. A third problem is the nature of academic evidence which nearly always lends itself to multiple interpretations.

The three brief case studies paint a rather dismal picture of the relevance of political science. They may not be entirely representative and further work will be required to see which sub-fields of the discipline might be able to make stronger claims of relevance. Solutions offered by political science analysis are frequently not politically possible or feasible, and solutions adopted by politicians are often shot down in flames at political science conventions for being poorly conceived and insufficient to solve the problem at hand. The above statement assumes, however, that political scientists would even identify the central problems that are animating political debate.

How could we strengthen the interface between academia and politics? Can we change academia to become more relevant? Can we change politics to become more open to scientific advice? It goes without saying that these are truly challenging projects. The academic system has always promoted – and these days increasingly so – the contributions to the national and international debate much more than the utility of the research questions and their answers. True, there are academic disciplines where utility is rewarded; public administration and policy analysis are examples of this pattern. Overall, however, employment and promotion will, for the foreseeable future, be based on traditional criteria such as teaching and research merits. Interestingly, politicians could change those criteria if there was a true interest in promoting usable research but have so far not taken very many steps in that direction.

Turning now to the flipside question, we ask whether the political process could be changed in order to allow for more input from political science? Meg Russell's idea of a new political charter would certainly be a step in that direction. But would politicians be willing to sign such a charter and, more importantly, act on its suggestions ? We need perhaps to recognize, as Weiss (1979) pointed out some three decades ago, that

research utilization in politics is likely to take a variety of forms. Only rarely will the conditions emerge for a pure problem-solving model: a clear and shared definition of the problem, timely and appropriate research answers, political actors willing to listen and the absence of strong opposing forces. As Weiss notes (1979: 428), 'because chances are small that all these conditions will fall into line around any one issue, the problem-solving model of research use probably describes a relatively small number of cases'. However research can engage in others ways: through more of an interactive exchange between academics and political actors and through a process that Weiss refers to as enlightenment, the capacity for research to highlight and explore issues and concerns and in particular for the concepts and theories of a body of work to enter into the assumptions and framing of political problem-solving. Citizens and politicians may not be listening all the time but if we as political scientists develop our contributions in accessible and relevant forms, some political actors, some of the time, will come and engage.

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Index