Preface

> Most of the book presupposes no knowledge of Mathematics beyond simple arithmetic, but at the same time it makes use of a mathematical mode of reasoning and the student who is acquainted with Mathematics will be at a considerable advantage.

These words were written by Duncan Black on the first page of *The Theory of Committees and Elections* (1958). Nearly forty years later, they still apply to books that address the analytical theory of politics. Mathematics is an important language of analysis. Students who know the rules of grammar and syntax in mathematics will find it easier to grasp the work immediately. What of students with little math background? Well, by the end of the book you will have learned some mathematics and some political theory. We hope that you will also be persuaded that the two go together.

Our hope for this book is that the reader will think of theories of politics as a form of analysis. The word "political" derives from the Greek *politicos,* a word that does not translate well into English. In ancient Greece, politics had to do with the participation of citizens in the government of their "polis," or city. The Greek word has to do with both the *process* of decision by government and the *quality* of those decisions. A nuanced reading of Greek thinkers of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. is hard for modern citizens of the West. The reason is that our conceptions of the scope of government and the individual's

place in it are different. Politics in ancient Greece was clearly "about" *the right thing to do for the good of the polis,* conceived organically.

In our world, because of the tradition of Western liberalism, it is often unreflectively asserted that politics is "about" the will of the majority. One often hears that the majority is (or should be) constrained by the constitutional rights of individuals. Otherwise, though, majority will and morality seem synonymous in the popular mind.

We will argue that this is a misreading of democratic theory. Worse, "majority equals morality" is a misleading basis for educating a society. There is nothing intrinsically moral about the "majority will"; it is just what most people think. Further, the majority may be fickle, changing allegiances or following populist demagogues whose goals have more to do with power than leadership.

In a way, most people already suspect that this is so. The word "politics," to the modern ear, has a definition different from its original Greek meaning. Politics connotes venality, scheming, opportunism, and duplicity. We all look for the "right thing to do," but that is the *end,* or objective, of politics. Majority rule is nothing more than a *means* for discovering that end, and it is not perfect.

In this book, we will reflect on what politics is about. The research we examine consciously compares the coherence, stability, and predictability of the outcomes of different political processes. We also consider "the good" in politics generally on ethical, or normative, grounds. In particular, we will ask how different forms of political choice, or institutional manifestations of particular theories about politics, shape the character and performance of human societies.

Let's start with a warning: The news is not always good. Politics is irreducibly rife with opportunities for scheming and strategizing. It is sometimes said that analytical theories of politics, or "public choice," are cynical and ideologically opposed to government. After reading this book, you can see why: Analyzing politics makes one wonder whether it is possible to have any truths, any real principles at all. Complex menus of political choice make it hard to give a definitive answer to the only question we really care about: What should government do? If we cannot *predict* what government will do, how can we possibly *assess* how well it has done?

The answer is that democracy is frustrating, time-consuming, unpredictable, and even absurd. But there is no defensible alternative, so we

had better discover how different forms of democracy work. As John Adams wrote (under the pseudonym Novanglus) in the *Boston Gazette* in 1774: "Metaphysicians and politicians may dispute forever, but they will never find any other moral principle or foundation of rule or obedience, than the consent of governors and governed."

Plan of the book

This book is designed as a classroom text and as a reference for the political science professional who wants to retool. Consequently, most of the material presented is introductory, with exposition oriented more toward examples than formal results or theorems. Nonetheless, to present the basic "spatial" model that we will use to represent political preferences we must use some notation that will appear forbidding to those without much practice in what Black called "simple arithmetic." To make the book useful for several different audiences, we have used an almost purely verbal and graphical presentation of the spatial model, with the more difficult technical material gathered in Chapter 4. Readers interested in learning only the intuition behind the theories we discuss should skip Chapter 4, as there is no new material covered in that chapter. Students who expect to pursue analytical politics in future courses should study Chapter 4 carefully, because the notation introduced there will be necessary for future course work to make any sense.

Chapter 1 presents the main issues in analytical political theory and introduces some examples we will use often in the rest of the text. Chapter 2 outlines the simplest version of spatial theory in politics, if there is only one issue or policy to be decided. Chapter 3 extends this simple model to the more complex (but important) situation where there are multiple issues. Chapter 4 reprises many results from Chapter 3, using matrix notation and a more rigorous statement of the results.

Chapter 5 is an overview of the problems of collective decisions and the paradoxes of social choice, as well as a brief introduction to several voting rules. Chapter 6 extends the basic model to account for policy preferences by elected officials and the uncertainty of voters. Chapter 7 considers the voting decision as a collective action problem. Chapter 8 considers "strategic" voting and the manipulation of outcomes by vote choice, as well as the more technical issues of nonseparability and

"probabilistic voting." Chapter 9 departs from the assumptions of most of the rest of the book, because it considers "mass" elections, instead of committee voting. Two models quite different from classical spatial theory, "directional" theory and the theory of "ideology," are presented and discussed.

Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed to the thinking represented by the arguments made here. The truth is that few of the ideas or theories we review are original to this book. Many of the substantive ideas about representing political choices are adapted or reworked versions of work by Hinich with previous coauthors. Two of the foremost of these are Otto Davis and James Enelow. Both gentlemen deserve great credit.

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