BJS

Neither real nor fictitious but 'as if real'? A political ontology of the state

Colin Hay

Abstract

The state is one of series of concepts (capitalism, patriarchy and class being others) which pose a particular kind of ontological difficulty and provoke a particular kind of ontological controversy – for it is far from self-evident that the object or entity to which they refer is in any obvious sense 'real'. In this paper I make the case for developing a distinct political ontology of the state which builds from such a reflection. In the process, I argue that the state is neither real nor fictitious, but 'as if real' – a conceptual abstraction whose value is best seen as an open analytical question. Thus understood, the state possesses no agency per se though it serves to define and construct a series of contexts within which political agency is both authorized (in the name of the state) and enacted (by those thereby authorized). The state is thus revealed as a dynamic institutional complex whose unity is at best partial, the constantly evolving outcome of unifying tendencies and dis-unifying counter-tendencies.

Keywords: State; political ontology; realism; 'as if realism'

No concept is more central to political discourse and political sociology than that of the state.[1] Yet the concept remains elusive and, for some at least, illusory; the term being notoriously difficult to define and with many questioning whether the concept offers social scientists any analytical purchase whatsoever. For those both happy to use the term and keen to reflect on its enduring significance, the state is typically seen as the single greatest influence on the course of social and political change and yet at the same time the core guarantor of social, political and indeed economic stability (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007; Rosanvallon 1981, 1998; Zürn and Leibfried 2005: 4). But despite this centrality, entire traditions of political analysis remain unconvinced that the state, in any meaningful sense, can be said to exist. The concept, they suggest, is a purely analytical abstraction and one which offers little if any theoretical purchase. It is difficult to think of another concept seemingly so central to political sociology and to the discourse of politics itself whose very status is so fundamentally contested.

Hay (Centre d'etudes européennes, Sciences Po) (Corresponding author email: colin.hay@sciencespo.fr)

The argument of this paper is that the reasons for this, though rarely acknowledged in such terms, are in fact largely *ontological* in character. The state is one of a series of concepts (capitalism, patriarchy and class being others) which pose a particular kind of ontological difficulty and provoke a particular kind of ontological controversy – for it is far from self-evident that the object or entity to which they refer is in any obvious sense 'real'. Consequently, by reflecting on the ontology of the state we might hope better to appreciate the issues involved in resolving such disputes (and the inherent contestability of any such 'resolution'). In the process of offering such a reflection I seek to differentiate between three core sets of ontological issues: (i) the existence of the state and the status of the concept itself; (ii) the character and content of state agency; and (iii) the paradoxical unity of the state itself. I suggest that the state is perhaps best seen as neither real nor fictitious, but 'as if real' – a conceptual abstraction, yet one to we which might still accord a very significant generative and causal power. I explore the ontological distinctiveness of such a position, showing how it differs from the philosophical realism which informs so much state theory before exploring its implications for the ontology of the state more specifically. In the process I show how conceiving of the state as 'as if real' might allow us to resolve, or at least negotiate a clearer path through, the classic 'problem of studying the state' identified by Philip Abrams (1988). Understood in such terms, the state has no agency per se though it can be seen to define and construct a series of contexts within which political agency is both authorized (in the name of the state) and enacted (by those thereby authorized). A correlate of this is that the state lacks a substantive unity and is perhaps best seen as a dynamic institutional complex whose unity is at best partial, the product of tendencies to which there are counter-tendencies, and as arising from attempts to impose what might be termed 'state projects' (Jessop 1990).

In the process I offer, in effect, an exploration of the heuristic of assuming the state to be neither real nor fictitious but 'as if real'. This proceeds in three parts. In the first of these I reflect on the ontological status of the concept and category of the state, setting this in the context of a wider 'as if realist' social and political ontology and establishing its distinctiveness in relation to the ostensibly competing philosophical realist and constructivist alternatives. In the second, I explore the implications for the paradoxical agency and unity of the state respectively and for our understanding of the relationship between the state, the idea of the state and the practices to which it gives rise. A brief conclusion reappraises the argument and assesses the wider appeal and significance of an 'as if realist' ontology.

Ontology, political ontology and the political ontology of the state

Since the seventeenth century, when the term was first widely deployed, the concept of the state has been heavily contested (Rosanvallon 1993; Viroli

1992). It remains so today. Much of the reason for this, as I hope to show in what follows, is ontological. Yet my aim is not so much to ontologize the state as to recognize and to *re-label as ontological* core issues within the political sociology of the state – specifically those concerned with the relationship between the concept of the state and its subject, object or referent. My principal concerns, then, are with the question of the state's existence, the character of any such existence, the effects its real or fictitious status might be seen to generate and hence whether it might be seen to occupy a place within any such broader social/political ontology. It is, logically, to the question of the state's very existence that we turn first.

But before so doing it is perhaps important to clear up a potential ambiguity in referring to the (potentially) 'fictitious' character of the concept of the state. For the state, or any other conceptual abstraction, might be held to be fictitious in at least three rather different respects. The state might be regarded as fictitious in so far as: (i) the concept appeals to a referent that does not exist (the fiction here being the pretence of the state's existence); (ii) the concept attributes to its referent or referents characteristics and traits (such as singularity, unity or agency) that it or they do not possess (the fiction here being the *distortion* of the character of really existing things necessarily implied by the concept); or (iii) those deploying the concept do so as a simplifying convenience of a more complex reality (the fiction here again taking the form of a distortion, albeit one which we might be prepared to tolerate under certain conditions). In what follows, when I refer to the state as 'fictitious', I refer only to the first two senses identified above; the third sense I discuss separately (as 'sceptical as-if-realism').

The (ontological) status of the state

What is the state and does it exist? There are, of course, no more fundamental questions in the theory of the state than these; yet neither is easily answered. Ostensibly the former is a semantic question, the latter more obviously ontological. Yet, as is so often the case, semantics and ontology are inextricably interwoven. It is not difficult to see why. For whether the state can be said to exist or not is almost bound to be dependent to some extent on how the state is defined. Yet we need to proceed with some caution even here. It is certainly quite possible to define the state, even in fairly conventional terms, in such a way that it clearly does *not* exist. A clumsy Weberian might, for instance, define the state as that body within society with a (complete) monopoly over the use of violence within the terrain over which it claims jurisdiction (cf. Weber 1978[1921]: 54). The point is that it is not terribly difficult to show that no such entity exists since there is, and never has been, a single body in any society capable of rationing out violence in such an absolute manner – violence, in

other words, is not something over which it is possible to exert such a monopoly. But this does not help us much. For whilst, as this suggests, we can perhaps define the state such that no entity satisfies our definitional standard, it is practically impossible to define the state, certainly in any conventional way, such that the state self-evidently *does* exist.

Why is this so? Because, in short, the state is an *abstraction* – a conceptual or theoretical construct (Abrams 1988; Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009: 1; Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 1; Edelman 1964: 1; Hay and Lister 2006: 4; Miliband 1969: 40; Poulantzas 1968: 12). Its existence is not obvious nor evident, it has no physical or material presence, it is not visible, it is not directly accessible to any of the senses. Thus, in so far as it might be held to exist (to those for whom its existence is credible) its presence has to be inferred, deduced or derived from an interpretation, an analysis in effect, of more tangible and more immediately accessible and observable things. In and of itself this does not make the state fictitious, just as the positing of the state as real does not make it real. But it suggests precisely why it is that the state, like other composite concepts (class, patriarchy, civil society) is likely to remain ontologically contested.

In that contestation three positions can usefully be discerned and distinguished – the first two rather obvious, the third perhaps less so but potentially the most valuable.

First, there are those who reject the existence of the state out of hand precisely on the basis that it *is* an abstraction. From this perspective, that the state is a conceptual abstraction *precludes* it from having any real or genuine existence. This position is associated most closely with behaviouralism and logical empiricism (Brady, Collier and Box-Steffensmeier 2009; Dahl 1961a; Eulau 1953; Hempel 1952). These approaches in fact go one step further – dismissing the state as an explanatory factor or causal variable on the basis that it is an (unnecessary) abstraction which relates to an entity that has no substantive existence; it is fictitious in the first sense identified above (it is a signifier without a referent). But it is by no means necessary to dismiss the potential explanatory significance of the state simply by pointing to its irrealism. It is, in other words, certainly possible to see the state as a conceptual or theoretical abstraction that lacks a direct real world referent whilst still according it an explanatory power or analytical purchase (as a theoretical construct). We return to such a position presently.

The second perspective is almost a mirror image of the first. Here the state *is* real. Rather like gravity, it is an abstraction and is both intangible and inaccessible directly to the senses does not make it illusory or fictitious – though it does suggest that it belongs to a rather different order of phenomena (the 'real' rather than the 'actual'). The state, in effect, belongs to a stratified reality, lying somewhere beneath the surface (a surface comprised of 'actual' phenomena such as individual decisions of government ministers, cabinet committees and the like or the blows inflicted by 'agents of the state' acting in the

name of the state on the bodies of protestors). The position is a form of philosophical realism which, by way of a qualified naturalism, typically seeks to infer how reality must in fact be structured in order that it presents itself to us in the form in which it does (Bhaskar 1979; Sayer 2000, 2010; see also Harré and Bhaskar 2005). An admittedly stylized Marxist example might help to clarify the point. From such a perspective, in order for capitalist social and economic relations to persist over time some (probably quite significant) degree of institutional coordination of political decision-making in different policy realms is required.[2] That coordination (and the coordinating body, the state, which provides it) may not be directly visible to us – indeed, it might not be possible in principle to render it visible – but it is no less real for all that. In other words that the state exists (and is real) is itself an almost logical correlate of the (exhibited) persistence of capitalist social relations over time. The state, in such a view, is real precisely because it can be held to exhibit causal powers (Bhaskar in Harré and Bhaskar 2005: 22; see also Elder-Vass 2010a).

It might seem that these two positions logically exhaust the possibilities for an ontology of the state – either the state (which in both accounts is acknowledged to be an abstraction) exists or it does not exist. Yet there is an intriguing third possibility. On the face of it, this looks like a modified version of the philosophical realist stance – though such initial similarities may be deceptive. Here the state, like other conceptual/analytical abstractions such as patriarchy, is neither real not fictitious but 'as if real' (compare Hay 2005 and McAnulla 2005). At first sight this might appear almost indulgently cryptic. But the basic point is in fact a disarmingly simple one. If accepted, as I hope to show, it serves decisively to recast the terms of the debate. For it suggests, quite simply, that we have been asking the wrong question. The issue, so the argument goes, is not the existential status of the state which, as an ontological matter, is likely to prove insoluble anyway, but the *analytical utility* of the concept. If our analytical purchase on social, political and cultural dynamics can demonstrably or even just credibly be augmented by referring to the state *as if* it were real, then that is sufficient justification for so doing – we do not first have to convince ourselves that the state *is* real in order to continue to appeal to the concept. Put slightly differently, the relevant issue here is not the existence or non-existence of the state but the extent to which it is useful to refer to such a construct.[3]

This might be seen as a displacement rather than a resolution of the ontological issue of the state's existence – and in a sense it is (though we return to the attempt to resolve the ontological dilemma of the state's existence below). But it is typically linked to a rather more directly ontological point, concerning the question of structure and agency. In a way this makes the 'as if realist' position closer to the first position discussed. For philosophical realists (as distinct, say, from their namesakes in international relations theory), to appeal to the state is to appeal to a structural concept – indeed, to an underlying structural level of reality (comprised of a series of structural entities like the

state) which underpins the surface level of appearance (comprised of things that are 'actual'). This is the stratified ontology 'as if realists' typically object to on ontological grounds. For it implies the ontological and not just analytical separability of structure and agency – that structures, like the state and patriarchy, can be said in effect to have a real existence independently of the actors who breathe life into them. This, for 'as if realists', is a conceptual error since it mistakes the purely analytical distinction between structure and agency for an ontological one (the position is very close to that set out by Rom Harré (Harré and Bhaskar 2005: esp. 24–6)). Structure and agency, they might suggest, are not separate and distinct dimensions of social and political existence, but analytical constructs we use to help us interrogate really existing social and political practices. Such practices (the real world stuff of social and political life) are simultaneously both agential and structural. The distinction, in other words, is an artificial one – though potentially a very valuable one in so far as it might help us achieve a greater analytical purchase on the real world phenomena we seek to comprehend (a conceptual move which lies at the heart of the strategic–relational approach – see Hay 2005; Jessop 2008: 40–1, 48–9; cf. Bates 2006).

What this implies is that if the state is indeed to be deemed a real entity it cannot simply be a structural concept (as in philosophical realism). But the perhaps more important point is that whether it is deemed to be real or not is not the issue – if it can be shown to be useful analytically then we should proceed as if it were real and make reference to it as such; if it cannot then the question of its existence need not trouble us further.

If accepted this has important implications – not least that the task of state theorists is not so much to demonstrate or defend the existence of the state, but rather to demonstrate and defend the value and insight to be gained from the use of the concept of the state as an analytical abstraction. In so doing it is crucial that they respond to two of the core potential objections to the use of the term – the problematic character of state agency and the fiction of the state's internal unity and coherence. It is to these questions that we must turn. But before so doing it is first important to delve in some detail into what, more precisely, the 'as if realist' position might entail, how it might be compared to other social and political ontologies and what its implications might be for the analysis of the state more specifically.

'As if realism' and the 'as if real' character of the state

To suggest, as in the preceding section, that we should be interested less in the ontological status of the state (the question of its very existence) and rather more with its practical utility as an analytical category might well be seen as an evasion. And it will not quite do, particularly if we are to accord to the state a

certain causal influence. It might be argued that we have a responsibility, as social and political analysts, to be clear about the ontological status of the analytic categories to which we make reference – not least when that reference is of an explanatory kind.

So what, then, does it mean to suggest that the state is 'as if real' and what are the implications of such a formulation? The first thing perhaps to note here is that there are a variety of different senses in which we might appeal the state as 'as if real'. In further clarifying the argument that I am making it is necessary to differentiate between them. A first step is to recognize that there is in fact an established literature which points, at least in one sense, to the 'as if real' character of the state – notably Philip Abrams' discussion of the 'idea of the state' as an agent in the generation of political effects (1988: 68). That literature is, typically, philosophically constructivist (though it is by no means confined to those prepared to declare themselves to be of a constructivist ontological persuasion). It points, invariably, to the 'state effects' (for want of a better term) which follow from actors behaving 'as if' the state were real – by, for instance, orienting their behaviour towards it. This process can take one of two forms. In the first of these, actors 'external' to the state (those who do not regard themselves as authorized politically by the state) orient their conduct towards the state by, for instance, organizing themselves as a pressure group and taking their grievance 'to the state' (by lobbying, perhaps, agencies and organizations they see as 'internal' to the state from which they seek concessions). Their behaviour and the specific orientation of that behaviour to 'the state' (as distinct from some other object, institution or entity) has effects – and it has such effects independently of the existence of the thing (the state) to which the behaviour is oriented.[4]

A second source of such state effects is when those who identify themselves as state actors (and who see themselves as authorized to act on the basis of a legitimacy they draw from the state) act in accordance with that belief – perhaps in responding to the lobbying of organized interests 'outside' the state. Once again the state itself need not exist as such for state effects to be generated in this way.[5] Behaving 'as if' the state existed is sufficient. This type of 'as if realism' and the state effects to which it might be seen to give rise are now widely recognized in a diverse body of literature (see, for instance, Abrams 1988; Bartelson 1995, 1998; Jessop 1990, 2005; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Martin 2002).[6]

But, important though the demonstration of such state effects is (and has become to contemporary state theory), this is not the principle sense in which I refer here to the state as 'as if real'. For the state might also be seen as 'as if real' in a rather different – and potentially more contentious – way. Here, it is not the ideas and beliefs of political subjects that we are interested in, but the ideas, beliefs and, indeed, the ontological assumptions of ourselves as social and political analysts. When we, as analysts of social and political systems,

appeal to the state, I suggest, we are – or might be seen – to be positing it in an 'as if real' sense.

But even here there is a certain ambiguity and one that needs to be resolved. For there are at least three rather different types of analytical move (potentially associated with rather different ontological commitments) that we might be making in declaring the state 'as if real'. These might be termed, respectively, agnostic realism, sceptical as-if-realism and ontological as-if-realism. Consider each in turn.

For *agnostic realists*, the state is 'as if real' in the sense that, although it is credible to think that it might exist, there is and can be no definite evidence that it does exist. Like patriarchy and the class structure, the state in such a view is never directly accessible to us. What can definitely be said to exist are social and political practices – instances of domestic violence for example. In order to see these as connected, with a view perhaps to addressing their prevalence collectively (and hence politically), we need to make appeal to a structural conceptual abstraction (in this instance, patriarchy) in and through which they are linked. But patriarchy itself (and, by extension other conceptual abstractions like the state) are at best only ever accessible to us through their effects (in specific instantiations of patriarchy or patriarchal state power). And such specific social and political practices could and can be accounted for differently – in terms of the appeal to different conceptual abstractions (they are, in that sense, over-determined). The implication of this is that if we are to make reference to such conceptual abstractions (thereby linking otherwise disparate social practices) we can only do so by positing them 'as if' they were real. We can never know that they are in fact real and this knowledge might incline us towards a certain conceptual modesty – leading us to refer to them as 'as if real' rather than real in the absence of any possibility of knowing that they are real. Such an agnostic realism would see the state as 'as if *but possibly real*'. This is in fact quite close to the position defended by Rom Harré in his debate on the causal efficacy of social structures with Roy Bhaskar (Harré in Harré and Bhaskar 2005).

The second, *sceptical as-if-realist* position is, in effect, merely a subtle inflection of the first in that it proceeds by way of a very similar logic – albeit to a somewhat different conclusion. The state, in such a view, can only ever be a conceptual abstraction. It is an analytical device (again, like patriarchy or the class structure) that might help us better to see the linkages between otherwise discrete and disparate social practices (which, for analytic or political reasons we might benefit from seeing as connected). That it is, or might be, useful in this way does not make it real; nor, conversely, does denying it reality make it less (analytically or politically) significant. Such a view treats the state as 'as if *but not* real'.

A final perspective, in many respects the most alluring, treats the state (and other similar conceptual abstractions) as neither real nor fictitious, but as

belonging to an entirely separate ontological category – the 'as if real'. This stance one might label a genuine (and genuinely ontological) 'as-if-realism' in that it ascribes a distinct ontological status to the category of things (properly) referred to as 'as if real'. The state, in such a view, is one such thing. Such referents are complex in that they cannot be discerned directly but are only rendered visible to us as analysts through their effects. They are, as in the other formulations, conceptual abstractions, but they are profoundly ontologically significant in that they are at least partially generative of the practices and processes which we can directly observe. This perspective sees the state as 'as if real *but neither real nor purely fictitious*'. The '*purely* fictitious' qualification here is in fact very important. For all conceptual abstractions of this kind (the state, patriarchy, the class structure and so forth) are at least partially fictitious in that the category they posit draws attention to certain dimensions of social and political reality at the expense of others. They are, in other words, conceptual abstractions facilitating analytical parsimony; and such analytical parsimony always comes at a price. Thus, the positing of patriarchy as 'as if real' draws attention to what are arguably the defining features of all instances of domestic violence. But it does so by diverting attention at the same time from other features of each such instance which could be (or become) the subject of an alternative analysis. This brings us to a crucial difference between 'as if realism' (in fact in all three of its variants) and the realism which typically informs (critical) theories of the state (and patriarchy and the class structure). For 'as if realists' can be very clear about the (inevitable) distortions engendered by positing structures like the state, the class structure and patriarchy; they do not need to make the pretence that such abstractions are ever capable of capturing the full complexity of social and political processes and practices (the real). In positing the state as 'as if real' they acknowledge the partially fictitious character of the abstraction they construct, taking responsibility for the necessarily distorting depiction of the realities (the real processes and practices) it purports, in a suitably stylized manner, to capture and describe. That, I believe, is a very good reason for commending 'as if realism' over philosophical realism as an ontological basis for state theory.

As this hopefully serves to make clear, I think that all three variants of the 'as if realist' position set out above are preferable, at least normatively, to the realist alternative (as defended by Bhaskar in Harre and Bhaskar 2005). Crucially, all agree that the positing of the state as 'as if real' is in no way a relegation of its analytic status or import. That it may not exist (position 1), does not exist (position 2) or exists (only) as 'as if real' (position 3) does not make it less significant; in fact it merely clarifies its analytical role and its explanatory import.

But this is perhaps not the only advantage of the 'as if realist' position that I have sought to set out. For it can, I contend, resolve without abandoning the concept of the state, the central difficulty of studying the state identified by

Philip Abrams in the late 1970s (in a classic essay published only posthumously in 1988).

Abrams' beautifully, if trenchantly, stated argument is that the very concept of the state (as a distinct and unified entity with a common identity) is not only an abstraction (often a political abstraction) but also, crucially, a *distorting* abstraction which prevents us from seeing more clearly the almost inevitable disparity between the idealized representation of the state in such terms and the practices authorized in the name of the state. In the process, as we have already seen, he differentiates between the distorting and reifying concept of the state (which he rejects and would have us reject), the grubby complexity of the state system (our shared object of analysis) and the idea of the state in and through which political subjects typically orient their behaviour to generate what I have termed 'state effects' (a process he would have us acknowledge). But his central conviction is that it is the concept of the state which prevents us from seeing the state system as really it is. As he suggests,

> the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents us from seeing political practice as it is. (1988: 82).

His solution to this problem is simple – to dispense with the concept of the state altogether so that we might better see the disparity between the idea of the state to which it gives rise and the practices in and through which the claim to power which that idea authorizes makes manifest. As he puts it,

> the state is, in sum, a bid to elicit support for or tolerance of the insupportable and intolerable by presenting them as something other than themselves. (1988: 76).

But there is another way, one that is opened up as a possibility by acknowledging the state to be 'as if real'. For if we concede that the state is only ever a conceptual abstraction, a means to the end of seeing state practices (the practices authorized in the name of the state) as linked and connected, and a distorting abstraction at that (one which draws attention to certain features of state practices at the expense of others), then there is no danger that our use of the concept of the state commits us to perpetrating the mystification that Abrams sees as inherent in the appeal to the concept of the state. Indeed, as soon as we accept the 'as if real' character of the state we are on the way to the demystification of the (problematic) idea of the state that Abrams finds so troubling. For, in Abrams' terms, it is the pretence that the state is real that perpetrates the mystification we need to resist. To see why accepting the 'as if real' character of the state might help contribute to the demystification of the state idea that Abrams calls for, we need only explore the implications of the preceding analysis for our understanding of the paradoxical agency and unity of the state respectively. It is to this task that I now turn.

The problem of state agency

Political ontology is dominated by the structure–agency debate (see, for instance, Bates 2006; Cerny 1990; Hay 2002, 2009; McAnulla 2005). It is perhaps hardly surprising then that the ontology of the state has generated its own variant of the structure–agency problem (Smith 2009). This is concerned principally with the seemingly paradoxical place of the state in existing state theory as both agent and structure. As we have already seen, in many (philosophically) realist treatments of the state (in Marxism perhaps most obviously, but also in much neo-statist and neo-institutionalist writing), the state is a largely structural term. In such a conception, the state is depicted, in essence, as a site or locus of power investing those with access to the resources it provides with a range of capacities which they would otherwise not possess. This is a conception which arguably has considerable promise and avoids many of the pitfalls into which much state theory falls. It is a conception to which we will return presently. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is by no means the typical conception of the state, either within state theory or social and political science more generally.

For, really from its first inception, the concept of the state has more typically been used to refer to agency than structure – as in phrases like 'the state taxes its citizens', 'the state wages war' and 'the state demands the presentation of a passport at its border'. Such a conception is almost certainly a fiction and it is most definitely a personification and an objectification. As Andrew Vincent puts it, 'when we speak of the state performing actions we personify it, we attribute to it a status equivalent to a unique personality – an agent or subject which acts' (1987: 8). It is difficult not to see this as a simplification, perhaps even a crass simplification, and a distorting simplification at that – yet it has become almost part of the logical grammar of the concept.

To see why this is so, it is perhaps instructive to return to the etymology of the term itself. The concept of the state is derived from the Latin *status*, meaning literally social status, stature or standing, specifically of an individual within a community. By the fourteenth century the use of the term to refer to the standing or status (indeed to the 'stateliness') of rulers, distinguishing and setting them apart from those subject to their rule, was commonplace. The idea that the state resides in the body of the ruler, indeed that the state and the 'sovereign' are synonymous, makes this a characteristically pre-modern formulation (Marin 1988; Shennan 1974; Skinner 1989). As this suggests, at this point the state was indeed an agential term, referring to the distinctive traits and characteristics of the sovereign.

The development of a distinctively modern conception of the state would take a further three centuries. A first step was taken by the authors of the so-called 'mirror-for-princes' writings, most famously Machiavelli (1988) in his *Il Principe* (*The Prince*). In this literature, the state (*lo stato*) now became

synonymous not only with the prince himself, but with the character of the political regime, the geographical area over which sovereign authority was claimed and maintained, and the very institutions of government required to preserve such authority (1988). Here, in effect, the distinction between the state as structure and the state as agent became blurred for the first time.

A second development came with the republican political theory of the Renaissance (see Skinner 1978; Viroli 1992). This movement championed the cause of a self-governing republican regime that might inaugurate a 'state' or condition of civic liberty. The state was here presented as claiming and enjoy-ing a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, and as deriving the author-ity for this claim not from the power or stature of its ruler(s), but from the people themselves. The state is referred to for the first time as a distinct apparatus of government and hence as a structure which rulers have a duty to maintain and which will outlast their rule, as opposed to an extension of the latter's innate authority or, indeed, agency.

The final step came with the rise of the absolutist state in Europe in the seventeenth century. Here, in particular in the writings of Bodin (1576) and Hobbes (1651), the state is eventually conceptualized as truly separate from the powers of both the ruler and the ruled. Three aspects of this formulation set it apart as a distinctively modern conception of the state: (i) individuals within society are presented as subjects of the state, owing duties and their allegiance not to the person of a ruler but to the state itself (as an institution or structure); (ii) the authority of the state is singular and absolute; and (iii) the state is regarded as the highest form of authority in all matters of civil gov-ernment (Skinner 1989: 90). The state now comes to be seen as a distinct form of authority independent of those who give effect to its power – as structure rather than as agency.

Yet this in no sense marks the end of a state theoretical tradition which casts the state as agent. Twentieth century state theory is dominated by such a conception. Until at least the 1980s, the political sociology of the state has been concerned centrally with characterizing the state in terms of its agency (or at least in terms of the outcomes to which its agency might be seen to give rise). Postwar US political science in particular has been a battleground between competing *input* theories of the state (pluralism, elite theory, instrumentalist Marxism, even at the margins, instrumentalist feminism). Such approaches typically paid little or no attention to the state itself (as a distinct institutional form, configuration or complex providing differential access to a range of capacities and resources). Instead they treated the state as something of a black box – an instrument if not of unlimited powers then certainly of very considerable powers that might be 'captured' by particular interests who might use it to their own specific ends and purposes (see also Smith 2003, 2009).

In a way these various theories of the state might be seen to have used the concept of state agency heuristically – with pluralists, elite theorists and the

like effectively asking themselves whether the outcomes of state decision-making processes were consistent with the idea of a singular state agency. In so far as they convinced themselves that this was indeed the case, they attributed this to the capture of the state by sectional interests and not, of course, to the workings of any more hard-wired or institutional of logics (such as the structural dependence of the state on capital accumulation). And, of course, they reached very different conclusions (compare Dahl 1961b, 1977 with Domhoff 1987, 1990; Miliband 1969; Mills 1956; and Lukes 1974).

But arguably it is not what these perspectives dispute but what these literatures share that makes them so problematic as theories of the state. Two aspects of this are particularly worthy of attention.

First, as already noted, to attribute any systematicity in the biases discerned in state power solely and exclusivity to the inputs into the political process, such that any pattern exhibited in the distributional asymmetries arising from state policy is seen as a product of 'state capture', is naïve in the extreme. And it is also the most thorough disavowal of the concept of the state itself. For the state is reduced to something fought over, but with absolutely no bearing whatsoever either on the outcome of the contest nor on the uses to which state power might be put. The state, in such a conception, becomes an empty vessel about which we need to know precisely nothing in order to comprehend fully the generation of political outcomes.

Second, and arguably more significantly, the entire debate is couched exclusively in terms of an interest-based and entirely instrumental conception of political behaviour. Political actors – *all* political actors – it seems are motivated solely by the promotion of the sectional interests they are assumed to serve. This, it need hardly be pointed out, is a profoundly limited, bleak and depressing view of human behaviour – and it eliminates at a stroke the very possibility of the state acting more nobly in pursuit of the collective public good (Flinders 2012; Hay 2007a; Stoker 2006). The best that can perhaps be hoped for, as in pluralism, is that the careful choice of democratic rules and institutional checks and balances might serve to minimize the chances of systematic capture of the state by a particular (and hence dominant) interest and that a diversity of interests capturing different aspects of government might, in effect, cancel one another out. But the point is that the projection of such a narrowly instrumental set of behavioural/motivational assumptions onto potential candidates for office essentially ensures that we should seek to make do with as little state as possible.

There is, of course, a serious irony here. For, both in the republican tradition inaugurated by Machiavelli and, indeed, in Hobbes, the very rationale for the existence of the state is couched precisely in terms of its capacity to provide collective public goods. Indeed, in Hobbes the irony is all the more acute since he derives the very need for the *Leviathan* in the first place from the inherently undesirability of the 'nasty, brutish and short' life we are all destined to suffer

if the state of nature is allowed to persist unchecked.[7] It need hardly be pointed out that the presumption that the state of nature persists is the starting point for instrumentalism's (normative) anti-statism.

As this implies, there is another whole tradition of writing on the state – whose lineage can arguably be traced all the way from Machiavelli and Hobbes to much contemporary institutionalism. This, despite Hobbes's derivation of the need for the state in the first place from the state of nature, is resolutely more open-ended in its account of human agency and it affords a much greater role to the state itself in shaping societal outcomes (for good or ill). It tends to see the state less as a single agency in itself so much as a set of institutional sites or contexts within which political agency is both authorized (in the name of the state) and enacted/institutionalized by those thereby authorized.

Two elements, in particular, of the potential analytical utility offered by the concept of the state in this conception might usefully be identified and differentiated. Both are concerned with the ability to contextualize political behaviour: the first relates to the structural and/or institutional contextualization of political actors, the second to the historical contextualization of political behaviour and dynamics. I consider each in turn.

The state as institutional contextualization

Within this broadly institutionalist conception, the state is seen to provide a context within which political actors are embedded and with respect to which they might usefully be situated analytically. The state, in such a conception, provides (a significant part of) the institutional landscape which political actors must negotiate (see also Duran and Thoenig 1996: esp. 610). This landscape is, in Bob Jessop's terms, 'strategically selective' – in that it is more conducive to certain strategies, and by extension, to the realization of certain goals and preferences, than others (1990: 9–10; see also Hay 2002: 127–31). It provides the unevenly contoured backdrop to political conflict, contestation and change – a strategic terrain with respect to which actors must successfully orient themselves if they are to realize their intentions (whether instrumental or normative).

As this perhaps serves to suggest, within such a framework (a framework elsewhere referred to as the strategic–relational approach – see Hay 2002; Jessop 2008) the appeal to the concept of the state tends to draw the political sociologist's attention to – and to sharpen her purchase on – the opportunities and, more often than not, the *constraints* that political actors face in realizing their intentions. A political sociology informed by such an institutionalist theory of the state is less likely to see political actors in voluntarist terms – as free-willed subjects in almost complete control of their destiny able to shape political realities in the image of their preferences and volitions. For, in

contrast to voluntarism and more agent-centred accounts, institutionalists tend to see the ability of actors to realize their intentions as conditional upon often complex strategic choices made in densely structured institutional contexts which impose their own strategic selectivity (the pattern of opportunities and constraints they present).

Such considerations are important and have the potential to provide a valuable and much-needed corrective to the tendency of an at times behaviouralist-dominated political science mainstream to see actors' preferences alone as the key to explaining political outcomes. State theory of this latter kind reminds us that the access to political power associated with a landslide electoral triumph does not necessarily bring with it the institutional and/or strategic capacity to translate such a mandate into lasting social, political and economic change (see, classically, Pierson 1990). If political will and the access to positions of power and influence were all that were required, wholesale political change would be endemic. That this is not the case suggests the value of institutionally contextualizing abstractions like the state. And these, in turn, encourage a rather more sanguine assessment of 'political opportunity structures' (Tarrow 1998).

Yet such valuable insights do not come without their own dangers. Institutionalist theories of the state have at times been characterized by a tendency to structuralism. Indeed, this would seem to be the pathology to which they are most prone. In at least some of their many variants, Marxism, historical and sociological institutionalism, green theory, feminism and even public choice theory, have all legitimately been accused of structuralism. For each has, at times and in certain forms, appealed to essential and non-negotiable characteristics of the state (its capitalism, its patriarchy, its complicity in the destruction of the natural environment, and so forth) reproduced independently of political actors. Such essentialism is both fatalistic and apolitical; it does nothing to enhance the analyst's purchase on political reality. Indeed, in a sense it denies that there is a *political* reality to be interrogated (on politics as the antithesis of fate, see Gamble 2000; Hay 2007a). Yet whilst structuralism has proved an almost perennial target for critics of state theory, contemporary theories of the state would seem more acutely aware of its dangers than at any point in the past. Indeed, the recent development of state theory can at least in part be read as a retreat from structuralism.

The state as historical contextualization

If the appeal to the concept or abstraction of the state serves to sensitize political analysts to the need to *contextualize political agency and agents institutionally*, then no less significant is its role in sensitizing political analysts to the need to *contextualize the present historically*. The two are intimately connected.

The characteristic concern of the political scientist with government and the holders of high office tends to be associated with an analytical focus on the present. Within this conventional framework, the determinants of political outcomes are invariably seen to lie in factors specific to a particular context at a particular point in time – typically, the motivations and intentions of the actors immediately involved and their access to positions of power and influence. This largely ahistorical approach is immediately problematized by appeal to the concept of the state. For whilst governments come and go, the state, understood as an institutional ensemble, persists as it evolves over time. That evolution is shaped by the intended and unintended consequences of governing strategies and policies. Yet this is a reciprocal relationship. For, at any given point in time, the strategic contexts in which governments find themselves are in turn a reflection of the strategic capacities and competences of the institutions of the state and the constraints and opportunities these impose. To understand the capacity for governmental autonomy is, then, to assess the extent of the institutional, structural and strategic legacy inherited from the past. It is, in short, to understand the dynamic relationship between state and governmental power over time.

An example may serve to reinforce the point. If the institutions of the British state in 2010 (when Britain's first Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government was elected) looked different from those in 1997 (when the first New Labour administration of Tony Blair took office), then this is likely to have exerted a significant influence on the autonomy of the incoming coalition administration. Yet, as this example perhaps already serves to indicate, there is a certain danger of structuralism here too. The newly incumbent administration certainly had to grapple with the institutional, political and above all economic legacy of its inheritance in 2010. Yet, in our desire to contextualize historically we may come to overemphasize the burden the past places on the present (this, in a sense, is part of the bias engendered by the appeal to the conceptual abstraction of the state). In so doing we may inadvertently absolve contemporary political actors of all responsibility for the consequences of their conduct – attributing, say, the absence of a credible growth strategy to the legacy of New Labour and the global financial crisis when it might more plausibly be attributed to the lack of an animating political and economic conviction shared between the coalition partners. State theory, perhaps especially in its neo-institutionalist form, is possibly rather too predisposed to see continuity, inertia and, at best, incremental evolution over time (Schmidt 2006). States, like governments, change and, under certain conditions, despite their path dependent nature, they may change surprisingly rapidly. It is important, then, that historical contextualization does not lead us to an historically undifferentiated account of the endless reproduction of the status quo ante. As this suggests, whilst the appeal to the concept of the state can certainly heighten our sensitivity to historical dynamics, it need not necessarily do so. An

overly structuralist and overly historicized account may dull rather than sharpen our analytical purchase on questions of change over time (Marsh 2010). Yet, as already noted, contemporary theories of the state are perhaps rather more acutely aware of this danger than their predecessors. Recent developments in the theory of the state are characterized by their emphasis upon the uneven pace of the state's development over time (see for instance Jessop 2006, 2008; Pierson 2004; Thelen 2004).

The paradoxical unity of the state

This brings us to a consideration of a final set of issues present undoubtedly in the previous sections but thus far in a largely unacknowledged form. They relate to the, again paradoxical, *unity* of the state (see also Abrams 1988: 79). The ontological question here is whether the state is a single entity, a question of course very similar to whether it can be seen to exhibit a singular agency. This is another difficult set of issues, but what is again immediately clear is that in most of the lay discourse of politics, the state is both treated as an agent and as a singular entity – as in examples like 'the state raises taxes' considered earlier. But state theorists who have reflected on this issue typically regard such formulations at best to be a convenient and distorting fiction (see for instance, Abrams 1988; Jessop 2006: 112, 123; see also Foucault 1975). The more one thinks about it, the less the state is credibly conceived as a singular entity – certainly as a singular agency. For if the state is perhaps best understood as an authority (or, better still, an authorizing identity) and an associated set of discourses which legitimates and sanctions certain practices and certain forms of behaviour whilst constituting specific institutional contexts in which these might take place (Foucault 2004; Mitchell 1991), then it is almost bound to authorize what will turn out to be different and incompatible things in different contexts. Such practices may well be unified in the sense that they are authorized in the same (or similar) ways and by the same authority (though even that is debatable); but no unity of practice, process or outcome is in any sense guaranteed by this – and it is in fact most unlikely.

There are then at least two rather different dimensions to the problematic and paradoxical unity of the state. The first relates to the question of the boundaries of the state – what is 'in' and what is 'outside' the state. As Max Weber famously notes, there are no activities that states have always performed and (scarcely) any that none have performed (1978[1921]). Similarly, as Philippe Schmitter rather disarmingly puts it, 'the modern state is . . . an amorphous complex of agencies with ill-defined boundaries performing a variety of not very distinctive functions' (1985: 33). The state is, then, an institutional complex; not a single entity but an entity comprised other entities. What these various institutional contexts have in common is that they, and the

social practices to which they give rise, are authorized in the name of the state – but potentially very little else. This almost inevitably generates a series of boundary questions (see also Mitchell 1991). Is the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the ('operationally independent') Bank of England a part of the British state – and does its nominal and/or practical 'operational independence' have any legitimate bearing on the answer to that question? It is, of course, very difficult to be definitive – neither answer seems in principle wrong and it is perhaps even tempting to see the MPC as both 'in' and 'outside' of the state in different respects (it would certainly seem wrong to offer an account of it which did not take some cognisance of the mandate for the conduct of monetary policy set by the state in defining the terms of its independence). But the point is that the MPC is by no means the exception to the rule here – most state agencies and many non-state agencies pose precisely the same kinds of boundary question.

This is already a fairly intractable problem in defining and circumscribing the boundaries of the state. Yet there is arguably a more fundamental problem still. This relates not so much to the boundaries of the state but to the internal coherence and consistency of the policies, practices and processes that occur within this institutional complex. This is likely to remain a problem even if we are able to reach a consensus on what counts as in and outside of the state. For the degree of coordination within the state apparatus (however defined) is almost bound to be insufficient to ensure the kind of coherence and consistency that the notion of a unified state would seem to imply. Different parts of the state do different things in different ways with different degrees of autonomy to yield, in all likelihood, a great variety of contradictory effects. Moreover, any attempt to impose or re-impose some unity or common purpose upon disaggregated state institutions will almost certainly yield differential results – some more coordinating than others (for practical illustrations of which see Hay and Farrall 2011, 2014). But this perhaps suggests a way forward. In so far as the state has a unity it has a dynamic, contested and provisional unity (Hay 1999). State projects – conscious attempts to impose a new coherence and reform trajectory upon the state – may be seen as tendencies reinforcing the unity of the state; just as the development over time of institution-specific practices, habits, conventions and the like might typically be seen as counter-tendencies to the unification of the state. As this suggests, the state is neither singular and unified nor disaggregated and fragmented – it is the constant product of the interaction of tendencies and counter-tendencies pulling in either direction.

Conclusion: towards a political ontology of the state

That in turn suggests a political ontology of the state in three parts. The state is neither real nor fictitious, but a conceptual abstraction whose value is best

seen as an open analytical question; the state possesses no agency per se though it serves to define and construct a series of contexts within which political agency is both authorized (in the name of the state) and enacted/institutionalized; and the state is a dynamic institutional complex whose unity is at best partial and the constantly evolving outcome of unifying tendencies and dis-unifying counter-tendencies. Conceived of in this way, the state may not exist but it is a potentially extremely valuable analytical abstraction. As this suggests, the key to resolving 'the difficulty of studying the state' identified by Philip Abrams in the late 1970s is not the abandonment of the concept of the state to which he points but, instead, the recognition that the state is in fact a conceptual abstraction which belongs – like patriarchy and the class structure – to the realm of the 'as if real' and not to the real.

(Date accepted: January 2014)

Notes

1. I am more than usually indebted to the referees chosen by the *British Journal of Sociology* for a penetrating and yet deeply constructive set of comments on an early iteration of the argument here presented and to Bob Jessop for consistently insightful comments on earlier versions of many of the arguments here developed. I would like to dedicate the published version of this piece, warts and all, to the memory of my former colleague and good friend Steve Buckler.

2. Claus Offe's (1974) account of the state as an 'ideal collective capitalist' is a good example of this kind of reasoning.

3. Before we proceed further, there is one obvious and extremely important objection to such a position that needs to be considered. For it might be argued that to resolve ontological disputes on the basis of practical considerations (such as the analytical purchase or utility of the concepts thereby attained) is to privilege not ontology over epistemology but epistemology over ontology – thereby violating the 'directional dependence' of epistemology on ontology (as defended in some detail in Hay 2007b). I am extremely grateful to one of the referees for suggesting this potential objection to the argument. But what I am suggesting here is not in fact the *resolution* of the

ontological dispute (far less an epistemological resolution) so much as a strategy for dealing with its insoluble character. Ontology, I would contend, remains philosophically prior. The point is that an acknowledgement of our incapacity to test ontological claims empirically and hence to resolve ontological disputes epistemologically (and, indeed, of the inherent contestability of such claims which follows from such a recognition) might well lead us to consider instead, and thereby elevate, more practical considerations. Chief amongst these might be the analytical utility gained by the conceptual move that we are contemplating (here the positing of the state as if it were real). Crucially, this would only become a trumping of ontology by epistemology if, having convinced ourselves of the analytic utility of the concept, we then ceased referring to the state as 'as if real' and started referring to it instead as real. That is not what I am suggesting at all.

4. That said, the nature of such effects will of course depend on which institutions are seen to comprise 'the state', how they are lobbied and how they respond to the lobbying they receive. But the point is that the state as such does not have to exist for the presumption that it does exist (and the

behaviour to which this gives rise) to have effects. These effects are state effects and they arise from the idea of the existence of the state.

5. One could go further and suggest that such 'state effects' do not even require the existence of a shared, conscious and articulated conception of the state. Indeed, they might even be detected in political cultures and traditions (like the Chinese) with no linguistic conception of the state *per se* in so far as conceptions of state-like entities and institutional ensembles (such as government, governance and sovereignty) guide, motivate and inform political behaviour. It

might, of course, be objected that the term 'state effect' is a rather anomalous one to describe such processes in political traditions and cultures with no concept of the state itself. But the point is that such effects are themselves no less significant and no less substantive for that.

6. Similar observations, albeit cast in slightly different terms, characterize the Foucauldian literature – see, especially, Elder-Vass' (2010b) excellent review. See also Foucault (2004); Mitchell (1991).

7. I am greatly indebted to conversations with Charlotte Epstein on this point (see also Epstein 2013).

Bibliography

Abrams, Philip 1988 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the state', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1): 58–89.

Bartelson, Jens 1995 *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bartelson, Jens 1998 'Second Natures: Is the State Identical With Itself?', *European Journal of International Relations* 4(3): 295–326.

Bates, Stephen R. 2006 'Making Time for Change: On Temporal Conceptualizations Within (Critical Realist) Approaches to the Relationship Between Structure and Agency', *Sociology* 40(1): 143–61.

Bhaskar, Roy 1979 *A Realist Theory of Science*, Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Bodin, Jean 1576[1977] *Les six livres de la republique*, Paris: Scientia Verlag.

Brady, Henry E., Collier, David and Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M. 2009 'Overview of Political Methodology: Post-Behavioural Movements and Trends' in Robert E. Goodin (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cerny, Philip G. 1990 *The Changing Architecture of Politics*, London: Sage.

Dahl, Robert 1961a 'The Behavioural Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest', *American Political Science Review* 55: 763–72.

Dahl, Robert 1961b *Who Governs?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dahl, Robert 1977 *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Domhoff, G.W. 1987 *Who Rules America?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Domhoff, G.W. 1990 *The Power Elite and the State*, New York: de Gruyter.

Dryzek, John and Dunleavy, Patrick 2009 *Theories of the Democratic State*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Duran, Patrice and Thoenig, Jean-Claude 1996 'L'état et la gestion publique territoriale', *Revue française de science politique* 46(4): 580–623.

Dunleavy, Patrick and O'Leary, Brendan 1987 *Theories of the State*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Edelman, Murray 1964 *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Elder-Vass, Dave 2010a *The Causal Power of Social Structure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elder-Vass, Dave 2010b 'The Causal Power of Discourse', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 41(2): 143–60.

Epstein, Charlotte 2013 'Theorizing Agency in Hobbes' Wake: The Rational Actor, the

Self or the Speaking Subject?', *International Organization* 67(2): 287–316.

Eulau, H. 1953 *The Behavioural Persuasion in Politics*, New York: Random House.

Flinders, Matthew 2012 *Defending Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, Michel 1975 *Surveiller et punir*, Paris: Editions Gallimard.

Foucault, Michel 2004 *Sécurité, territoire, population: cours au collège de France, 1977–78*, Paris: Seuil/Gallimard.

Gamble, Andrew 2000 *Politics and Fate*, Cambridge: Polity.

Harré, Rom and Bhaskar, Roy 2005 'How to Change Reality: Story vs. Structure', in Garry Potter and Jose Lopez (eds) *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, New York: Continuum.

Hay, Colin 1999 'Crisis and the Structural Transformation of the State: Interrogating the Process of Change', *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 1(3): 317–44.

Hay, Colin 2002 *Political Analysis*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Hay, Colin 2005 'Making Hay . . . Or Clutching at Ontological Straws? Notes on Realism, "As-If-Realism" and Actualism', *Politics* 25(1): 39–45.

Hay, Colin 2007a *Why We Hate Politics*, Cambridge: Polity.

Hay, Colin 2007b 'Does Ontology Trump Epistemology? Notes on the Directional Dependence of Ontology and Epistemology in Political Analysis', *Politics* 27(2): 115–18.

Hay, Colin 2009 'Political Ontology' in R.E. Goodin (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hay, Colin and Farrall, Stephen 2011 'Establishing the Ontological Status of Thatcherism by Gauging its Periodisability: Towards a Cascade Theory of Public Policy Radicalism', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13(4): 439–58.

Hay, **Colin and Farrall**, **Stephen (eds)** 2014 *The Legacy of Thatcherism*, Oxford: British Academy/Oxford University Press.

Hay, Colin and Lister, Michael 2006 'Theories of the State' in Colin Hay, Michael Lister and David Marsh (eds) *The State: Theories and Issues*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hempel, Carl G. 1952 *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science*, Chicago, Il. Chicago University Press.

Hobbes, T. 1651[1968] *Leviathan*, edited by C. Macpherson. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Jessop, Bob 1990 *State Theory*, Cambridge: Polity.

Jessop, Bob 2005 'Critical Realism and the Strategic–Relational Approach', *New Formations* 56: 40–53.

Jessop, Bob 2006 'The State and State-Building' in R.A.W. Rhodes, S. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jessop, Bob 2008 *State Power: A Strategic–Relational Approach*, Cambridge: Polity.

Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso.

Lascoumes, Pierre and Le Galès, Patrick 2007 *Sociologie de l'action publique*, Paris: Armand Colin.

Lukes, Stephen 1974 *Power: A Radical View*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan..

Machiavelli, Niccolo 1988 *The Prince*, trans. Q. Skinner and R. Price, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marsh, David 2010 'Stability and Change: The Last Dualism?', *Critical Policy Studies* 4(1): 86–101.

Marin, Louis 1988 *Portrait of the King*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Martin, James 2002 'The Political Logic of Discourse: a Neo-Gramscian View', *History of European Ideas* 28(1/2): 21–31.

McAnulla, Stuart 2005 'Making Hay with Actualism? The Need for A Realist Concept of Structure', *Politics* 25(1): 31–8.

Miliband, Ralph 1969 *The State in Capitalist Society*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Mills, C. Wright 1956 *The Power Elite*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Timothy J. 1991 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics', *American Political Science Review* 85(1): 77–96.

Offe, Claus 1974 'Structural Problems of the Capitalist State' in K. von Beyme (ed.) *German Political Studies*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Pierson, Paul 1990 *Dismantling the Welfare State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pierson, Paul 2004 *Politics in Time*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Poulantzas, Nicos 1968 *Political Power and Social Classes*, London: New Left Books.

Rosanvallon, Pierre 1981 *La crise de l'état-providence*, Paris: Editions Seuil.

Rosanvallon, Pierre 1993 *L'état en France de 1789 a nos jours*, Paris: Points.

Rosanvallon, Pierre 1998 *La nouvelle question sociale: repenser l'état-providence*, Paris: Points.

Sayer, Andrew 2000 *Realism and Social Science*, London: Sage.

Sayer, Andrew 2010 *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. 2nd Edition, New York: Routledge.

Schmidt, Vivien 2006 'Institutionalism' in Colin Hay, Michael Lister and David Marsh (eds) *The State: Theories and Issues*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schmitter, Philippe 1985 'Neo-Corporatism and the State' in Wyn Grant (ed.) *The Political Economy of Corporatism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shennan, J.H. 1974 *The Origins of the Modern European State, 1450–1725*, London: Hutchinson.

Skinner, Quentin 1978 *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume 1: The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Skinner, Quentin 1989 'The State' in T. Ball *et al.* (eds) *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Martin J. 2003 *Pressure, Power and Policy*, London: Prentice-Hall.

Smith, Martin J. 2009 *Power and the State*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stoker, Gerry 2006 *Why Politics Matters*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tarrow, Sidney G. 1998 *Building a Composite Polity: Popular Contention in the European Union*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Thelen, Kathleen 2004 *How Institutions Evolve*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vincent, Andrew 1987 *Theories of the State*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Viroli, Maurizio 1992 *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250–1600*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, Max 1978[1921] *Economy and Society*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Zürn, Michael and Leibfried, Stephan 2005 'A New Perspective on the State: Reconfiguring the National Constellation', *European Review* 13(S1): 1–36.