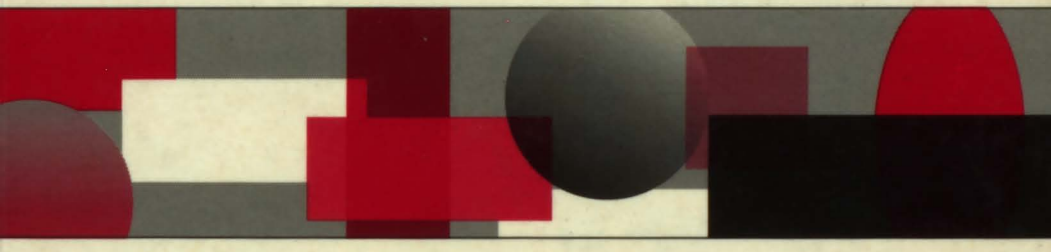
THE CONCEPTS AND THEORIES OF MODERN DEMOCRACY



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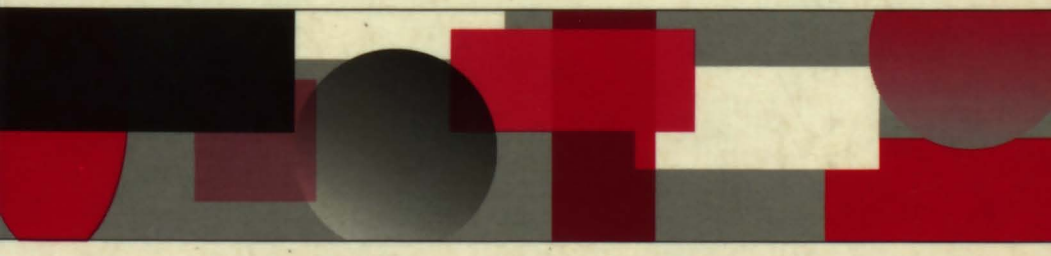

'...AN ADMIRABLY CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIVE INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF POLITICS.'
BRIAN BARRY

ROUTLEDGE

The concepts and theories of modern democracy

The primary purpose of this book is to define and examine the principal concepts that are employed when people write or argue about modern democratic politics, to discuss the implications of using the concepts in this way or that, and to examine the normative theories associated with the concepts. A second purpose is to summarize methods of analysis used by political scientists and to discuss the controversies that have arisen about these methods, with particular reference to the attempts to create a science of politics.

'This book is the fruit of a lifetime's reflection on politics. Birch has unfailingly sensible things to say about the main theoretical issues that the discipline of political science has thrown up in recent decades. The book will form an admirably clear and comprehensive introduction to the study of politics. But those familiar with the field will also profit from Birch's mature thoughts on the controversies that have shaped the subject.'

Professor Brian Barry, Department of Government,
London School of Economics and Political Science

'This is an impressive book . . . it is balanced in judgements, is rooted in careful examination of evidence and texts, and yet never loses sight of the largest issues'

Professor Michael Moran, Department of Government,
University of Manchester

'Professor Birch has written a manual for actual or aspiring democrats. He brings us down from the realms of rhetoric and cliché to the deeper and more difficult conceptual questions and conundrums that any democrat must face.'

Professor Terence Ball, Department of Political Science,
University of Minnesota

Anthony H. Birch's work is intended primarily for undergraduate students of political science. *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy* is the product of more than forty years of teaching experience at universities in the United Kingdom, Australia and North America.

Anthony H. Birch was educated in London and pursued postdoctoral studies at Harvard and the University of Chicago. He has taught political science at the universities of Manchester, Hull and Exeter, at Tufts University in Massachusetts, at the University of Western Australia and at the University of Victoria in Canada. He has published seven previous books, has served a term as Vice-President of the International Political Science Association, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

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The concepts and theories of modern democracy

Anthony H. Birch

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A. H. B.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a book about the concepts and theories that are invoked when people discuss politics and government in modern democracies. It examines a variety of theories, both analytical and evaluative, and approaches them by analysing some basic political concepts because ideas about politics can only be expressed by using concepts.

A concept is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'an idea of a class of objects, a general notion or idea', and by *Webster's Dictionary* as 'an abstract or generic idea generalized from particular instances'. A political concept is an abstract idea about politics and people who discuss political matters use political concepts all the time. They cannot avoid doing so, because, as a British philosopher has said, 'our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts that we have settle for us the forms of the experience we have of the world' (Winch 1958: 15). An American political theorist has said much the same with particular reference to politics, observing that in political life 'our language is not just a neutral medium from some independent reality but instead is partly constitutive of that reality' (Herzog 1991: 141).

The problem for all those who observe, study or participate in politics (and in modern societies that means most people) is that many political concepts are ambiguous, value-laden and subject to more than one meaning or interpretation. The object of this book is to examine some of the basic concepts of modern politics so as to clarify their meaning or meanings, to indicate the implications of using them in one sense rather than another, and to discuss their utility in political analysis.

In the course of doing this various familiar theoretical controversies will be thrown into a new light and examined from a relatively detached viewpoint. These include controversies about the power of the national state, the bases of political authority within the state, the nature of democratic ideals, the relationships between economic and political power, the case for extending popular participation in government, and the nature of minority rights. Because students of politics have varied widely in their

methods of analysis, as well as in the nature of their political values, the final two chapters of the book will discuss the main methods adopted by political scientists and make suggestions about their relative utility.

An example may illustrate the nature of the conceptual problems involved in discussing politics. If it is said that George Bush became President of the United States in 1988, this is a simple historical statement that does not employ any concepts. If it is said that the American President wields extensive executive powers conferred on him by the constitution, this statement employs a concept with a fairly low level of generality, namely 'executive powers'; but it does not involve any ambiguity or uncertainty as the powers in question are set out in a legal document. However, if it is said that the American President enjoys more political power than the Prime Minister of Britain, this statement hinges on a concept with a rather high level of generality, namely 'political power'. There are problems about defining political power and disagreements between political analysts as to how its extent should be assessed or measured. That these problems and disagreements are serious will be clear to anyone who reflects for a moment on a further proposition sometimes advanced, namely that the industrial-military complex in America wields more power than the President.

There are similar problems about the terms commonly used in the classification of political systems. There is fairly general agreement about which systems can be called democratic, now that the people of eastern Europe have made it clear that they were never deceived by the term 'people's democracy'. However, there is endless disagreement about whether democracy should be defined in terms of institutional arrangements or in terms of the ideals which those arrangements are claimed to promote. When it is said that the United States is a pluralist democracy, this raises questions about the exact meaning of the term 'pluralist'. If it is said that Austria or Sweden have corporatist systems of policy making, this raises questions about the definition of 'corporatist'. If it is said that the state in capitalist society is an agent of the capitalist class, this raises problems about definition together with problems about the evidence that might be adduced to establish or refute the proposition.

It is my belief that everyone concerned with the study and analysis of politics needs to give more direct consideration than is normally given to the definition and understanding of the basic concepts involved in this field of study. Many of these concepts are commonly used without definition because they are familiar to us from general usage and we think we know what they mean. But they have ambiguities that need to be cleared up and shades of meaning that need to be distinguished if they are to form the basis of significant generalizations. Conceptual clarity is desirable in all academic disciplines, but students of politics seem to stand in special need of it. To illustrate this point, let us consider, for a moment,

the differences between the study of politics and the study of history, on the one hand, and economics on the other.

Students of history have little need to make a special study of concepts, for the academic discipline developed by historians makes little use of generalizations based on concepts. The concern of historians is to provide a chronological account of the more important events in the country and period they are studying, including an account of the behaviour of the more significant political, military or economic leaders. As Gottschalk has said, the historian 'is distinguished from other scholars most markedly by the emphasis he places upon the role of individual motives, actions, accomplishments, failures and contingencies in historical continuity and change' (Gottschalk 1954: 279). Historians use concepts of a fairly low level of generality when they group events together and give them a collective label, such as 'civil war' or 'the industrial revolution'. However, conventional historians (as distinct from Marxist or neo-Marxist historians) rarely use concepts as the basis of empirical generalizations, so that precision in defining them is not all that important. Conventional historians do not believe in laws of historical development and the study of history does not normally involve either the theorizing or the attempts to make empirical generalizations that political scientists constantly engage in. It is true that every now and again individual historians commit themselves to law-like propositions, such as that certain kinds of industrial development were bound to lead to the rise of the middle classes. But no sooner do some historians say this kind of thing than other historians jump in to point out that the middle classes have been rising ever since the end of the feudal period, whether or not the specified types of industrial development occurred. Historians as a class are sceptical about attempts to generalize and theorize, with the consequence that students of history can do quite well without getting involved in conceptual analysis.

The position of economists is very different. The whole science of classical economics has been built up on the basis of simplifying assumptions about human behaviour that have enabled scholars to develop models, theories and causal generalizations based on technical concepts that are peculiar to the discipline. They write of marginal cost, marginal utility, indifference curves, the law of diminishing marginal utility, marginal cost pricing, and so forth; all these terms being concepts that have precise meanings and will be learned by students in their first few weeks of studying the subject. The law of diminishing marginal utility, for example, holds that the marginal utility to the consumer of acquiring each extra unit of a commodity will at some point begin to diminish. If one is buying bread, diminishing marginal utility will set in early, after two or three loaves have been bought; if one is drinking beer it may not set in until later; but eventually all commodities are subject to the law. When the utility of an extra unit comes to be less than the marginal cost of the

unit, demand will cease, so that the level of demand for each commodity for each consumer, or by aggregating preferences for the whole body of consumers in a market, can be determined by the intersection of curves on a graph.

Economic concepts such as these are precise, because they have been formulated by academic economists and derive their meaning from the whole body of theory that economists have constructed. Students of the subject have to be able to define and use these concepts, but they can hardly avoid doing so as they are the building blocks of the discipline. One cannot complete a diploma or degree in economics without acquiring conceptual precision.

The student of politics lies somewhere between the historian and the economist in his use of generalizations and concepts. Political scientists constantly seek to go beyond the description of institutions and events in order to generalize about them. They compare the institutions and political cultures of one country or region with those of another, using some kind of conceptual framework in the attempt to give rigour to their comparisons. They produce theories of political development and political change. However, only a few of the concepts they use are technical concepts comparable in precision to those used by economists. There are certainly a few technical concepts that have been evolved within the discipline, but the great majority of the generalizations made by political scientists are based upon concepts that are constantly used and misused by politicians, journalists and the man in the street. In these circumstances it takes a conscious effort for students of politics to be precise and consistent in their use of concepts.

As an example, consider one of the most fruitful generalizations ever made about politics. Alexis de Tocqueville, after studying the events leading up to the French Revolution of 1789, produced the generalization that revolutions are most likely to take place when autocratic regimes are partially liberalized. The theory is that partial liberalization awakens expectations of more rapid progress than the regime is willing or able to provide, while also creating greater opportunities for the expression of dissent and the organization of opposition. The validity of this generalization has gone virtually unchallenged and in the past few years it has been of direct relevance to events in the former Soviet Union and in the Republic of South Africa.

The concepts used in the generalization are, however, far from precise. There is, for instance, room for disagreement about the definition of the term 'autocratic regime'. Everyone would agree that during most of the eighteenth century French government could be categorized in this way, and nearly all observers would say the same about the Soviet regime between 1917 and 1989. However, there is room for disagreement about the South African regime, which has been exceptionally autocratic in

regard to its black population but reasonably liberal in regard to its white citizens.

The term liberalization may also lead to arguments, and there is even more room for doubt about the precise meaning of the term 'revolution'. As John Dunn has pointed out (Dunn 1989: 337–8), before 1789 the term was applied loosely to various kinds of political disturbance, change and restoration. It was only as a consequence of the political and intellectual impact of the French Revolution that it came to be defined as a violent change of regime leading to significant social changes, and thus to be distinguished from leadership replacements known as coups d'etat. In the strongest modern sense of what constitutes a revolution, there have been only a handful of revolutions in world history, such as those in France in 1789–94, in Russia in 1917, in China, Albania and Cuba (see Dunn 1972). However, the American achievement of independence in 1776 is also generally regarded as a revolution, even though it did not result in immediate social change, because it involved violent conflict with the British and set the former colonies on a new political course. There is room for difference as to whether the achievement of independence from Moscow by Lithuania and other former Soviet republics should be regarded as revolutions, attained as they have been with only a minimal amount of violence but likely to lead to extensive economic and social change. There is clearly scope for honest disagreement about when the term should be applied this way rather than that. The object of this book is first to make this kind of analysis and then to examine various normative controversies in the light of the analysis.

This conceptual vagueness does not render Tocqueville's generalization useless, for it has been shown to have predictive value. Nor am I suggesting that political scientists should try to prescribe precise meanings for terms like revolution in the way that economists have prescribed precise meanings for terms like diminishing marginal utility. Such an attempt would be doomed to failure, for there is no way of preventing politicians and political commentators from using political terms in ways other than those favoured by academics, even if academics were able to agree. Technical concepts can sometimes be very helpful, but to stipulate special meanings for terms like liberty and democracy would be a pointless exercise. These are the terms in which political discourse is carried on. The scholar has to work with these terms, and the suggestion here is simply that academic students of politics ought to make a systematic effort to analyse the ways in which these and other basic concepts involved in the explanation of political activity are used and to understand the consequences of using them in this way rather than that. It is to this kind of analysis that this book is devoted.

THE CHOICE OF CONCEPTS

There are a very large number of political concepts in general use and it is obviously impossible to deal adequately with more than a small proportion of them in a book of reasonable length. It has therefore been decided, in the first place, to limit the analysis to concepts used in the study of the process of government in the modern democratic state. This means that we shall not deal with the concepts used in the study of international relations and defence policy, nor with those used exclusively in connection with the history of political ideas, nor with those appropriate to systems of tribal government or, for that matter, the Greek city state.

Three further criteria of exclusion have also been adopted. First, we shall not examine constitutional and institutional concepts such as federalism, the separation of powers, the sovereignty of Parliament, ministerial responsibility and so forth. Almost all books on constitutional law and on particular systems of national government explain the meaning of these concepts and there is no reason why serious students of the subject should find them ambiguous or difficult to understand.

Second, we shall omit technical concepts that do not cause difficulty because they have been clearly defined by academics. As already noted, there are not nearly as many of these as there are in economics, or for that matter in other social science disciplines like social psychology or sociology. There are a few, however, that have helped the growth of knowledge. An example would be social mobilization, a concept used by students of political integration to summarize the process by which economic modernization within the area of a state draws citizens out of their traditional occupations and local communities to establish them as members of the wider national society, a process that has clear advantages in terms of nation building but tends to erode or even to destroy the traditional languages and cultures of peripheral areas.

A quite different example would be political efficacy, a concept invented to indicate the extent to which citizens feel confident of their abilities to participate in the political process and to influence government policies. Political efficacy can be and has been measured, by questions included in regular surveys of American voting behaviour, so that we now know which groups within the American electorate feel most efficacious (the answer being white, educated, middle-class males) and how these feelings have varied over time. Some indicators of social mobilization can also be measured, as they have been by Karl Deutsch and his colleagues (see, for instance, Deutsch 1953), though such measurements are more difficult to make and more open to controversy than the measurement of political efficacy. Whatever the problems of measurement, however, there is no real difficulty or confusion about the meaning of technical concepts in

political science, of which these are merely two random (and very different) examples.

In the third place, we shall omit ideological concepts such as liberalism, conservatism and social democracy. These concepts are of crucial importance to political scientists and all students of the subject should acquire an understanding of them. To help them do so, there are some excellent texts as well as a voluminous and rewarding literature on each of the ideologies. For this reason, it is not felt necessary to include specific discussions of these concepts in this book, though a partial exception has to be made for Marxism. The reason for this partial exception is that an acceptance of Marxist or neo-Marxist assumptions by political scientists affects the way they analyse political activity in a very special fashion. Whereas liberals, conservatives and social democrats may well share similar or identical understandings of what is meant by political power or democracy, and may well engage in similar or identical styles of political analysis, Marxists and neo-Marxists see matters differently and handle their material differently. In a book devoted to conceptual analysis it would be wrong to ignore this. It is not thought necessary to give a summary of Marxist ideology as such, which would in any case require more space than is readily available, but from time to time (and particularly in Chapters 9, 11 and 13) reference will be made to Marxist approaches and concepts, such as cultural hegemony and false consciousness.

If all these types of political concept are omitted, there remain a fair number of basic concepts for analysis. In Part I of the book we shall examine the concepts of nationalism and the nation-state, which logically come first because the nation-state is now the predominant unit of government in the world. This will lead into a discussion of authority in the modern state, which raises various interesting problems. Part II will contain an analysis of the concept of democracy and the various concepts associated with democratic systems of government. It is true that only a minority of the world's states can clearly be categorized as democratic, but the number of democracies has recently increased and may be expected to increase further in the future. The extraordinary events that took place in eastern Europe in the winter of 1989–90 indicate the strength of democratic ideals, a strength which surprised many commentators and political scientists.

In Part III of the book we shall turn to an examination of the concept of political power and the conceptual questions associated with the study of policy making in the modern democratic state. The three most common models used in the analysis of policy making are the pluralist model, the Marxist model of class dominance, and the corporatist model. There are questions to be discussed about the definition of terms, about the evidence that has been adduced in support of each model, and about the utility of the models in political analysis.

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Finally, in Part IV we shall discuss some of the more important concepts used to categorize styles of political analysis. All students of politics will know that political scientists vary in their methodologies and frequently argue about them. In such arguments, concepts like positivism, historicism, and hermeneutics tend to be employed without definition, in the assumption that readers will not only be familiar with them but will also have a full understanding of them. In my experience this assumption is untrue in relation to the average undergraduate, and in the final two chapters of the book an attempt will be made to elucidate the origins, meanings and significance of these terms, as well as to say something about the styles of analysis themselves.

QUESTIONS ABOUT POLITICAL CONCEPTS

In analysing political concepts, it is helpful to ask four questions about them. One preliminary question is whether the concept is a purely political one or whether it is a concept in more general use that has a political application. The concepts of nationalism and corporatism are examples of concepts that are only used in a political context and have no non-political meanings. On the other hand, power and representation are concepts that have non-political as well as political applications. We talk of powerful motors, powerful waves and powerful personalities as well as of power in the political arena; of representative samples and representational art as well as of representation by election or lobbyist. Non-political usages are apt to colour or give overtones to the political usages and it is as well to be aware of this.

A second question, not quite the same as this, is whether the concept has one central meaning or several distinguishable meanings. Political participation has one central meaning whereas political representation, it will be argued in Chapter 5, has four distinguishable and logically independent meanings. Positivism has one central meaning whereas historicism has been used as a label for two different modes of thought. It is essential for the student to understand that historicism type A is logically different from historicism type B, even though they are occasionally lumped together under the same heading.

A third question was first raised by the philosopher W. B. Gallie, who argued that some concepts are 'essentially contested' whereas others are not (Gallie 1955–6). An essentially contested or, better, essentially contestable concept is one that is so permeated and surrounded by values that reasonable men may argue interminably without ever reaching agreement on the true meaning and implications of the concept. The utility of Gallie's distinction has been accepted by many theorists, but has recently been called into question by Terence Ball on the ground that the distinction is ahistorical. Ball points out that concepts which are hotly contested in one

period of history may be the subject of virtual consensus in another period, so that it would be a mistake to characterize them as 'essentially' contestable or non-contestable: 'Conceptual contestation remains a permanent possibility even though it is in practice actualized only intermittently' (Ball 1988: 14).

This is a good logical point and it draws attention to the historical fact that the meanings attributed to a number of political concepts have been modified over the centuries; a fact that has also been emphasized by Farr (1989) and Skinner (1989). In this book I am concerned only with the period of the modern democratic state, namely the past two hundred years, and readers should appreciate that some of the concepts under discussion were used in slightly different ways in earlier periods of history. It is also the case, of course, that the meanings of political concepts in the western world are not necessarily the same as their meaning in other civilizations, such as those of China or Japan or Arabia. The fact that these complexities are rarely mentioned in the chapters that follow should not be taken to imply that they are unimportant, only that, to keep the discussion within bounds, the book is confined to the problems of conceptual meaning and usage in the western world in the modern period.

Not wishing to reject Gallie's suggestion entirely, I shall replace the term 'essentially contested' by the term 'currently contested', and shall note in passing that some of the concepts are currently contested whereas others are not. This distinction is different from the distinction between two or more agreed meanings that a concept may have. Even though representation has several meanings, reasonable scholars may be expected to agree on these once they are defined, and this does not appear to be the case with concepts like liberty or democracy.

A fourth question is whether the concept gives rise to normative issues. This fourth question overlaps the third question posed above but is not identical with it. All concepts that can be described as currently contestable involve or raise normative issues, for this is why they are contestable. But some concepts that are not contestable in meaning are nevertheless rarely used except as part of a debate about normative questions, and when this is the case I shall follow the explanation of the concept with a discussion of the normative issues. An example would be political participation, a concept that is reasonably clear in meaning but is rarely invoked except as an introduction to or a part of a debate about whether a new form or a higher degree of participation is desirable, for this reason or that.

The concepts to be examined below are too varied for it to be feasible to ask exactly the same questions about each of them and tabulate the answers. However, it is important to be as systematic as possible and the four questions just itemized will assist the enterprise of clarifying the concepts and explaining their meanings, usages and implications.

Before turning to this enterprise, a word about my own stance may be

appropriate. There are some scholars who believe that political scientists should always attempt to be value-free in their analysis, while others believe that, as this is impossible, the writer should declare his own political outlook and allegiance. My own position lies somewhere between these extremes. I think that the attempt to be completely value-free when writing about value-laden concepts and theories such as those analysed in this book could only lead to sterility. My belief is that the scholar's duty in these circumstances is not to attempt freedom from values but to be balanced and fair in his discussion of values. Scholars should express their views in such a manner that readers who disagree with these views may yet gain from the argument, and scholars should acknowledge the existence and, if space permits, indicate the nature of alternative views. My own central beliefs about politics are quite conventional, for someone living in the industrialized west in the second half of the twentieth century. I place a high value on individual liberty and mutual toleration, I think that the state should provide social services for the security and welfare of its citizens, and I believe that representative democracy is the best institutional arrangement for government yet devised. Beyond this, I have various views that will emerge in the following chapters, but I doubt whether they add up to a consistent ideology. My views about many of the issues under discussion are eclectic rather than committed, and my aim has been to illuminate the issues rather than to lay down the law about them. It will be, of course, for readers to judge how far I have succeeded in this aim.

Part I

Authority in the modern state

Chapter 2

Nationalism and the nation-state

The entire land surface of this planet, with the single exception of Antarctica, is now divided for purposes of government into territories known as nation-states. This is a relatively recent development in human history. Only two hundred years ago, there were fewer than twenty states with the shape and character that we should now recognize as deserving description as nation-states, with the rest of the world being divided between a host of very small principalities and city-states, a few untidy empires, and large areas that were the home of tribal communities who lived without fixed territorial boundaries. The transformation has come about largely because the doctrine of nationalism has both triumphed in Europe and been exported to the rest of the world.

Because of this transformation, in the contemporary world we all live under the political authority of the nation-state within whose borders we reside. Political authority is a concept which raises a host of interesting questions and problems. Of course, in the practical experience of day-to-day life, everyone knows what the authority of the state means to the citizen. In the simplest terms, it means the ability of the state to make and enforce laws binding upon its inhabitants, including the ability to take their money in taxation, to confine them in prison, or (providing they are citizens) to conscript them into the armed forces. There are, however, important questions about the character, bases and limits of this authority, and these will be discussed in Chapter 3. There are also problems about its justification that have been discussed by political philosophers over the centuries, most notably by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss this kind of problem, and it must be emphasized now that the fairly brisk and concise account of the nature of political authority that follows in Chapter 3 can only be brisk and concise because these large normative questions have been left to the several hundred other authors who have addressed them.

The term nation-state is itself a conjunction of two terms that are best dealt with separately, with the definition of the first raising more difficulties than that of the second. It is true that the question of how to define

the state has led political theorists and constitutional lawyers to produce a variety of alternative definitions and generalizations. The difficulty of producing a simple and agreed definition arises from the fact that in the modern world the state is an abstraction, that is deemed to exist independently of the individuals and institutions that exercise state power. This assumed independence is a fairly recent development in human history, for in pre-modern times the state was frequently identified with its ruler, but it is not now a matter of controversy. But although one cannot see a state, in any concrete sense, one can see the manifestations of the state's existence, which have to be divided into external and internal manifestations. Seen from the outside, a state is a legal entity possessing sovereign independence, having unfettered control over its own territory, defining its own citizenship rules, and equal in international law to all other states. Seen from the inside, a state manifests itself in a collection of public institutions, legislative, executive, administrative and judicial, having the power to govern the territory and all its inhabitants. There is no conflict between these exterior and interior manifestations, however; rather, they are like two sides of the same coin. As the nature of the modern state, viewed in this double way, is fairly clear, it is not intended to pursue the problem of providing a precise short definition of it.

The one controversy regarding the state that will be addressed in this book is that raised by the Marxist generalization that the actions of the state are severely circumscribed by the need to protect the interests of the dominant economic class in society, which in the modern democratic state means the capitalist class. The question will be discussed in Chapter 11.

The term nation raises more problems than the term state. It refers to a community of people rather than to a set of institutions, but the definition of who constitutes a nation involves conceptual difficulties that, in turn, lead to practical problems. Thus, the Irish are everywhere recognized as a nation, but what about the Northern Irish? Given that the English and Scots are both nations, can there also be a British nation? Are the three million Muslims living in France really French? If the Palestinians are a nation, in spite of never having governed themselves, is this also true of the Kurds, the Sikhs, the Tamils, the Karens and the Chins? The French-Canadians living in Quebec seem to constitute a nation, but how should we describe the million English-Canadians who also live in Quebec?

Because the term nation is different in character from the term state, there was some discussion in 1919 about whether the new international organization that was being created should be called the League of Nations or the League of States. The second of these alternatives would have been more logical and more precise, but the doctrine of nationalism had achieved such a hold on men's minds by 1919 that the first alternative

was chosen. In 1945 the United Nations Organization was created without any debate on this point.

In this chapter we shall discuss in turn the concept of nationalism, the concept of nationhood, the concept of national integration, and various recent developments in world history involving these concepts that raise theoretical questions.

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM

As suggested in Chapter 1, political concepts can be divided into three broad categories. There are age-old concepts that have both political and other usages, such as power and representation. These terms are widely used by the public at large and tend to be applied to political life in more than one way, so that differing usages have to be distinguished. There are a number of precise technical concepts that have been developed by political scientists and are used only in scholarly communications within the discipline. Somewhere between these, in terms of precision, there are concepts that have no usages outside of politics but have entered into the general currency of political debate. The concept of nationalism falls into the third category. It has been developed only in the past two centuries; it has a basic meaning that is not contestable; but it is often used loosely in public discourse and confused with related but different concepts such as national identity or patriotism.

The confusion of nationalism and national identity, for instance, is quite common in general speech. Scotsmen in England or America who celebrate St Andrew's Day, wear the kilt and eat haggis might well be described by their neighbours as 'real Scots nationalists'. However, Scotsmen in Scotland would only be described in that way if they supported the creation of a Scottish National Assembly and the eventual secession of Scotland from the United Kingdom, and this way of using the term is more correct. The Scotsmen abroad are displaying symbols of national identity, which is a sentiment, whereas supporters of the Scottish National Party are invoking the principles of nationalism, which is a doctrine or ideology.

Like several other terms ending with 'ism', such as liberalism, conservatism and socialism, nationalism is a normative doctrine that embodies a particular set of assumptions and beliefs about politics. The essence of nationalism is a belief about the social basis of political authority. The prevailing assumptions of eighteenth-century Europe were that government could properly be based on force, in the conquest of empires, or on heredity or marriage, in the government of principalities and monarchies. In contrast to these assumptions, nationalists asserted the view that the only proper form of government is one in which the boundaries of the state correspond to the boundaries of a society and the rulers of the state are members of that society. It was wrong, in terms of nationalist doctrine, for the Poles

to be ruled by Russians, the Greeks to be governed as part of the Ottoman Empire, the southern Italians to be ruled by Spanish or French aristocrats, the Hungarians to be ruled by Austrians, and the Germans to be divided between scores of principalities.

The development and spread of this doctrine in Europe during the nineteenth century led to the emergence of two types of nationalist movement. On the one hand, there were movements for the national independence of peoples under imperial rule; for the independence of Greeks from Turkish rule, of Poles from Russian rule, of (later) the Irish from British rule. The generic form of the aims of this type of nationalist movement can be expressed in the proposition that 'the Ruritanian people ought to be liberated from foreign domination so that they can govern themselves'. On the other hand, there were movements to unite under a single government people who were said to belong to a single society but were actually divided for political purposes between a number of rulers. This type of movement had its intellectual origins in what is now Germany, where nationalist theories were developed in reaction to a situation

level of disposable personal incomes, be unpopular with most citizens and have a depressing effect on the economy. A third option is to dodge the issue by letting public expenditures rise without increasing taxation, which would increase the national debt and only postpone the task of getting to grips with the problem.

According to Rose and Peters, any of these options is likely to reduce public confidence in their government and to provoke a decline in political authority. Citizens could be expected to become cynical about government, unwilling to co-operate with it, and reluctant to comply with its edicts unless they are forced to do so. Governments would therefore become less effective and a cycle of declining authority would be initiated, to which the authors gave the label 'political bankruptcy'.

How much truth is there in these various theories about the relationship between the economic system and the level of political authority? To begin with Gramsci, the answer must be that his theory about the ideological hegemony of bourgeois values in capitalist society is undoubtedly correct. Since the end of the Second World War, the social values of the 'consumer society' have become dominant in all western industrial states. Capitalism has had such a beneficial effect on the living standards of the great majority of citizens in these states that alternative values have lost their attraction to all but a small minority. The revolutionary changes in eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990 have shown that forty years of brainwashing by socialist governments have failed to convert their citizens to socialist values. Public ownership and central economic direction in these societies has been a conspicuous failure, as it has been in the Soviet Union, and people have reacted accordingly. Radicals may regret that Gramsci was so penetrating, but the validity of his insight can hardly be denied.

The neo-Marxist argument that the capitalist system has been legitimized in the eyes of the workers by the liberal-democratic state is also both valid and helpful. There can be no doubt that political authority in the modern state is enhanced by democratic institutions. In past eras, when the functions of the state barely extended beyond foreign affairs, defence, customs duties and the maintenance of internal order, democracy might have been desirable but was not actually necessary. Governments could carry out their limited duties effectively so long as they had the support of the bureaucracy and the army, without needing much support from the general public. This could also be said of many Third World states today. But in modern industrial societies where the state regulates all aspects of public life, provides services for all its citizens and spends nearly half the national income, all sections of the community have to feel that they have some influences over government decisions if they are to acquiesce in government policies and co-operate willingly with government agencies. The modern state depends upon the co-operation of its citizens and this is a central fact of political life. It is beyond dispute that modern

states with dictatorial systems of government have had to use stronger measures of coercion to secure public compliance with laws and policies than democratic states have needed.

The argument that welfare policies adopted by modern governments protect their legitimacy and that of the social order is undoubtedly valid. If proof is needed, it is provided by examples of the partial breakdown of political authority among groups affected by prolonged unemployment, a tragic condition for which unemployment benefits can never be an adequate compensation. In Britain, unemployed workers engaged in riots and fights with the police during the period of mass unemployment immediately after the end of the First World War, and did so again in the depression years of the early 1930s. The large-scale unemployment of 1980–1 produced more riots, accompanied by widespread looting of shops, in twenty-seven urban areas in the summer of 1981. There was a racial element in the 1981 riots, for the first and worst of them (in Brixton and Liverpool) were fights between blacks and the police, and many of the subsequent disturbances were started by black teenagers. But most of the participants in the later riots were white and unemployment was clearly a major factor.

The final set of arguments examined in this section of the chapter, namely those relating to fiscal crisis and political overload, are particularly interesting in that they suggest that the modern state may be running into unavoidable problems as a consequence of its acceptance of responsibility for protecting its citizens against many of the hazards of life. People have higher expectations of what their government can do for them than were entertained by earlier generations. The efforts by governments to meet these expectations have put a heavy burden of costs on the national exchequer, which cannot easily be met unless the national economy is constantly growing, so that enhanced revenues are available to meet increasing costs.

The concern about fiscal overload arose during the 1970s because that was a bad decade for the industrial economies of the western world. A period of continuous economic growth since 1945 was checked by the four-fold increase in oil prices imposed by the Arab states in 1973, and western economies fell into a period of stagnation and growing unemployment accompanied by inflation. These conditions pushed several countries towards a position of fiscal overload, which might have had the serious political consequences predicted by some social scientists had the stagnation continued through the following decade. Fortunately, the 1980s were years of continuous economic growth lasting from 1982 until 1990, so the predicted crisis did not develop. However, although the predictions made in the 1970s were unduly pessimistic, the analyses pointed to a significant potential problem. There has been a squeeze on national budgets in recent years, met in Britain and Australia in the 1980s by cutting

government programmes and in Canada and the United States by allowing the accumulation of unhealthy deficits, which are themselves causing problems in the early 1990s. If western economies fall again into serious recession there will doubtless be renewed concern about the possibility that the problems created by fiscal overload may lead to a withdrawal of public confidence in government and a consequent decline in political authority.

Even without serious recession, there is, in Habermas's opinion, a danger that the legitimation of political authority by economic growth and welfare policies will be thought inadequate by some groups in society, either because (like the homeless or some ethnic minorities) the system has not worked for them, or because (like anti-nuclear protestors or radical environmentalists) the economic aims of the modern state are thought to be incompatible with moral principles that ought to govern the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

of the French Revolution talked of a republic also; and in Britain people described their system as one of representative and responsible government.

The term 'democracy', in its modern sense, came into use during the course of the nineteenth century to describe a system of representative government in which the representatives are chosen by free competitive elections and most male citizens are entitled to vote. In the United States this state of affairs was reached in the 1820s and 1830s, as the franchise was extended state by state. In France, there was a sudden leap to adult male suffrage in 1848, but parliamentary government was not established securely until 1871. In Britain, parliamentary government was secure from 1688 onwards, but the franchise was not extended to the majority of male citizens until 1867. Democracy is therefore a fairly new phenomenon in world history and, although it is spreading and seems likely to spread further, it is firmly established in only about 30 of the 180 or so states that now exist. In Europe, these are Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Holland, Luxemburg, Belgium, France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In America, the established democracies are Canada, the USA, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. In Asia, the examples are Turkey, Israel, India, Sri Lanka, and Japan. In Australasia, there are Australia and New Zealand.

In addition to these established democracies, there are several fledgling democracies and an uncertain number of states that are partially democratic. The fledgling democracies are Poland, Hungary, and the two halves of Czechoslovakia, and the Philippines. The states that exhibit some but not all of the features of a democracy include Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua and Cyprus. There is yet another category of states that may become democratic by the turn of the century if all goes well. These include the Baltic republics, Russia, Ukraine and some of the other former Soviet republics, Slovenia and possibly South Africa. Democracy is still far from being the most common form of government, but it is gaining ground.

In defining and discussing democracy in the twentieth century, there have been two sources of confusion. One source of confusion is that the term has been used not only to describe a system of government but also to describe other social relationships. Thus, Americans have said that their country not only has a democratic set of political institutions but also has or is a democratic society. Many socialists have identified themselves as believers in social democracy. Some socialists have advocated industrial democracy. Communists have described the Communist Party states of eastern Europe as people's democracies.

However, this kind of confusion does not pose serious problems so long as language is used with some precision. Thus, a democratic society, in the American sense, is one without hereditary class distinctions, in which there is something approaching equality of opportunity for all

citizens. The term 'democratic' is used to indicate a degree of social equality, not a form of government. Social democracy is a political ideology which advocates socialist economic and social policies to be carried out within a society which has democratic political institutions and processes, so the concept of social democracy is parasitical upon the concept of political democracy. Industrial democracy, a term coined by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the early years of the twentieth century, means a form of workers' control within industrial plants.

The term 'people's democracies' is an essentially misleading one that was coined because, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the idea of democracy was so universally popular among the victorious allies that none of them wanted to admit that their systems were undemocratic. Actually, it was in 1936 that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union changed its official line about democracy. Up until then, democracy had been portrayed by Marxists everywhere as a kind of sham, devised by the ruling class in capitalist societies to give the workers the illusion that they could improve their position substantially without a revolution if they exerted pressure through the electoral system. The Soviet system was described as one of proletarian dictatorship – a workers' state – as Marx, Engels and Lenin had advocated for the period following the workers' revolution. However, by the middle of the 1930s communist parties in the west, acting on instructions from Moscow, were attempting to promote a 'popular front' of liberal and socialist parties against fascism. To assist this effort, the new Soviet constitution of 1936 described itself as a democratic constitution and established some institutions that took the outward form of western democratic institutions even though the official monopoly of power by one party prevented them from working in a western democratic way. It can be regarded as an extension of this new party line that, from 1948 onwards, the Soviet-dominated regimes of eastern Europe claimed to be democratic also. No sensible person has ever been deceived by this into thinking that these states were democratically governed in the accepted sense of the term. Clearly the citizens of the states themselves had no such illusion.

It follows that we need not be concerned about these extensions of the term 'democracy', but should focus our attention on the other source of confusion, namely the vagueness of the terms commonly used to define a democratic political system, the difficulty of clarifying these terms in a value-free way, and the array of partially incompatible justifications for democracy advanced by democratic theorists. It is because of these difficulties that the concept has to be regarded as currently contestable.

DEFINITIONS OF DEMOCRACY

If we start from the dictionary definition, that democracy means the rule of the people, we immediately run into the problem of how, in practical

terms, to define the people and how to define the meaning of rule. Does 'the people' mean the whole adult population, or only those who possess enough property to give them what nineteenth-century politicians called a stake in the country? Does it matter if women are excluded from the franchise, as they were until after the Second World War in several European countries that were universally recognized as democratic, including France and Switzerland? Can one say that a system is partially democratic if the right to participate in politics is confined to one section of the population? The South African regime, for example, has long rested on what are normally described as democratic institutions for its white citizens, but not for the majority of its people, who are black or coloured. Would the answer to this question be different if the great majority of South African citizens were white? In practice, the answers that people give to these questions depend on their political values, so it is impossible to formulate a value-free definition of 'the people'.

This is even clearer in regard to the question of what is meant by 'rule'. If ruling is taken to mean the activity of reaching authoritative decisions that result in laws and regulations binding upon society, then it is obvious that (apart from occasional referendums) only a small minority of individuals can be rulers in modern, populous societies. So for the dictionary definition to be operational, ruling must be taken in the much weaker sense of choosing the rulers and influencing their decisions. But how weak can this sense be and still remain meaningful? Is it essential to a democracy that governmental decisions, though only made by a small minority of politicians, should nevertheless reflect or embody the popular will? If so, how can the popular will be defined and how can it be identified in practice? The answers that people give to these and various similar questions clearly depend on their values and ideals.

It follows that we cannot arrive at an objective and precise definition of democracy simply by elucidating the intrinsic meaning of the term, in so far as it might be said to have an intrinsic meaning. We are therefore left with two alternatives. On the one hand, we can start with the observation of political practice and common usage, which leads to a definition in terms of institutions and processes and leaves the question of justification to a distinguishable (though not entirely separate) intellectual exercise. On the other hand, we can spell out our democratic ideals and consider what the practical implications of these are. Some theorists of democracy have taken the first approach, which can best be called the empirical approach, while others have taken the second, best called the idealist approach. Others again have tried to blend the two approaches.

In discussing theories of democracy, there is another distinction that is very relevant, namely the distinction between theories about parliamentary democracy and theories about American democracy. Because American political scientists occupy a rather dominant position in the discipline, it

is sometimes forgotten that, among democracies, America is the odd man out. All other democratic states have political systems based on the principle that sovereignty inheres in the national parliament or assembly. The controversies about democracy in these countries are essentially controversies about the selection and functions of representatives in this parliament.

The United States, in contrast, has a political system based on the principle that sovereignty inheres in the people. The US constitution begins with the words 'We the People of the United States . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution.' Congressmen, Senators, the President and the judges are all regarded as deriving their authority from the people. In view of this difference, it will be convenient, in what follows, to deal with theories about American democracy separately from theories about parliamentary democracy.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Simplifying somewhat, it can be said that Americans have defined their democracy in three different ways: a populist way, in terms of the rule of the people; a pluralist way, in terms of competition between sections and pressure groups; and an institutional way, in terms of a set of institutions and processes. All three versions had their origins in the thought and writings of the Founding Fathers of the American republic.

A belief in the principle of popular sovereignty was common to all the Founding Fathers, whether they were relatively conservative or relatively radical. One of the latter, James Wilson of Pennsylvania, declared in 1787 that:

> in our governments, the supreme, absolute, and uncontrollable power remains in the people. As our constitutions are superior to our legislatures, so the people are superior to our constitutions . . . In giving a definition of what I meant by a democracy . . . I termed it, that government in which the people retain the supreme power.
>
> (quoted Padover 1963: 19)

Madison and Jefferson, while sceptical of democracy because of its Greek connotation of direct rule, were quite clear that the American republic must have frequent elections so that the people could keep the politicians in check. They and their colleagues were, indeed, much more sceptical than British and French liberals have been of what could be expected of politicians. Thus, Madison declared that 'it is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will not be able to adjust . . . clashing interests. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm' (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 47). Jefferson believed that unless politicians and public officials were kept under the direct eye of their constituents, the result would be 'corruption, plunder and waste' (quoted Birch 1975: 227). Alexander Hamilton

observed more than once that men love power. Thomas Mason said that 'From the nature of man, we may be sure that those who have power in their hands . . . will always, when they can . . . increase it' (quoted Dahl 1956: 8).

This scepticism about the motives and behaviour of politicians underlie the American belief in frequent elections. Hamilton said it was essential that representatives should 'have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can be effectually secured' (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 290). Jefferson was of the same opinion, declaring that legislators should have to submit themselves 'to approbation or rejection at short intervals' and saying that the executive (by which he meant a state governor or the president) must be 'chosen in the same way . . . by those whose agent he is to be' (quoted Padover 1969: 27). The President, be it noted, was regarded by Jefferson as an agent of the people; a view that has never been taken of a Prime Minister in a parliamentary system of democracy. In fact, the several state constitutions that existed between 1776 and 1787 all provided for frequent elections of legislators: in Connecticut and Rhode Island elections were held every six months; in South Carolina, every two years; and in the other ten states, every year. The decision to have biennial elections to the US House of Representatives, which is more frequently than in any other national legislative chamber in the world, followed naturally from these assumptions and practices.

This belief in popular sovereignty and frequent elections did not at first lead American theorists and leaders to identify their system of government as democratic. They preferred to call it republican, both because of the eighteenth-century tradition of republicanism among advanced thinkers and because the term was thought more appropriate to the balanced constitution that had been adopted in 1787 than the term democratic, with its connotations of lower-class dominance. (For a discussion of republican rhetoric during the early years of the republic, see Hanson 1985: Chapters 2 and 3.) It was not until the Jacksonian period that the term democratic came into widespread usage, and at first it had partisan connotations.

By the 1860s it had gained general acceptance, however, and the belief in popular sovereignty was reflected in Lincoln's famous definition of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. As Sartori has pointed out, this phrase defies exact analysis. The three concepts in the phrase can be interpreted in a variety of ways; Stalin could have used it to characterize his regime without doing violence to the wording; and the phrase as a whole has rhetorical value rather than logical meaning (Sartori 1987: 34–5). It has rhetorical value because it reflects a strain in the American political tradition that all Americans can recognize; a strain that has been otherwise identified as faith in the common man.

When Woodrow Wilson inspired popular enthusiasm for democracy during the First World War – which he described as a war to make the world safe for democracy – much was said about the twentieth century being the century of the common man. Padover reports that in the six years following the end of Wilson's presidency in 1921, 'there were, in the United States, no less than 120 books in print with "democracy" or its derivatives in their titles' (Padover 1963: 29).

This rather idealistic and enthusiastic way of discussing democracy was attacked in 1943 by a book which must be analysed, not so much for its intrinsic value as for the influence it has had on subsequent theoretical writings. The book was by Joseph Schumpeter, a Harvard economist, and was entitled *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. In this book Schumpeter advanced three main arguments about the definition and working of democracy, of which one may be regarded as reasonable while the other two were clearly unfortunate. The reasonable argument was that a democratic system of government is best identified in institutional and procedural terms, rather than in terms of the ideals which democracy is supposed to serve. As he put it, 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote' (Schumpeter 1942: 269). The primary advantage of this definition, he claimed, was that it provided 'a reasonably efficient criterion by which to distinguish democratic governments from others'. Definitions in terms of ends did not do this because 'both the will and the good of the people may be, and in many historical instances have been, served just as well or better by governments that cannot be described as democratic according to any accepted usage of the terms'; whereas Schumpeter's definition stressed a procedure 'the presence or absence of which is in most cases easy to verify' (Schumpeter 1942: 269–70).

This argument has certain obvious merits and cannot be regarded as particularly novel. The Founding Fathers had stressed the desirability of free elections for the selection of both legislators and leaders of the executive. Theorists of parliamentary (as distinct from American) democracy have nearly all accepted a definition in terms of institutions and procedures. Moreover, Schumpeter's definition reflects a good deal of common usage. The average citizen, asked to decide whether a country like Pakistan should or should not be regarded as a democracy, would be likely to use precisely Schumpeter's criterion.

Unfortunately for his reputation, Schumpeter advanced two other arguments that had much less to commend them. In the first place, he declared that his definition of democracy was an alternative to something called 'the classical doctrine of democracy' that had hitherto held sway. In explaining what the classical doctrine was, he located it in the late eighteenth century, said it was developed by the Utilitarians, and said that it

hinged on 'the particular concept of the will of the people or the *volonté générale* that the Utilitarians made their own' (Schumpeter 1942: 252). In saying these things he was wrong on all counts. The Utilitarians were certainly not the only founders of democratic thought. They did not all subscribe to the same doctrine, John Stuart Mill's views being, for instance, significantly different from those of Bentham and James Mill. However, one thing on which the Utilitarians were most definitely agreed was that they all rejected Rousseau's theory of the *volonté générale*. In writing as he did, Schumpeter, an economist by profession, displayed an ignorance of the history of political ideas that would disgrace an undergraduate.

The idea that there was a classical doctrine of democracy is, in fact, a most unhelpful piece of nonsense. It has received frequent mentions in the literature despite this, largely because Schumpeter's more idealistic or radical critics have gratefully accepted the label that their preferred ways of defining democracy represent the classical view rather than just a populist view. This makes them appear to be in the mainstream and enables them to describe writers who prefer a definition in terms of institutions and processes as revisionists. Moreover (and perhaps surprisingly), some scholars who favour an institutional definition seem to have accepted, by implication at least, the judgement that they are revisionists.

The other mistake that Schumpeter made was to develop the argument that the average voter is not sufficiently rational or responsible to make sensible decisions on political issues. Without much evidence, he declared that: 'the reduced sense of responsibility and the absence of effective volition in turn explain the ordinary citizen's ignorance and lack of judgement in matters of domestic and foreign policy', and that 'the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field' (Schumpeter 1942: 161 and 262). By putting this argument in such extreme terms he tied his case for a procedural definition of democracy to a highly conservative ideological position, which was both unnecessary and unwise. It was unnecessary because adopting a procedural or institutional definition can be defended on a purely pragmatic ground, that it provides a clear criterion for distinguishing between democratic and dictatorial systems, without any assumptions about the wisdom or ignorance of voters. It was unwise because it gave the impression that the author rejected basic assumptions held by most American defenders of democracy, and it inevitably alienated populist thinkers.

One of the theorists who was alienated was Peter Bachrach, who castigated Schumpeter's position as that of a 'democratic elitist'. Bachrach copied Schumpeter in the assumption that there was a classical theory of democracy, though he described it quite differently. Whereas Schumpeter had located it in the late eighteenth century, Bachrach located it in the middle of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. Its authors, he maintained, were the British theorists J. S. Mill (writing in the

1860s), A. D. Lindsay and Ernest Barker (writing between the wars). What they had in common was a belief in human development through political participation. As Bachrach put it: 'The emphasis in classical democratic theory upon citizen participation in all aspects of public affairs is based on the premise that such involvement is an essential means to the full development of individual capacities' (Bachrach 1969: 4).

Bachrach described Schumpeter and others who think like him as elitists because they focus only on the method of appointment of political elites, they assume that the masses are politically incompetent, and they believe that democracy can be defined without reference to values and ideals. Bachrach said that this approach to democratic theory had become so common among American social scientists in the post-war period that it could well be described as the 'general theory of democracy' (Bachrach 1969: 93). It was a theory that claimed to be value-free, in line with the assumption of the empiricists and behaviouralists who had come to dominate political science in the 1950s and 1960s that facts and values are conceptually distinct. (This assumption will be discussed in Chapters 13 and 14). In his earlier article on political power (to be discussed in Chapter 9), Bachrach had shown that he did not accept the empiricists' position, and in 1967 he made this more explicit, with the following comment on the dominant view:

> This general theory purports to be above ideology but is in reality deeply rooted in an ideology, an ideology which is grounded upon a profound distrust of the majority of ordinary men and women, and a reliance upon the established elites to maintain the values of civility and the 'rules of the game' of democracy . . . While embracing liberalism it rejects, in effect, the major tenet of classical democratic theory – belief and confidence in the people.
>
> (Bachrach 1969: 93–4)

Bachrach's own preference was for what he called a 'self-developmental theory of democracy', that would take its stand in the belief that 'the majority of individuals stand to gain in self-esteem and growth toward a fuller affirmation of their personalities by participating more actively in meaningful community decisions' (Bachrach 1969: 100 and 101). He acknowledged the impossibility of taking national government out of the hands of elites and proposed to get around this by extending the concept of democracy to include self-government in the workplace. In wrestling with this evident dilemma he was grappling with the difficulties involved in the whole concept of mass political participation, which will be addressed in Chapter 6. For now, it is sufficient to note that Bachrach's book was an influential re-affirmation of the populist strain in the American tradition of democratic thought, though with a new twist in terms of its recommendations.

There is another strain that is also important, namely the pluralist strain. The origins of this, like the origins of the populist and institutional strains, can be found in the writings of the Founding Fathers. In *The Federalist* no. 10, Madison argued that the size and diversity of the proposed federation would safeguard the rights of minorities by making it difficult for any coherent majority to be formed.

> Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less likely that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other.
>
> (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 50)

In *The Federalist* no. 51, Hamilton repeated this argument.

> In the federal republic of the United States . . . the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens that the rights of individuals or of the minority will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority.
>
> (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 287)

This suspicion of majority rule runs through a great deal of political debate in America. It goes along with the attachment to the separation of powers between the legislature and the executive that operates at both federal and state levels of government. It adds up to a preference for weak government that has no clear equivalent in other democratic states. In parliamentary regimes there have been some groups at some periods who have favoured laissez-faire economic policies (as in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century) or have shown suspicion of state power (as in France in the Third Republic), but the dominant strain in theories of parliamentary democracy has been a preference for government that has the capacity for firm leadership, though being responsible to elected representatives for the way this leadership is exercised.

In the post-war period these early theories about sectional pluralism were given a new emphasis by writers who argued that disciplined national parties were undesirable and probably impossible to achieve in a society as large and heterogeneous as America. And, following that, writers like Earl Latham and David Truman developed a new form of pluralism which hinged on the activities of organized interest groups rather than on pressures from geographical sections. American government, it was urged, is democratic because policy making is an arena for conflict between organized groups, which represent all relevant interests and ensure that the outcome would be a series of compromises which took these interests into account. All citizens were free to organize and join such groups, and the politicians responsible for reaching decisions would be influenced not only

by the activities of existing groups but also by the knowledge that new groups would undoubtedly be formed to defend any interest that was presently unrepresented, if decisions were reached that were harmful to that interest.

This line of argument was in part persuasive, because one of the characteristics that stands out in American politics is the openness of the system to group pressures and the vigour of the conflicts between interest groups. However, the argument was open to the criticism of being complacent in its assumption that all interests are adequately represented, because it is evident that some groups are much more influential than others, while some categories of people, such as the homeless, have no effective group to look after their interests.

In general, it seems clear that scholars of the pluralist school are broadly correct in their insistence that conflict between group pressures is a central characteristic of American politics, but controversial when they equate this with democracy. To populists, it is not good enough to show that power is divided between competing elites and pressure groups, when democracy, properly defined, would be a system in which power belonged to the common people.

Without necessarily accepting the superiority of the populist approach, it must be conceded that there are grounds for doubting the claim that a pluralistic dispersal of political influence in a political unit can be equated with democracy. Imagine an American city divided on ethnic lines, as New York, for example, was during the 1950s. Suppose that in the government of this city representatives of the Irish community tended to have a dominant influence on issues relating to the police and the appointment of magistrates; that representatives of the Jewish community tended to have a dominant influence on policy regarding education and the social services; and that representatives of the Italian community tended to have a large say in decisions about highways and the award of construction contracts. This would be a pluralistic system, but it would not be a fully democratic system if representatives of the black community lacked influence over any area of policy. Nor would it be fully democratic unless the representatives of the various communities were answerable to the electorate for their actions.

Some writers of the pluralist persuasion are more cautious than others in their claims. It is fair to say, however, that the pluralist view of democracy rests upon the three propositions that America is democratic, that the American political system is pluralistic, and that pluralism equals democracy, it being possible to start with any of these propositions and move to the other two, as if moving round a circle. And it is not unreasonable for critics to be sceptical about the third of these propositions, even while accepting the first two. One might well take the view that the

American system is both pluralistic and democratic, but that its democratic character depends on more than its pluralistic dimension.

To sum up this rich literature on American democracy in a paragraph is almost impossible, but it is perhaps fair to suggest that a summation might be based on the following propositions. First, the institutional or procedural approach to the definition of democracy is empirically helpful, but is open to the criticism that it ignores the idealistic vision that constitutes the spirit of American democracy. Second, the populist approach does justice to the vision, but cannot easily be translated into criteria for assessing the actual practice of government. Third, the pluralist approach is empirically quite (though not entirely) realistic and embodies a normative commitment, but critics doubt whether this commitment adequately reflects the democratic ideal.

PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

The debates over the definition of democracy in countries enjoying parliamentary systems have been more limited in scope than the American debates. Very few writers in these countries have adopted populist definitions or pluralist definitions. The great majority have defined democracy in institutional and procedural terms, as parliamentary government with free competitive elections and a wide franchise. However, they have generally placed more emphasis on the normative case for democratic institutions than American institutionalists like Schumpeter have done. The European theorists who constitute the great majority of the writers about parliamentary democracy have neither claimed nor wanted to be value-free in their analyses. They have been in broad agreement about how to distinguish democratic systems from undemocratic systems, but they have varied to some extent in their interpretations of the purposes served by democratic institutions and the ways in which they have justified these institutions as superior to others. They have been idealists, though their ideals have rarely been populist in character.

In discussing European ideas about democracy it is appropriate to begin with French ideas, because the French have influenced more countries that have remained democratic than the British have done. The British have certainly planted parliamentary institutions in nearly all their ex-colonies, but it is only in a few cases that these countries have remained democratic for more than a few years after the achievement of self-government. The French, in contrast, have influenced the growth of democratic institutions and practices throughout most of continental Europe.

A discussion of French democratic ideas has to begin with the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is, of course, arguable whether Rousseau should be regarded as a democrat. He did not believe in representative government, because he did not think that men's wills could be represented

by others. His ideal revolved around direct self-government in small communities, and even there he did not apparently think it important that all adults, or even a majority of adults, should be entitled to participate in political decisions. He wrote admiringly of the government of Geneva, where he had spent his youth, even though less than 10 per cent of the residents of that city had the right to participate. He is, nevertheless, important, because he developed a vision of popular self-government that has influenced the ideas of subsequent generations and affected the way they regard politics in large communities where representation is the norm.

One of the main keys to Rousseau's thinking is his commitment to the idea of civic virtue. Whereas most democratic theorists in both America and Britain have thought in terms of the protection and promotion of individual interests through political action, Rousseau considered that in an ideal polity individuals should put their personal interests on one side when they participated in politics, and commit themselves instead to the promotion of the communal welfare. He postulated the possibility that citizens could have two levels of consciousness, leading to two types of political will.

On the one hand, they would be conscious of their own individual or group interests, leading to a set of 'particular wills' to promote measures favourable to those interests. On the other hand, they could, in the right conditions, be led to think in terms of the interests of the community as a whole, leading to a 'real will' to promote measures that would protect these shared interests. The particular wills of citizens would be diverse and to some extent mutually incompatible; their real wills, on the other hand, would merge into a consensus that Rousseau called the 'general will'. It followed that if the laws of the state were based on the general will, they would not restrict the liberty (properly defined) of citizens, who would be forced to obey only laws that they had prescribed for themselves. It was in this way, Rousseau declared, that man could resolve the most fundamental problem of politics, that of how to achieve freedom while being bound by the laws of the community.

Rousseau was not naive enough to believe that this ideal state of affairs could easily be achieved. On the contrary, he set out some quite stringent conditions for its achievement. The community must be small enough for its active citizens to meet and cast their votes directly, rather than through representatives. Members of the community must be educated to accept what Rousseau called a civil religion – 'a purely civil profession of faith of which the sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen' (Rousseau 1913: 121). The laws to be determined by the general will must be general in their scope, not regulations on specific matters which would be bound to divide citizens according to their particular interests. The formulation of the questions to be put to the sovereign body,

namely the assembly of citizens, must be left to a statesman described as the legislator.

It is obvious that when Rousseau wrote of the laws he was thinking of a small body of laws on fundamental questions of state, not of a mass of detailed legislation such as regulate the affairs of industrial societies in the late twentieth century. It is also made clear that in his ideal state the day-to-day business of government would be conducted not by the sovereign assembly, but by a body of public officials answerable to the sovereign assembly (see Rousseau 1913: Book III, Chapters 16–18).

This very brief sketch is intended only to indicate the character of Rousseau's vision of an ideal self-governing community, not to serve as a guide to his rich and rewarding philosophy of politics. Rousseau's ideas have had a profound influence on subsequent thought in many countries, including most notably the philosophies of Kant, Hegel and numerous followers of Hegel in Germany and, much later, the social ideas of the English Idealists. It is Rousseau who was the originator of what is now called the positive concept of liberty, to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Within France, Rousseau has always been a controversial figure, revered by some and reviled by others. What French attitudes to democracy have in common with Rousseau's ideas is the assumption that democracy is to be advocated in collective terms rather than in the individualistic terms common in America and Britain. French republicans tended to see the French revolution and the later extensions of the franchise as nation-building activities. Although French revolutionaries talked of the rights of man, they did not share the American belief in popular sovereignty. The doctrine of the revolutionaries was not that the French people were sovereign and that their views were represented in the National Assembly. The doctrine was that the French nation was sovereign and the National Assembly embodied the will of the nation. The 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* stated that members of the Assembly should not be 'bound by the instructions of their constituents', while the 1791 constitution said clearly that 'the representatives elected in the departments will not be representatives of a particular department but of the whole nation, and they may not be given any mandate'.

This doctrine marked a turning point in continental European ideas about political representation. Before this, the political representative had been viewed on the continent as a delegate, so that there were three parties in the representative process: the principal, the representative, and the authority to whom representations were to be made. According to the new theory promulgated by the French revolutionaries, political representatives were no longer to be thought of as intermediaries of this kind but were to contrive, in their collective capacity, to act as the voice of the nation. This theory clearly differs from both the populist view of democracy and the pluralist view of democracy; it is a European but not an

American theory. It views the elected representative as an independent maker of national laws and policies, not as an agent for his constituents or for sectional interests.

This French view has been generally accepted in Europe. The French constitutional provisions that prohibited mandates and instructions were subsequently copied or followed in the constitutions of most of the countries of western Europe, including those of Belgium in 1831, Italy in 1848, Prussia in 1850, Sweden in 1866, Austria in 1867, Germany in 1871, Switzerland in 1874, The Netherlands in 1887, and Denmark in 1915. Similar provisions are included in the 1948 constitution of Italy and the 1949 Basic Law of the German Federal Republic.

In Britain, which has no written constitution, the same attitude is embodied in the constitutional doctrine that sovereignty belongs to Parliament, there being no mention of the people, and also in the conventions that protect the privileges of Members of Parliament. In the 1950s, for instance, the Committee of Privileges of the House of Commons found that a serious breach of privilege had been committed by the editor of a national newspaper (with a circulation numbered in millions) who had published the private telephone number of an MP and advised those of his readers who disagreed with the views of the MP to telephone him and say so. The committee insisted that MPs must be free to say what they pleased in the House without the fear that it might lead to their being pestered in this way. The editor had to apologize to the House and could conceivably have been sent to prison for his offence.

It is unnecessary to follow the vicissitudes of French democratic thought since the revolution, but two general points about it should be noted. The first is that the French, unlike the British, have not had protracted arguments about the extent of the franchise. This was based on a property qualification from 1791 to 1848; was then extended to all male citizens; and was extended to women in 1946 as the result of the changed status of women brought about by the Second World War rather than as the consequence of a debate about democracy.

The other point is that French debates have been influenced by the ideological factionalism that was for long a characteristic of political life. In the Third and Fourth Republics the existence of a multi-party system meant that every government was based on a coalition, while the weakness of party discipline increased the frequency with which these coalitions fell apart. In the life of these two regimes, totalling 81 years, France had 118 different governments, with an average duration of only eight months each. Some theorists were quite happy with this situation, feeling that it had the desirable result of keeping the executive in check. Others were critical, feeling that the representatives were spending much of their time on political intrigues and factional disputes rather than advancing the

interests of the nation. The Chamber of Deputies in the Fourth Republic was sometimes described as a 'house without windows' for this reason.

The situation changed with the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. De Gaulle was called to power because French governments had been unable to deal effectively with the political crisis and civil war in Algeria. He then adopted the tactic of appealing directly to French electors, over the head of the National Assembly, by holding referendums on critical issues. Two of these dealt with Algeria, the result being that de Gaulle's favoured policies were endorsed and he claimed that he had a mandate from the nation to grant independence to that territory. He also claimed a popular mandate for a constitutional revision to provide for the direct election of the President, and succeeded in carrying this through, although the use of a referendum in these circumstances was not authorized by the constitution.

The present system of government in France is a hybrid system, not only in the sense that it combines some of the features of normal parliamentary democracy with a strong executive presidency that is not answerable to parliament, but also in the sense that it has broken with the traditional republican doctrine that the National Assembly (and only the National Assembly) embodies the will of the nation. De Gaulle claimed on occasion to speak for the national will himself, while on other occasions he declared that the electorate had done so. He saw himself on these latter occasions in the role of Rousseau's legislator, putting a simple question to the people and eliciting a large majority in favour of a course of action that would probably not have emerged from factional debates in the Assembly. De Gaulle is not normally regarded as a democratic theorist, but the undoubted success of his approach to democratic government has added another strand to the French political tradition.

The history of the development of democratic government in Britain differs from the French case in three significant ways. First, Britain had a liberal culture and a constitution based on the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty for nearly two centuries before the system became democratic. Second, British politicians and theorists engaged in a debate over the extent of the franchise for the greater part of the nineteenth century. Third, British liberal theories were more individualistic in their assumptions than French theories.

From 1688 onwards the British political system was liberal in two senses. First, it was established that ultimate power rested with Parliament rather than with the king. Whereas most European states, including France, were ruled in the eighteenth century by monarchs who claimed absolute powers, the British king depended on Parliament for the passage of laws and for finance. As taxation could not be authorized for more than 12 months, Parliament had to meet at least once a year – a sharp contrast to the position in France before the revolution, when the Estates-General

(the three legislative bodies meeting simultaneously) had not been summoned for 175 years.

Second, Britain had a liberal regime from 1688 onwards in the sense that there was substantial freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of political association. Along with these freedoms, British residents had the right to trial by jury and they had a judiciary whose members were appointed for life and were independent of both the legislature and the executive government. In the eighteenth century, Britain had the most liberal regime in the world.

This regime was, however, far from being democratic. Fewer than 5 per cent of adult citizens were entitled to vote, constituencies were wildly unequal in size, the electoral process was highly corrupt, and wealthy land owners controlled almost half the seats in the House of Commons. Various radical reformers objected to this system and argued in favour of franchise reform, on the ground that all citizens should have equal political rights. The French Revolution stimulated demands for reform, particularly among the working classes. Tom Paine's book on *The Rights of Man*, published in 1792, sold about 200,000 copies within 2 years (see Brown 1918: 84). From this period until the major parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, there was constant agitation for radical changes in the electoral system, based on a belief in natural rights and popular sovereignty. (For a fuller outline of these radical movements, see Birch 1964: Chapter 3).

British legislators were to some extent influenced by these agitations and demonstrations in industrial areas, but were quite unable to accept the validity of demands that invoked the concept of natural rights. They were more willing, however, to accept the proposals for reform put forward by the Utilitarians, based on those were on the concept of interests. In the view of Jeremy Bentham and his collaborator, James Mill, the key to good government could be found in two propositions. The first is the principle of 'self-preference', by which it was affirmed that all men, including legislators, know what will promote their own happiness and try to maximise this. The second is the principle of 'utility' by which it was claimed that 'the right and proper end' of government is to promote 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' of citizens (Bentham 1838–43: vol. 9, p. 8).

These propositions, if accepted, established a case for parliamentary reform which was quite independent of cloudy ideas like natural rights. The unreformed Parliament of the early years of the nineteenth century could not be expected to maximize the happiness of the general body of citizens, it was said, for its members were drawn from a very narrow section of society and would reflect the interests of only that section. If Parliament were to promote the general welfare, the franchise must be extended so that elected members were drawn from all sections of society. The logic of the argument pointed to universal suffrage, though Mill,

anxious to make his ideas acceptable to a middle-class male audience, declared that it would be enough to give the vote to men over the age of forty.

This theory had philosophical limitations and, as a prescription for action, was not without ambiguities and difficulties. For one thing, it is not easy to see why a process of free election in geographical constituencies should automatically produce a House of Commons that would be a microcosm of the interests of the whole citizen body. Some interests, being those of a minority in each constituency, might never be represented at all. The assumption that women had no interests of their own, not represented by male members of their family, is clearly faulty. Beyond this, there is the problem presented by the differences in the intensity with which pains and pleasures are felt or anticipated. If such differences were ignored by legislators, as Bentham suggested, the interests of the majority would always be put first, even if the majority were only mildly in favour of a proposed policy or law while the minority felt that it threatened their wellbeing in a quite drastic way.

Despite these shortcomings, the Utilitarian theory acquired a great deal of influence in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. It did so largely because it met the needs of influential groups. The manufacturers of the northern industrial towns and the traders and craftsmen of London were alike in wanting fairly radical reforms in the system of parliamentary representation. The theories of the Whigs, though somewhat supportive of reform, were too moderate and too aristocratic in tone for them; the views advanced by Tom Paine and his followers were unacceptable because they insisted on the dangerous doctrine of natural rights of man. The Utilitarian theory had the advantage of being radical without seeming revolutionary; it was apparently logical and apparently hard-headed; it was admirably suited to be a vehicle for the claims of the new middle classes.

These middle-class groups were given the vote by the 1832 Reform Act. At about the same time, the principle of ministerial responsibility to parliament was established, while the procedure by which the Reform Act was passed seemed to establish the dominance of the House of Commons over the House of Lords. The system therefore became more liberal; but was still undemocratic because the property qualification for the franchise excluded the great majority of the population.

The system was democratized in the period 1867–85, when (in two bites) the franchise was extended to include nearly all adult male citizens, the distribution of seats was reformed to provide something much nearer to equality in the size of constituencies, and effective measures were taken to stop electoral corruption. The campaign leading up to these reforms, however, was conducted in the name of liberalism rather than that of democracy. It was marked by caution and by openly expressed doubts

about the political reliability of the working classes. There was precious little rhetoric about the intrinsic wisdom of the people, as had long been commonplace on the other side of the Atlantic.

Reformers placed their faith not in this but in the view expressed by John Stuart Mill (son of James Mill) that political reform would lead to the gradual education of the masses; that granting men the right to vote would develop their sense of social responsibility and would stimulate them to understand political problems and prepare themselves to take part in political life. The younger Mill's views therefore stressed the possibility of civic education rather than just the simple representation of interests. In this way he was more of an idealist than his father or Bentham had been. However, he was a rather cautious idealist, recommending that the extension of the franchise to working-class citizens (provided they paid taxes and could pass a literacy test) should be accompanied by the granting of multiple votes to citizens who had a higher education or were working in skilled or managerial occupations (J. S. Mill 1946: Chapter 8).

In 1865 William Gladstone summarized the cautious liberalism of the period by offering a definition of the attitudes of the two main parties to the franchise question. The Liberal attitude, he said, was 'trust in the people, only qualified by prudence', while the Conservative attitude was 'mistrust in the people, only qualified by fear' (quoted Bullock and Shock 1956: 143). In the event it was a Conservative government that took the plunge by introducing the Reform Act of 1867.

Universal suffrage was not established until women were granted the vote, which was done in two instalments, in 1918 and 1926. However, it was generally accepted that the reforms of 1867–85 made the British system democratic. Moreover, these reforms, having been supported by both major parties, and not leading to any serious problems, were quickly accepted by all shades of opinion as having been desirable. Lord Bryce, writing in 1920, said: 'Seventy years ago the word "democracy" awakened dislike and fear. Now it is a word of praise' (Bryce 1920: vol. 1, p. 4).

Since 1920, with the franchise issue settled, there have been three other developments in British democratic theory that deserve mention. First, the political ideas of the English Idealists influenced the attitude to democracy taken by several theorists in the inter-war period. The Idealist social philosophers, writing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, introduced some of Rousseau's notions to British intellectual circles. They advocated what has become known as the positive concept of liberty, and their approach to this topic will be discussed in Chapter 7. They and (more particularly) their followers also developed a less individualistic and more uplifting view of the purpose of representation than had been common in the nineteenth century.

One such theorist was A. D. Lindsay of Oxford. In a book called *The Essentials of Democracy* , published in 1929, he said this:

> The purpose of representative government is to maintain and preserve different points of view, in order to make effective discussion possible . . . it is democratic in so far as it is recognized that anyone . . . has something special and distinctive to contribute . . . But this belief that everyone has something to contribute does not mean that what everyone has to say is of equal value. It assumes that if the discussion is good enough the proper value of each contribution will be brought out in the discussion.
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> (Lindsay, 1935: 40–1)

About the same time, Harold Laski wrote in similar terms: 'The underlying thesis of parliamentary government', he said, 'is that discussion forms the popular mind and that the executive utilizes the legislature to translate into statute the will arrived at by that mind' (Laski 1928: 13). Ernest Barker of Cambridge followed the same trend when he wrote that the real basis of democracy is the 'discussion of competing ideas, leading to a compromise in which all the ideas are reconciled and which can be accepted by all because it bears the imprint of all' (Barker 1942: 41).

Bachrach has suggested that Lindsay and Barker, along with J. S. Mill, should be regarded as the authors of the 'classical theory of democracy'. This is quite implausible, both because there is no classical theory and because Lindsay and Barker were not particularly influential. They are quoted here only because their views indicate the width of the Atlantic Ocean in regard to democratic theory. The predominant tendency in Britain in this field has always been to favour pragmatic Utilitarian views, but those British theorists who did briefly (because their views did not survive the Second World War) develop more idealistic theories produced ideas that were far removed from the idealism of American populists.

A second line of argument in Britain has revolved around the theory of the electoral mandate, developed by Labour Party spokesmen. This theory states that each party has a duty to present the electorate at a general election with a detailed manifesto setting out the policies that the party proposes to follow, and the legislative changes it proposes to introduce, if it wins the election and forms the next government. The incoming government would then be entitled to claim that it had a mandate from the electors to carry out its promises and would therefore be acting democratically in using party discipline to press these policies through Parliament.

To some extent, this theory reflects the traditions and practices of the British trade-union movement, which has always believed that leaders should not only be elected but also be mandated to pursue specific policies endorsed by the rank-and-file members. Beyond this, however, it can be and has been claimed that the theory is the most appropriate one for a country whose politics are dominated by two highly disciplined national

parties. It is said that individualistic theories of representative government like those of the Utilitarians are outdated in a situation in which the role of the voters is not to get their individual interests represented but simply to decide which of the two main parties should govern the country for the next four or five years. This may be a restricted choice, but if the parties are democratically organized (as the Labour Party is), so that all who are interested in party policy can play a part in framing it, then the ordinary citizen can have a continuing role in the democratic process and the policy of a party winning a general election can reasonably be regarded as reflecting the will of the majority.

This theory has some plausibility in the context of a parliamentary system dominated by two disciplined parties. It is, however, highly controversial and most academic opinion is against it. The theory runs contrary to the accepted constitutional doctrine that the government of the country has a responsibility to protect and advance the interests of the whole nation, not just to look after its own political supporters. The theory also seems to be incompatible with the fact that the victorious party at a general election in Britain rarely gets the support of a majority of voters and virtually never gets that of a majority of electors. In 1987, for instance, the Conservative Party won a handsome victory with the support of only 42 per cent of the voters and only 32 per cent of the electors.

In reviewing the theory of the electoral mandate in the early 1960s I reached the conclusion that it had little descriptive validity, citing as evidence the results of sample surveys of public opinion and voting behaviour. These showed that in the 1950s there was a poor match between opinions on policy issues and voting behaviour. In the 1950 general election in a London constituency, 41 per cent of Labour voters agreed with Conservative policy positions, while in the 1955 election in Birmingham 39 per cent of Labour voters had pro-Conservative policy positions as against only 34 per cent who had pro-Labour policy positions (see Birch 1964: 120–1).

It was also shown that most voters decide how to vote on the basis of factors other than their view of the rival election manifestos; the authors of a study of voting in Birmingham in the 1951 election concluded that 'the maximum proportion of voters whose vote was primarily decided by an issue or issues cannot have been more than 10 per cent, and may have been much smaller' (Milne and Mackenzie 1954: 139). These data suggested that it would be unrealistic, as well as controversial on constitutional grounds, to interpret election results as conferring a mandate for the victorious party to pursue the particular policies listed in its election manifesto.

Is there any reason to revise this verdict in the early 1990s? The answer to this question has to be a little ambiguous. The constitutional argument against the mandate theory remains, and the argument in terms of the

opinions of voters can still be put. A 1970 survey showed that only 4 out of 16 policies set out in the Labour Party's manifesto had the support of a majority of Labour voters (Rose 1976: 309). In 1982 a leading student of voting behaviour reported that 'for at least the last fifteen years people have voted Labour despite its policies' (Crewe 1982: 37). A 1987 survey found that only about a third of the voters favoured four of the central proposals put forward in the manifesto of the victorious Conservative Party (Oliver 1989: 128).

In view of these rather powerful arguments against the mandate theory, why is it suggested that the evidence of recent years is slightly ambiguous? The reason is that there has been a growing tendency for politicians to place more stress than previously on the claim that they have a mandate for certain specific policies. The behaviour of the House of Lords has been one reason for this. Their Lordships have adopted the convention, quite voluntarily, that they will not mutilate or reject government Bills to which the ruling party committed itself in its last election manifesto, though they might mutilate or reject other Bills. In consequence, Conservative ministers in the 1980s were heard arguing that their government had a mandate for such policies as the compulsory sale of municipal housing or the abolition of the Greater London Council, about which the Lords had reservations.

Another relevant development is that British electors have become more volatile in the past two decades, apparently more willing to switch votes between parties in reaction to specific policies carried out or promised. This does not mean that the theory of the electoral mandate is much more convincing, because voters are not any more likely to endorse the whole platform of the party they support at the polls. However, it does mean that parties are apt to place more emphasis on specific policies they have designed to attract votes, and to claim that they have a mandate to implement such policies if they win the election.

The consequence of these developments is that, although the theory of the mandate, in its strong form, may have been undermined by empirical evidence, British politicians still talk about mandates to do this or that, and are likely to continue to do so. To use a familiar colloquialism, the theory of the mandate may be dead, but it won't lie down.

If British government is viewed in comparative perspective, it can be said that the mandate theory at least has the merit of drawing attention to one of the most democratic features of the system. One of the strengths of British democracy is the existence of a closer connection between electoral behaviour and government policies than can exist in a system fragmented by the separation of legislative and executive powers, or competition between numerous parties. British electors have the opportunity to base their vote on the plans of the rival parties, with some expectation that these plans will be carried out by the winner, and that

must be regarded as a distinct advantage in democratic terms even if only a minority of electors actually decide on this basis. British general elections give the public a more meaningful influence over future government policies than congressional elections in the United States, parliamentary elections in Italy (where every government is a coalition), or federal elections in Canada (where the parties do not publish detailed manifestos). Perhaps this aspect of the British system should be called 'manifesto democracy', to avoid the awkward connotations of the term 'mandate'.

Another controversy about democracy that has occurred in Britain is a controversy about intra-party democracy. This has been essentially a controversy within the Labour Party rather than between parties, but it raises a question of theoretical interest. Up until 1981, leadership selection and policy determination in the Labour Party were effectively in the hands of the parliamentarians. In 1981, the rules were changed so as to provide that the parliamentary leader would be chosen by an electoral college in which the Labour MPs would have only 30 per cent of the votes, the rest being divided between the local party branches (30 per cent) and the affiliated trade unions (40 per cent). It was also provided that sitting MPs would no longer have an automatic right of re-nomination, but could be deselected by their constituency party branches. The object of the changes was to give the unions and the party activists in the country more power to influence party policy and the behaviour of Labour MPs.

This objective would not be thought controversial in the United States, but it provoked a storm of controversy in Britain. Within months of the changes, twenty-five Labour MPs had left the party in protest and joined the new Social Democratic Party. They believed, as did many constitutional commentators, that giving extra-parliamentary organizations the power to influence party policy in Parliament contravened the principles of parliamentary democracy. R. T. McKenzie, an academic supporter of the Labour Party, had declared in his magisterial book on the party system that if the extra-parliamentary organizations of the Labour Party 'attempted to arrogate to themselves a determining influence with respect to policy or leadership they would be cutting across the chain of responsibility from Cabinet, to Parliament, to electorate, which is a fundamental feature of the British parliamentary system' (McKenzie 1955: 588). In a much later article he said that 'intra-party democracy, strictly interpreted, is incompatible with democratic government' (McKenzie 1982: 195).

The vigour with which this view was expressed by McKenzie, an academic supporter of the moderate wing of the Labour Party, reflected his concern that radical party activists might gain the upper hand in struggles over party policy. However, the general principle involved has the support of most theorists of parliamentary democracy, in Britain as in continental Europe. It underlay Edmund Burke's famous 1774 speech to the electors of Bristol asserting that MPs should not surrender their judgement to the

views of their constituents, which was itself one expression (and by no means the first) of what is best called the Whig theory of representation (see Birch 1964: 28–30).

The modern justification for this principle is that party leaders, when in office, have to balance the doctrinal aims of their party with a myriad of conflicting pressures, financial problems, and international developments. It is the responsibility of these leaders to get the balance right and to answer for their decisions to Parliament, and subsequently to the electorate. It would be wrong, so the argument goes, for leaders to be subject in this difficult task to instructions or threats from party committees whose members do not have the same duty of governing the country, are not engaged full-time in this activity, do not have expert advice from the bureaucracy, and are not answerable either to Parliament or the electorate. The position of ministers in a parliamentary system is very different from that of US Congressmen and Senators, who do not have executive responsibilities, and this is one of the reasons for the differences between European and American democratic theories. Europeans are rarely populists, in the American sense, and while in the nineteenth century this was partly because Europeans were more sceptical about the political wisdom of the people, in the late twentieth century it is mainly because of the constitutional differences between a parliamentary system and one based on the separation of powers. These transatlantic differences are so great that any attempt to generalize about democracy which ignores them must inevitably be inadequate.

Chapter 5

Political representation

DISPUTES ABOUT REPRESENTATION

Representation is a concept that has given rise to more disputes at the level of practical politics than at the level of political theory or philosophy. This is not to say that there are no difficulties at the philosophical level because, as I shall argue later, there are four logically distinct types of representation that are not always distinguished. But this kind of difficulty can be resolved, whereas the practical disagreements are mostly incapable of final resolution because they hinge upon normative differences about how political life ought to be conducted.

Within the period of the modern democratic state there have been three kinds of public dispute about representation in legislative assemblies, to say nothing (for the moment) about other forms of representation within systems of government. First, there have been disputes about who should be represented. Should it be sections of the country or economic interests, such as the land-owning interest, the farming interest, the merchants and bankers, the manufacturing and mining interests? Should it be social classes, with the franchise confined to citizens who have a stake in the country, to use the term used in British debates in the nineteenth century to describe people with a certain amount of property? Should women have the vote as well as men, a question that was not settled in France and Switzerland until 1946?

A second type of dispute is about how representatives should be chosen. Should they be appointed or elected? The Canadian Senate and the German Bundesrat both have appointed members, so this question is still current. If members are elected, how should they be elected? Should it be by simple plurality, as in Britain, the United States and Canada, or by some form of proportional representation, as in all the members of the European Community apart from Britain?

A third type of dispute is about how elected representatives should behave. Should they act as if they were mandated to pursue policies favoured by their constituents or should they act independently of con-

stituents' wishes, as trustees for the public interest? This third type of dispute has been described by Hanna Pitkin as 'the paradox of representation' (Pitkin 1968: 38). 'Can both views be right', she asks, 'when they seem to support opposite and incompatible conclusions about the duty of a representative?' (Pitkin 1968: 41).

The first of these three disputes has now been resolved by a combination of campaigns by groups who were excluded from the franchise, prudence on the part of ruling groups, and propaganda by reformers and political theorists. It is now accepted everywhere, even (since 1990) in South Africa, that all adult citizens should be represented through the electoral system. In states where elections are not competitive the process may not give any substantial degree of influence to the electors, but at least the proper extent of the franchise has passed out of dispute.

The other two questions are still in dispute in various countries and it does not seem likely that they can be resolved by the contributions of political theorists. The mechanics of electoral systems are likely to remain as a subject of controversy in some states, because the conflicting interests of the political parties are directly affected by the way that the system converts votes in the polling booth into seats in the assembly. The mandate/independence controversy is likely to remain alive because each represents a viable view of how an elected person should behave. The views are not easily compatible, but a reasonable case can be made for each of them. It is important to note, however, that members of Congress or Parliament do not hold that status either because they may be (to some extent) mandated or because they act largely as trustees for the public interest. These are recommendations about their behaviour; but what establishes their status as representatives is that they have been appointed by a certain process of election. This is their defining characteristic; and as there are other ways of defining a representative it will be helpful now to distinguish these by a brief exercise in linguistic analysis.

TYPES OF REPRESENTATION

The best philosophical guide to linguistic analysis is Wittgenstein, who suggested that when a word has two or more distinct usages the relationship between these usages should be regarded in the way that we regard relationships between members of a family. We recognize that family members have a common origin and that they may share a recognizable family character, but we do not concentrate all our attention on what they have in common because to do so would mean that we miss the distinctive characters of the various members. In dealing with concepts that have differing usages, the shared characteristic is sometimes very important but sometimes relatively unimportant. In the case of representation, I think it is relatively unimportant, a view that is strengthened by Pitkin's reminder

that the German language has three quite different words – *vertreten, darstellen*, and *reprasentieren* – 'all of which are usually translated by the English "represent" ' (Pitkin 1989: 132). The view that I wish to advance here, which I have also expressed in previous publications (see Birch 1971a and 1971b), is that there are four main usages of the term 'representative', corresponding to four main types of modes of representation, each of which is logically distinct from the other. Three of them have both political and non-political connotations, while the fourth is purely political.

The first type of representation occurs when the term 'representative' is employed to describe a person who has the acknowledged duty of defending or advancing certain interests specified by his or her principal. A sales representative is a representative in this sense of the term; so is an ambassador; and so is a lawyer appointed to defend the interests of a client in a court hearing. The representative does not necessarily act exactly as his or her principal would; in some situations the representative may drive a harder bargain than the principal would feel able to do, while in others the representative may be restrained by professional etiquette and conventions. But in all cases the function of this kind of representative is to achieve certain goals set by his or her principal, and the extent to which these goals are achieved is a criterion of successful representation. As a form of shorthand, I will henceforth describe this kind of representation as 'delegated representation'. In a modern political system the most conspicuous form of delegated representation is that by spokespersons for pressure groups.

One question which commonly arises in connection with delegated representation is the extent to which the representative is, or should be, bound by the instructions of the principal. This question has been discussed in scores of books, hundreds of articles, thousands of speeches. No agreement has been reached on the answer, for the simple reason that no meaningful answer is possible when the question is phrased in general terms. It is a question to which the answer depends almost entirely on the exact circumstances of the representative relationship under discussion. For example, a lawyer cannot be so closely bound by the client's instructions as a sales representative can be bound by the firm's instructions, because the lawyer is governed by a strict code of professional behaviour and has duties to the court as well as to his or her client. How closely the lawyer will follow instructions also depends on the nature of the case: a lawyer in a divorce case might expect to receive fairly detailed instructions about the kind of evidence to call and the kind of settlement to work for whereas a lawyer defending a man charged with murder would expect a fairly free hand in reaching decisions about the best line of defence.

Another question which often arises is the extent to which a representative of this kind can bind his or her principal. It is sometimes assumed that if a representative of this kind agrees to a proposal this can be taken

to imply the consent of the principal. In fact this is only sometimes the case. The relationship between representation and consent varies, and depends upon all sorts of contingent factors. Thus, modern ambassadors hardly ever have power to commit their governments, but when international communications were slower ambassadors were sometimes given such powers. The relationship between representation and commitment or consent is therefore (like the question of instructions) a matter for historical inquiry, depending as it does on the exact circumstances of each situation.

The statement that a person is a representative in the sense of being an agent therefore conveys only a limited amount of information. It does not tell us how the person was appointed, what kind of person he or she is, whether he or she acts under close or loose instructions, or whether the representative's agreement to a proposal binds the principal. However, it tells us something about his or her functions and probable behaviour, and is therefore to be sharply distinguished from the second general usage of the term, which refers not to the functions but to the descriptive characteristics of the representative.

This second usage refers to physical similarity. It is found when representational art is distinguished from abstract art. It is well exemplified in the term 'representative sample', which indicates a sample of the relevant population chosen by statistical methods so that the main characteristics of the population will be mirrored in the sample. The term is used in the same sense, but more loosely, to denote a person who is in some respects typical of a larger class of persons to which he belongs. This usage occurs in such statements as 'the varied membership of the club is represented fairly well in the composition of the executive committee' or 'a parliament where fewer than 10 per cent of the members are women is hardly representative of the electorate'. Since a representative body would be ideally constituted, in this sense of the term, if it were a microcosm of the larger society, I shall describe this kind of representation as 'microcosmic representation'.

The statement that a person is a representative in this sense does not tell us anything about his or her functions, intentions or even behaviour. It simply tells us something about his or her personal characteristics. However, many writers have asserted that characteristics, particularly social and economic characteristics, have a strong influence on behaviour, so the fact that ruling groups rarely represent the population in a microcosmic sense has sometimes been adduced as an explanation for their evident failure to govern properly. As is well known, Jeremy Bentham's conversion to the cause of parliamentary reform occurred when he became convinced that a House of Commons dominated by the upper classes was unlikely to do more than advance upper-class interests. Many of the arguments of the early Utilitarians were based on the belief that the country needed a parliament which would be representative in this microcosmic sense, so

that its members, while pursuing their own interests, would automatically further the interests of the whole population.

Of course, this highly influential school of thought was based upon a whole set of fallacious arguments. Quite apart from the philosophical limitations of Utilitarianism, their political programme was beset by practical difficulties. One cannot get a representative sample by calling for volunteers, particularly when the job in question requires special talents and rewards them with a high degree of insecurity. The world has never seen a representative assembly which is fully representative in a microcosmic sense, but party managers are well aware of the criticisms that may be levelled against their party if no serious attempt is made to at least reflect the main social divisions of the electorate in their choice of candidates. It is for this reason that American parties frequently nominate a 'balanced ticket' for election in urban areas, ensuring that the party's list of candidates contains a suitable proportion of persons drawn from each of the main ethnic groups in the community. With less success, parties in most democratic states are currently making an effort to see that more women are nominated for office.

The criticism of unrepresentativeness, in this microcosmic usage of the term, has been levelled against various institutions besides legislative assemblies. It used to be said that the US Supreme Court was unrepresentative of the American population when all its members where white, a situation that has been corrected since 1967 by the practice of always including one black judge. It used to be said that the Canadian Supreme Court was unrepresentative of the population when all its members were male. It has often been said that recruitment to the policy-making grades of the British civil service is socially biased, with preference given to candidates from private schools and the older universities. Attempts to meet this criticism have been somewhat half hearted, as is evidenced by the fact that in 1987 a candidate who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge 'was nine times as likely to be appointed as a candidate from another university' (Birch 1990: 141). In the United States a more determined effort has been made to eliminate the more obvious forms of social bias in recruitment to bureaucratic posts, so as to make the bureaucracy 'more representative.' (On the American situation, see Krislov 1974).

The third main usage is found when an object or emblem is described as representing a larger or more abstract entity in a symbolic way. As examples, the scales of justice represent the essential character of the law, the Christian cross is a symbol of the crucifixion, the stars and stripes on the American flag symbolize the growth of the United States from thirteen states to fifty. Persons can be symbolic representatives also, as Queen Elizabeth is sometimes said to be a symbol of the British nation and the Governor-General of Canada or Australia is a symbolic representative of the crown and the historic connection between Britain and those countries.

In one of Marx's early writings the industrial protelariat was depicted as the symbolic representative of all humanity, having 'a universal character because its sufferings are universal' and not claiming 'a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general' (Marx 1964: 58).

This usage is neither so common nor so important as the first and second usages, but it should not be ignored because symbolic representation plays a significant part in political activity. It is often the case that the appointment of a member of a minority group to a position of prestige is valued not so much for any real difference in policy that he or she may bring about as for the fact that the appointment symbolizes the acceptance of the group as full members of the community.

These three usages of the term representation are non-political in origin, though often applied to political situations. None of them adequately covers the position of elected members of a legislative assembly in a modern democratic state. Members of Parliament or Congress are not actually delegates of their constituents. There is no machinery whereby constituents may formulate instructions and communicate them to members, and in any case the normal situation is for the constituents to be divided among themselves in terms of their interests, values and opinions about policy. Nor can the members be said to be microcosmic representatives, either of their constituents or of the population as a whole. In all western democracies, the elected representatives of the people are disproportionately (and sometimes overwhelmingly) white, male and middle-class. At the same time, they are more than purely symbolic representatives.

In these circumstances the best course is to recognize that elected assembly members are representatives in a fourth sense of the term that cannot be reduced to any of, or any combination of, the other three usages. They are representatives because they have been appointed by a particular process of election to occupy that role. It was Hobbes who first maintained that representation is essentially a process of authorization, and although this is not true of microcosmic representation or symbolic representation I believe that it is true of elective representation. Members of Parliament or Congress are people who have been authorized by the process of election to exercise certain powers. This is their defining characteristic, and they remain legal representatives until they step down, die or are defeated, no matter how they behave in the assembly.

To say this is not to play down the importance of the mandate/independence controversy, only to say that it involves a separate level of debate that cannot be settled by arguing about the nature of elective representation. In practice, most elected representatives pay at least some attention to the interests and values of their constituents, but also feel free to exercise their independent judgement about what is best for their party or their country. How far they lean one way or the other depends upon the nature of

the governmental system within which they work. American legislators customarily lean more towards the promotion of local interests than British or French or Canadian legislators do, though they are elected in the same way, and this is partly because the separation of powers in the United States means that they are not committed to supporting or criticizing the executive, partly because of the relative weakness of American party discipline, and partly because their ideological commitments tend to be less rigid.

It is also important to notice that the behaviour of elected representations may vary from one period to another within the same polity. In medieval and early modern times, Members of Parliament in England leaned more towards the defence of local interests than they do in contemporary England. In those days their main representative functions were to express the grievances of propertied classes in their county or borough and to indicate how willing the latter would be to contribute their taxes for use by the king and his ministers. Attitudes and behaviour changed during the eighteenth century under the influence of the Whigs, who believed that Parliament should be the centre of political power rather than merely acting as a forum for grievances and a check on the executive. If Parliament were to be a deliberative and decision-making body, it was clearly necessary that the MP should be free to do what he thought best in the national interest rather than act as a spokesperson for the interests of his constituents. It was this that led Edmund Burke to make his famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, though he was only the most eloquent, not the first, of the Whigs to do so. Parliament, Burke told his constituents, was:

> not a *congress* of ambassadors from different hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest, that of the whole; where not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole.

Certainly a representative should keep in close touch with his constituents and should even:

> prefer their interests to his own. But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgement, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you . . . Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving, you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.
>
> (Burke 1921: 63–4, italics in the original)

A similar position was adopted by the Abbe-Sieyes and his fellow revolutionaries in France, who included in the first revolutionary constitution of that country the clear statement that members of the National Assembly

could not be given any mandate by their voters. As was noted in Chapter 4, during the nineteenth century this doctrine, with its associated prohibition of instructions, was adopted in most countries of western Europe. European legislators are not less certainly representatives because they lean rather more (though in practice not entirely) towards the independence side of the mandate/independence controversy than American legislators; they simply operate in a different constitutional setting.

The upshot of this analysis is to throw serious doubt on the value of searching for any true or essential meaning of representation. It is better simply to accept that there are four different types of representation, each of which has its own character.

THE FUNCTIONS OF REPRESENTATION

In most books and articles on the subject of representative government, the main focus is on the popular election of assembly members and their role and behaviour in the legislature. This is natural, for these are the activities that enable the system as a whole to be characterized as representative and democratic. However, there is some advantage to be gained from elaborating the precise functions that are involved in this process and it will also be helpful to indicate certain other functions that representative institutions can perform, on the output side of the governmental process as well as on the input side. I believe that a comprehensive inventory of the functions of political representation has to include at least six entries.

It is fair to begin with political recruitment. The existence of a variety of elective posts, at both local and national levels, provides a mechanism for the recruitment of politicians that is considerably more free of nepotism and favouritism than the mechanisms commonly in place in dictatorial regimes. It is not difficult for would-be politicians to get themselves nominated for the more modest of these positions and to gain office if they can win support from enough local voters.

A second and closely related function is to provide a series of public competitions for office during which personalities can be assessed, issues can be aired, records criticized, and policy options debated. Public elections also provide an opportunity for voluntary participation by large numbers of supporters who can thus play a larger part in the political process than simply by voting.

A third function is that of providing for both responsiveness and responsibility in the conduct of government. When we talk of responsibility in government one of the features we expect is that those in charge of policy making shall be responsive to the wishes and interests of the general public. The representative system obviously provides a strong incentive for political leaders to satisfy the majority of the electorate by their policies. However, there is another side to the ideal of responsibility in

politics that also has to be taken into account. This is that a government will be regarded as irresponsible if its policies, however popular at the time they are formulated, prove to be imprudent or inconsistent in the longer run.

The usage of responsibility to mean consistency and prudence is well illustrated by a speech made on the budget by a leading British minister some years ago:

> When a government has to choose between a run on the pound and its own popularity, it has only one choice it can make. It makes it unwillingly. It must face unpopularity, loss of by-elections and even, if need be, defeat at a later general election. This is the price of responsible government.
>
> (quoted Birch 1964: 19)

This kind of dilemma is often faced by governments. In 1991, for instance, President Bush and the Canadian Prime Minister were both caught in the dilemma of a recession that needed a large injection of public money to reduce unemployment, at a time when it was highly desirable to minimize the budgetary deficit because of the excessive burden of public debt that had been accumulated over previous years. They both decided, rightly or wrongly, that the most responsible course of action was to contain the deficit.

If political responsibility in this sense of the term is a virtue, then it can be said that one of the functions of representation – and one of its advantages over direct democracy – is that it gives political leaders the distance from immediate public pressures that is needed if they are to act in a consistent and prudent fashion, after weighing all the consequences of action in the balance. They will have to account for their decisions to the electorate in due course, but they have time that may allow them to recover from the unpopularity that their decisions may have caused. To do so they need to educate the public about the relative costs of alternative policies, so that this distance and time may contribute to political education.

The fourth function of political representation is indicated by the above paragraph. It is to ensure that political leaders are held accountable to the electorate for their actions in elections that are spaced in time, but not too widely spaced.

These four functions of representation can all be grouped under the general heading of popular control of government. However, representative institutions and processes are also constantly used by governments to help their administration and maintain the system. Their first advantage of this kind is that they help to legitimize the system and the powers of those who direct the government. The importance of legitimacy, as an essential ingredient of political authority, has been stressed in Chapter 3.

In the modern democratic state the most important of all the sources of legitimacy is the fact that the power to make laws rests with elected representatives, while the leaders of the executive either depend on the support of the elected assembly, as in parliamentary systems, or are directly elected themselves, as in the United States and France.

The legitimizing function of representation can also be seen where representatives are appointed rather than elected. A commission of inquiry into race relations would lack legitimacy in the eyes of ethnic minorities unless it included members from the minorities. A commission on industrial relations would lack legitimacy in the eyes of workers unless it included one or two prominent trade unionists among its members.

A related function of representation is the mobilization of consent. This was the chief original purpose of the older European Parliaments, and it has been well described by historians. The English king's motives in summoning the first English Parliament have been described in the following way:

> In 1275 Edward I summoned knights to his first parliament, not to take an active part in drawing up the Great Statute of Westminster, but rather to hear and understand the reforms in local government which it contained and to carry back . . . the explanations of the new provisions for restraining the corruptions of sheriffs. In 1283 and again in 1295 and 1307 Edward I was . . . making use of the representative system for propaganda purposes; demonstrating to the communities of shire and borough, on whose material assistance he was bound to rely, the justice of his own cause against the villainy of his enemy.
>
> (Cam 1963: 226–7)

Things have not changed a great deal over the past seven centuries. Parliament is constantly used to publicize the government's plans and its justifications for them. The general rule is that all channels of political communication tend to become two-way channels, and this can also be seen rather clearly in the operation of advisory and consultative committees established with the ostensible purpose of representing the consumers of the service or state industry in question. The function that such committees serve is that of creating opportunities for grievances to be ventilated, so that critics are able to let off steam instead of building up their frustrations. However, it does not follow that the critics will bring about changes. Some years ago public criticisms of the quality of British radio and television services led to the suggestion that a new Broadcasting council should be established to oversee all the broadcasting media and to deal with complaints from aggrieved members of the public. The London *Daily Telegraph* made the following comment:

> Alas, this suggestion will not begin to solve the problem. It is our

> experience generally that boards which are set up to regulate and supervise some activity . . . are soon captured by the industry in question and fashioned into its apologists.
>
> (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 January 1971)

It is highly unlikely that this tendency is confined to Britain. The generalization that all channels of political communication become two-way channels can be supplemented by the generalization that, unless political passions are aroused, the party with most expert knowledge will tend to get the better of the argument. All representative institutions, if skilfully handled, can serve to mobilize consent to the policies of those actually running the industry, agency, or government department involved. It follows from this that, when we discuss the role of political representation in the modern democratic state, we should consider the part that representative arrangements play in maintaining the system as well as the part they play in securing a degree of popular control over government.

Chapter 6

Political participation

DEFINITION OF THE TERM

Republican and democratic theorists from Rousseau onwards have either urged or assumed that a proper system of government must provide opportunities for political participation by the ordinary citizen. The opportunity to vote in periodic competitive elections is the minimum condition that a governmental system must satisfy to qualify as democratic, and most liberal theorists, indeed most political scientists, have believed that further opportunities and forms of political participation are highly desirable. The concept of political participation is not nearly as complex as the concept of representation, is not currently contestable, and can be easily illustrated by example, in the form of a list of the main forms of participation open to citizens in the modern democratic state. Before giving this list, however, a word about definition will be helpful.

Participation is an activity, that of taking part with others in some social process, game, sport or joint endeavour. The social dimension is essential to the term; Robinson Crusoe did not participate in anything, because he was alone. Political participation is participation in the process of government, and the case for political participation is essentially a case for substantial numbers of private citizens (as distinct from public officials or elected politicians) to play a part in the process by which political leaders are chosen and/or government policies are shaped and implemented.

It must be emphasized that participation is an activity, as distinct from an attitude. In their celebrated study of *The Civic Culture* Almond and Verba characterized the American political culture as a 'participant civic culture', largely on the basis that Americans had a stronger belief than the citizens of the four other countries studied in the importance of citizen participation in political life and in their competence to play a meaningful role (Almond and Verba 1965: 313–15). This is exactly what could be expected in view of the long-standing American belief in popular sovereignty, already discussed in Chapter 4. However, belief in the virtue and probable effectiveness of political participation is not the same as partici-

pation itself, as is shown by the fact that turnout figures for voting in American national elections are much lower than the equivalent figures in most other democracies. The figures are 30–35 per cent in mid-term congressional elections, compared with 75–85 per cent in most parliamentary elections in Europe.

The main forms of political participation can easily be listed, and are as follows:

1 voting in local or national elections;
2 voting in referendums;
3 canvassing or otherwise campaigning in elections;
4 active membership of a political party;
5 active membership of a pressure group;
6 taking part in political demonstrations, industrial strikes with political objectives, rent strikes in public housing, and similar activities aimed at changing public policy;
7 various forms of civil disobedience, such as refusing to pay taxes or obey a conscription order;
8 membership of government advisory committees;
9 membership of consumers' councils for publicly owned industries;
10 client involvement in the implementation of social policies;
11 various forms of community action, such as those concerned with housing or environmental issues in the locality.

JUSTIFYING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Although participation is a behavioural concept, it is one with strong normative overtones. Very few people think political participation is a bad thing. Many commend it as one of the factors in the success of western democratic systems, and, being broadly content with the systems, are broadly content with the level and character of public participation in them. Many others believe that democracy would be enhanced in quality and perhaps improved in efficiency if the level of participation were increased, either through existing channels or through additional ones that ought to be established.

To some extent participation can be justified in terms of the functional requirements of any system of government, whether democratic or not. Those who wield political power, whether this be at local or national level, will be likely to do so more effectively if they are well informed about the problems, needs and attitudes of the citizens and community they govern. Dictatorships are apt to rely for this kind of information on government agents of one kind or another, from municipal clerks to secret police, but this inevitably involves the danger that the agents will tell the rulers what they think the latter want to hear, or what the agents think

will benefit their own career prospects. It is better, in the sense of more efficient, if there are open channels of communication through which private citizens or freely elected representatives can pass relevant information to decision makers.

Another general point is that the existence of channels for public participation in the political process is likely to increase the propensity for citizens to comply voluntarily with governmental rules and orders. If people have had the opportunity to play some part in the selection of public officials, to communicate their views on public issues, and to exert pressure on decision makers, they are more likely to accept that governmental decisions are legitimate, even if disliked, than would be the case if citizens did not have such opportunities. It was this kind of argument that led European monarchs to establish parliamentary bodies in the first place, way back in the thirteenth century in the English case, in the hope of increasing the probability that taxes levied by the national government would actually be collected. In some modern dictatorships, such as Hitler's Germany or the Soviet Union, mass membership in the ruling party has been encouraged as a way of mobilizing support for government policies. To socialize young people into accepting the legitimacy of the regime, mass movements for children and teenagers have also been created, such as the Hitler Youth movement in Germany and the Little Octobrists in the Soviet Union. A belief in the advantages of widespread political participation is not confined to democratic regimes.

A commitment to democratic principles supplements these basic arguments with others. It is part of the definition of democracy, and fundamental to all democratic theories, that private citizens should have the opportunity to vote in elections, to organize political parties and pressure groups, and to give public expression to their views on political issues without fear of reprisals if their views happen to be unpopular with the government of the day. Beyond this basic normative commitment, there are several arguments by democratic theorists about mass participation in the political process, some in favour of increased participation and some against it. These are rather varied in character and have been divided by scholars into the two categories of instrumental arguments, in terms of the benefits or dangers to the system that mass participation can bring, and developmental arguments, in terms of the benefits or costs to individual citizens (see Parry 1972: Chapter 1). In what follows I shall outline the main arguments in these two categories, though without using the terms 'instrumental' and 'developmental', which can create problems.

ARGUMENTS IN TERMS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The majority of empirical political scientists who have studied political participation in democratic states in the post-war period have been broadly

content with the level of participation as sufficient to meet the requirements of the system, though some of them have noted that the level achieved falls short of that assumed by a good deal of democratic theory. In 1954 this point was made rather forcibly by three political sociologists who had conducted an elaborate survey of public opinion and voting behaviour in the 1948 presidential election. They reported that the voters had not shown a great deal of interest in or knowledge of the political issues involved in the election, that there had been little meaningful discussion or debate of these issues, and that it seemed to be true of many voters that their political preferences were akin to cultural tastes rather than being the outcome of rational calculations (Berelson *et al.* 1954: 307–11).

These scholars observed that in these respects the electors failed to behave in the way that much popular democratic theory then took for granted. However, they thought that this implied a fault in the theory, which focused too much on the supposed virtues of the individual citizen and not enough on the requirements of the democratic system as a whole. They asserted that American democracy was working, 'perhaps even more vigorously and effectively than ever' (Berelson *et al.* 1954: 312). One of the conditions for its success was the existence of cross-cutting cleavages in society, so that there was a partial but not a complete correlation between social characteristics and political preferences; a situation that provided for more stability and consensus than would exist if there were a complete correlation (ibid.: 318–20). Another condition was the existence of a certain amount of political apathy. 'Extreme interest goes with extreme partisanship and might culminate in rigid fanaticism that could destroy democratic processes if generalized throughout the community', whereas 'low interest provides maneuvring room for political shifts' and compromises (ibid.: 314). A somewhat similar line of argument was developed by a British scholar in an article entitled 'In defence of apathy' (Morris-Jones 1954). The overall thrust of the argument was that populist theories of democracy involved unnecessary and unrealistic assumptions about the political interest, knowledge and rationality of the average citizen; and that they should be replaced by more pragmatic theories based on empirical evidence about the requirements of democratic systems.

The snag about this argument, in the view of critics, is that it ignores the existence of a strong social bias in the practice of political participation. Repeated surveys have shown a clear correlation between education, income and social status on the one hand and the tendency to vote and join pressure groups on the other. The poor and the badly educated, who might be thought to have most to gain from political reforms, are generally the most apathetic and the least active in politics. (For a comprehensive summary of evidence on this, see Milbrath 1965.) This bias means, it is said, that the system cannot be regarded as fully democratic.

What could be done to minimize this bias? One tactic, clearly would be to make voting compulsory, as it has been for many years in Australia, Belgium and Italy. This provision is not the subject of much controversy in these countries, where the sanctions are so minimal as to be insignificant, but the existence of the rule pushes turnout in national elections to over 90 per cent of the electorate. In view of the exceptionally low turnout figures for national elections in the United States, one might expect American critics of a radical disposition to recommend the adoption of compulsory voting, but my search of the literature has not revealed any examples of this.

Another recommendation that Americans in favour of higher political participation might be expected to make, but have not made, is that the political parties should follow the example of many European parties in developing mass memberships, with branches in every town and intensive programmes of local meetings and social activities. The British Conservative Party and the German Social Democratic Party both have memberships of over a million, and all have intensive activities that make the American (and Canadian) parties seem, in comparison, like empty shells. In every electoral district in Britain, for instance, the Conservative Party has a local branch that organizes frequent meetings and a constant programme of social activities. In the industrial areas the Conservative Clubs have bars, billiards tables, darts teams and the like, whereas in suburban areas the emphasis is more on weekly whist drives and on dances, garden parties, sherry parties and similar fund-raising events. The Labour Party is organized on much the same lines and both parties are heavily into the publishing business, producing a constant stream of booklets, pamphlets and discussion papers on policy issues. The parties have discussion groups, ideological pressure groups and youth movements. One consequence of all this activity is the communication of opinions between rank-and-file members and parliamentary leaders; another is to reduce the dependence of the parties on corporate or union donations; yet another is that during election campaigns each party can call on an army of voluntary workers, making paid helpers unnecessary.

Having been a participant/observer in elections in four English-speaking countries, my judgement is that the level of public discussion of political issues is appreciably higher in Australia, which has compulsory voting, and Britain, which has parties with mass memberships, than it is in the United States or Canada, which have neither. However, this is only one observer's judgement and other factors are also relevant, such as the greater ideological gap between the Australian and British parties than between the North American parties and the sharper character of television interviews in the former countries.

As noted, the critics (mainly American) who are not content with current levels of political participation have not advocated either of these

developments. Instead, they have favoured changing the system in other ways. Thus, Bachrach has argued in favour of industrial democracy. He accepts that 'participation in key political decisions on the national level must remain extremely limited' (Bachrach 1969: 95), and believes that the way to make America a more democratic society is to make the managers of large corporations accountable to the workers by law. Bachrach is surprisingly sceptical about the political abilities of the average citizen, saying that 'the illiberal and anti-democratic propensity of the common man is an undesirable fact that must be faced' (Bachrach 1969: 105). His proposal is to educate the factory worker by involving him in 'the solution of concrete problems affecting himself and his immediate community', which in modern America is 'the factory community' (Bachrach 1969: 103). He has no proposals to improve the participation of the majority of adult Americans, who do not work in factories.

A similar line has been taken by Carole Pateman, who argues that 'for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist' (Pateman 1970: 43), and claims that if industrial workers were given some share in decision making at their place of work this would improve their sense of political efficacy and make it more likely that they would also participate, and participate well, in the process by which the country is governed. 'The existence of a participatory society', she says, 'would mean that [the ordinary man] was better able to assess the performance of representatives at the national level, better equipped to take decisions of national scope when the opportunity arose to do so' (Pateman 1970: 110).

A more radical critique of western democratic institutions has been mounted by enthusiasts for the drastic decentralization of power to create a 'participatory democracy', by which they mean a system in which small local units, perhaps informally organized, would have a veto power over national decisions. A book called *The Case for Participatory Democracy* contained twenty-one articles by scholars of anarchist or near-anarchist convictions – American, Canadian and British – arguing in favour of various forms of community self-government (see Benello and Roussopoulos 1971). This kind of view is held by only a very small minority, but it has become more common in the past two decades than it was previously, in part because the evident failures of central economic planning in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe have led some neo-Marxists to think in near-anarchistic terms and to stress the near-anarchistic ideas expressed in Marx's early writings rather than the dialectical materialism developed in his later writings.

A more balanced discussion of participatory democracy is provided in a book with that title by T. E. Cook and P. M. Morgan. They draw a useful distinction between co-determination, in which amateurs join with professionals in decision-making bodies, and self-determination, in which

groups of amateurs take decisions themselves. Examples of co-determination include student-faculty committees in universities and government advisory committees of all kinds. Examples of self-determination include Israeli kibbutzim and 'some of the community-action programmes in the War on Poverty' (Cook and Morgan 1971: 5). They suggest that the best way to break the 'iron law of oligarchy' (to be discussed in Chapter 11) is:

> to shift towards non-elitist decision-making units. Hence workers should participate directly in making and applying rules on working conditions, wages and similar matters; students should participate in decision-making on teaching, curriculum and campus life; and racial or ethnic minorities should be maximally involved in decisions regarding their housing, schools, welfare payments and the like.
>
> (Cook and Morgan 1971: 14)

The implication of their discussion is that co-determination is preferable to self-determination, in that it ensures that specialized information and expertise are available to decision makers.

There are also arguments against participatory democracy. One is that groups of amateur politicians may lend themselves to manipulation by demagogues or by ideological factions. It has frequently been observed that this was the case among student groups at the time of student revolts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when New Left activists effectively dominated the scene although they were often in a minority among the student bodies as a whole. Open participation may mean domination by those with strong ideological motivations who are willing to give their time to it, but who would not necessarily be able to win a competitive election. Moreover, normal representative institutions have rules of order that protect all parties to the debate, but this is not always the case when decisions are taken at mass meetings (see Cook and Morgan 1971: 30–1).

Another possible argument is that elected representatives and appointed officials can probably bargain and compromise over issues more easily than citizen groups can (Cook and Morgan 1971: 34). Being full-time professionals in the game of politics teaches people to accept the realities of political life, which frequently involve compromise and partial defeat. Amateurs may not be so flexible.

Another possible argument is that mass participation may mean that a spontaneous group can effectively nullify a decision by the elected body responsible for decision making. When Columbia University decided in 1968 to build a gymnasium on the edge of Harlem, this decision was ratified more than once by the elected representatives of the citizens of Harlem. However, a sizeable group of non-elected black students at Columbia decided that it would not be good for Harlem and created a crisis ending in violence. Henry Kissinger's comment on this was that it was

'government by a process of private nullification, which has never been especially good news for democracy'.

While the arguments against wider citizen participation in politics are mostly rather conservative, there is also a radical argument to the effect that many forms of participation tend to co-opt people into the system and thus blunt the edge of protest. Writing about community problems, John Dearlove has said this:

> [Participation] can force, or educate, the participants to gain an awareness of governmental problems and policies and this will not only inhibit the public from pressing for solutions to their own problems, but will also enable the authorities to legitimize their decisions with the stamp of public approval.
>
> (quoted Richardson 1983: 59)

The East London Claimants' Union, a group representing people on welfare, has declared that:

> any of this 'participation' would be a sell-out to the system and an attempt on the part of the establishment to absorb our militancy. To the establishment, participation merely means that a few of us will help 'them' to make decisions about us.
>
> (quoted Richardson 1983: 59)

There is a good deal of force in this argument. Many years ago K. C. Wheare, writing about the vast number of advisory committees established by British government departments, observed that there was a risk that 'all those who might influence and guide public opinion may be captured by the departments, placed on their committees, and so won over to the official side from the start' (Wheare 1955: 66). My own study of the role of the regional consumer councils attached to the British gas and electricity boards (then under public ownership) revealed that 'they are more effective in bringing the excuses of the authorities to the attention of the public than in bringing the complaints of the public to the attention of the authorities' (Birch 1959: 162). The general point (as suggested in Chapter 5) is that all channels of communication between the public and the government are or quickly become two-way channels, which can be used by both sides.

One of the conceptual lessons that may be learned from this very brief sketch of some of the arguments that have been made about political participation in recent years is the need for clarity about the forms of participation. While the general definition of the term is not problematic, it has to be accepted that it is an omnibus term. There is a world of practical difference between enhanced participation through the existing processes of representative government, participation in new institutions to be added to the existing system, participation in spontaneous demon-

strations, boycotts and other forms of direct action, and participation in social and industrial institutions that may influence political behaviour but is not directly political in itself. There are also significant distinctions to be drawn between co-determination and self-determination, as already mentioned, and between participation in policy-making processes and participation in the implementation of policy. It follows that a general commitment to more widespread citizen participation in politics, while being an entirely reasonable commitment for democrats to have, does not in itself constitute a programme for reform. It is essential for critics of the existing pattern of institutions and behaviour to be specific about the changes they would like to see.

ARGUMENTS IN TERMS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

There is a basic difference of opinion here between theorists who regard political participation as a cost that the individual participant has to incur in order to secure benefits, and those who regard participation as a beneficial activity in itself. Theorists of the former type can be regarded as descendants of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, the British Utilitarians who viewed the political arena as a kind of market-place in which individuals constantly attempted to maximize the benefits and minimize the losses they could secure from the political process. The assumptions of the theory included individual selfishness, in the sense that each participant would be motivated by the desire to protect or enhance his own personal interests, and individual rationality, in the sense that each participant could be expected to make a rational calculation of probable gains and losses before acting.

Academic economists have adopted these assumptions regarding economic behaviour in a free-market economy and have built up an impressive body of theory based upon axioms about behaviour and models indicating the reactions that could be expected to follow various stipulated changes, such as variations in the rate of interest or the overall level of purchasing power or the distribution of incomes. Since the late 1950s, a number of political scientists or political economists have tried to apply the same kind of logic to political behaviour.

The leader in this enterprise was Anthony Downs, whose book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* was published in 1957, and one of his most influential successors was Mancur Olson, whose book on *The Logic of Collective Action* appeared in 1965. Downs raised a basic question about the reasons why people participate in politics by voting. Given that the act of voting requires some expenditure of time and energy, the decision to vote could only be justified by some calculation of the probable benefit to the individual voter. It must therefore depend on the perceived difference between the policies of the competing parties, in so far as they might

affect the voter, the perceived expectation that the choice of an individual candidate would determine which party emerged victorious in the overall result, and the perceived expectation that the vote of the individual voter would determine the result of the election in that district. As Brian Barry has pointed out, the chances of a single vote determining the result in any sizeable electoral district are so small that the logical decision for the great majority of electors would be not to bother to vote. This kind of analysis therefore points to a puzzle about voting behaviour in democracies (Barry 1970: 14–15).

There are various possible answers to the paradox of why most people in most democracies do actually turn out to vote in national elections. One, suggested by Riker and Ordeshook, is that people get rewards from voting other than an expected material benefit from the result. They get emotional satisfaction from such considerations as performing their civic duty, 'affirming allegiance to the political system', 'affirming a partisan preference', and so forth (Riker and Ordeshook 1968: 28). This is undoubtedly true, but it seems to undermine the value of the economic approach to the problem. These are psychological or emotional satisfactions, not calculated prospects of personal gain. Barry's comment on this is pertinent: 'It may well be that both the costs and the . . . benefits of voting are so low that it is simply not worth being rational about it. Thus habit, self-expression, duty and other things have plenty of room to make themselves felt' (Barry 1970: 23).

Olson's book deals with activities that involve a higher cost, in so far as participation can be regarded as a cost. He discusses membership of trade unions and other pressure groups, where the member has to pay subscriptions and, if he is active, to give much more time to the organization than is involved in casting a vote on election day. In so far as these organizations provide benefits to a whole category of people, whether or not they are members, it follows (according to Olson's argument) that there is no direct incentive for potential beneficiaries to incur the costs of joining and working for the group. They will benefit anyway, and it is not likely, in any sizeable group, that one extra member will make a significant difference to the outcome. The economic logic of the situation encourages people to become 'free riders' rather than participants (see Olson 1965: *passim*).

This is undoubtedly true, and it explains why trade unions are so keen to impose a closed shop, or a union shop, in industrial plants. They want to force workers to join their union, or at any rate a union, because they understand that the costs of membership would otherwise keep some potential members out. It also explains why many unions emphasize the selective benefits that they provide to members, but not to other workers, such as information, representation in case of grievances, pay while on strike, and in some cases pension plans or health and accident insurance

schemes (see Barry 1970: 27). This argument applies not only to unions but also to other pressure groups. Motorists' organizations would not be nearly so large and well financed if they appealed only on the grounds of their activities as pressure groups, without offering selective services in the form of emergency towing and repairs in the case of breakdowns. The British National Trust would not be so large and successful if it appealed only as an environmental pressure group, without offering selective benefits to members in the form of free admission to stately homes and gardens. Olson's theory about free riders has more explanatory value than Downs's theory about voting, because the costs of group membership are significantly higher than the cost of voting.

Olson's theory does not, however, explain everything about participation in organized groups. As Barry has pointed out, it does not explain why union membership is much higher in some periods than in others (Barry 1970: 29) or in some countries than in others. The proportion of workers belonging to a union is, for instance, well over twice as high in Britain, Australia and Germany as it is in the United States or France. These variations cannot be explained in individualistic terms of selective benefits offered to union members, but only in more collective, sociological terms like feelings of class solidarity, a belief in collective action, and so forth. The very marked recent growth in environmental groups in most advanced industrial societies, or of groups for and against abortion in North America, cannot be explained in terms of individual calculations of costs and potential benefits, but only in terms of ideological and moral commitments and an altruistic readiness to spend time in pursuit of general causes believed to be worthy and important. Then again, others would say that participation in such organizations does not involve a cost at all, except in very narrow financial terms, for the activity is enjoyable and rewarding for members.

This brings us to the other point of view about the effects of political participation for the individual, namely that it is likely to be beneficial. Theorists who take this view point out that it alleviates, or would alleviate, the sense of isolation or even alienation that many people feel in modern industrial society, a sense that the growth of automation in industry and the growing use of computers in office work can only increase. It has been said that:

> the complexity of modern society's division of labour tends to isolate men from a sense of moral responsibility for the ultimate consequences of their actions . . . Participatory democracy may be able to contribute to meeting the psychological and ethical problem of relating personal conduct to social consequences.
>
> (Cook and Morgan 1971: 15)

A similar line of argument is that increased participation is likely to

increase the feelings of political efficacy that ordinary citizens have, so that increased confidence that their actions can have an effect on public policy will lead them to a greater sense of control over their communal lives and will have a knock-on effect, greater participation in one sphere of activity leading to greater participation in other spheres. This was Carole Pateman's main argument for the introduction of workers' control in industry, as developed in her 1970 book. However, in an article published in 1980 she reports in a very dissillusioned way about the experience of workers' control in Yugoslavia. Studies published since her book had revealed that the social bias so conspicuous in political participation in capitalist America was found also in socialist Yugoslavia. Skilled and better-educated workers were more likely to become members of workers' councils than unskilled workers, and participation in these councils was seen 'as a technocratic activity, based on skills and expertise, rather than as a matter for political commitment' (Pateman 1980: 91).

Pateman believes rather passionately that this is wrong. In this article she draws attention thirty times, in the space of forty-six pages, to the correlation between social and economic status and political participation, which she believes should be unacceptable to democratic theorists. Now, a writer as talented as Pateman does not say the same thing thirty times in a single article by accident; she wrote in this way to ram the point home, because she believes that its significance is too often overlooked. In taking the view that she does, Pateman seems to be following the example of the logical positivists (to be discussed in Chapter 13), who argued strongly that experience and empirical evidence could not in themselves lead to value judgements. This was expressed in a phrase that became famous in the immediate post-war years: 'an "is" cannot produce an "ought" '. In Pateman's view, the argument of political sociologists that our democratic values should be modified to bring them into line with the empirical evidence about political behaviour is an argument that can only lead to the defence of the status quo. If democratic values demand mass participation in decision making plus social equality in that participation, then those values should be re-affirmed despite all evidence that in the contemporary world most citizens do not want to participate actively (that is, beyond voting) and that those who do tend to be drawn from the ranks of the more skilled, the better educated and the more affluent. It is a tenable viewpoint, even though it may lead those who hold such values into a certain state of frustration when considering the empirical evidence.

Robert Dahl is also a believer in workers' control in industry. In 1970 he claimed that American democracy would be more complete if all employees in business enterprises were given the power to control those enterprises, employing expert managers to conduct day-to-day management where this seemed appropriate. He argues that representative govern-

ment in a sizeable community suffers from the remoteness of decision makers from the ordinary citizen (Dahl 1970: 142) and that self-management at work would compensate for that. It would be desirable, he says, even if it were to result in a slight loss of productive efficiency in the enterprise, for this would be balanced by the value of 'democratic participation and control, as good both intrinsically and in their consequences for self-development and human satisfaction' (Dahl 1970: 132).

In 1985 Dahl re-affirmed this view, claiming not only that employee control of business enterprises would reduce feelings of alienation in the workplace but that it would also contribute 'to the values of justice and democracy' in society and 'improve the quality of democracy in the government of the state by transforming us into better citizens' (Dahl 1985: 93 and 94). He went so far as to say that citizens of the modern state had not only a right to participate in democratic forms of government but also a right to participate in the management of the firms in which they worked (see Dahl 1985: 111–35).

In reviewing reports on the results of various American experiments with workers' participation in management, Dahl had to admit that the evidence was mixed. In some firms the experiment had led to increased feelings of satisfaction and political efficacy while in others it had led to increased alienation from work and disenchantment with the idea of participation (Dahl 1985: 96–8). The evidence from Yugoslavia was discouraging, and he quoted a Yugoslav scholar's conclusion that for participants in workers' councils 'the direct experience with self-management has been so frustrating that their sense of alienation has become even greater' (Dahl 1985: 97). Nevertheless, Dahl remained optimistic, saying that American and Yugoslav experiments were still young and that a hundred years of experience with self-management might bring about a truly beneficial modification of attitudes (Dahl 1985: 98).

SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In the late 1960s there was much talk on both sides of the Atlantic of the desirability of wider participation in the governmental process, and in Britain the government sponsored a nationwide survey of public attitudes to this question. This survey did not reveal a sizeable public demand for change, however. When people were asked to say what they would like to see done to improve things in their region, only 3 per cent spontaneously said that they would like more say for people in the area as against central government, compared with 21 per cent who wanted better roads, 20 per cent who wanted better leisure facilities and 20 per cent who wanted more economic development. Of the fourteen types of improvement mentioned, more local democracy was in fact the least popular (see Birch 1977: 153–6). The desire for decentralization was, however,

significantly higher in Scotland than in England and somewhat higher in Wales. The Royal Commission on the Constitution, which sponsored the survey, subsequently recommended an extensive scheme for the devolution of power to Scotland and (more modestly) to Wales, but the consequence of referendums on the proposals held in Scotland and Wales in 1979 was the abandonment of the scheme on the ground of insufficient public support.

However, in practice there have been developments in both Britain and the United States since 1970 which have involved wider participation in the political process, and it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter by mentioning them.

In Britain there has been some decline in membership in the two main parties, which was at its peak in the 1950s, but this has been balanced by a growth in minor parties. Since 1970 the Liberals have increased their membership and trebled their vote, the Social Democratic Party has been established and attracted wide support (though now merged with the Liberals), and the Scottish and Welsh nationalists have become significant players on the national scene. There has also been a growth in single-issue pressure groups, such as those concerned with housing, child poverty, and environmental issues.

Another development has been a significant growth in the participation of clients (or, as some would say, consumers) in the implementation of social policies. The past two decades have seen the establishment of local community health councils all over the country and 'patients' participation groups' in a number of areas, and of associations of tenants in municipal housing who have to be consulted under the provisions of the 1980 Housing Act (see Richardson 1983: Chapter 3). Parents are now commonly members of school governing bodies and many schools have pupils on their governing bodies also. The 1988 Education Reform Act makes it possible for schools to opt out of municipal or county control and become self-managing if a majority of parents approve of this move. Under the legislation on race relations, every sizeable community with ethnic minorities now has a community relations commission containing representatives of the minorities.

A very different type of growth in political participation has been seen in the increased prevalence of various types of direct action by groups protesting against some aspect of government policy. Trade unions boycotted the Industrial Relations Court established in 1971. Thousands of homeless people have 'squatted' in unoccupied houses. Anti-nuclear groups have blockaded nuclear bases. Environmentalists and local property owners have held up plans for highway construction by obstructing public inquiries. Strikers conducting illegal mass pickets have had violent confrontations with the police. Unemployed teenagers have rioted and looted shops. Racial minorities have staged violent demonstrations to protest against

police harassment. In 1990 tens of thousands of citizens refused to pay the new poll tax (replacing municipal property taxes), the revolts against which contributed to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. Like them or not, these are all forms of political participation by ordinary citizens.

In the United States in the past two decades the parties, and particularly the Democratic Party, have become weaker, electoral turnout has declined, but there has been an increase in the number and vitality of single-issue pressure groups. It is a matter of dispute whether this is healthy or unhealthy in terms of the democratic process as a whole, but the development lends support to the arguments advanced by pluralists like Truman and Dahl about the significance of latent or political groups that might become actual groups when new issues get on to the agenda.

Another development has been the marked increase in the use of the initiative and referendum to change state laws in the twenty-three states, mainly in the west, that allow for these procedures. The campaign for the initiative and referendum began in the Populist Movement of the 1880s and 1890s, was successful in many western states in the first two decades of the present century, but did not lead to extensive changes in state laws until the 1970s. The most dramatic change was the adoption in 1978 of Proposition 13 in California, a proposal to cut property taxes by more than half. This was passed by a two-to-one majority and more Californians voted on the question than voted in 'any of the candidate contests on the same ballot' (Schmidt 1989: 132). The tendency was widespread and between 1970 and 1986 there were 158 statewide initiatives passed by voters in 22 states and the District of Columbia (Schmidt 1989: 287–94). This is clearly a move towards participatory democracy, though not one that has been universally applauded by academics who favour wider participation in politics.

Other advanced democracies have also experienced an increase in political participation in recent years, and it seems fair to say that there is a secular trend in that direction. However, it also seems fair to say that the forms of increased participation have been very varied, have not always been predicted by political scientists, and have not always been welcomed by liberals. Although political participation is fairly easy to define, the arguments about it are complex and somewhat contradictory.

Chapter 7

Liberty and freedom

There is an initial question, that can be dealt with quickly, as to whether or not these two terms are synonymous. One reason for thinking that they are is that most dictionaries define each of them in terms of the other. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'freedom' as personal liberty, civil liberty and liberty of action, while it defines 'liberty' as freedom from control. *Chambers Dictionary* defines 'freedom' as liberty and 'liberty' as freedom to do as one pleases. A second reason for regarding the terms as synonymous is that, as Hanna Pitkin has pointed out, it is only in the English language that one has a choice, as in other European languages there is simply one word (Pitkin 1988: 523). As 'liberty' comes from a Latin root whereas 'freedom' comes from a Germanic root, it would seem that the existence of the two alternative words is simply an accident of the historical fact that (as Fichte put it) English is a bastard language.

On the other hand, it has been observed by Hannah Arendt that in a political context the terms are commonly used in slightly different ways, with liberty more likely to be used when the writer means the absence of restraint and freedom more likely to be used when the writer means the opportunity to engage in some activity, such as political participation. In his famous lecture on 'Two concepts of liberty' Isaiah Berlin declared that he was using these terms interchangeably but, as Pitkin has observed, in what followed he more commonly used liberty when referring to what he called the negative concept of liberty, and freedom when he gave examples of what he called the positive concept of liberty (Pitkin 1988: 544–7). In so far as a distinction of this kind is commonly made by those who comment on political issues, the fact underlines the significance of the difference between (to use Berlin's phraseology) the negative and positive concepts. As Berlin's terminology is more descriptive and less liable to cause confusion than prescribing different meanings for the two words, in this chapter I shall follow his example (and that of the dictionaries) by treating 'liberty' and 'freedom' as if they are synonymous.

Two further preliminary points must be made. One is that the concept of liberty or freedom is essentially political when applied to human beings,

as distinct from animals. The other is that it is currently contestable, for people in the most varied political situations and systems have claimed that their mode of political activity promotes liberty or freedom, so long as this is properly defined.

The inherent importance of liberty to human beings arises from the fact that they are essentially choosing creatures, constantly taking decisions about how they want to act. The limitations on liberty arise from the fact that human beings are also social creatures, constrained in their choices by all kinds of social pressures. Throughout most of history, these restraints have arisen from pressures to conform with group or tribal customs, from pressures to conform with the dictates of religion, and from the power of land-owners over tenants or serfs. In the recent history of the western world, people have partially escaped from these traditional constraints, but have become increasingly subject to the power of the state. It is therefore not surprising that the political theorists of ancient and medieval times paid little attention to the concept of liberty, whereas western political theorists since the seventeenth century have made it one of their central concerns.

Berlin has made a good case for saying that the various ways in which the concept of liberty has been interpreted can be reduced to two categories. On the one hand, liberty has been defined as freedom for the individual to do whatever he or she wants to do; in short, that liberty is the absence of restraint. This is the negative concept of liberty. On the other hand, liberty has been asserted to be freedom to do things that are worth doing, to engage in self-development, to have a share in the government of one's society. In Berlin's terminology, this is the positive concept of liberty. As will be seen, the views grouped under the latter heading are somewhat diverse, and it is open to question whether they should be given the same heading. However, there can be no doubt that the negative/positive dichotomy is an aid to understanding, and the issues will be discussed under those headings in what follows.

THE NEGATIVE CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

This concept found its first clear expression by a political theorist in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, who said in his *Leviathan* that 'Liberty, or freedom, signifieth, properly, the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion' (Hobbes 1985: 261). To underline this definition, he added: 'A freeman is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to do' (Hobbes 1985: 261). This straightforward view has been repeated, or taken for granted, by a whole series of political theorists and politicians who have accepted liberal individualistic assumptions about

political life, among whom, most notably, were the British Utilitarians from Jeremy Bentham to John Stuart Mill.

The most eloquent of these writers was Mill, whose essay *On Liberty* has become a classic. The main contribution of this book was to propose criteria for determining the proper limits of state action. The political implication of the negative view of liberty, in the context of the modern state that regulates all our lives, is that citizens are free in so far as they are not constrained by laws and regulations. As Bentham said, liberty is the silence of the law. However, none of these writers was an anarchist. They all regarded freedom as the most important political value, but they realized that boundaries to individual liberty had to be established in order to protect other values such as security. In an argument about these boundaries, the onus of proof was on those who wanted to restrict liberty, but there was clearly a need for theorists of a liberal persuasion to indicate what kinds of argument would be compatible with liberal principles.

Despite his massive contributions to liberal theory, Bentham did not really do this. His overriding principle for deciding whether a proposed law or regulation was acceptable or not was the so-called 'felicific calculus'. The test for all legislation, in Bentham's view, was whether it was likely to increase or diminish the sum total of human happiness. If the legislation could be expected to increase this total, it was beneficial; but if it was likely to cause more pain than pleasure, it was harmful. This theory had the virtue of simplicity, and the further virtue (in Bentham's time) of giving a logical ground on which to challenge the age-old assumption of the land-owning classes that they knew what was best for the rest of society as a result of their upbringing, education and traditions. However, it was not always a satisfactory theory for those concerned above all with the protection of human liberty. There were (and are) many possible policies and laws that would pass Bentham's test, but yet inflict grievous limitations on the freedom of minorities whose values and/or interests differed from those of the majority. Promoting the interests of the majority is clearly better than promoting those of a ruling minority, but it is not necessarily a guarantee of what contemporary liberals would call individual rights.

To understand J. S. Mill's contribution, it is helpful to know a little about his personal history and intellectual development. He was educated by his father, James Mill, who was Bentham's assistant and a significant political theorist in his own right. The aim of the elder Mill was to train his son in the principles of Utilitarianism and to launch him on a career as a politician and political theorist who would propagate Utilitarian ideas. This was remarkably successful in that the younger Mill became in turn secretary of the Utilitarian Society (a reforming pressure group), an influential civil servant, a Member of Parliament and a brilliant writer. However, he revealed in his memoirs that when he was in his early twenties

he went through an intellectual crisis. His attachment to music, poetry and the arts led him to believe that the pleasures of life could be divided into higher pleasures and more mundane pleasures, in contradistinction to the strict Utilitarian doctrine that all pleasures were of equal value in so far as they made people happy and that, in Bentham's famous words, 'pushpin is as good as poetry'. And, following this, he came to think that the pursuit of happiness should not be regarded as the end of life, as happiness tends to be a by-product of the pursuit of other objectives. As Mill put the matter:

> Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way.
>
> (Mill 1924: 120)

These beliefs took Mill quite a way from the pure spirit of Utilitarianism, even though he continued to work in public for Utilitarian causes, and he took another mental step away from it when he began to have doubts about democracy. After reading Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, published when he was 29, Mill started to worry about the possible tyranny of the majority in a democratic polity. While all citizens were in some sense equal, he did not think them equal in sensibility, culture or political wisdom. Democratic institutions, he felt, would not in themselves prevent the possibility that a government, while seeking to maximize the welfare and happiness of the majority, might harm the minority in ways crucial to their wellbeing, for instance by curtailing their personal freedom. Considerations of this kind convinced Mill of the need to formulate some guiding principle that could be invoked to protect that most precious of all political values, the liberty of the individual citizen.

The principle that Mill formulated was in essence very simple; it was that the state would only be justified in curtailing the freedom of individuals if the purpose of that curtailment was to prevent harm to others. Mill put it thus:

> As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it becomes open to discussion. But there is no room for entertaining any such question when a person's conduct affects the interests of no person besides himself, or needs not affect them unless they like . . . In all such cases there should be perfect freedom, legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences.
>
> (Mill 1946: 67)

This principle is fairly clear, but a certain amount of argument has developed about it. One line of argument challenges the validity of the distinction between actions that affect only the actor (self-regarding actions) and actions that affect other citizens (other-regarding actions). It has been said that in modern society we live such intertwined and interdependent lives that all our actions affect others. The logical implication of this argument is that the category of self-regarding actions is an empty category, like that of glass mountains or carnivorous cattle.

This criticism of Mill has been met by the comments of John Rees, who has pointed out forcibly that Mill regarded an action as other-regarding only if it affected the interests of others, not if it was merely distasteful or inconvenient to others (see Rees 1960). Indeed, Mill had himself anticipated and largely answered this criticism, saying that:

> with regard to the merely contingent . . . injury which neither violates any specific duty to the public nor occasions perceptible hurt to any assignable individual except himself; the inconvenience is one which society can afford to bear, for the sake of the greater good of human freedom.
>
> (Mill 1946: 73)

Another line of criticism focuses on Mill's famous example of the man about to cross an unsafe bridge. If there were no time to warn the man of this imminent danger, it would be appropriate to seize him and stop him, 'without any real infringement of his liberty; for liberty consists in doing what one desires, and he does not desire to fall into the river' (Mill 1946: 86). It has been said by several critics that this sentence is inconsistent with Mill's general principle, that self-regarding actions should be inviolate. However, this criticism does not survive a careful examination of the text, for Mill went on to say that if there was only a danger, as distinct from a certainty, of an accident, the man should be allowed to take the chance if he decided to do so after he had been warned about it. The case for warning people about a dangerous bridge, but not prohibiting them from taking a chance with it, is on a par with the case (also discussed by Mill) for labelling poisonous chemicals as poisonous but not prohibiting people from buying them. It is very different from the position of the paternalist who would ban the sale of poisonous substances, or alcohol or cigarettes, on the ground that people ought not to be permitted to take a chance with their health (on this topic, see Lively 1983).

Criticisms of Mill's logic and consistency are certainly possible, for he wrote with passion rather than in the manner of an academic philosopher, but in my judgement they do not seriously weaken the force of his argument. What about the utility of his theory as a practical guide to political action?

In these terms also the theory stands up rather well. Western liberal

governments have indeed acted in a Millian way by labelling poisons but permitting their sale, in some circumstances (also recommended by Mill) requiring a register of sales to be kept. In the same spirit, western governments have required cigarette manufacturers to label their products as dangerous to health and the United States government decided in 1990 to take the same action in respect of wine and spirits. In most western jurisdictions one may invoke the law to prevent one's next-door neighbour building in such a way as to cut off one's daylight or create a fire hazard for one's property, but not to prevent him from painting his house in distasteful colours. In the United Kingdom people can be arrested for being drunk and disorderly, but not for simply being drunk. In most western states a woman is free to engage in prostitution, but not to organize a brothel. In all these examples, the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding actions is observed.

The British police seem to be particularly observant of this distinction. They are much more tolerant of speeding on the open road than North American police are, but much less tolerant of driving without courtesy to other road users. On one occasion I had to stand in line for a train that was crowded with people travelling from London to Newmarket to go to a race meeting. After the journey had been in progress for a few minutes each compartment was visited by a plain-clothes police officer who warned passengers that several professional card-sharps had been seen boarding the train, so 'if you play cards with strangers, we advise you to keep the stakes low'. John Stuart Mill would have applauded with enthusiasm.

Of course, there are borderline cases, of which the control of mood-altering drugs is the most obvious contemporary example. The sale of such drugs is forbidden in all modern states, on the grounds that they are a certain danger to health, that they are so addictive as to deprive the drug taker of the capacity to make subsequent free choices, and that they are likely to increase the crime rate. However, some liberals would say that soft drugs like marijuana ought to be exempt from the ban, as they are no more dangerous than alcohol or tobacco, while others would argue that most of the crime results from the fact that such drugs are illegal, so legalization would be socially desirable. One cannot expect Mill's essay to provide a clear answer to a dilemma as difficult as this. What one can say is that, with certain limitations, the essay is a pretty good guide to political practice in a liberal state. To say this, however, is not to say that the negative concept of liberty which Mill's essay enshrines is the only valid concept of liberty, for many reasonable people think otherwise.

OBJECTIONS TO THE NEGATIVE CONCEPT

Without distorting the facts (though admittedly with some simplification), it may be said that three different kinds of objection have been levelled at the negative concept of liberty, and that these may be given the labels of practical, theological and philosophical objections.

One practical objection takes the line that an abstract freedom to do something is meaningless to a person who lacks the capacity to do it. In its classic form, the argument is that it is meaningless, if not insulting, to tell an unemployed worker that he is free to eat at the Ritz. The negative concept of liberty, it is claimed, is tied up with a belief in laissez-faire and a willingness to accept gross inequalities in society that leave the poorer sections without the ability to take advantage of opportunities that are said to be open to them. Freedom, to be meaningful, must involve real opportunities, not just theoretical ones.

The trouble with this line of argument is that it involves a confusion between liberty and ability. There is a world of difference between being unable to afford the price of a meal at the Ritz and being refused admission because your skin is black. In the former situation one could save up for a meal, if one had a special occasion in mind, or could look forward to eating there when one's income improved. In the latter situation one would be outraged by the discrimination. The two situations are not on a par and it is quite reasonable to say that the former involves a lack of means, the latter a restriction of liberty. Another example would be the difference between the position of Robinson Crusoe, who cannot leave his island because he cannot swim far enough and has not yet built a boat, and that of a prisoner on Devil's Island who would be shot if he tried to escape.

Another practical objection is that the negative concept of liberty takes no account of what many regard as the most important political freedom, namely freedom to choose one's government. Individualists would say that the franchise is a legal entitlement rather than a form of freedom, and at the level of the individual this distinction makes a good deal of sense. When I had the status of a landed immigrant in Canada I did not feel that my liberty was restricted by the fact that I could not vote in national elections, though I would have felt it was restricted had I not been able to criticize the government without fear of imprisonment or deportation. The ground for making this distinction is that the ability to vote depends on an entitlement – some would say a privilege – conferred on citizens by law, whereas the ability to express one's opinions exists naturally unless it is restricted by government action. But taking this view of the matter involves pre-suppositions that not everybody would share.

At the level of collective action the idea of freedom to choose the government is less controversial. When the countries of eastern Europe

rejected their communist systems of government in 1989, it was quite appropriate to say that their citizens acquired a new form of freedom, namely the freedom to vote for non-communist candidates in the ensuing elections. This way of using the term retains the assumption that freedom involves choice, and is therefore a less radical departure from the negative concept than is implied by the theological and philosophical versions of the positive concept to be outlined below. However, freedom to choose political leaders is clearly 'freedom to', as distinct from 'freedom from', and the fact that the term is commonly used in this way indicates one of the limitations of the negative concept of liberty.

Theological objections to the negative concept have a quite different basis. When Pope John Paul addressed a vast audience in Philadelphia in 1979, he made the following declaration:

> Freedom can never be construed without relation to the truth revealed by Jesus Christ and proposed by his church, nor can it be seen as a pretext for moral anarchy. This is especially relevant when one considers the domain of human sexuality. Here, as in any other field, there can be no true freedom without respect for the truth regarding the nature of human sexuality and marriage. Moral norms do not militate against the freedom of the person or the couple; on the contrary, they exist precisely for that freedom, since they are given to ensure the right use of freedom.

The belief expressed here is that freedom, properly defined, is not freedom for the individual to do what he chooses, but freedom to do what is morally right. It is an enduring belief of the Roman Catholic Church and is shared by theologians in some other Christian Churches and in most branches of Islam. It is a matter of faith and is therefore not a belief that can be discussed as if it rested on rational or pragmatic arguments. Believers accept it and non-believers reject it, but true believers are logically bound to reject the negative concept of liberty as inadequate and misleading.

The third kind of argument against the negative concept is philosophical. Critics hold that the Utilitarians and other classical liberals, such as most American thinkers, are mistaken in their assumptions about human nature and human history. The primary truth about man, they say, is that he is a social animal. The history of mankind is not a history of isolated individuals coming together to form a civil society, as social contract theorists like Hobbes and Locke assumed. On the contrary, man has always lived in communities that were held together by social norms. The essence of man is not, therefore, that he is an autonomous, choosing creature who must be free from external restraint in order to set his own values and course in life. On the contrary, his most important values are socially determined, and social laws to uphold those values should not be

regarded as a restriction on some pre-existing liberty but as an appropriate part of the conditions of a satisfactory life.

This philosophical outlook had its origins in the writings of some of the Greeks, most notably Aristotle, but the theorist who erected a theory of positive freedom on this kind of basis was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writing in France in the 1760s. However, Rousseau had little impact on British or American thought until towards the end of the nineteenth century. As John Plamenatz has said, the trouble with Rousseau, in British eyes, was that he was held responsible for inspiring the French Revolution. 'The English therefore condemned his doctrines, discovered a great deal of nonsense in them and took no notice of the rest.' (Plamenatz 1949: 46). It was partly for this reason that Utilitarian ideas held a dominant position in British thought for most of the nineteenth century, until they were challenged in the 1880s by the work of T. H. Green, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Oxford. The writings of Green and those who thought like him, known collectively as the English Idealists, afford a convenient introduction to the philosophical basis of the positive concept of liberty because they were writing for an audience who mostly took the negative concept virtually for granted.

THE POSITIVE CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

The contributions of the English Idealists to this topic can most easily be summarized by listing the main points at which they parted company from the theories of the Utilitarians. These comprise a denial of the psychological assumptions of the Utilitarians, a rejection of individualism, a rejection of the Utilitarian view of the state, and the formulation of a different definition of freedom.

The Utilitarian view of human nature was that men are essentially pleasure-loving and pain-avoiding creatures. This is, it is said, the one clear generalization that can be made about human motives that appears to have universal validity. Men's reasoning powers present them with a great variety of tactics for the pursuance of these objectives, but (as David Hume had said) their reason is the servant of their passions.

To Green and the others, this is a sadly inadequate understanding of the human situation. Animals are motivated in this simple way but men and women are more complex. What they desire in life is not just prompted by their appetites. They desire what they think is good; they wish not only to be satisfied in various immediate ways, but to be moral. They seek to improve themselves, to make themselves capable of appreciating better things, to live in a better way.

Second, the Idealists rejected the individualistic assumptions that the Utilitarians had made, in common with earlier liberal theorists like Hobbes and Locke. Man lives in society, the Idealists maintained, and society is

much more than a collection of independent human beings who happen to live in the same territory. According to F. H. Bradley, the individual of individualist theories is an abstraction who does not actually exist: the real man 'is what he is because of and by virtue of community . . . a born and educated social being' (quoted Milne 1962: 62). The aspirations of real men are shaped by the assumptions, traditions and ideals of their society. They wish to behave in a moral way, and moral codes differ from one society to another. It is true that some men sometimes harbour ambitions that conflict with social and moral norms, but the pursuit of such ambitions will not, in the long run, benefit the personalities of the people involved. Any realistic theory of society and politics must accept that, to a large extent, human ambitions and behaviour are socially determined.

Third, the Idealists had a view of the state that differed from the view taken for granted by the Utilitarians. To the latter, following Hobbes and Locke, the state is a mechanism, a set of institutions created to safeguard the security of its citizens and to make arrangements (such as the laws regulating marriage or trade) for their convenience. Because the state restricts individual liberty and relies on coercion, it must be regarded with suspicion, but it should be looked on as a kind of necessary evil.

To the Idealist, this view ignores the social basis of the state. In Green's words, 'it is a mistake then to think of the state as an aggregation of individuals under a sovereign . . . a state presupposes other forms of community, with the rights that arise out of them, and only exists as sustaining, securing and completing them' (Green 1941: 139). Ideally, the state should not have to depend on coercion except at the margin, for 'will, not force, is the basis of the state'. If society were indeed as atomistic as most liberals of the nineteenth century assumed, coercion would be needed constantly, but these liberal theories were misleading as description and wrong in their ideals. Ideally, there should be a common will in society which the state should embody and express, recognition of which would lead the great majority of citizens to conform voluntarily with the law.

Finally, the Idealist view led to a different understanding of the nature of liberty. This emerged most clearly in the writings of Bernard Bosanquet, Green's successor at Oxford. Bosanquet claimed that the term liberty has both a lower sense and a higher sense. In the lower, more literal, sense liberty is taken to mean simply the absence of restraint. In the higher sense, which is metaphorical but yet deeply meaningful, liberty means acceptance by a man of his real will, as a rational being, to make the best of himself. In an ideal state, the conditions of self-realization would be established through political institutions, so that citizens would be free, in this higher sense, when they conformed to the requirements of society expressed through these institutions. 'Any system of institutions which represents to us, on the whole, the conditions essential to affirming such

a will . . . has an imperative claim upon our loyalty and obedience as the embodiment of our liberty' (Bosanquet 1899: 149).

In this book Bosanquet was attempting to reformulate Rousseau's ideas in terms that would be acceptable to British opinion at the turn of the century. The relevant parts of Rousseau's theory are those relating to the distinction between three different types of will, respectively the 'general will' of society, the 'real will' of citizens, and 'the actual wills' of citizens.

The general will, in Rousseau's theory, consists in agreement on a set of policies to be adopted by the citizens of an ideal republic regarding basic issues which do not divide the population into sections whose interests differ. The process of eliciting the general will requires a civic leader, known as the legislator, who will formulate the questions on which a public verdict is required, together with an institutional arrangement, such as a public meeting if the republic is small enough, that will enable an expression of public opinion to be secured. Even in an ideal republic, many issues would be divisive in terms of sectional interests and on these issues no general will could be expected. But on basic issues, given the right kind of civic education, the people should be united and a general consensus should emerge. When the general will is elicited it would, in an ideal polity, be embodied in laws and the obligation to obey those laws could not be regarded as a restriction of liberty, for citizens would have had the opportunity to participate in the process by which the laws were formulated. As Rousseau declared 'obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty' (Rousseau 1913: 19).

In this ideal republic, citizens would consider their common interests when they voted, so that their real wills would be consistent with the general will as it emerged. It had to be admitted, however, that on some issues a minority of citizens would persist in opinions running contrary to those embodied in the general will. They would have particular or actual wills that reflected their personal preferences rather than the interests they had in common with their fellow citizens. They might consider their preferences unrepresented on that issue and consider ignoring the law. In such cases the state would have to threaten or use coercive measures against the minority so as to ensure that the laws were obeyed. This could be done without any restriction of freedom, properly defined, for the general will embodied the best interests of all citizens and it would be for their own good that the minority were coerced. In Rousseau's famous phrase, they would be 'forced to be free'.

This phrase stuck in the gullet of most British liberals in the nineteenth century, and it was to persuade them of the validity of Rousseau's theory that Bosanquet produced a reasoned account of the difference between men's actual wills and their real will that is worth quoting at some length:

In order to obtain a full statement of what we will, what we want at

> any moment must at least be corrected and amended by what we want at all other moments; and this cannot be done without also correcting and amending it so as to harmonize it with what others want . . . But when any considerable degree of such correction and amendment had been gone through, our own will would return to us in a shape in which we should not know it again, although every detail would be a necessary inference from the whole of wishes and resolutions which we actually cherish. And if it were to be supplemented and readjusted so as to stand not merely for the life which on the whole we manage to live, but for a life ideally without contradiction, it would appear to us quite remote from anything we know . . . In the plainest language, what we really want is something more and other than at any given moment we are aware that we will, although the wants which we are aware of lead up to it at every point.
>
> (Bosanquet 1899: 119)

This passage gives a clear indication of the character of the ideal that inspired Rousseau in the eighteenth century and the English Idealists at the end of the nineteenth century: a belief in the possibility of human self-improvement and self-realization in the context of a harmonious community organized for self-government. It may perhaps be counted as a nobler ideal than that of the maximization of happiness and the minimization of pain, though the latter is certainly not to be despised. It lies at the base of the philosophical case for believing that the negative concept of liberty is inadequate and should be supplemented by a positive concept of true freedom as a social phenomenon, to be found in societies dedicated to an improvement in the human condition.

TWO TYPES OF LIBERTY

The work of the English Idealists was responsible for a marked change in the thinking of British liberals. It came to public attention at a time when social conditions in working-class urban areas called out for positive intervention by public authorities, which liberal leaders felt was necessary but were chary of advocating because their party had always been committed to the view that increasing the powers of government would diminish liberty. The possibility of redefining liberty enabled them to escape from this dilemma, and the change can be seen in the following quotations from prominent supporters of the Liberal Party.

J. S. Mill: *Principles of Political Economy* (1848):

> It is no less important in a democratic than in any other government, that all tendency on the part of public authorities to stretch their

interference, and assume a power of any sort which can easily be dispensed with, should be regarded with unremitting jealousy.

J. S. Mill: *On Liberty* (1859):

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

T. H. Green: *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* (1881):

When we speak of freedom as something to be so highly prized, we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others. We mean by it a power which each man exercises through the help or security given him by his fellow-man, and which he in turn helps to secure for them. When we measure the progress of a society by its growth in freedom, we measure it by the increasing development and exercise on the whole of those powers of contributing to social good with which we believe the members of the society to be endowed; in short, by the greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves. Thus, though of course there can be no freedom among men who act not willingly but under compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom.

H. H. Asquith: *Election Address* (1892):

I am one of those who believe that the collective action of the community may and ought to be employed positively as well as negatively; to raise as well as to level; to equalise opportunities no less than to curtail privileges; to make the freedom of the individual a reality and not a pretence.

Herbert Samuel: *Liberalism* (1902):

To support a policy of state regulation in industry is quite consistent with a belief in liberty, and not merely consistent with it but rather to be regarded as its necessary consequence.

L. T. Hobhouse: *Liberalism* (1911):

There is no true opposition between liberty as such and control as such, for every liberty rests on a corresponding act of control. The true opposition is between the control that cramps the personal life and the spiritual order, and the control that is aimed at securing the external and material conditions of their free and unimpeded development.

Members of the Infant Labour Party also embraced the positive concept of liberty with enthusiasm, while Conservatives found that it suited their rather paternalistic attitudes towards politics. From the turn of the century until the Second World War the positive concept of liberty was more fashionable than the negative concept in Britain, though this was not true of the United States. However, the 1940s and 1950s saw a change of opinion in Britain on this question, for two quite unrelated reasons.

On the one hand, revulsion at what had been done by the state in Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany led people to turn away from a theory of politics that could be used to glorify the powers of the state and minimize the threat that state controls posed to human liberty, in the simple negative sense of that term. Rousseau's theories seemed somewhat dangerous and the phrase 'forced to be free' seemed positively sinister. In 1947 Ernest Barker, in an introduction to a new edition of *The Social Contract*, declared that 'in effect, and in the last resort, Rousseau is a totalitarian' (Barker 1947: xxxviii). In 1955 J. L. Talmon said the same thing at much greater length in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Talmon 1955).

On the other hand, the academic popularity of logical positivism (to be discussed in Chapter 13) led philosophers and political scientists to eschew metaphysics and to develop a preference for the plain, descriptive, behavioural use of language without concealed meanings. To logical positivists and those influenced by them, it seemed natural for freedom to mean the ability to do as one likes, not self-realization or self-improvement or a raised social consciousness or conformity to the general will.

Isaiah Berlin's famous 1958 lecture on 'Two concepts of liberty' faithfully reflected this new climate of opinion, for the heart of the lecture was a passionate attack on the positive concept. At the level of practical politics, the concept was dangerous, for it could be and had been used by tyrants. Once a ruler embraced the view that men had a real self or spirit, 'of which the poor empirical self in space and time may know nothing or little; and that this inner spirit is the only self that deserves to have its wishes taken into account', then that ruler would be 'in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their "real" selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man . . . must be identical with his freedom' (Berlin 1969: 133).

At a more academic level, the positive concept involved a confusion of linguistic usage that led to a confusion of values. Berlin insisted that we must use language plainly if we are to keep our arguments clear:

> Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience . . . If I curtail or lose my freedom . . . this may be compensated for by a gain

> in justice or in happiness or in peace, but the loss remains, and it is a confusion of values to say that although my 'liberal' individual freedom may go by the board, some other kind of freedom . . . is increased.
>
> (Berlin 1969: 125)

These disputes over the true meaning of freedom are never likely to be resolved. In part, this is because freedom is so universally regarded as a desirable state of affairs that people will go to almost any length to show that their own political theories and agendas are compatible with the preservation or expansion of freedom. In part, it is because thinking about the nature of freedom raises philosophical issues on which basic disagreements are certain to continue. Thus, there is a fundamental difference of view between theorists who, like Berlin, believe that 'the essence of men is that they are autonomous beings – authors of values, of ends in themselves' (Berlin 1969: 136), and those who believe that the essence of men is that they are social animals, deriving their values and ends in life from the communities in which they have their being. The plain man might observe that men are both social animals and to some extent autonomous, so that what is involved in this disagreement is no more than a quibble about the meaning of 'essence'. But to political philosophers this is much more than a quibble.

Again, there is an unresolvable difference of belief between moralists who distinguish between liberty and licence and secular thinkers who regard this as no more than an attempt to confine the stamp of approval to behaviour which the moralist happens to find satisfactory. It is deeply meaningful to some, but virtual nonsense to others, to say that 'man is not free but enslaved when he seeks merely the satisfaction of his own unrestrained desires. He becomes free when and in so far as he endeavours to act as a moral being' (Bassett 1935: 10).

The tendency in several recent writings by political theorists has been to suggest that liberty and freedom have a range of meanings, so that it may be unhelpful to draw a stark contrast between the negative and positive concepts. In 1976 Benjamin Gibbs asserted that: 'freedom means different things in different contexts; not because the term is incorrigibly ill-defined or because we are all incorrigibly vague about its meaning, but because it has a number of meanings' (Gibbs 1976: 9). By the end of his book Gibbs had come down in favour of a collectivist version of the positive concept, stressing the desirability of a revolution to bring real freedom to the under-privileged, but this ideological preference did not destroy the validity of his more general point about the co-existence of several shades of meaning for the concept of freedom.

In 1979 Charles Taylor asserted that there are not so much as two concepts of liberty as two 'families of conceptions of political freedom', and within each family 'there is quite a gamut of views' (Taylor 1979: 175).

Writers who favoured one concept or family of concepts tended to attack the most extreme version of the other concept, sometimes reducing the other concept to a caricature. As an example, Taylor said that the negative view of freedom should be thought of as embracing freedom from all restraints to self-fulfilment, not just external restraints. If people have been manipulated into false consciousness of the possibilities open to them this is a restraint on their freedom, just as it would be if a man were 'paralysed by the fear of breaking with some norm which he has internalized but which does not authentically reflect him' (Taylor 1979: 177). If the negative concept of liberty or freedom is portrayed as simply the physical opportunity to do as one likes, without reference to internal restraints of this kind, as it frequently is even by its proponents, then it becomes too simplistic to be a good guide to the richness of meaning that the terms have. You cannot really be free, even in the negative sense, if you have been indoctrinated.

Now, not everyone would go along with Taylor in this line of argument and his examples. In practical terms in the 1990s, readers who have observed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and the rejection of communism in eastern Europe may find it easier to accept that a person's negative freedom may be said to be restricted if they are in the grip of a dogmatic religious code than that it may be said to be restricted by false consciousness about the desirability of free enterprise. In philosophical terms, however, there is not much difference between the two examples.

Another line of criticism would be that, by trying to extend the meaning of negative liberty in this fashion, Taylor is really trying to undermine the validity of the whole concept of negative liberty, as the title of his article suggests; and this would be unreasonable as there clearly is a well-established usage by which liberty simply means the absence of external restraints. This criticism has considerable force, but it may still perhaps be accepted that Taylor has succeeded in blurring the sharp distinction between the two concepts of liberty that Berlin and others have drawn.

In 1983 Quentin Skinner added to the debate by drawing attention to a very long-standing belief by thinkers in the tradition of classical republicanism that, to be secure in their enjoyment of negative liberty, citizens must live in a polity that embraces the republican virtue of government that is in some degree representative of its citizens' interests. This strain of thought had its roots in the traditions of classical Rome but was articulated for the modern world by Machiavelli in his *Discourses*. When Machiavelli wrote of liberty he meant just what is now meant by the negative concept of liberty, namely the absence of 'limitations imposed by other social agents on one's capacity to act independently in pursuit of one's chosen goals' (Skinner 1983: 206). As he valued liberty, he was concerned to ask what kind of state would be most likely to maximise the liberty of its citizens. His answer was a self-governing state with a

republican system of government. His thesis was that 'it is only those who live under republican forms of government who can hope to retain any element of personal liberty to pursue their chosen ends' (Skinner 1983: 207).

This thesis was rejected by Hobbes, who believed that freedom was freedom, whatever the form of government, and it has not always been put forward, or at any rate not stressed, by modern exponents of the virtues of the negative concept of liberty. It was accepted by the Utilitarians, of course, but some of Machiavelli's further beliefs were echoed more faithfully by Rousseau than by any other modern thinkers. Machiavelli, like Rousseau two centuries later, believed that there could be a common will of society that was reflected in governmental decision. He also believed in the virtues of political participation. Citizens would not maintain their liberty, he maintained, unless they were willing to perform voluntary services, to participate in political debate, and to serve in public office (Skinner 1983: 214). Machiavelli was therefore suggesting that liberty, though defined in what we now call negative terms, requires positive commitment and positive action by citizens if it is to be maintained. Though he did not embrace what we now call the positive conception of liberty, he went some steps towards it by urging the case for popular participation in forming the common will.

In the light of these modern debates, it seems fair to conclude that we should be mistaken if we were to commit ourselves to one concept of liberty, to the exclusion of the other. It would certainly be wrong to exclude the negative concept, for this is exactly how the terms liberty and freedom are used, and will undoubtedly continue to be used, in everyday speech. The case against the negative concept cannot be that it is wrong, or that it is ambiguous, or that it portrays a kind of liberty that is inherently undesirable. The only fair argument against it is that it is inadequate as a guide to the varied meanings that liberty and freedom have acquired in political debate.

The positive concept of liberty is more ambiguous, more slippery perhaps, because its usage raises complex problems about the nature of an ideal political community. It may be thought difficult to reject the vision of such a community as one in which citizens will check their immediate wishes and interests as individuals against their longer-term and wider interests as members of the community. Why else could citizens be expected to support wage restraints or measures to protect the environment or expensive schemes to help the unemployed? One might, if thinking on those lines, be willing to support the distinction between the 'actual wills' and 'real will' of citizens, but yet jib at Rousseau's claim that dissenters who had to be coerced to obey the laws were being 'forced to be free'. The phrase is not only a superb piece of rhetoric but also an essential key to Rousseau's theory, so that much would be lost if it were replaced by

some anodyne phrase such as 'forced to be good citizens'. However, there can be no doubt that its use, outside the strict context of that theory, has caused a good deal of intellectual and political confusion.

It is clear that different concepts of liberty, like different concepts of democracy, are used as weapons in political debate. Students of politics cannot stop this, but they have to recognize what is being done. One conclusion that the uncommitted student might reach is that some of the protagonists in this argument about the meaning of liberty are misleading in the impression of exclusivity that they give. The advocates of negative liberty would be more realistic if they acknowledged that democratic self-government is a kind of collective freedom. They might also acknowledge that extending the capacities and abilities of human beings tends to extend the value of freedom to them. Thus, Robinson Crusoe was undoubtedly a free man whereas the prisoners on Devil's Island were not, but his freedom would have been more valuable – and, one might say, would actually have been extended – if he had had a serviceable boat at his disposal.

The advocates of positive liberty should acknowledge that a large measure of liberty in the negative sense of the term is an essential prerequisite to the process of finding a consensus, for it could not be a genuine, freedom-enhancing consensus if it were simply imposed from the top. The negative and positive concepts draw attention to different kinds of liberty, but in the real world of political practice most citizens want some of each kind. If both sides always made these concessions the debate between them would be less stimulating, but their arguments would be more realistic in terms of understanding the meaning and significance of political freedom.

Chapter 8

Rights

We live in an age in which it has become common for people in democratic societies to invoke the concept of rights in political discourse. We talk of the rights of individual citizens, the rights of categories of citizens like children or women or pensioners, and the rights of groups within society like ethnic and cultural minorities. Outside the United States, this kind of talk was not very common in the first half of the twentieth century. Lawyers talked about rights and so did people involved in legal cases, but people engaged in political debate found it more natural to talk in terms of interests, needs and welfare. Americans have always tended to place more emphasis on rights, partly because their society is more individualistic than that of other democracies, but mainly because of the great importance in American political life of the Bill of Rights, added to the constitution in 1791 and invoked and redefined endlessly since that date. The separation of powers has given the American judiciary more influence on politics than has been possible in other democracies, which are all parliamentary in character and tied to the concept of parliamentary sovereignty.

The language of rights has become more general since 1945, for two quite different reasons. On the one hand, 1948 saw the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has brought the new idea of human rights into general currency in the western world. This was followed in 1949 by the inclusion of some guarantees of rights in the Basic Law of the German Federal Republic, which made it clear that entrenched rights were not necessarily incompatible with a parliamentary system of government, and in 1950 by the promulgation of the European Convention on Human Rights. On the other hand, the emergence of a new kind of radicalism in the late 1960s in the west led many persons and movements on the left of the political spectrum to change their emphasis from the advocacy of policies designed to extend state powers, by economic planning, public ownership and extended social security arrangements, to the advocacy of policies stressing the rights of the individual against the state. There was a change of fashion in political debate

that has continued to this day, with radical reformers concerned less with economic issues and more with such issues as students' rights, women's rights, gay rights, prisoners' rights and even animal rights. For better or worse, talk about rights is more common now than ever before, and all students of politics need to come to grips with this concept.

THE NATURE OF RIGHTS

There is some disagreement among philosophers as to whether the best synonym for 'a right' is 'a claim' or 'an entitlement'. (For references, see Feinberg 1980: xi and 154.) Although the majority preference seems to be in favour of 'a claim', I believe that, if a choice has to be made, it makes much more sense to opt for 'an entitlement'. To say that someone has a right to X is to say something much stronger than that he has a claim to X. We all have claims to this, that and the other; they are the very stuff of politics. We can only turn our claim into a right if we win the argument or struggle, which not everyone can do. Another difference is that the term 'claim' implies activity, for a claim has to be made. A right, however, may exist without any activity at all on the part of the person holding the right. More than this, one can have a right without even knowing that one has it, as babies have rights. The term 'entitlement' allows for this much more naturally than the term 'claim'. In the field of politics, it would seem silly to speak of a Universal Declaration of Human Claims, but only clumsy, not silly, to speak of a Universal Declaration of Human Entitlements.

The concept of rights is essentially a concept about human relationships in society. If one person has a right to something, other members of his society have an obligation to respect this right. If it is a right of action, such as a right to engage in political dissent, fellow citizens and the government have an obligation to tolerate expressions of dissent. If it is a right of recipience, such as a right to a pension, the appropriate agency or corporation has an obligation to provide the pension. If it is a right to be left alone, such as a right to privacy in sexual relationships, fellow citizens and government agencies have an obligation not to intrude on those relationships.

The social character of rights is an essential aspect of the concept. The existence of rights always implies obligations on the part of other citizens and frequently implies obligations on the part of the person or group holding the right. Persons engaged in political dissent have an obligation not to block the public highway with their demonstrations, for this would interfere with the right of others to use the highway. Persons acting as union pickets during a strike have a right to inform potential workers about the strike, but they also have an obligation to let the workers cross the picket line if that is their wish. Persons claiming privacy for their sexual

relationships have an obligation to conduct sexual activities in private, so as not to intrude on the feelings of others. It is this social aspect of rights that makes it meaningless to talk of animal rights. It is cruel, and may be illegal, for human beings to inflict unnecessary pain on other living creatures, but animals do not belong to human societies and cannot be said to possess rights in those societies.

There are two important questions to ask about a right, or a potential right, in addition to the question of whether it is a right of action, a right of recipience, or a right to be left alone. One question is whether, and if so how far, the right is limited in time and space. The great majority of rights are so limited, because they have reality only in the context of a particular human society that did not always exist in the past, may not always exist in the future, and has territorial boundaries in the present. The rights possessed by Americans in the twentieth century did not exist in the fifteenth century, may not have much meaning in five hundred years' time, and in any case do not extend to Asia or Africa. It is convenient to describe these limitations as the contextual limits of the rights in question. Some rights are said to be of universal applicability, but this is a difficult claim to make and will be discussed below in the section on natural and human rights.

A further question is the basis of the right in question. Some rights derive from law, some from moral codes, some from tradition. It is essential to distinguish rights according to their basis, and this will be the subject of the following section.

THE BASES OF RIGHTS

The most obvious basis of a right is the existence of a legally binding contract. It is in the nature of contracts that they confer rights upon one of the signatories and impose obligations on the other. They are binding in so far as they are not in conflict with the laws of the jurisdiction in which they are made, a proviso which excludes contracts to commit a crime. There may be a grey area on the margins of criminality, but apart from that there are no conceptual problems about contractual rights.

A second category consists of positive rights, which are created by decisions of the legislative body within a jurisdiction. In modern democratic states citizens have positive rights to participate in public education, to be paid state pensions when they reach retirement age, and to receive various other benefits as provided by law. In addition to such rights of recipience, they may also have positive rights of action, such as a guaranteed right of free speech or, in the United States, a right to bear arms. Positive rights are always contextual, as by definition the rights are conferred only upon residents of the territory covered by the jurisdiction,

and they exist only for such time as the relevant law is not rescinded by the legislature or rendered nugatory by judicial interpretation.

A third category consists of moral rights, which derive their authority from a code of morality shared by members of the community within which the rights can be said to exist. Such rights are enforced by the conscience of individuals, by the custom of the community, or by the pressure of public opinion. They may also be enforced by law, for moral codes underlie many laws, but in that case the moral laws become converted into positive rights, which are more secure because they are enforced by the state.

Moral rights are normally contextual rather than universal, for they are limited to people who share a common code of morality. It has been argued that all known codes of morality have certain basic beliefs in common, but this is disputable and certainly difficult to establish. The contextual nature of most (if not all) moral rights has been made evident by recent international migrations. Thus, Muslims living in Britain or France come (or have parents who came) from societies in which they were permitted to have four wives, but this custom is unacceptable to the majority of British and French citizens and cannot be followed. Hindus living in Britain cannot follow the Hindu custom of incinerating widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands. British people living in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan cannot celebrate weddings with champagne, as they would do in Britain.

A fourth category consists of political rights. Many political rights have been embodied into law and have thus become positive political rights. In western democracies these include the rights to vote, to organize political parties and pressure groups, and to compete for political office. Like all positive rights, these are clearly contextual in nature and they do not present conceptual problems.

Interesting questions arise, however, when it is claimed that people have political rights that are not recognized by law. What is meant by saying that black South Africans have a right to vote, that Russian Jews have a right to emigrate, that Chinese students have a right to demonstrate in favour of democracy, that Kurds have a right to political autonomy within Iraq? What bases can be claimed for such notional rights?

In essence, there are two possible bases, namely custom and tradition on the one hand and human reason on the other. The distinction was first made clearly by Edmund Burke, the founder of British conservatism, who called the first type customary rights and the second type speculative rights. He argued strongly in favour of the superiority of customary rights over speculative rights, on the ground that the wisdom of past generations is embodied in the customs of a society whereas human reason is fallible, and therefore an unreliable guide. This position led Burke into practical attitudes that many of his contemporaries regarded as contradictory, as

when, alone among British Members of Parliament, he defended the revolution in the American colonies but attacked the revolution in France. He did so because he regarded the American colonists as defending the traditional rights of British citizens, in particular their right not to be taxed without representation, whereas he regarded the French revolutionaries as led by a false belief in speculative rights into overthrowing existing institutions and customs in favour of political experiments of which the outcome was unpredictable. The fact that the American revolution was a triumphant success whereas the French revolution led to dictatorship, state terrorism and the eventual restoration of the monarchy has naturally been held by Burke's later supporters to be a vindication of his views.

As Alfred Cobban pointed out, Burke's philosophical conservatism led him to support at least five separate rebellions against authority; not only the American War of Independence but the English Revolution of 1688, the nationalistic struggles of the Corsicans and Poles, and the various Indian revolts against corrupt administrators of the British East India Company. What was common to these rebellions was 'the rising of practically a whole community . . . in defence of what were claimed to be ancient liberties' (Cobban 1960: 100).

If Burke's criteria were to be applied to the contemporary examples mentioned above, the argument would support the rights of Russian Jews to emigrate and of Kurds to enjoy, if not complete autonomy, respect for their culture and freedom from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. It would not support the rights asserted by Chinese students and South African blacks, on the ground that, since the rights run contrary to local custom and experience, their assertion may lead to political instability. It is not a negligible argument, even though most modern democrats would probably regard it as excessively cautious. If it is rejected in favour of a belief in speculative political rights based upon reason, this raises the question of how universality can be claimed for arguments that seem entirely rational in some societies but are rejected by other societies. It is a difficult question to answer, and it leads us straight into a consideration of natural rights and human rights.

NATURAL RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Natural rights and human rights are rights claimed in respect of all human beings. They are said to be of universal rather than contextual applicability and are therefore very different from positive rights, which are limited to particular jurisdictions, and moral rights which are based on a particular moral code. To justify the large claims that are made about them they must be morally compelling, as distinct from merely desirable, and possible of achievement, as distinct from utopian dreams. They inhere in individual human beings rather than in societies or states, and the actual rights that

have been nominated as human rights are in large measure rights against the state, that is, rights which it is said every state ought to respect. The promoters of human rights have not pretended that ordinary human interactions can be regulated by sweeping generalizations of this kind; their concern has been to establish criteria by which the actions of governmental authorities can be judged.

Now, the assertion that human beings may have rights against their governments has been made from time to time since the days of the Greek city-states by theorists of natural law and natural rights. The Stoic philosophers of classical Greece maintained that slavery was contrary to natural law. It was a somewhat radical proposition in its day, as slavery was not then contrary to either positive law or custom or the prevailing religion. In medieval Europe various Catholic theorists equated natural law with divine law, as laid down by the Roman Catholic Church. The authority for it was said to be God's will, as interpreted by his vicars on earth. The powers of secular rulers were said to be limited, for in all spiritual matters natural law was supreme.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the unity of Christendom had been shattered and natural law theorists turned to human reason rather than divine revelation as the source of law that had greater authority than the dictates of governments. Grotius declared that 'the law of nature is a dictate of right reason, which points out that an act, according as it is or is not in conformity with rational nature, has in it a quality of moral baseness or moral necessity' (quoted Sabine 1937: 424).

Later in the century Hobbes and Locke made certain deductions from their logical construct, an imaginary state of nature said to have preceded the establishment of political authority. Hobbes's state of nature was essentially a condition of anarchy, marked by the struggle of all against all for the necessities of life, in which men and women had no rights other than that of self-defence – which was not a right at all in the sense used in this chapter because it was not accompanied by any corresponding obligations. Civil society was then formed for mutual security, and in this condition citizens gave up their so-called right of self-defence in exchange for the protection of their lives by the authority of the government. They then had one right against the government, namely the right to life. Locke's version of the mythical state of nature was more civilized, and in his theory men took into civil society their natural rights to life, liberty, and the property with which they had mixed their labour. In both cases the theories were rational constructs and the rights enumerated were in this sense based on reason.

Locke's theories had a direct influence on the thought of the founders of the American Republic. The Declaration of Rights issued by the Philadelphia Congress of 1771 appealed to 'the immutable laws of nature' and

claimed the right 'to life, liberty, and property'. The first clause of the Virginia Bill of Rights, adopted in June 1776, proclaimed:

> That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity: namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property and pursuing and obtaining happiness.

In the following month the Declaration of Independence left out property but inserted a reference to God: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'. Thirteen years later the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizens asserted 'the purpose of all political association is the conservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man: these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression'. And in 1791 the first ten amendments to the American constitution entrenched the Bill of Rights as binding on all American legislatures, so turning the rights specified into positive political rights.

It seems a little paradoxical that, after this burst of inspired enthusiasm, the whole doctrine of inalienable rights should have fallen into disrepute among political philosophers. It was so, however, for all the main theorists of the following century repudiated the doctrine. Edmund Burke attacked the whole idea of speculative rights in his book *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written and published very speedily in 1790. The attempt to make the cold light of human reason the only guide to political action was, in Burke's view, a calamitous mistake, destructive of the customs and sentiments that bind citizens together. The science of government, he declared, is a practical science, that can only be built upon experience and has no place for a priori principles. It is a view that European conservatives have held from that day to this.

Six years later, Jeremy Bentham attacked the idea of natural rights from a liberal perspective when he wrote *Anarchical Fallacies*, written in 1796 although not published until 1816 in French and 1843 in English. Bentham, who had much more influence on British liberalism than Locke, rejected the whole idea of rights prior to and against the state. Rights were conferred by law, in his view. 'Before the existence of laws there may be reasons for wishing that there were laws . . . but a reason for wishing that we possessed a right does not constitute a right'. To talk of universal rights as if they existed would be equivalent to saying 'everybody is subject to hunger, therefore everyone has something to eat' (quoted Manning 1968: 43). He observed that 'the language of natural rights . . . is from beginning to end so much flat assertion' (quoted Waldron 1987: 74). Instead of making assertions about rights, polticians should make a careful

investigation of the circumstances and the expected consequences of governmental actions. His conclusion was sweeping: 'Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptable rights, rhetorical nonsense – nonsense upon stilts' (quoted Waldron 1987: 53).

From Bentham onwards, Utilitarian theorists insisted that the test of good government was the extent to which legislation and government policy pursued a progressive goal, namely the maximization of happiness among citizens, rather than protecting what was deemed to exist already, namely a package of individual rights. J. S. Mill varied from this a little in his essay *On Liberty*, where he attached a very special value, beyond mere happiness, to the protection of individual liberty, but he remained faithful to the idea of the felicific calculus in his book on *Utilitarianism*.

In the last years of the nineteenth century British Liberals moved from the hedonistic assumptions of the earlier Utilitarians and the attachment to a purely negative concept of liberty towards the more uplifting views of the English Idealists and the positive view of liberty that accompanied them, as has already been explained in Chapter 7. British liberals had mostly abandoned Utilitarian views by the turn of the century, but they moved to Idealism without at any time accepting the widespread American belief in inalienable rights. Nor was this latter idea taken up by British conservatives or socialists.

This is also true of thinkers and political leaders in continental Europe, once the heady years of the French revolution had given way to the restoration of Bourbon rule. From 1815 until the Second World War, the rival heroes of European political theorists were Hegel on the one hand and Marx on the other. Hegel and his followers rejected any idea of inalienable rights because they glorified the authority of the national state and could not conceive of citizens having rights against the state. Marx and Engels rejected the idea of inalienable rights because they regarded it as a bourgeois notion, based upon individualistic assumptions rather than upon any conception of social needs. In his essay *On the Jewish Question*, published in 1843, Marx attacked the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*:

> None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond the egoistic man . . . that is, an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice.
>
> (Tucker 1978: 43)

From this time onwards, European socialists of all varieties, be they Marxists or social democrats, have been concerned to promote the interests of the working class, and beyond that the interests of the whole community, but have not focused on the rights of the individual. Almost by definition, socialists are collectivists, not individualists.

The introduction of the idea of human rights immediately after the Second World War therefore marked a sharp change of outlook. It was the direct consequence of revulsion against the genocidal policies followed by Hitler's regime. This revulsion led the victorious nations to put a number of German leaders on trial for an offence that had no place in any statute book, but was created by decision of the international court. This offence was called 'crimes against humanity', and, as a standard for the future, a special committee of the United Nations Organization then drafted, and in 1948 the General Assembly proclaimed, a *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The Declaration was said to set 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations'. No philosophical or religious basis for it was claimed; the basis was said to be the pledge given by member states of the United Nations to promote 'universal respect for and observation of human rights and fundamental freedoms'. The argument, it will be noted, was circular; the rights were proclaimed because the victorious nations all believed in them; the Universal Declaration embodied a consensus of values at the time it was formulated. The rights itemized in the Declaration were: first, individual rights of action, namely rights to life, liberty, property, privacy, emigration, freedom of speech and association, and freedom of religion; second, rights to protection under the law, namely rights to equal treatment by the law, freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial by an impartial tribunal, and freedom from cruel or degrading punishment; third, political rights, namely to participate in periodic free elections based on universal suffrage; and fourth, economic and social rights, namely to employment, an adequate standard of living, equal pay for equal work, holidays with pay, social security benefits, and free education.

Maurice Cranston has argued forcibly that it was a mistake to include the economic and social rights, on the ground that they are no more than utopian ideals for the poorer (and hence the majority) of the member states, and their inclusion may lead sceptics to regard the other enumerated rights as no more than utopian ideals also (see Cranston 1962: 38–44). It would have been more sensible, he maintains, to have restricted the list of rights to those that are both morally compelling and capable of achievement throughout the world. Cranston clearly has a point, though it might be argued in response that having education, employment and an adequate standard of living are just as important to human beings as some of the political rights set out in the Declaration.

Brian Barry has another criticism of the inclusion of these social rights when he points out that they involve relativities about which argument is always possible: 'An analogy to "an adequate standard of living" would be "a moderate amount of free speech", but the latter is not what is called for in a declaration of rights' (Barry 1965: 150). Quite so, but the right to free speech is not generally thought to include the right to publish

libellous statements about a rival. There is always a problem about whether rights are absolute rights, such as to publish whatever you please about anything, or whether they can properly be limited in this way or that while preserving their essence.

It is reasonable to raise queries about both the philosophical basis of the Declaration and its practical utility. The assertion that human rights inhere in all human beings, irrespective of their religious beliefs or their social customs, is clearly a very sweeping assertion. It cannot be based on faith, not only because faiths differ so much, but also because the advanced industrial societies that actually attach most importance to the idea of human rights are societies in which religious faith is (except perhaps in North America) in sharp decline. It was stated to be based on a political commitment by the founding states of the United Nations Organization, but that raises questions about why the governments of those states at that moment of history should have the power to commit successor governments, despite numerous changes of regime. It must presumably be based on reason, or an appeal to common understandings about the human situation, but that raises the familiar philosophical dilemma about how values, particularly values said to be binding, can be extracted from facts. All governments might agree that human beings seem to enjoy freedom of action in this field or that without agreeing that it is good for them to be given such freedom. (For a full discussion of the philosophical questions surrounding the concept of human rights, see Paul, *et al.* 1984; and Nickel 1987.)

If the philosophical arguments for the Declaration are shaky, so are the arguments about its practical utility. Most states have dictatorial regimes, and the Declaration has not deterred most of those regimes from violating several of the human rights specified. When President Carter cited human rights violations by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan as a reason for leading a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, that caused grievous disappointment to hundreds of sportsmen who had been training for the games, without in any way helping the people of Afghanistan. It might be said that appeals to the Declaration have been at best an empty gesture, at worst a weapon in the cold war. It might also be said that the Declaration has made it more difficult, not easier, to bring violators of human rights before some future equivalent of the Nuremburg Tribunal that tried the Nazi leaders, for article 11 states that: 'No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed.'

Despite these various doubts about the value of the Universal Declaration, it has clearly introduced the concept of human rights into the language of political debate. When this innovation was supplemented by the new type of liberal radicalism that emerged in the 1960s, the result

was a search by political theorists for a formula that would establish individual rights, rather than Utilitarianism or philosophical Idealism, as the foundation of a liberal theory of the state.

Ronald Dworkin is the best known, and perhaps the most determined, of the theorists who have engaged in this enterprise. In his book on *Taking Rights Seriously* he declares that 'the language of rights now dominates political debate in the United States' (Dworkin 1978: 184), and he sets out to build a new theory of politics based on the primacy of moral rights. His theory identifies only two moral rights as inalienable – as being, in fact, natural rights – namely the right of citizens to be treated equally and their right to have their human dignity respected. This claim is not based on any general philosophy of politics and it is clearly not rooted in historical experience and tradition. It has to be regarded, therefore, as a speculative claim based upon reason.

It is a somewhat surprising claim or assertion in that its author places little or no value on the traditional American belief that citizens have inalienable rights to life, liberty, property and the pursuit of happiness. Dworkin emphasizes more than once that there can be no general right to liberty. 'The idea of a right to liberty', he says, 'is a mis-conceived concept that does a dis-service to political thought' (Dworkin 1978: 271). Some specific liberties should certainly be regarded as important, but only because they are based on the right to equality. 'Individual rights to distinct liberties must be recognized only when the fundamental right to treatment as an equal can be shown to require these rights' (Dworkin 1978: 273–4). He goes on to say that citizens 'have distinct rights to certain liberties like the liberty of free expression and of free choice in personal and sexual relations', but do not have a right to the free use of property (Dworkin 1978: 277–8).

Substituting equality for liberty as a fundamental right serves Dworkin's purpose, as an acknowledged subscriber to liberal-left views, of enabling him to defend the rights of homosexuals without defending the rights of property owners. But, as H. L. A. Hart has pointed out, the argument about equal treatment in regard to sexual behaviour would not be a sound basis for objecting to a law banning all forms of sexual intercourse, homosexual and heterosexual. Equally, it would (if generally accepted) secure minority religions against discrimination, but would not afford a basis for objecting to a law that banned all forms of public religious observance (see Hart 1979: 97). That equal treatment should be one right among several would be agreed by most democrats, but making it the only fundamental right apart from the preservation of dignity (which is too vague to count for much) seems to place more weight on it than it can bear.

Another aspect of Dworkin's theory is its extreme individualism. When he writes about the right to express political dissent, he argues that it is

wrong for the law to ban speakers at demonstrations from incitement to violence, on the ground that arguments based on considerations of general utility or public interest should not be used to restrict the individual rights of demonstrators and speakers. In answer to the point that violence would violate the individual rights of neighbouring property owners, to say nothing of the rights of citizens wishing to use the public highway, he maintains that speculative violations of rights like these should not be accorded priority over the certain rights of demonstrators (see Dworkin 1978: 192–5). In taking this stand, he is by implication condemning the state of the law in all democratic states, because incitement to violence (under whatever name) is a legal offence in all polities. It is hard to see how this stand can be derived from the basic rights of equal treatment and respect for human dignity.

In his book, Dworkin devotes a chapter to the question of affirmative action and positive discrimination, focusing on the question, hotly disputed in recent years in the United States, of whether a university is violating the rights of white applicants for places in a law school or medical school if it rejects them while accepting applications from black students with inferior qualifications. Dworkin's position is that there is no violation of rights in such a situation. Now, it is quite possible to make a case for this kind of affirmative action on the ground that it is in the public interest to have more black lawyers and doctors, or on the Utilitarian ground that the expected gain to the black student outweighs the expected loss to the white applicant. However, according to Dworkin's principles both these kinds of argument must be rejected if they run counter to the individual right of equal treatment, and it is absolutely clear that in a situation of this kind the white applicant with good qualifications who is rejected is receiving less than equal treatment. Dworkin's treatment of this issue (see Dworkin 1978: 223–39) therefore contradicts his main argument.

In view of these weaknesses and inconsistencies, it is hard to believe that Dworkin has established a theory of liberalism based on the enumeration of fundamental rights. I would go further than this and argue that it seems unlikely that a coherent theory can be formulated on such a basis. In their different ways, Utilitarianism and philosophical Idealism are both coherent and viable theories of politics; each of them includes a view of human nature, a view of society and a view of the functions of the state. No theory that gives priority to rights has yet been advanced that can match these two theories in terms of completion and coherence; and it is not easy to envisage this happening. When Peter Jones examined the various attempts that have been made, his conclusion was that:

> there are still fundamental disagreements amongst philosophers over the conceptual question of what it is to have a right. If there has been

> progress in recent years it has been the progress of an unfolding diversity rather than progress towards a single truth.
>
> (Jones 1989: 96)

There is clearly no coherent philosophy of rights that can take the place of existing theories as the theoretical foundation of liberalism, and it seems to be putting the cart before the horse to imagine that proposing a list of preferred rights could form the foundation of a philosophy. It is difficult to see how the enumeration of such a list, based simply on the reason or intuition of the theorist, could escape a repetition of Bentham's criticism that such lists are 'so much flat assertion'.

MINORITY RIGHTS

The 1970s and 1980s saw not only an enhanced concern about individual rights but also an enhanced concern about the rights of groups and communities within national societies. This poses more difficult theoretical problems than the issue of individual rights does, because membership of groups is only sometimes fixed and certain. As was pointed out in Chapter 2, we all have various group identities, and which of them is most salient to us at any one time depends partly on the social and political circumstances of that time and partly on a subjective process of self-identification. As John Dunn has pointed out, this process is commonly influenced by theories about what ought to be done, so that it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the issue in terms of independent and dependent variables:

> What constitutes a right-claiming human grouping in the course of social and political conflict is not an externally specifiable social location. Rather, it is precisely the espousal of a moral and political theory about its own identity and social extension.
>
> (Dunn 1990: 53)

The problem can be made more manageable by distinguishing legally identifiable categories of people, such as women, mothers, widows or senior citizens, from groups which do not have precise legal boundaries, like cultural minorities. The rights that are commonly granted to legally identifiable categories are essentially individual rights. Members of such categories get positive rights to pensions, child allowances and so forth in most democratic states. They are also entitled to speculative political rights such as equal pay for equal work and non-discriminatory treatment by employers and institutions, these rights being included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and granted in principle by most modern democracies, though notoriously difficult to protect and enforce. There are no conceptual problems about rights of this kind, though there may

be practical problems, as when women, for example, are refused mortgages that would probably have been granted to men in similar situations.

In passing, it is as well to acknowledge that for radical feminists the guarantee of these individual rights for women, even if they were extended by affirmative action, would not be enough to remedy the disadvantages from which women living in patriarchal societies (i.e. all contemporary societies) are said to suffer. Radical feminists want to change the whole structure of patriarchal society. In its rather extreme way, this is an understandable objective, but radical feminists do not constitute a legally identifiable category and in any case it could not reasonably be claimed that they have a right to change the structure of society. They have a right to work for this aim, as others have a right to work against it, but they do not have an inherent right to achieve the aim. Radical feminism is a social movement of our time and its adherents constitute pressure groups in several countries, but they do not have rights beyond those enjoyed by other women.

The question of what rights are, or should be, enjoyed by cultural minorities is more difficult to answer and therefore more interesting. I cannot follow Vernon Van Dyke in his view that such minorities can be said to have human rights (see Van Dyke 1985). The whole point about human rights is that they inhere in all human beings, irrespective of ethnicity or culture. Individual members of cultural minorities can certainly be said to have human rights, but this has nothing to do with the fact that they are members of a minority group. Nor is it helpful to say that minorities have collective moral rights, because these are based on a common code of morality and one of the problems in multi-cultural societies is that the minorities may not share the same moral code as the majority. It follows that the rights claimed for cultural minorities, in so far as they are not positive rights, must be political rights.

The political rights frequently claimed for minorities amount to special help for members of the minority or special protection for their language and their culture. The former claim sometimes raises problems if it seems to conflict with the principle of equal treatment for all citizens. The latter claim raises problems because languages and cultures are not right-bearing entities. It may be culturally desirable for a minority language to be kept alive, but it is not clear why taxpayers who have no knowledge of or interest in the language should be expected to pay for it. This question becomes particularly difficult to answer if it is the case, as it sometimes is, that most members of the minority are more concerned that their children should acquire a thorough knowledge of the majority language than that they should speak the minority language. To deal with puzzles like this, it is helpful to divide the rights claimed by members of cultural minorities into four distinct categories, which can be labelled the right to be in, the right to be out, the right to stay out and the right to get out.

The right to be in is the right to enjoy full and equal opportunities in society. The absence of discrimination may not be sufficient to ensure this in the case of cultural minorities. Immigrants admitted for permanent residence can reasonably be regarded as having a right to receive education and training in the official language of the country. In Australia, an official report stated that 'to a great degree, occupational mobility in Australia depends on skill in the English language', while 'a poor knowledge of English approximately doubles the likelihood that a migrant will be unemployed' (Lo Bianco Report 1987: 56 and 58). In England, the exceptionally high unemployment rate among women of Bangladeshi origin is partly explained by the fact that most of them have a very poor or even no command of English (see Brown 1984: 138). This creates a need for language instruction for immigrants of all ages, with some need for the initial instruction to be given in the language of the immigrants.

So far, this is not controversial. The controversial question about the right to equal opportunity is whether members of ethnic minorities should be entitled to affirmative action or positive discrimination if the relevant statistics reveal them to suffer from practical disadvantages in the economic or educational sphere despite legal bans on negative discrimination. Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it is helpful to reserve the term 'affirmative action' for voluntary behaviour by employers and other organizations and to use 'positive discrimination' for behaviour mandated by legal regulations. The theoretical problem is the same in both cases, however. It is that measures of this kind are directly costly to members of the majority who may be passed over in spite of having better qualifications for the post (or the university place) than some members of the minority who are appointed or accepted. In such cases there is a conflict between the desire to help the minority and the individual rights of all citizens to equal opportunity without discrimination on ethnic or cultural grounds. In practice this may not be perceived as a problem when the level of competition for the appointment and the personal advantages conferred by it are not great. The fact that blacks can get a job in the New York police with lower qualifications than whites has not caused significant difficulties, for instance. But when the issue is admission to medical school or law school, affirmative action may cause resentment, and it has led to court cases brought by white students in California and the state of Washington.

Because of this problem of equity, there can be no such thing as an absolute right to positive discrimination or affirmative action. These are policies of which the appropriateness depends to a large extent on local circumstances, including not only the nature of the appointments but also the nature and history of the minorities in question. Thus, descendants of black slaves in America might be thought to have a stronger claim to special assistance than recent immigrants, while the position of the lower

castes in India is different again. There is also a question of timing. Affirmative action to help immigrant groups to become integrated should presumably be a temporary measure, becoming unnecessary after a time, but cancelling it might well cause more controversy than starting it.

The right to be out is the right of a minority to preserve its cultural identity and traditions within a larger society. The General Conference of UNESCO has asserted 'the right of all . . . peoples to preserve their culture' (Van Dyke 1982: 27). In most respects this can be done without any action by governments being required. Families can preserve their cultural traditions through their attitudes to love, sex and marriage, their child-rearing practices, their celebration of anniversaries and religious holidays, their eating, drinking and recreational habits, their choice of reading material, their funeral rites and so forth. Just occasionally, minority habits and customs conflict with the interests or norms of the majority and cause controversy. Examples from the 1980s include the question of whether Sikhs should be exempt from the law requiring motor cyclists to wear crash helmets (an issue in Britain and North America); whether Sikhs should be permitted to wear ceremonial but sharp daggers when being prosecuted in court or when in prison (an issue in Canada); and whether westerners should be permitted to kiss in public in countries influenced by Islamic fundamentalism. I believe that the only general principle that can reasonably be endorsed in such cases is that the majority has a social obligation to be tolerant. It should be noted, however, that an obligation to be tolerant does not necessarily confer a right on the minority. Rights always create obligations but the reverse does not hold. If I see a child drowning in the surf I have a moral obligation to rescue him or her if I can, but the child does not have a right to be rescued. I have to weigh my obligation to help against my swimming abilities and my obligation to stay alive for the sake of my family.

Occasionally, issues arise in which public authorities have to weigh their obligations to be tolerant of minority customs against their duty to protect the rights of individuals. In England there have been several cases of teenage girls of Pakistani origin applying to the High Court to become wards of court, so as to escape from their parents' pressures or orders to enter into arranged marriages with men whom the girls disliked or had not even met. Given a favourable report from a social worker, the English courts have acceded to these requests. In the United States there have been cases of hospitals asking the courts to authorize medical treatment to save the lives of children whose parents, being members of certain religious sects, refused to permit such treatment. Some judges have acceded to these requests.

The minority right to be out, as I have called it, most commonly causes difficulties when the issue involved is the maintenance of a minority language. It is clear that bilingualism is not a natural state of affairs and

that if two languages are spoken in a given area the stronger of them will normally drive out the weaker (on this, see Laponce 1987). A weaker language cannot be expected to survive over a long period unless it receives government help in the form of language teaching in schools, perhaps supplemented by media communications in the weaker language. In Australia this has led to pressure from immigrant spokesmen for the teaching of modern Greek, in Canada to pressure for Ukrainian, in England for the teaching of Urdu.

The problem about establishing this kind of educational policy as a right is that it may involve what scholars have called an 'ethnic trap' (see Wiley 1967; Kringas 1984). This refers to the hypothesis that there is an inevitable trade-off between ethnic or cultural identity and social mobility. The more strongly minorities retain their ethnic identities and cultural values, it is said, the less likely they are to be economically successful. The evidence for this hypothesis is scattered but apparently significant. In his authoritative study of social mobility in Canada, John Porter showed that the French-Canadians, although the first to colonize Canada, have consistently held an inferior economic position there, being poorer not only than British-Canadians but also than some ethnic minorities who arrived much later than the French but have overtaken them. Porter attributed this to their education, saying that 'the more *French* and *Catholic* education has been, the less has it been adequate for the French to improve their position in the modern economy' (Porter 1965: 98, italics in the original). The problem about the religious element was not the faith itself, of course, but that, at least until the 1960s, French Catholic teachers were so keen to ensure the survival of their culture in North America that their emphasis on theology, Latin and the inculcation of spiritual and cultural values cut down the time available for instruction in subjects of greater utility in the North American economy.

Similarly, comparable tests taken by Irish and British teenagers in the 1950s shows that the Irish, on average, had poorer educational attainments, apparently because they had spent so much of their time at school learning the Irish form of Gaelic. In response to this and other evidence that Gaelic teaching was somewhat dysfunctional, the time devoted to it was reduced. In Wales, one of the reasons for the hostility of most voters to the Welsh Nationalist Party, and why the proposal for a Welsh Assembly was rejected by an overwhelming majority in the 1979 referendum, is that they do not want to have their children made to learn Welsh, which many voters regard as a waste of time in an English-speaking society. During the period of the Krushchev reforms in the Soviet Union, there was opposition to the proposal that Russian should be replaced by local languages as the medium of instruction in some universities, on the ground that students were more likely to have successful careers if they were trained in the dominant language of the country. In the 1980s there was

opposition in parts of India to the proposal that English should be replaced by Hindi as the medium of instruction in universities, for the same reason.

It is clear from these examples that the question of language training is inherently apt to cause controversy. There may well be a clash between cultural arguments and economic arguments when choices have to be made, perhaps resulting in a clash between sentimental parents and ambitious parents. In these circumstances the language of rights seems inappropriate, because too categorical in its implications.

The right to stay out is the right to maintain the culture and lifestyles of aboriginal peoples who have been numerically overwhelmed by settlers from different cultures. It deserves a separate heading because the original inhabitants of an area may well be thought to have stronger claims to the preservation of what has become a minority culture than immigrants who freely chose to move to another country have to maintain the culture of the society they left in this new environment. It is difficult not to feel sympathy with the native Indians of North America or the Aborigines of Australia, whose lifestyles have been transformed by an alien invasion over which they have had no control. It would seem that they have quite a strong claim, perhaps amounting to a right, to maintain what remains of their traditional culture and way of life.

There are, however, two serious problems about the assertion of this kind of right for aboriginal peoples. One is the great variety of ambitions that they harbour, which is not surprising in view of the fact that their integration into white society ranges from almost nil to almost complete. A few years ago spokesmen for the Indian tribes of British Columbia had the opportunity to make a case for the needs of their peoples. Their answers varied enormously, from some who wanted better secondary school so that their children could compete more effectively for jobs in the Canadian economy, to others who wanted a greater degree of municipal self-government or greater control over the issue of fishing licences, to others again who wanted independence from Canada and representation at the United Nations. In this situation it is very difficult to frame any broad generalization about Indian rights. In the 1980s the Canadian federal government met what seemed to be a dominant mood among Indian leaders by saying that it hoped to move towards a greater measure of Indian self-government, but social, economic and geographical circumstances among the Indian peoples vary so much that it is difficult to make this move except on the basis of piecemeal local agreements. Indian bands living on large reserves in the wilds can clearly be given much more in the way of self-government than those living on small reserves in urban or suburban areas; and approximately half of Canada's 573 reserves have fewer than 300 inhabitants. In any case it is not clear that self-management (as it is better called) will always lead to the preservation of traditional cultures; some Indian bands use their new powers to give Indian entre-

preneurs exemption from government regulations in this area or that, so that they can compete more successfully in the western economy.

A second problem is the poverty of the resources available to aboriginal peoples wishing to preserve a traditional lifestyle. They can no longer hunt buffalo across the plains of North America, nor can they eke out a living from Australian land that has long been enclosed for cattle and sheep stations. They are bound to be economically dependent on government aid, whether this is given on an individual basis in the form of welfare payments or on a collective basis in the form of grants to aboriginal bands. It may be argued that they deserve specially generous treatment in compensation for the destruction of the traditional bases of their lifestyles, but I believe that the extent of this generosity is better assessed in terms of current needs than in terms of an attempt to measure such an immeasurable loss or to balance it against gains in health and housing.

In view of these two problems, it seems far from clear that the language of rights is the most appropriate language for the conduct of negotiations over future relationships between aboriginal peoples and governments. Aboriginal peoples have needs, interests and claims; they may be given positive rights to wield certain powers or enjoy certain benefits; but so much depends on local circumstances that generalizations about abstract rights are probably best avoided.

The right to get out is a shorthand label for the right of ethnic or cultural minorities concentrated in viable territorial areas to secede from their existing state and become completely self-governing. In international law and practice no such right exists, for the units of the international system are states and a unilateral declaration of independence from an existing state will not normally be recognized by other states. Rhodesia's unilateral declaration in 1965 got no recognition whatever and the country became subject to UN sanctions, on the request of the United Kingdom, until it came back under direct British rule in 1979 and was then granted independence on British terms. Lithuania's declaration in 1990 got much more international sympathy, but no official recognition until the authorities in Moscow accepted it. If we talk of the right to secede we are therefore talking in rather abstract terms about the factors that might lead theorists of a liberal disposition to feel that secession would be justifiable.

The view that I have advanced elsewhere is that, given majority support in the territory for secession, there are four conditions that should be regarded as justifying it (see Birch 1984; 1989: Chapter 6). In very brief outline, the four conditions are as follows:

1 That the region had been included in the state by force and there had been a continuing refusal by its people to give full consent to the union.
2 That the national government had failed, in a serious way, to protect the basic rights and security of the citizens of the region.

3 That the political system of the state had failed to safeguard the legitimate political and economic interests of the region, resulting in a serious form of relative deprivation for the region.
4 That the national government had ignored or rejected an explicit or implicit bargain between regions that had been entered into as a way of preserving the essential interests of a region that might find itself outvoted by a national majority.

The first of these points would cover the cases of Ireland before 1921 and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1990. The second would cover the Ibo people of eastern Nigeria, who attempted to secede under the name of Biafra in 1966, and the Kurds of Iraq. The third would cover the Bengalis of East Pakistan, who managed – after an armed struggle – to form the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. The fourth would appear (though this is much more controversial) to cover the southern states of the USA in 1860.

Allan Buchanan has addressed this topic in much greater detail than was possible in my rather brief treatment, and his stated aim has been to provide a 'moral framework' for the assessment of cases rather than to provide a list of conditions. In the course of discussing this framework he does, however, suggest a list which includes my first three conditions, though with a variation on my third. He points out that relative deprivation need not be a part of the condition, as relatively wealthy regions such as the Basque country might suffer from 'discriminatory redistribution' of their resources. Buchanan omits my fourth condition, but he adds a fourth condition of his own in the form of a case for 'cultural preservation', which could be said to justify a claim for secession if it could be shown that membership of the cultural community is an important ingredient in the good life of its members, that the culture is imperilled, that it is a reasonably liberal culture, and that it cannot be preserved by measures that are less disruptive than secession (see Buchanan 1991: 54–61). This is an important argument, subtly presented.

It must be admitted, however, that in practice political movements often vary from what may be morally justifiable, so that this kind of normative discussion is not a good guide to practice. At the time of writing there are groups like the people of East Timor and the Kurds of Iraq who have ample justification for secession, but do not have the political resources needed to mount a plausible separatist movement. At the same time there are flourishing separatist movements among the Quebecois, the Scots and the Sikhs, even though they cannot claim any of the suggested justifications.

The attraction of nationalism as an ideology is so great that territorially concentrated ethnic groups are now always likely to consider secession as a possible strategy, and in a democratic state a secessionist movement in

one of its regions is likely at least to produce compromises or bribes. When western Australia mounted such a movement in 1933, the result was a new plan for federal grants to the states which benefited western Australia. Spain has decentralized its system of government to please the people of Catalonia and at least some of the Basques. Canada has made constitutional concessions to Quebec and given the province much favourable treatment in regard to government contracts.

At the same time, the period between 1990 and 1992 has seen the emergence of over a dozen newly independent states as the result of the collapse of central authority in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Some of these new states had a long history of nationalist sentiment, as in Ukraine and Armenia and Croatia, while others simply seized the opportunity as it emerged. In some of these territories the transition to independence has been relatively smooth, whereas in others the presence of ethnic minorities within the territory has led to violence and bloodshed, as in Azerbaijan, Croatia and Bosnia. These developments have also drawn attention to some of the difficult problems that are inseparable from secession, such as dividing responsibility for the national debt, dividing the country's navy, army and air force, and dividing the country's weapons, conventional or nuclear, between the seceding territory and the rest of the country. It may perhaps be concluded that the question of secession is surrounded by so many contingencies and complications that the question of abstract right has only a minor role to play.

A FINAL WORD ON MINORITY RIGHTS

In view of the fact that each of the four types of right claimed for cultural minorities involves the problems that have been mentioned, it is clearly difficult to make sweeping statements about the inherent rights of cultural or ethnic minorities in the way that liberals can make sweeping statements about the inherent rights of individuals. Some minorities both should and do enjoy group rights to protect aspects of their culture that are important to them. Certain linguistic minorities in Canada, Switzerland, Belgium and elsewhere enjoy the right to communicate with government agencies in the language of their choice and to have their language preserved by being taught in schools. Native Indians living on reservations in the United States and Canada have collective property rights and in some cases have other collective rights deemed necessary to protect their cultures, such as participation in the administration of justice. Such rights are important and should be defended by liberals. At the same time, it is fair to observe that these and similar rights depend upon such a variety of local and historical circumstances that it is difficult to generalize from them. The language of rights has to be used with great care when it is applied to groups rather than to individuals, and there are occasions when political

arguments about minorities would be more easily resolved if the participants would forego the language of rights and talk instead about specific needs and interests.

Part III

Political power and policy making

Chapter 9

Political power

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

The *OED* defines power as 'the ability to do or act' and 'control, influence, ascendancy', while *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as the 'possession of control, authority, or influence over others'. Power can be possessed and exercised in all kinds of social contexts, from an office or factory to national or international society. Political power is power within a political system and in this book we are concerned not with the international system or the tribes of the Amazon rainforest but with the political system of the modern state.

Unfortunately, it is not feasible to begin with an operational definition of political power, even when the context is limited to the modern state, because different scholars operate with different definitions and there is no agreement between them. This raises the question of whether political power is an inevitably contestable concept in the modern world, and on this question too, more than one view is possible. At first sight, it would seem that it ought not to be contestable, because, except perhaps to anarchists, power appears to be a value-neutral concept. Power can be exercised in good or bad ways but it is not a capacity that all groups wish to claim they possess, varying the definition to make their claims more plausible. It is not, that is, an obviously contestable concept like freedom or democracy. However, in practice, the meaning of the concept is contested, and the literature is full of controversies about it. It therefore seems wise to leave open the question of whether this contestability is unavoidable, and to proceed instead to examine the difficulties of handling the concept.

One difficulty arises from the complexity of the political system in the modern state. Political power is wielded through numerous channels, by a great variety of political actors, in a large number of direct or indirect ways. Some forms of power can be readily identified, as when the police carry out an arrest or a judge pronounces sentence. However, the most interesting form of political power, which is the main concern of this

chapter, is the power to influence decisions taken by government agencies, and this is often more difficult to identify.

Another problem is that of identifying political actors. Voters are political actors when they go to the polls, but are non-voters to be regarded as actors? Since their abstention may determine the result of the election, presumably they are. In between elections, political leaders will frequently be influenced by their expectations about the likely effects of proposed policy decisions on voting behaviour at the next election. Does that mean that electors are exerting influence, and therefore a degree of power, all the time? Are we to say that an elector who is completely passive and uninterested in politics is nevertheless a political actor because his possession of the right to vote may influence decision makers? Should we say that school children are political actors because, while lacking the right to vote, they have the ability to disrupt classes or boycott the schools (as in black townships in South Africa) if they object to certain decisions on educational policy? Should we say that financial institutions exercise political power because governments moderate their economic policies for fear of a flight of capital out of the country, even if the institutions in question make no political move? Would this be the case even if the fear of a flight of capital were quite unfounded? If we answer all these questions in the affirmative, and some do, this means that political power can be a very tricky thing to identify, let alone measure.

A further problem about the concept of political power is that of assigning causality in a chain of political events and responsibility for political outcomes. Let us suppose that a convict with a record of violent crimes is released on parole, buys a gun, and kills his former wife. There is more than one way of assigning responsibility for this death, beyond the simple answer that the murderer is responsible. Some would say that the members of the parole board are responsible, for they took the decision to release the convict. Others would say that the psychiatrist who advised the board is responsible, for the precedents and conventions that govern the behaviour of parole boards make it very difficult for a board to reject a psychiatrist's recommendation. Others again would criticize the whole system of parole and parole boards, saying that a sentence of ten years' imprisonment should mean just that. Yet another group would argue that the real trouble is the absence of effective controls on the sale of guns. None of these ways of assigning responsibility for the death can be dismissed as wrong. They differ because each of them reflects the perspective of the person or group making the judgement.

This simple example illustrates the problem of multi-causality, which affects the analysis of most political decisions in the government of modern states. It is only in relatively rare circumstances that one can say: 'X exercised power; he or she had a free choice and decided that Y should be done'. In the real world of politics X rarely has a free choice, but is

constrained by many pressures and considerations. Nor can a decision normally be taken without consulting others or working through committees. There is always a procedure to be followed, and the final decision depends on the nature of the procedure, the behaviour of all the political actors who can exercise direct or indirect influence through it, the values prevalent in the society, and the external constraints that in practice limit the freedom of choice. This means that assessing the distribution of political power is an inherently difficult operation, liable to be affected by the preconceptions, perspectives and values of the analyst. However, the operation can be made somewhat easier if it is preceded by a process of conceptual clarification.

FOUR TYPES OF POLITICAL POWER

If we start with the most obvious manifestations of political power and move to the least obvious, it is possible to outline a four-fold typology.

First, there is political coercion, defined as the control of citizens by agents of the government using force or the immediate threat of force, leaving the citizens with no real choice about their behaviour. Examples include the power of a riot squad breaking up a demonstration, of the police carrying out an arrest, of prison guards controlling convicts, of a municipality using bulldozers on a gypsy encampment, of an army enforcing a curfew. This type of power rarely raises conceptual problems. Its exercise often raises legal or moral problems, but there is no real difficulty about defining coercion or recognizing it when it is used.

Second, there is political authority, defined as the exercise by certain designated persons and institutions of the right, generally regarded as legitimate, to make and implement decisions that are binding within a prescribed area of jurisdiction. Examples include the power of legislative assemblies to pass laws, of judges to interpret the laws, of ministers to take executive decisions, of civil servants to implement these decisions, of municipalities to make zoning regulations, of regulatory agencies to control pollution or license new medications, of the police to direct traffic or investigate breaches of the law. This type of political power involves a number of interesting conceptual and practical problems, which have been discussed in Chapter 3 and will not be raised again in the present chapter.

Third, there is political influence, defined as the exercise of indirect or direct influence over the personnel or decisions of governmental institutions and agencies. This sounds clear and simple, but it has to be added that there is a wide spectrum of political influence ranging from the most diffuse influence over political opinions to the most specific influence over appointments to political office or the decisions of political agencies. It is not easy to draw a hard and fast line between diffuse and specific forms

of influence as if they were watertight categories, but an example may illustrate the difference.

If I persuade a group of friends or acquaintances that the government ought to spend more money on preventive medicine I am exercising a degree of political influence as an opinion leader, but the probable impact of this influence on future governmental actions is so small that it can hardly be counted as an example of political power. On the other hand, it would certainly be an example of power if I were to persuade the members of a decision-making committee on health service expenditure that their priorities should be changed in the way I preferred. In between these extremes of diffuse and specific influence, there is an example of a person who might use his argumentative skills to persuade delegates at a party conference that a certain policy should be added to the party's list of long-term objectives. To cut through this maze, it might be sensible to stipulate that persuading other people about the merits of a proposed policy should be regarded as a form of political power if, but only if, the people persuaded have the ability and desire to take decisions binding on a wider category of people who have no say in the matter.

The definition and identification of political influence raises a number of conceptual and empirical problems that will be discussed below. Much of the controversy about political power in the recent literature of political science has in fact been about whether political influence has one, two, or three dimensions, and how these should be defined, recognized and measured.

The fourth and least tangible type of political power is political manipulation, defined as the activity of shaping the political opinions, values and behaviour of others without the latter realizing that this is happening. Examples include teachers teaching history or civics in a biased way, journalists disseminating partial or slanted information about a political event or issue, opinion leaders acting and speaking as if a certain set of preferred values are the only ones open to reasonable people, the mass media presenting a political or social situation as inevitable when it is actually open to change.

This type of power is inherently controversial, since it can rarely be identified, let alone measured, in a way that will be accepted by other scholars as objective. The writing or teaching of history provides an obvious example. In history the truth is everything that happened, so that every book, article or lecture on a historical topic contains a small sample of the truth chosen to form a coherent pattern. Some presentations are more partial and biased than others, but since every account is selective there is no clear way of establishing what would be truly objective. A similar comment could be made about journalistic summaries of current (meaning very recent) events, or about presentations of belief systems and social values. In these circumstances the identification of political

manipulation is an inevitably tricky business that is difficult to separate from the political values of the identifier. This difficulty will emerge in the subsequent discussion of what is often called the third dimension of political power, meaning power in the form of influence.

If we consider the work that has been done by political scientists on the distribution and exercise of political power, it is immediately apparent that scholars have nearly always concentrated on one or the other of these types of power, choosing one that fits their preferred research methods, without much effort to put their studies into perspective by discussing the relationship of their findings to work on the other types of power. Up until the 1950s, political scientists writing about the government of the modern state were concerned with political authority rather than with political coercion, political influence, or political manipulation. They wrote about constitutions and institutions; about the sovereignty of Parliament, the rule of law, the separation of powers, the structure of the administration, and the authority granted to the President, Prime Minister, legislative assemblies, government departments and courts. The only important exception to this generalization was research done in the United States, but not elsewhere, into the influence exerted on the legislative process by certain national pressure groups chosen for case studies.

In the 1950s two different kinds of study were made as a result of the development of new research techniques, coupled with a new emphasis on the desirability of turning the study of politics into a truly scientific activity. The object was to supplement (and in the ambitions of some to replace) the delineation of legal powers and institutional structures by the production of causal generalizations about political behaviour. One consequence was that scholars turned their attention to the attempt to assess the distribution of political influence within systems of government.

THE ASSESSMENT OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The first wave of this new type of research focused on opinion formation and electoral behaviour among the general body of citizens. Sample surveys of electors yielded generalizations about the relationship between demographic variables like age, sex and class, political attitudes, and political participation. They also yielded, though not so clearly, some suggestive evidence about the impact of election campaigns, the mass media and opinion leaders on the attitudes and behaviour of the ordinary citizen, which constituted political influence of a rather diffuse kind.

A second wave of behavioural research focused on the distribution of political influence on municipal government within particular communities selected for study. Several studies by sociologists reached the conclusion that political influence, which they called by the generic term political power, was concentrated in the hands of a social and economic elite. The

most influential of these was a book by Floyd Hunter entitled *Community Power Structure*, which analysed the distribution of power in Atlanta, Georgia. This book can easily be criticized. In it, Hunter seemed to assume from the beginning what he claimed to have proved, namely that power in Atlanta was concentrated in the hands of a business elite. In his opening pages he stated it as a 'self-evident proposition' that 'power is a relatively constant factor in social relationships with policies as variables' (Hunter 1953: 6), thus excluding the possibility that power might vary from one issue-area to another. His method of inquiry was to ask a panel of people whom he selected to say whom they thought had most power in the city, permitting them to choose forty, but only forty, persons. The fact that most of the forty chosen were members of the business elite was taken to be evidence that this elite dominated the local political system, without it being thought necessary to investigate particular areas of policy or particular decisions.

The influence of electors was discounted on the ground that relatively few of them were politically active, while the inactivity of the majority was taken as evidence that the power structure prevented them from participating. No consideration was given to the possibility that they might not have participated because they were reasonably content with the system, or because they preferred to spend their time working in the garden or playing baseball. It was simply assumed that they would have liked to participate but were somehow prevented from doing so. In short, the analysis presented was unconvincing. It may conceivably have been true that Atlanta was dominated by a business elite – the city certainly had one very large and wealthy industrial concern in the shape of the Coca-Cola Company – but Hunter's book fell a long way short of demonstrating this to be the case. It is instructive to note that, despite its obvious shortcomings, Hunter's book received favourable reviews in the *American Political Science Review* (vol. 48, 1954, pp. 235–7), the *Journal of Politics* (vol. 16, 1954, pp. 146–50), and the *American Journal of Sociology* (vol. 60, 1955, pp. 522–3). It was in this climate of opinion that Robert Dahl and his colleagues at Yale launched their elaborate inquiry into the structure of power in New Haven, Connecticut, which was subsequently to play a central role in academic controversies about the forms or dimensions of political influence.

Dahl defined political power as a relationship in which A (being an individual or group) induces B to behave in a way that B would not have chosen without A's pressure. This was a fairly conventional definition, very similar to those that had previously been adopted in books by Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan (see Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 75) and Herbert Simon (see Simon 1957: 65–6). As Terence Ball has pointed out, in its origins this definition was three centuries old, having been first advanced by Hobbes and copied by Locke (see Ball 1988: 83–7). The

assumption is that power, properly defined, is exercised only in situations where there is an overt disagreement or conflict between parties about what should be done and one side comes out on top. Dahl acknowledged that in the modern state, at either the national or local level, only a small minority of citizens actually participate in power struggles about the policies to be followed. His approach in the New Haven study was to choose three key issue areas and to discover who actually took part in the struggles in these areas.

The research carried out by Dahl and his team revealed that the active minority differed from one issue area to another and that the citizens classified as 'economic and social notables' did not play a leading role, or anything approaching a leading role, in any of the three areas. It was therefore concluded that in New Haven there was no 'power elite' (to use the term popularized by C. Wright Mills) but a distribution of political influence that Dahl described as pluralist. There were undoubtedly inequalities between citizens in the degree of power they exercised in the system, but these inequalities were dispersed rather than cumulative. The 1,066 positions identified as influential in the three issue areas were occupied by 1,029 persons, so that less than 40 persons had exercised influence in more than one area. The government of New Haven was said to be an example of pluralist democracy (see Dahl 1961: Chapters 6, 7, 19–24).

There was much more to Dahl's study than this bare sketch suggests and some of its conclusions and implications will be examined in Chapter 10. In this chapter what is important is the operational definition of power that was adopted, which has been criticized and has led to a prolonged debate among scholars. In a seminal article, Bachrach and Baratz disputed Dahl's assumption that political power is exercised only when an overt disagreement over an issue is argued about and subsequently resolved by the victory of one side or the other. They pointed out that power may also be exercised by preventing an issue from being brought up for decision:

> Of course power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A.
>
> (Bachrach and Baratz 1962: 149)

They described this second face of power as 'non-decision-making' and described the process by which issues are kept off the agenda as 'the mobilization of bias', using a term that had first been coined by Schattschneider (see Schattschneider 1960: 71; Bachrach and Baratz 1962: 150).

There can be no doubt that these writers drew attention to a significant aspect, or more precisely two significant aspects, of the process by which

communities are governed. A minority wishing to get an issue considered by decision-making bodies may indeed find itself frustrated in this aim, either by the strength of prevailing opinion in favour of the status quo or by procedural rules and conventions. However, there can be practical problems about identifying the political actors in such situations. A prevailing consensus of political values may make things difficult for reformers, but it is rarely easy to say who created the consensus. A consensus is apt to be the product of many factors, operating over a period. The problem of multi-causality always arises. Institutional practices may also hinder reformers, but these practices may have been developed over the years for the convenient conduct of business, without any reference to the issue that reformers now wish to get on the agenda and possibly without any intention of hindering reformers in general. In an important article, Nelson Polsby has argued forcibly that it is difficult to make empirical investigations of the mobilization of bias (Polsby 1979).

A small decision in which I was involved may illustrate the problem of identifying the exercise of this 'second face' of power. In the late 1960s, students in my university demonstrated in favour of a change in the system of university government that would give them representation on the University Senate. There was a strong bias among professors to the effect that students should not be permitted to discuss several of the issues that were debated at Senate meetings. Eventually everyone agreed to a compromise I proposed, whereby six students would sit on the Senate but questions of admissions policy, staffing and student assessment would be decided not by Senate but by a new body called Senate Standing Committee, on which there would be no student representation. The decisions of Senate and Senate Standing Committee would be equally binding. Now, suppose that 10 years down the road a later generation of student reformers had wanted to raise the question of assessment techniques on the governing bodies of the university. They would have found this difficult, because the procedures to which their predecessors had agreed excluded student representatives from discussions of this issue. This would presumably be an example of what Bachrach and Baratz called non-decision-making. But who would have exercised power in this later situation? If there had been a conflict about the procedural rules won by conservative professors, the latter could have been identified as powerful. But suppose the students had not started such a conflict but had just been frustrated by the rules. Would it be sensible to say that I was still exercising power, even though I had moved away to another university? Or would it be more sensible to forget about the concept of power and simply say that the procedural rules were weighted against student reformers in this area of policy?

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, it is certainly true that political scientists studying decision making should take note of the prevailing

social and political values in that community or society relevant to the issue and of the institutional channels through which would-be reformers have to work. If individuals can be identified as overtly reinforcing the values and procedures that favour the status quo, as is suggested by the passage quoted from Bachrach and Baratz's article, then they are exercising political influence that is rather different from the influence exerted by the people who actually participate in controversies over particular issues of policy. It is an open question whether this more general kind of influence on the political system is more significant than the specific influence exerted by those who argue about education, housing or defence policies. It is inherently difficult to compare different kinds of influence and it is best to leave this question unanswered and simply acknowledge that Bachrach and Baratz made a valuable contribution by indicating that political power takes more than one form, or has more than one dimension.

A THIRD POSSIBLE DIMENSION

Other scholars have suggested that there is also a third dimension of political influence, whose exercise prevents potential issues from even emerging as actual issues. The lead in this was taken by Steven Lukes, arguing from a Marxist or neo-Marxist perspective. Lukes observed that in many capitalist societies workers accept the system even though their real interests should lead them to favour radical change. They do this because they have been socialized into acceptance by dominant groups who control the processes of socialization, such as the educational system and the mass media. The ability to influence the way people think, to induce them to accept false values, and/or to make them feel powerless should be regarded as a highly important form of political power (see Lukes 1974). While Lukes agrees that both the first and second dimensions of political influence are significant, he believes that this third dimension, by means of which the whole economic and social system is protected, may be the most significant of the three.

The great problem about this view, of course, is that it assumes people have 'real interests' that can be identified by the observer even though the people themselves are unaware of them or would reject them. How can an observer claim to know better than the people where their real interests lie? To Marxists this is not a serious problem, because Marxists believe that their understanding of the economic and social system and the way it is developing enables them to recognize that in capitalist societies the workers are inevitably exploited, and would serve their interests best by working to replace the capitalist system by a socialist system. Workers who do not realize this are suffering from 'false consciousness' and need to be re-educated. If they accept the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Marxists

will accept that western capitalist societies in the twentieth century suffer from a hegemony of bourgeois values, so that the re-education of the masses can only be a long and difficult process. But the fact that bourgeois values are generally dominant might be said only to emphasize the power of those groups who have promoted these values and inculcated them into the minds of their contemporaries.

Empiricists such as Dahl and Polsby reject this whole line of argument as impossible to verify by empirical methods and therefore worthless. Whether the masses suffer from false consciousness can only be a matter of faith or ideology, not a proposition that social scientists can establish or refute. That the proposition cannot be proved empirically is accepted by Lukes, who says, very honestly, that only scholars with a Marxist perspective can be expected to agree with his contention about the significance of what he calls 'the third dimension of power'.

However, if his contention cannot be proved, it can be illustrated, and Lukes encouraged one of his research students to make a study of a community in the Appalachian hills where the workers acquiesced in a situation of obvious exploitation and poverty. The resulting book provided an interesting case study of a coal-mining community dominated by a single foreign (actually British) company, with workers enduring low wages, poor housing and a miserable environment (Gaventa 1980). The workers did not protest or struggle to improve their conditions, as workers in other mining communities had done, and their union was remarkably passive. It was concluded by the author that the workers had been socialized into feelings of powerlessness, which led them to acquiesce in their poverty. However, it was not possible to produce evidence of the socialization process or to show that the company had controlled it, so in the end the study, though suggestive, was inconclusive in its attempt to reveal an example of what Lukes called the third dimension of political power and I prefer to call political manipulation.

At this point I should like to introduce a helpful suggestion bearing on the second and third dimensions of political influence made by Bob Jessop. He says that analysts should distinguish between the structural elements in a situation and what he calls the 'conjunctural' elements and I prefer to call the modifiable elements. The structural elements are 'those elements in a social function that cannot be altered by a given agent (or set of agents) during a given time period' (Jessop 1982: 253), while the modifiable elements are those that can be altered. The structural elements constitute a restraint on potential reformers. In some situations 'the same element can function as a "structural restraint" for one agent (or set of agents) at the same time as it appears as a modifiable element to other agents' (Jessop 1982: 253).

In the light of this, I would argue that it is helpful to distinguish four situations, rather than three, in which the exercise of power, in the form

of political influence, may possibly be identified. If we assume the existence of a potential political actor called Smith, the four situations can be summarized as follows.

1 Smith takes the opportunity to intervene in a debate or vote so as to influence the policy adopted by a group, party or authority regarding a given issue. This is an example of the first dimension of political influence, the dimension studied by Dahl.
2 Smith would like to influence policy regarding a given issue, but cannot do so because she/he cannot get the issue on the agenda, either because (a) another actor called Jones is able to keep the issue off the agenda or (b) the procedural rules and conventions operate as a structural constraint preventing Smith from raising the issue. In case (a) this would be an example of the second dimension of influence being exercised by Jones. Case (b) might be regarded as an example of the second dimension of influence exercised by those who, in an earlier time period, framed the rules or helped to form the conventions. If there are people or groups in society who have the capacity to modify the rules or conventions, then it could be said that the rules and conventions operate as a structural constraint on Smith but afford an opportunity for the exercise of power by these other people or groups.
3 Smith would like to change the system, whether this be the system of industrial relations, the system of government, or (the favourite example) the capitalist system. However, she/he does not think it is feasible to do this, does not think it is worthwhile to try, decides instead to work for small improvements within the system, and after a time comes to accept the system and take it for granted. The complexity and entrenched nature of the system would in this case be a structural constraint for Smith. If his/her perception of the near-impossibility of changing the system had been developed by a conscious campaign of socialization by teachers, journalists and groups who had an interest in maintaining the system, then the behaviour of the latter could probably be regarded as an example of the exercise of the third dimension of influence.
4 Smith is quite content with the system, even though, in the opinion of a radical critic called Robertson, the system is oppressive and has provided Smith with a poorer lifestyle than he deserves, and could probably secure under a different system. Steven Lukes's position is that Smith's complacency can be regarded as the result of the exercise of the third dimension of influence by all those groups in society who manipulate the minds of citizens like Smith so as to make the latter content with a system that is oppressive and unfair, the contentment being a form of 'false consciousness' in the heart of Smith and others. However, most social scientists, including this author, reject this position on the ground that the characterization of the system as oppressive is a value judgement

by Robertson, who has no right to say that Smith is mistaken in having reached a different value judgement. The concept of false consciousness seems, to almost everyone except Marxists, to involve a degree of certainty about highly controversial questions that is inappropriate.

FOUR ADDITIONAL CONCEPTS

At this stage in the argument it will be helpful to add a word about four additional concepts that are relevant to the study of political power. One of these is the 'raising of consciousness'; another is 'real interest' (as distinct from apparent interest); a third is 'cultural and ideological hegemony'; and the fourth is 'political socialization'.

The term 'raising of consciousness' did not come into popular usage until the 1970s, although the process has existed for centuries and was known earlier as (according to taste) enlightenment, education or agitation. It is very relevant to situations 3 and 4, as outlined in the previous paragraphs. In situation 3, a radical reformer might be able to persuade Smith that, although he could not hope to change the system by himself, he might be able to do so if he joined with others and took part in a long-term campaign of propaganda and political activity. If the radical were successful in changing Smith's mind he would have raised Smith's consciousness about the possibilities of collective political action. In situation 4, radicals might be able to change Smith's evaluation of the system, so as to lead him to regard it as oppressive rather than benign. This also could be described as the raising of consciousness.

This concept has become relevant in recent years to the feminist movement, whose leaders have been able in most advanced industrial countries to raise the consciousness of women in situation 3, who were discontented with the opportunities open to women but did not previously think much could be done about the matter. In North America, and to a much smaller extent in Europe and Australasia, feminists have also raised the consciousness of women in situation 4, who were previously content with the position of women in society but have now changed their minds about this.

The concept is also relevant to the recent campaigns by homosexual and lesbian groups to increase public tolerance of differing forms of sexual preference and behaviour. When municipal authorities in Greater London established lesbian workshops in the 1980s, the object was not only to provide meeting places but to raise the consciousness of lesbians about their position, the need to educate the general public about it, and the desirability of changes in law and custom that would make it possible for lesbian couples to adopt children.

The concept of 'real interests' is commonly used in connection with the assertion that the real interest of workers in a capitalist system is to bring about the transformation of that system to socialism or communism.

However, it may be a mistake to identify the concept solely with this assertion, on which the gap between the two sides is unbridgeable, for there are other issue areas in which the idea of real interests, though hardly scientific, may spark off useful pieces of research.

As an example, British social scientists visiting the United States often come away with the belief that the real interest of Americans would be served by the creation of a national health insurance scheme, though only a minority of Americans have seemed to want this and it has only now got on to the political agenda. This issue is one that can fruitfully be studied by scholars interested in political power. When the question of national health insurance was put on the agenda under Truman's Presidency, a lively debate was won by the American Medical Association, which scored a brilliant propaganda victory by the tactic of dubbing national health insurance with the name of 'socialized medicine' and thus mobilizing the strong bias that Americans have against socialism. This controversy can be studied by empirical methods as an example of pressure-group politics. In the forty or more years since that debate, it could be argued that all the publicists who use the term 'socialized medicine' are continuing to mobilize bias against the idea, with the entirely successful aim of keeping the issue off the agenda. While the debate in 1948 was an example of the first dimension of political power, with the Medical Association coming out on top, the intermittent propaganda on the question since that time can be regarded as an example of the second dimension of power.

Another possible example is the belief of many American social scientists that the real interests of the British would be served by a massive expansion of the proportion of teenagers going to university. There would be no problem about studying the various debates and reports on the optimum size of the university sector, and discovering why the governments of the 1970s decided to expand polytechnics rather than universities. The power that was exercised in this area was power of the first kind, as analysed in the New Haven study, and locating it would not be difficult. Neither this nor the health service example would reveal the third dimension of power, even though our hypothetical researchers might have been drawn to them by thoughts about a real interest being overlooked.

It would be quite a different matter to investigate why the American people have not embraced socialism. Numerous scholars have attempted an explanation, in terms of such factors as the opportunities offered to immigrants, the expanding frontier, the rapid growth of the American economy, the degree of social mobility, and the existence of ethnic divisions that led to conflict between ethnic groups rather than between social classes. However, it is doubtful whether it would be useful to employ the concept of political power when making an inquiry into this question. People were not prevented from adopting socialist ideas by censorship or

controls over political association or institutional hurdles. Socialist ideas were floated, but they did not catch on.

As noted in Chapter 3, the concept of cultural and ideological hegemony (which will come up again in Chapter 11) was developed by Gramsci in the 1930s. It seems to this author to be clearly true that in most advanced capitalist societies there exists a dominant set of values that is compatible with capitalism and supports the operation of the capitalist system. It is not the only set of values present, for there is also a quite widely held set of trade-union values that are rather different, though they are not normally incompatible with capitalism, together with a set of revolutionary values held by a small minority of citizens. It is fair to say that the dominant values are generally upheld by schools, churches, the mass media and other opinion-formers as well as by politicians. The process of upholding social values and passing them on to the next generation is commonly known as socialization, and in the opinion of Marxists and neo-Marxists the result of the socialization process in western societies has been the development and maintenance of an ideological and cultural hegemony of bourgeois values.

If the development and maintenance of this hegemony is to be regarded as the exercise of political power, in the third dimension of power suggested by Lukes, it is important to ask how this can be studied empirically. The concept of power involves the idea of a political actor with certain intentions, who communicates a message and is able to make some difference to the political behaviour of others. If it can be shown that people who control the dissemination of ideas, be they teachers, journalists or newspaper proprietors, have deliberately presented slanted information that has had a measurable impact on the attitudes and values of their audience, then this should be regarded as a form of political power, of the type that I have called political manipulation. The audience may not have the resources of time and knowledge required to check the validity of the messages presented to them, and in the long run beliefs instilled in this way are likely to affect political behaviour. However the problems of analysing this hypothetical power to shape ideas are very great indeed. Much political communication takes the form of private conversation or classroom dialogue that is simply not on record. When communications are on record their content can be analysed, but one can rarely do more than infer the intentions of the author and it is not easy to assess the impact of the message.

A good deal of research has been carried out, but the results of it have been highly inconclusive. People are socialized throughout life, the main sources of influence being parents, schools, peer groups, colleagues at work, life experiences and the mass media. Of these, the only sources amenable to empirical research are school curricula with a political content and the mass media. However, it has been reported that 'most of the survey type research . . . on the impact of various types of political edu-

cation curricula seems to confirm that their influence on children is minimal' (Dowse 1978: 408). The results of research on the influence of the mass media have also been largely negative. The public seem to take what they want from the mass media rather than be educated by the messages presented, with the consequence that 'on the whole, the mass media serve to reinforce existing orientations rather than to alter old ones or create new ones' (Dawson and Prewitt 1969: 198).

People certainly acquire and develop political attitudes as they go through life, and it may be appropriate to call this a process of political socialization, but in modern industrial societies citizens are exposed to such a multitude of communications and experiences from which they may acquire a political message that it is almost impossible to assess the impact of any one of them. After surveying the literature, Dowse and Hughes report that 'in recent years the interest political sociologists have shown in the process of socialization has waned, due in no small part to the inconclusiveness of much of the research' (Dowse and Hughes 1986: 217).

Even in closed societies the evidence suggests that people are markedly resistant to indoctrination by political propaganda. The citizens of the Communist Party states of eastern Europe were supposedly brain-washed for forty years after the Second World War about the advantages of a socialist economic system and a single-party state. The dramatic events of 1989–90 showed that most people did not believe the propaganda. Events in the former Soviet Union indicate that Soviet citizens were also remarkably resistant to political socialization, despite seventy years of indoctrination and a good deal of isolation from the western world. In view of these revelations, it behoves political scientists to think very carefully before using phrases like 'the power of the capitalist press'. The evidence suggests that life experiences have much more influence on people's attitudes than the mass media can exert, even when the media are substantially in unison.

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT POLITICAL INFLUENCE

When we work with the first type of political influence, namely the direct influence of individual political actors in the decision-making process, there can be no doubt that the technique adopted by Dahl and his colleagues is superior to that adopted by Hunter. It is simply not good enough to ask a panel of people whom they believe to exercise political power; it is essential for the researchers themselves to study the process and identify the persons involved in it. There are naturally problems about which issue areas to investigate, what time-scale to adopt and so forth, but these are problems that competent researchers can cope with.

The assertion that the ability to control the agenda constitutes another dimension of power must be accepted, though care must be taken in identifying its exercise. It is unsatisfactory to conclude from the fact that

a conflict is not on the agenda that it would have been there if values or procedures had not been manipulated to keep it off. It is possible that the people who might have been expected to raise the issue did not wish to do so, because they felt that the time was not ripe to pursue it. There has to be evidence of a wish to have the issue on the agenda that was frustrated by values or procedures.

Further care is needed in identifying the persons or groups responsible for formulating and upholding the relevant values or procedures. As noted above, they may have been quite innocent of the intention to frustrate reform. In such circumstances it would be possible to say that such persons had a significant though unintended influence on the resolution of the issue under consideration. However, since the concept of exercising power involves intention, it would probably be better in those circumstances not to invoke the second dimension of influence, but to say instead that various established procedures and values constituted a structural constraint that reformers have to cope with.

Another possibility is that the most important actors in the formulation of the values or procedures may have departed from the scene. Some might say that this does not matter. It would not be unreasonable or unusual to say that the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin had an influence that extended beyond their respective lifetimes. On the other hand, it would be odd to say that these men exercised power after they were dead. If we keep, as we should, to the assumption that political power is exercised only by live human beings, a more correct statement would be that the political leaders of the Soviet Union and certain other states have used the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin to justify the dictatorship of the Communist Party in their states. After they are published, ideas are available to all; as a resource for supporters and a target for critics. It is the people who use the ideas as weapons who are exercising power.

These quibbles are not intended to undermine the significance of the second dimension of political influence; only to insist that statements about it must be expressed carefully. It is more difficult for scholars to handle than the first dimension of influence.

The suggestion that there is a third dimension of influence raises more fundamental questions. The most basic of these is the question of whether it is reasonable to say that people have real interests, as distinct from their perceived interests, and if so how these can be identified. This is analogous to the question, already discussed in Chapter 8, of whether it is reasonable to talk of real freedom to live a worthwhile life, as something distinct from freedom to do whatever one likes. Positivists (and positivism will be discussed in Chapter 13) would say emphatically that such claims are unreasonable. However, it is not clear that the idea can be dismissed in such a categorical manner. Most people now recognize that certain kinds of industrial process and certain kinds of packaging (such as aerosol con-

tainers) damage the environment in ways that are contrary to our real interests, though this was not recognized twenty years ago and many people are still unwilling to make the material sacrifices required to safeguard these long-term interests. If this example is accepted as valid, it cannot, in principle, be denied that there may be other real interests that conflict with perceived interests. Knowing how to identify them is certainly a difficult problem, but they may exist.

Even if this problem can be partially overcome, at least for some policy areas, there remains the further problem of how to identify the groups who are alleged to have wielded power so as to prevent people from recognizing their real interests. In the example just mentioned, the conflict between real and perceived interests, in so far as it exists, is caused by ignorance of rather complex scientific laws, not by propaganda in favour of environmentally unsound practices. If it is to be said that power has been exercised, it is incumbent upon the person making this statement to show who has exercised the power and how it has been done. Sweeping assertions that the capitalist class has used political power to promote false values throughout society do not appear to satisfy this requirement. It is not clear that the capitalist class has enough cohesion to be a political actor; there is no evidence (and no possibility of evidence) to show that people would hold different values if capitalist propaganda had not in some way shaped their views; and of course the judgement that bourgeois values are false is dependent upon acceptance of a particular ideology.

This last sentence would be unacceptable to Marxist scholars, who might respond in a variety of ways. One possible response would be that the view that generalizations about politics are only meaningful if they can be proved or disproved by empirical evidence reflects the false assumption that the study of politics should be based on the methodology of the natural sciences. This issue will be discussed in Part IV of this book. On a quite different tack, another possible response would be to point out that in western capitalist societies citizens are faced with a constant barrage of advertising for consumer goods, clearly designed to promote acquisitiveness and encourage the work ethic, and thus to bolster bourgeois values. Non-Marxists would not regard the advertising of dishwashers as a political action, but Marxists regard economic and political activities as so interdependent that they would not want to draw this distinction. Because Marxists take a much broader view of what is political than non-Marxists do, their concept of what constitutes political power is also much broader. In view of these differences, it seems probable (as Lukes himself admits) that Lukes's concept of a third dimension of political power will seem highly significant only to scholars with Marxist inclinations.

Others, while discounting the specific example of class oppression, may think that Lukes has pointed to an important aspect of power relationships. The process of political socialization is so complex that it is very difficult

to trace cause and effect, while the evidence suggests a surprising degree of public resistance to political propaganda. But when all this is said, the fact remains that a minority of people holding particular positions in society have the opportunity to influence the thinking and assumptions of the majority, and it cannot reasonably be denied that this is a potential form of power.

It is not at all clear that this influence is always (or even usually) exerted by agents of the capitalist class, as Marxists would have us believe. Most of the publicity about pollution, for instance, is generated by environmentalists rather than by supporters of industrialists anxious to keep their costs down. Nevertheless, there is clearly the possibility of political influence being exerted, for or against the real interests of the majority of citizens, in ways that are not entirely covered by the first two dimensions of influence. To this extent, non-Marxists should be grateful to Steven Lukes for his contribution, even though they will probably not be able to accept his whole theory.

It is now possible to make some tentative generalizations. If political scientists wish to make an empirical study of political influence in action, then the best strategy is to study particular examples of decision making, at either the local or the national level. To reach a full understanding of the decision-making process, students should take account of five factors or sets of circumstances in addition to finding out who participated in the process. Some of these factors might be dealt with very briefly, but none of them should be ignored. First, the student should take account of the institutions and procedures in the polity he is studying, and note that these may make things easier for some groups than others. If one strategy for conservatives is to strengthen the procedural barriers to reform, this is obviously relevant. Second, the researcher should study the prevailing political values relevant to the issue under consideration, and the attempts made to reinforce or change these values. Political power is not just a matter of getting votes on a committee, it is also a matter of influencing the way people think about an issue.

Third, some account should be taken of the administrative difficulties consequent upon alternative causes of action, and the frequently large influence of the bureaucrats who advise those responsible for reaching a decision. It should never be forgotten that in most polities a good deal of political power resides in the hands of senior public servants. Fourth, the researcher should be aware of the political restraints on various alternatives, in the shape of fears that certain decisions might lose votes at the next election or lead to a large-scale refusal to comply with the policy. Fifth, account should be taken of the other restraints on decisions, such as the possible economic loss if export industries were made to bear the costs of drastic environmental controls. The question of economic restraints on policy making will be discussed in Chapter 11.

It might be argued by behaviouralists that taking account of all these factors, although ideal in principle, would enlarge the study unduly and draw attention away from the basic question of who actually exercises influence. I would understand this argument but not accept it. The concept of political power is central to the study of politics, but I do not believe that it can properly be studied in isolation from the factors that surround its exercise and play an important part in determining political outcomes.

SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

It sometimes happens that the discussion of a political concept comes to be dominated by the terminology used in a particular dispute, even though that dispute focuses on only one aspect of the process or activity or pattern of behaviour covered by the concept. In recent years this has happened to the concept of political power. The article by Bachrach and Baratz discussed above referred to a 'second face of power', while the book by Lukes referred to the 'three dimensions of power'. In fact these contributions dealt only with forms of political influence, or in Lukes' case with two forms of influence and one form of what I prefer to call political manipulation. They said nothing whatever about political coercion or political authority. In consequence there is some danger that the lively and useful controversy about whether 'power' has one, two, or three dimensions will divert attention from the fact that political coercion and political authority are just as important as political influence and logically distinct from it.

It is important to recognize that these types of political power are logically distinct, just as it is important (as emphasized in Chapter 5) to recognize that there are four logically distinct types of representation. This recognition promotes clarity of analysis and enables the scholar to put particular empirical or historical studies into proper perspective. Let us therefore conclude with some thoughts on each of the four types of power.

In the literature of political science, *political coercion* features mainly in case studies of particular examples of political violence. In recent years terrorism has been extensively studied and an excellent literature on that topic now exists, including a specialized journal. The literature on the coercion exerted by the police and allied security agencies, such as the US National Guard, is more patchy. In the past fifteen years half a dozen good books on the British police have appeared, but other countries have not been so well served. Since the police constitute the sharp end of the power of the modern state, it could be expected that every textbook on a national system of government would include a chapter on the powers, organization and behaviour of the police. These matters are important, both because contacts (even if usually only visual contacts) with the police are the most frequent contacts that the average citizen has with agencies

wielding state power and because the police have enormous discretion in deciding on the priority they will give to different types of law enforcement and on the methods they will use. It therefore seems unfortunate that only a small minority of textbooks include a chapter on the police.

The exercise of *political authority* in the modern state has been much more thoroughly covered by the literature. Accounts of the structure, powers and work of the executive, legislative and judicial organs of government have always been at the heart of the discipline and it can be expected that this will be so for the foreseeable future.

The study of *political influence* has, as already suggested, tended to follow fashions. An emphasis on the legislative influence of economic pressure groups was followed and accompanied in the 1950s by an emphasis on the nature and influence of public opinion, through elections, political parties and promotional groups for various good causes. This emphasis was followed in the 1960s by an enthusiasm for analysing the patterns of influence within municipal government. That decade saw the completion of over thirty substantial studies of community power structure in American cities and about eight studies in British cities.

In the 1970s and 1980s the emphasis shifted again. On the one hand, a revival in support for minority nationalist movements within several democratic states led to a new focus on the political significance of non-economic cleavages within society. Experience invalidated earlier assumptions that ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages were ceasing to be politically important in advanced industrial societies. The influence of minority nationalist parties came under fairly intense study and was followed by research on the political influence of ethnic minorities and linguistic minorities seeking governmental aid for the protection of their interests. On the other hand, a new generation of Marxist or neo-Marxist scholars stressed the influence, amounting to dominance, that Marxists believe the capitalist class to exercise over government policy in all societies where the economic system is one of capitalism.

In the three chapters that follow we shall examine some of the concepts that have been developed by scholars studying the structure of influence over policy making in democratic states. Chapter 10 will be devoted to pluralism, a label for the view that political influence in democratic (and some pre-democratic) systems is divided between a plurality of groups and sections that compete freely with one another. Chapter 11 will deal with elitism, a name for the view that democracy is always largely a sham. It is obvious that in any country government policies are actually formulated and implemented by only a small minority of the population, and the elitist argument is 'that the dominant minority cannot be controlled by the majority, whatever democratic mechanisms are used' ((Parry 1969: 31). The most elaborate and sophisticated form of the elitist argument is the Marxist theory of class dominance, which holds, in a nutshell,

that the interests of the most powerful economic class in society always tend to be dominant in the policy-making process. Chapter 12 will deal with corporatism, a label for a view that falls somewhere between the extremes of pluralism and elitism. According to theorists of corporatism, the main characteristic of economic policy making in many modern democratic states is that groups representing business and labour have come to work in partnership with the executive branch of government and thus to enjoy much more political influence than other groups.

Political manipulation is inherently more difficult to study by empirical methods. The enthusiasm for studying political socialization that was evident in the 1960s has largely faded away in recent years, because the many studies to which a great deal of effort was devoted yielded results that were, on the whole, disappointing. Since the early 1980s, thought about political manipulation has been dominated not by empirical research but by the theoretical suggestions of Michel Foucault, the French social philosopher and, through his writings, by reflections about the ways in which we are all manipulated in our daily lives. Foucault's explorations of power relationships focused not on the power of people at the top of the political system, the decision makers and the groups that influence decision makers, but on the power relationships in the system itself, as seen in the numerous forms of local power applied to citizens so as to induce conformity in their behaviour. Some of these forms are explicit and brutal, such as the powers exercised by police officers and magistrates, while others are subtle and exercised without the subject being conscious of the fact, so that they can be regarded as manipulative power. In any area of human activity there is a multiplicity of customs and pressures that collectively limit freedom of action, pushing people to do what is thought proper and appropriate, and in the second half of the twentieth century it is evident that one of the instruments of this kind of power is the accumulation and dissemination of various types of specialized knowledge; particularly knowledge of the human sciences. This line of reasoning led Foucault to his assertion that in modern society knowledge is itself an important form of power, giving experts a way of shaping the behaviour of others.

Foucault, himself a radical, maintained that the cumulative impact of the power of experts is conservative in its nature. Psychiatrists, by defining what is normal or abnormal, have the long-term effect of inducing conformity in behaviour. It could be added that sociologists give us generalizations about the normal family, sexologists tell us how to conduct our sex lives, and dieticians tell us what to eat. University professors, by defining what research methods are appropriate or inappropriate, may limit the new knowledge that becomes available. Art and dramatic critics may influence what kinds of painting or drama are produced. It is not difficult to find examples of the kind of power that Foucault had in mind, though it is not necessary to follow him in his apparent assumption that expert

knowledge is always conservative in its impact on society. Some forms of knowledge have this kind of impact whereas other forms have a liberating or reforming impact. Anyone familiar with the outlines of history in the past two centuries knows that intellectuals have often taken the lead in promoting social and political change. A clear contemporary example of the reforming impact of intellectuals is the impact of educational theorists on school education in Britain and North America since the 1960s. However, Foucault, though in some sense a political theorist, was not interested in broad movements leading to change at the top. His concern was with the local mechanisms of social control found everywhere in modern society. The kind of power that interested him is only indirectly political, and is not state-centred but diffuse; as Ball puts it, this knowledge/power consists of 'a highly decentralised array of . . . practices operating in unsuspected and subtle ways in everyday life to produce "normal" subjects' (Ball 1988: 101). Moreover, it is central to Foucault's thinking that people may themselves assist in the process that leads to what he calls their subjugation, as in the case, presumably, of people who willingly provide data for computerized data-banks that may subsequently be used to their disadvantage.

Another general point, however, is that this kind of power is far from being absolute. Human beings are constantly influenced by it, but they can escape from it if they have the mind to do so. There are 'points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape' (Foucault 1983: 225). One task of the theorist, Foucault maintained, is to clarify the nature of this kind of power, 'thereby disclosing points of possible intervention and resistance and thus helping to empower others to take advantage of them' (Ball 1988: 103). When there is resistance 'the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries' (Foucault 1983: 226) which may modify the structure of dominance.

One source of resistance to the power of organized knowledge, that is, to knowledge as science which commands respect and conformity, lies in the local and 'minor knowledges' that also exist in society. An example is the knowledge of psychiatric patients and nurses, as contrasted to the knowledge embodied and formalized in medical science (see Foucault 1980: 82). Foucault explained that his research into the history of sexuality, the history of psychiatric illness and the emergence of the prison system had been intended to rediscover the 'historical knowledge of struggles' that had been 'confined to the margins of knowledge' (Foucault 1980: 83). He called these rediscoveries 'genealogies'; he described them as 'anti-sciences'; and he did not claim that in any objective way they were more correct than normal scientific knowledge. What he claimed is that knowing them would be a weapon opposed not to the contents or methods of science but to 'the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the

institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours' (Foucault 1980: 84).

Foucault's dislike of the society in which he lived was not explained or justified in an explicit manner, but it seems to have been quite intense. He said, for instance, that 'what is at stake in all these genealogies is the nature of this power that has surged into view in all its violence, aggression and absurdity in the course of the last forty years' (Foucault 1980: 87). The overall impression left by his writings is not that of a scholar who had a coherent theory about political power to put alongside other theories, but rather that of an individualistic scholar who distrusted coherent theories, disliked the organization and discipline of contemporary society, and linked this to the dominance of orthodoxies in the human sciences. His objects in acting as an intellectual archaeologist, digging out examples of past social thought and practice for current inspection, were to open windows for speculation, to shock people out of complacency, to liberate thought from its conventional limits, and to encourage society's rebels and critics. In one of his several revealing interviews, he said that all his books were 'if you like, little tool-boxes. If people want to open them, use a sentence, an idea, an analysis as a screwdriver or a spanner in order to short-circuit, disqualify and break systems of power . . . well, so much the better' (quoted O'Farrell 1989: 110). Taken as a whole, Foucault's writings have the bracing effect of leading readers to regard familiar situations and relationships in an entirely fresh light.

Chapter 10

Pluralism

Pluralism is an American theory about the impact of sectional and group conflict on policy making. It occupied a central place in political debate in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is an enduring concept in American political thought, having been formulated in one form by the founders of the republic and being current in a modified form right up to the 1990s. As a theory, pluralism has been defined and redefined, supported by empirical studies, criticized and attacked as misleading. It no longer has such a central place in debate as it had a few years ago, but it has featured in so much of the writing about American politics that it clearly deserves a chapter in this book. Moreover, its use has spread from the United States to other countries, some writers having said that all democratic systems are pluralist in character. To some extent, the concept of pluralism is an American intellectual export.

SECTIONAL PLURALISM IN AMERICAN THOUGHT

As already noted in Chapter 4, the first pluralist thinkers in the United States were Madison and Hamilton. They were writing to advocate the proposed transition from a loose confederation of states to a federal union. Their arguments were a combination of empirical hypotheses and normative assertions. They have been subjected to an elaborate logical analysis by Robert Dahl (see Dahl 1956: Chapters 1 and 2) and I am indebted to Dahl for this analysis. In so far as Madison and Hamilton's writings were relevant to pluralism, however, I think their points can be summarized without injustice in the form of four empirical hypotheses, one normative assertion and a conclusion. The empirical hypotheses were as follows:

1 That politicians are not normally motivated by altruism or a concern for the public interest. On the contrary, they enjoy the exercise of power and can be expected to maximize it if given the opportunity to do so.

2 That a conflict of interests in society is inevitable and will necessarily lead to the development of factional disputes. As Madison put it:

> A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilised nations . . . The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government.
>
> (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 46)

3 That factions within society will, if not checked by others, seek to maximize their own interests at the expense of others.
4 That factions will be led or represented by politicians who can be expected to use their power to promote factional interests.

The normative assertion was that Americans ought to organize their system of government so as to minimize the possibility that leaders of any one faction could dominate the others, which Madison said would lead to a deprivation of rights.

The conclusion was that joining the thirteen states into a federal union would be desirable on the ground that, by multiplying and diversifying the factions, the danger of any one faction gaining a position of dominance would be greatly reduced. Hamilton's assertion to this effect in paper 51 of *The Federalist* bears repetition because it was so clear; it was that 'society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens that the rights of individuals or of the minority will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority' (Hamilton *et al.* 1901: 287).

This line of argument was given a new emphasis in the 1850s by John C. Calhoun, the influential southern politician who was concerned that northern politicians, if they gained control of Congress, might use their majority to abolish slavery. Calhoun took the view that representative government could only safeguard the interests of geographical minorities if it were based on the principle of the 'concurrent majority' (see Calhoun 1943: 28). He asserted that this view was to some extent recognized in the US Constitution, by the equal representation of each state in the Senate and by the clause requiring the agreement of three-quarters of the states before any constitutional amendment could be passed. The essence of his message was that this principle should be extended by convention so that a numerical majority in Congress would never use its power to pass measures which deprived some of the states of rights that they considered essential to their wellbeing. If northern politicians refused to accept such a convention in regard to slavery, Calhoun warned, the result

would be to upset the delicate equilibrium of American politics and probably to lead the southern states to secede from the union.

It is possible to argue either that the American civil war justified Calhoun's view, for the war was an undeniably tragic event, or that it rendered his extreme version of states' rights pluralism obsolete by demonstrating the power that a national majority could exert. After the civil war somewhat less was heard about this type of pluralism, and the improvement of communications and the trend towards the nationwide organization of industry made American society more homogeneous. Nevertheless, the ideas of sectional pluralism did not die out, and were re-affirmed in 1950 by Herbert Agar, who wrote as follows:

> Successful federal policies will tend to follow Calhoun's rule of concurrent majorities. Every interest which is strong enough to make trouble must usually be satisfied before anything can be done. This means great caution in attempting new policies, so that a whole ungainly continent may keep in step.
>
> (Agar 1950: 690)

A. N. Holcombe held a similar viewpoint, arguing that disciplined national parties (as then being advocated by many political scientists) were undesirable and probably unworkable in a large and heterogeneous society like America. The price of union, it was said, was the acceptance of the right of minorities to veto policies that they found intolerable (Holcombe 1950). This was a fairly straightforward application of the doctrine first advanced by Madison and Hamilton. Dahl came close to this position when he suggested that the distinction between dictatorship and democracy could be described as one 'between government by a minority and government by minorities' (Dahl 1956: 133).

Not everyone in the post-war period shares the values implied by this quotation, for some critics have wanted firmer national leadership than has normally been given. However, it is true as a matter of fact that political power in America is more decentralized than in any other modern democratic state, with the exceptions of Canada and Switzerland. Sectional interests with a geographic base have more influence on national policy than is normal elsewhere, while the extent of congressional log rolling for regional and local interests in regard to the budget, appropriations and defence contracts would be thought shocking in all other democracies.

PRESSURE-GROUP PLURALISM

After 1950, an emphasis on the sectional and geographical basis of American pluralism was replaced by an emphasis on the role of organized pressure groups, however based, on governmental decision making. In 1952, Latham's book on *The Group Basis of Politics* asserted that the

pressure group is 'the basic political form' (Latham 1965: 10) and that the political process is essentially a struggle between such groups:

> The legislature referees the group struggle, ratifies the victories of the successful coalitions, and records the terms of the surrenders, compromises, and conquests in the form of statutes . . . The legislative vote on any issue tends to represent the composition of strength, i.e. the balance of power, among the contending groups at the moment of voting. What may be called public policy is the equilibrium reached in this struggle at any given moment.
>
> (Latham 1965: 35–6)

The 1950s saw the publication of many books and articles with a similar emphasis, some of which have already been quoted in Chapter 4. The most influential of them was Truman's book, *The Governmental Process*, which sought to synthesize the results of numerous specialized studies so as to provide a 'systematic conception of the role of interest groups in the political process' (Truman 1951: VIII-IX). It will be noted that Truman preferred the term 'interest group' to the term 'pressure group'. He did this because he thought that the latter term had become part of 'the language of political abuse' (Truman 1951: 38) whereas the former term was more neutral. However this may have been in 1951, it would be a great pity to follow him in this usage in the 1990s. The terms are equally capable of being used in a neutral way, as they usually are by political scientists, and it is much more helpful to use 'pressure group' as a generic term, to describe all organized groups that try to exert pressure on the process by which policies are made and implemented, while distinguishing between the two sub-categories of interest groups and promotional groups.

An interest group, in this usage, is a group that has the function of defending or advancing the material interests of its members, while a promotional group is one that exists to promote a particular value or cause. Thus, in regard to defence policy there is a useful distinction to be drawn between groups defending the interests of firms (and their employees) working on defence contracts and other groups, like those opposed to nuclear arms, whose members share an attitude or moral conviction about the proper nature of the policy. In regard to the law on abortion, there is a similar distinction between groups representing the interests of doctors, nurses and the owners of abortion clinics and other groups whose members simply have convictions about the rights and wrongs of abortion. The distinction is reflected in the financial and other resources available to the groups and, frequently, in the tactics of pressure they employ. Interest groups are more likely to be consulted by government agencies and thus to have an inside track in the decision-making process, while promotional groups are more likely to rely on public

campaigns and demonstrations. 'Pressure group' is clearly the most appropriate generic term and it will be used in what follows.

The main thrust behind the pressure-group pluralists of the 1950s was methodological. They believed that there was an unhelpful tendency among political scientists to depict the role of pressure groups as being in some sense outside the basic process of government, or at any rate on the periphery of it. In contrast, the pluralists' view was that such groups were at the heart of the policy-making process. 'The institutions of government', Truman declared, 'are centres of interest-based power' (Truman 1951: 506). Is this true of the Presidency, the Supreme Court, the State Department? Truman's answer is in the affirmative: 'The political structure of the United States . . . has adopted characteristic legislative, executive, and judicial forms through the efforts of organized interest groups' (Truman 1951: 513).

This statement seems like an exaggeration, an attempt to redress the methodological balance that goes too far the other way. Pressure groups are important, but they are not all-important. There was, moreover, an element of complacency in the suggestion that the American democratic system automatically registers a state of approximate equilibrium between conflicting pressure groups. In Truman's version the concept of a 'potential interest group' was introduced to serve a function analogous to that of 'the invisible hand' in Adam Smith's writings, namely to guarantee that the clash of private interests would not produce consequences that would upset the system. Another balancing factor was said to be the existence or likelihood of overlapping memberships between interest groups, widely defined so as to include potentially overlapping memberships in both actual and potential groups. One of Truman's conclusions was as follows: 'It is thus multiple memberships in potential groups based on widely held and accepted interests that serve as a balance wheel in a political system like that of the United States' (Truman 1951: 514).

This position went beyond the empirical evidence to produce what could be (and was) construed as a theory of American democracy in terms of an automatic balance of group pressures. The theory could be (and was) attacked by critics on the ground that it was smug, perhaps to the point of being Panglossian, and this line of criticism is understandable. In the 1950s the American system was rather obviously one in which some groups, such as those representing farmers or doctors or business interests, had more influence than others, such as those representing slum-dwellers or racial minorities or the consumers of medical or legal services. It is not clear that pluralist writers would actually have disagreed with this generalization, but their comments about equilibrium, balance, countervailing powers, potential interest groups and the like tended, by implication at least, to minimize its significance.

The fact is that the 1950s were years characterized by a good deal of

political and other self-satisfaction in America. There was a fair amount of Panglossian writing in that decade, and a prize for pluralist complacency in this period might perhaps be awarded to Max Lerner for the following sentences in a book entitled *America as a Civilization*:

> [Power in America] is plural and fluid. It is many-faceted rather than uniform, it is dispersed among a number of groups . . . The pluralist, pragmatist and federalist character of American politics has compelled it to develop the arts of compromise and to achieve an equilibrium of conflicting powers in motion . . . The American system of power has become like a system of nebulae held together by reciprocal tensions in the inter-galactic space.
>
> (Lerner 1957: 398, 405 and 406)

Despite this kind of rhetorical exaggeration, writers in the pluralist tradition have pointed to an important dimension of American democracy. Thus, Truman said that 'the outstanding characteristic of American politics . . . is that it involves a multiplicity of co-ordinate or nearly-co-ordinate points of access to governmental decisions' (Truman 1951: 519). Robert Dahl said much the same thing in his textbook on American government:

> When one looks at American political institutions in their entirety and compares them with institutions in other democracies, what stands out as a salient feature is the extraordinary variety of opportunities these institutions provide for an organized minority to block, modify, or delay a policy which the minority opposes.
>
> (Dahl 1967: 326)

These two generalizations are undoubtedly valid, though it is open to question whether this feature of the American system is entirely desirable. Should democrats be pleased, for instance, that the National Rifle Association has been able to hold up effective gun control for many years, against the apparent wish of the majority of citizens to see such control? Dahl's defence of pluralism is that it provides opportunities for groups of citizens to mobilize slack political resources for whatever interests and values they wish to press, and that it also limits the power of governing bodies. As he puts it, when 'one centre of power is set against another, power itself will be tamed, civilized, controlled and limited to decent human purposes' (Dahl 1967: 24). Charles Lindblom has gone rather further than this, arguing that pluralism is not only democratic, but also likely to produce more desirable policy outcomes than any more centralized system of policy making. It involves 'muddling through' rather than political planning, but the complexity of problems in modern industrial societies is so great that it is unlikely that planners can master them all

and it is better to leave the outcome to what he calls 'partisan mutual adjustment' (Lindblom 1959 and 1965).

In the 1960s the emphasis changed again, as the publication of Dahl's *Who Governs?* turned attention from the role of pressure groups in Congress to the distribution of influence in municipal politics. The background to this study was the publication of seven or eight surveys of community power structure by sociologists, all of which had reached the conclusion that power within American cities was dominated by an established elite of upper-class citizens. The upper class (variously defined) was said to have a ruling position in local society, the elected politicians and officials were said to follow the orders of the upper class, and each community, it was concluded, was therefore controlled by a power elite. Dahl and his junior colleague, Nelson Polsby, took the view that the methodology used in these studies was faulty and the conclusions were mistaken. Polsby produced a detailed and searching analysis of the studies which cast great doubt on their validity (Polsby 1963), while Dahl organized the study of power in New Haven that has already been discussed in Chapter 9 (see Dahl 1961).

As indicated in that chapter, I believe that the methodology employed by Dahl and his colleagues was superior, by normal scientific criteria, to the methodology of their sociological predecessors. However, it is important to be precise about what was and what was not demonstrated by the New Haven study. It was demonstrated that the government of New Haven was an arena of conflict between small groups and factions, with different factions coming out on top in different areas of policy. It was also shown that the members of the city's social elite were not very active or powerful in the decision areas studied, so that it would be implausible to characterize the social elite as being also a political elite.

It was not shown, and not claimed, that all classes and groups in the city had equal power or equal access to the levers of power. It was not shown that the decision makers were not dominated by what may loosely be called middle-class values. It was not shown that there were no other potentially important areas of conflict in the city that had not reached the political agenda, either because (as Dahl would say) the would-be reformers in these areas had failed to mobilize enough resources to get the issues on to the agenda or because (as Bachrach and Baratz would say) the opponents of change had been able to keep the issues off the agenda. It was not shown, and not claimed, that New Haven was typical of all American cities or that its political structure should be regarded as a microcosm of the whole structure of American politics.

The New Haven study and the accompanying methodological analysis by Nelson Polsby exposed the weaknesses of the earlier studies of community power by stratification theorists and opened up an instructive debate (summarized in Chapter 9) about the nature of political power and

the problems of assessing it. However, Dahl and Polsby did not exhibit the complacency of some earlier pluralist writers, as Dahl was at pains to point out in a much later book. In this he said, among other things, that organizational pluralism is apt to contribute to the maintenance of political inequalities (Dahl 1982: 40–1).

PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Under this heading it is pertinent to ask whether pluralist systems of government are necessarily democratic and, conversely, whether democratic systems of government are necessarily pluralist. The answer to the first question has to be negative. Pluralism is clearly compatible with democracy but incompatible with totalitarianism, for governments cannot exercise total control over society if autonomous organizations are permitted to exercise any substantial degree of social and political influence. However, most systems of government are neither democratic nor totalitarian. It is not difficult to imagine a system of government that is characterized by competition between organized groups for influence and power, but is nevertheless undemocratic, either because only a minority of citizens are permitted to participate in political life or because the dominant groups use the power of the state to exclude other relevant groups from the competition.

History provides numerous examples of just such a system, including Britain between 1688 and 1867, Germany under Bismarck, and France during the Second Empire. Looking further back, it can be argued that many pre-modern systems of government were pluralist without being democratic, characterized by political struggles between churches, land owners, farmers and merchants while excluding most citizens from political influence.

The answer to the question of whether democratic systems are necessarily pluralist depends upon how pluralism is defined. It is clearly not the case that all democracies are characterized by sectional pluralism with a geographical base, as envisaged by Madison and Hamilton and as exemplified by the American situation. Most European democracies are not only much smaller but also more homogeneous. They also (apart from Switzerland) have more centralized systems of government with, in consequence, fewer points of access for sectional pressure groups than exist in the United States. However, it would not be sensible to say that for these reasons countries like Britain, France, Denmark and Sweden are less democratic than the United States.

If pluralism is defined as Truman and Latham defined it, in terms of a political system in which pressure groups (however based) compete for influence on the decisions of the national government, then all modern democracies have a pluralist dimension. Pressure groups are more con-

spicuous in some democratic systems than in others and they exhibit a great deal of variety in terms of their organization, their resources and their political tactics, but in systems characterized by freedom of organization and political communication some pressure groups are bound to exist. There are important practical questions about how far the activities of pressure groups advance or detract from the public interest, but these are best regarded as local and particular questions to which general answers cannot be given. It has, for example, been plausibly said that the power exerted by trade unions was harmful to the British economy in the 1960s and 1970s, that the influence of industrial organizations has prevented Italy from establishing adequate environmental controls, and that the influence of agricultural groups kept food prices in the European Community unnecessarily high in the 1980s. Many similar generalizations could be cited, some apparently reasonable, others evidently biased, all of them involving some kind of value judgement. However, questions of this kind are essentially questions for specific applications of political judgement, not questions that can be resolved by conceptual or theoretical analysis.

This said, it can be added that some democratic systems are more obviously pluralist than others. The United States is the extreme case, not only because of its geographic sectionalism and its decentralized system of government, but also because, within Washington, the executive branch of the national government is weaker than its equivalent in other democracies. The separation of powers, combined with the weakness of party discipline in Congress, make it very difficult for the executive to get draft legislation translated into law if influential groups are opposed to it. The executive cannot even be sure of getting approval for the annual budget, which could be taken for granted in most parliamentary democracies. One of Dahl's many accurate comments on the federal government was that, to a large extent, 'the numerical majority is incapable of undertaking any co-ordinated action. It is the various components of the numerical majority that have the means for action' (Dahl 1956: 146).

This is a comment that would not be made about the national governments of Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, or Australia. Pressure groups are very influential in these countries, and often have direct access to the administration. In this area of policy or that, some groups might have more influence than their American equivalents can muster. But the results of their pressure can rarely be counted in parliamentary votes, and they can rarely prevent a government with a parliamentary majority from pursuing and implementing a policy once the government has made up its collective mind. It is partly these institutional differences, as well as the differences in their theoretical concerns, that have led American political scientists to place much more stress on the concept of pluralism than their colleagues elsewhere have done. However, the concept can be used in the analysis of almost any system of government.

Chapter 11

Elitism and class dominance

An elite is defined by the *OED* as a 'select group or class' and elitism, as a rather loose political concept, is the theory or view that modern industrial societies are always governed by elites. The significance of the theory in the contemporary world is that it runs contrary to almost all versions of democratic theory. If the elitists are correct, all systems of government are actually oligarchic and democracy is 'either a will-o'-the-wisp or a sham' (Runciman 1963: 74). The theory therefore challenges most western liberal assumptions about politics and the organization of government.

Before discussing the work of the main theorists who are normally classified as elitists, it will be helpful to specify, at least in outline, what would have to be shown to substantiate this challenge. The first point to note is that it would not be sufficient to show that political authority is concentrated in the hands of a small group of people who take the day-to-day decisions of government. This is true of virtually all organized societies in the modern world. Even so small a society as a golf club normally has an executive committee with power to appoint, dismiss or raise the wages of staff and take a variety of decisions about the club's affairs. Golf clubs govern themselves in this way partly because it is efficient and expeditious to have a small committee do the work, partly because most members want to spend their time at the club playing golf. Authority in the modern democratic state is exercised by a president or prime minister, a cabinet, a legislature and a set of courts – a few hundred people out of a population of millions. Geatano Mosca, arguing for the inevitability of oligarchy, said that it would be difficult to conceive of 'a real world otherwise organised – a world in which all men would be directly subject to a single person . . . or in which all men would share equally in the direction of political affairs' (Mosca 1939: 50). This is true, but not significant, because statements about the size of the office-holding group tell us nothing about who they are, how they are appointed, or the relationship of the decisions they take to the views and interests of the rest of the community.

To substantiate a theory of elite domination, it would be necessary to supplement the truism that the rulers in a political system are few in number compared with the ruled with evidence supporting one or other of the following three propositions.

Proposition A is that access to political office is strictly limited to members of a relatively small and cohesive social group whose members have a commonality of interests or values that have policy implications, and that do not reflect the interests and values of the majority of citizens. It would not be sufficient to show that most members of the US Congress have law degrees, because American lawyers constitute a rather heterogeneous group of people with varied values and interests – except perhaps on those rare occasions when Congress might discuss the regulation of the legal profession. It would be sufficient, however, to show that all members of the Cabinet and most Members of Parliament were large land owners, for they constitute a small and rather homogeneous group with many common interests of political relevance that are not shared by the majority of citizens.

Proposition B is that the office-holders are rarely responsive to the views and interests of the general public, being in the habit of substituting their own views and interests for those of the masses and being able to avoid the consequences that accountability to the masses might be expected to bring, either because the machinery of accountability is inadequate or because the office-holding elite is able to use coercion, threats or indoctrination to induce public compliance with their rule.

Proposition C is that the office-holders, while not necessarily looking after their own interests, regularly take decisions on behalf of the interests of a relatively small group or class of citizens, such as the capitalist class in capitalist societies, who possess some non-political kind of power base and have interests which differ from those of the majority of citizens.

With these three propositions in mind, I shall now turn to the work of the four writers who are normally classified as elitists. In order of date of birth, they are: Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian sociologist in the very early days of that discipline; Geatano Mosca, a constitutional lawyer who is commonly described as the father of Italian political science and published his treatise on *Elementi di Scienze Politica* (later translated as *The Ruling Class*) in 1896; Robert Michels, a German sociologist whose main work was published in 1911; and C. Wright Mills, an American sociologist who wrote a best-selling study of *The Power Elite* in 1956.

Karl Marx and his followers are also elitists in that they believe liberal democracy to be essentially a facade which disguises the power of a minority, but they differ from the writers just mentioned in that they locate real power not in the hands of a political elite but in those of an economic class, for whom politicians act, directly or indirectly, as agents.

Because of this difference, Marxist theories will be discussed in a later section of the chapter under the heading of 'class dominance.'

PARETO AND THE CIRCULATION OF ELITES

Pareto was a contemporary of Weber and Durkheim and, like them, he conceived his role to be that of laying the foundations of sociology as an academic discipline. He developed a highly ambitious and complicated framework for social analysis, with its own specialized terminology. In the event, however, he largely failed where they entirely succeeded. Few modern sociologists look up to him as a founder of the discipline and his terminology now seems outdated and irrelevant. Accordingly, and because his contribution to elitist theory is inconclusive, I feel able to give his work only cursory attention in this chapter.

Pareto held that every field of endeavour has its own elite, consisting of those persons who happen to be best at the activity in question. The condition of entry into an elite is skill, not virtue; in every field some participants are bound to be more talented than others and thus to rise to the top. There is an elite of lawyers, of scientists, of poets, of thieves (see Parry 1969: 45). Among these various elites there will be a governing elite, composed of the people who have proved themselves most talented in the art of politics. In discussing the skills involved in this field of activity, Pareto made use of the Machiavellian categories of cunning (used by 'foxes') and coercion (used by 'lions'), and suggested that the most successful governors are those able to deploy a mixture of these talents and tactics.

History shows, according to Pareto, that there is a recurrent circulation of elites, by which he meant (rather confusingly) both a circulation of individuals between the upper and lower strata in the same field of activity and a circulation between governing and non-governing elites, with different groups of men moving into positions of political power in turn. Pareto rejected both the Marxist view that political power is determined by the economic class structure and the common liberal view of his time that the history of civilization illustrated the march of progress. On the contrary, political power fell to men who exercised political skills and there was no clear strand of progress. Some governing elites were progressive, others were conservative, and overall judgements about the direction that history was taking were unscientific.

There is much more, for Pareto wrote extensively about these matters, his main treatise occupying four volumes. However, I shall not discuss his contribution at any length because he did not show that the governing elite, in Italy or more generally, dominated the general public in accordance with either of propositions A, B or C, as itemized above. There is a clear implication of proposition B, that the governors rule with their

own ends in view, but no systematic evidence is presented. There are numerous illustrations, drawn mainly from ancient history, but illustrating an argument by disconnected illustrations from an almost infinite pool of possible examples does not establish the validity of the argument. A writer who claims to be offering a science of society has to do better than that to establish general laws. As T. B. Bottomore has noted, 'there are historical examples which appear at once to invalidate Pareto's generalization' (Bottomore 1966: 53). What Pareto presented is best regarded as an elaborate conceptual framework for other scholars to use when analysing particular cases.

The value of this contribution to the understanding of politics does not seem to be very great, but it has to be appreciated that Pareto was attacking some of the most fashionable ideas of his period. In self-image and mode of presentation he was a ruthless iconoclast, anxious to puncture high-flown liberal beliefs about morality, humanitarianism and the inevitability of progress, 'always talking about masks being torn away or people being led by the nose' (Runciman 1963: 71). His intention was to make his readers reject what he saw as the illusion of liberalism, that the people could rule through democratic institutions, as well as the illusion of Marxism, that human equality and freedom could be achieved by a workers' revolution. His basic political attitude was that of a cynic, but his attack on prevailing ideas had some originality and his work earns him a place in the history of thought. However, he did not go far towards establishing elitism as a viable theory of politics with general relevance.

MOSCA AND THE IDEA OF THE RULING CLASS

Mosca was an Italian contemporary of Pareto who also believed that the Aristotelian division of regimes into monarchic, oligarchic and democratic disguised the reality that all regimes are characterized by the rule of the few over the many. These points of similarity have caused the two writers to be bracketed together and to be viewed with suspicion by democratic theorists. Meisel tells us that when translations of their main works were published in America in the 1930s 'both Mosca and Pareto were believed to be at least the intellectual parents if not the open partisans of fascism' (Meisel 1965: 17).

This was an unfortunate judgement, based on ignorance, as the two authors were very different in their careers, their theories and their political preferences. Pareto was a youthful enthusiast for Italian unification and liberalism who was soundly defeated when he contested a parliamentary election in his early thirties. This experience so embittered him that he turned against liberalism and democracy for the rest of his life. He was not an 'intellectual parent' of fascism, as that doctrine, in so far as it was not invented by Mussolini, was derived from a twisted interpretation of

Hegelian philosophy, not from Paretian sociology. However, he supported Mussolini's regime when it was established and accepted an honour from it.

Mosca, in contrast, was part of the political establishment in Italy's liberal regime, even though critical of some features of it. He worked for eight years as editor of the journal of the Chamber of Deputies, then served for 10 years as a liberal-conservative member of that chamber, and was subsequently appointed to the Senate. He criticized the idea of participatory democracy but he admired the parliamentary system and greatly disliked the fascist regime that took over in 1923.

The success of Mosca's career is doubtless one reason why his writings are much more agreeable in manner than those of the other three writers considered in this section. Unlike Pareto and Michels, he had not been embittered by personal experiences; and unlike Mills, he did not feel alienated from the society in which he lived. He was a university professor as well as a politician and his books are characterized by thoughtful reflections on European history and politics.

Mosca's starting point in *The Ruling Class* was his observation that all societies known to historians have been divided into a minority who controlled the reins of government and the majority who were ruled by the minority. It must always be so, he maintained, for two reasons. One is that a minority can organize itself in a fashion that is beyond the reach of a large multitude: 'A hundred men acting uniformly in concert, with a common understanding, will triumph over a thousand men who are not in accord and can therefore be dealt with one by one' (Mosca 1939: 53). The second reason is that 'members of a ruling minority regularly have some attribute, real or apparent, which is highly esteemed and very influential in the society in which they live; (Mosca 1939: 53).

When he wrote of the ruling class, Mosca did not mean just the holders of high office (the people Mills later described as members of the 'power elite') but also the wider class of people from whom the office-holders were drawn. This class was not to be defined simply in economic terms, as Marxists defined class, for Mosca's study of history led him to identify various groups or classes that had dominated their societies. There had been, or were still, societies dominated by an hereditary aristocracy, others dominated by a priesthood, others by a class of warriors, others by large land owners, others by financiers, others again by a ruling group to which entry was gained by education and talent.

Each ruling class develops a 'political formula' by which it justifies its rule to the rest of the population. The Chinese mandarins claimed to be 'interpreters of the will of the Son of Heaven' (Mosca 1939: 70); Muslim rulers talked of the will of Allah; French aristocrats of the divine right of kings; English politicians of the sovereignty of Parliament; American rulers of the will of the people. The use of propaganda to propagate and sustain

this legitimating formula is one of the main weapons at the disposal of the ruling class in any period (see Mosca 1939: 190–2).

Ruling classes are in a strong position to hand on their dominant role to their children and grandchildren, but history shows that from time to time political power passes from one class to another. A causal factor in such a transfer is usually a decline in general acceptance of the political formula. A priestly ruling class is in trouble when people start to question the rightness of the will of God. The French ruling class lost its grip when people ceased to believe in the divine right of kings. This shrewd observation seems obvious enough, once stated, but it was novel when Mosca made it and was one of his most illuminating ideas.

Unlike Pareto, Mosca believed in human progress. His study of history led him to the conclusion that, over the centuries, there had been, at least in Europe, a general improvement in the level of civilization. He did not think that progress was constant or inevitable, for there were instances where the erosion or collapse of a regime had led to retrogression. This had been true of Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire and true of the Middle East after the collapse of Islamic Empires. Nevertheless, the general trend was one of progress and improvement, and this was continuing.

In the late nineteenth century, when Mosca was writing, the most advanced countries had developed systems of representative government, and he approved of these with certain reservations. He contrasted the principle of representative government with that of democracy, which he took to mean participatory democracy of the style recommended (or at least, widely thought to have been recommended) by Rousseau, which Mosca did not think would be feasible. Now, most people would agree that participatory democracy, in a full sense of that term, seems unsuitable for industrial societies of any size, and might perhaps be unworkable in them. Contemporary western societies are not without advocates of participatory democracy, but they generally recommend that it be tried in small units of government, or within economic enterprises, rather than at the level of the national state. This question has been discussed in Chapter 6. However, the term 'democracy', without a qualifying adjective, is not generally thought to have that meaning in the twentieth century. It is generally understood to denote representative government with a wide franchise. To ascertain Mosca's views about democracy, as generally understood, it is therefore necessary to consider his views about representative government and the franchise.

In terms of principle, Mosca was an admirer of Montesquieu, whose theories, he said, 'cannot be regarded as mistaken in any substantial respect' (Mosca 1939: 254). He accepted Montesquieu's belief that liberty was best safeguarded by a separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government. He also accepted that represen-

tative government and the parliamentary system were the most promising forms of government yet devised. In terms of practice, however, Mosca's experience was of an employee and then a member of the Italian Parliament, which had various limitations.

The Italian parliamentary system was created in 1871, when Italy was unified. It was a liberal system of representative and responsible government on paper, but was far from being a shining example of this style of government. The franchise was limited by a property qualification, which admitted only 2 per cent of the adult population at first. This proportion rose gradually to 7 per cent in 1912, when a reform took it to 25 per cent, so when Mosca was writing in the 1890s it was in the region of 5 per cent. The Roman Catholic Church advised its members to boycott elections, because at that time the Church disapproved of liberalism, with the result that voting turnout never exceeded 50 per cent of the qualified electors. Many of the parliamentarians engaged in dubious activities, and corrupt practices were common in elections, with the result that no Italian government was defeated in a general election during the whole life of the liberal regime from 1871 to 1923. The element of governmental responsibility to the people was there in the constitution but was not very apparent in practice.

Although, in view of his official position, Mosca did not direct his criticisms at his own Parliament in so many words, it is clear both that this is what he was thinking of when he made them and that his Italian readers would have understood this. His criticisms can be summarized as follows. First, nominations for election are controlled by small minorities in each area (Mosca 1939: 154); second, parliamentary majorities tend to become irresponsible (p. 157); third, individual Members of Parliament tend to interfere excessively in public administration, in the administration of justice, and in the control of banking and public charities (p. 255). He cited these forms of behaviour, along with the imperfections of the electoral system, as reasons for public disappointment with their experience of parliamentary government (p. 325). However, it must be stressed that Mosca did not allow these problems to undermine his own support for the parliamentary system. The problems of representative systems, he said, 'are merest trifles as compared with the harm that would inevitably result from abolishing them or stripping them of their influence' (p. 256).

On the franchise, Mosca was very much a man of his time. He wanted the electorate to be moderately large, so that only a small fraction of electors would aspire to political office and the majority of voters could act as impartial judges between rival candidates (Mosca 1939: 413). At the same time, he thought that universal suffrage would lead party leaders to engage in demagogic appeals to the electorate; to 'flatter the masses, play to their crudest instincts and exploit and foment all their prejudices and greeds' (Mosca 1939: 412). His conclusion was that a limited electorate

was most likely to satisfy the requirements of liberalism, 'that those who represent shall be responsible to the represented' (Mosca 1939: 413.)

The question we have to answer is whether Mosca can appropriately be described as an elitist, defined as a theorist who denies the possibility of democratic government. In considering this, it would be wrong to place much weight on his cautious views regarding the extent of the franchise. His position on that question was not unlike that of many European liberals in the nineteenth century, who favoured representative government but were afraid that enfranchising the masses would lower the tone of political debate and competition. Tocqueville had worried about the tyranny of the majority. John Stuart Mill had wanted educated electors to have extra votes. The assumption of these middle-class theorists was not that democracy would make no difference, because the bourgeoisie would continue to rule. On the contrary, their assumption was that democracy would make an important difference, because it would put the working classes into the majority and force public policy to take account of their crude demands for the erosion of bourgeois privileges. Such writers might be described as elitist in their sentiments, but that was perhaps natural for middle-class intellectuals writing at a time when many or most of the workers were illiterate. What is important for the present argument is that they were not elitist in their theories.

The broader question is whether Mosca's views about the inevitability of a ruling class meant that he subscribed to propositions A or B, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Since he drew most of his examples from European and Asian history and he was writing in the early days of democracy in Europe, and before any sign of democracy in Asia, it was inevitable that his examples should suggest an affirmative answer. Feudal Europe was obviously a period of government by land owners in the interests of land owners. There had been examples of priestly rule in Asia, with the privileges of the priesthood and the maintenance of religious conformity as the main aims of government. Iran in the 1980s has been a contemporary example that fits the same pattern. There were examples of aristocratic rule, where power was confined to a small group of ruling families, and this is still true in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. There were examples of rule by the military, and Pakistan has been a modern example for much of the period since 1947. These were all self-serving ruling groups who adjusted their policies to pressures from the wider society they governed only when prudence dictated it.

The essential question, however, is whether Mosca believed that democratic regimes, as they developed, would also be subject to political domination by a small ruling class acting in its own interest. He certainly believed that the activity of government would be concentrated in the hands of a small minority of the population, but this is a truism that does not amount to a significant theory. He did not try to formulate a specific

answer to the more interesting question of how far the ruling minority constitutes a definite class with interests of its own, so we have to rely on scattered remarks. At one point he said that in a representative system 'the door has been left open to all elements in the governed classes to make their way into ruling classes' (Mosca 1939: 389). At another point he said that in a representative system with a universal or nearly universal franchise 'the chief task of the party organizations into which the ruling class is divided is to win the votes of the more numerous classes' (Mosca 1939: 411).

By these two comments, Mosca acknowledges that in a democratic system the ruling class will be open to penetration by 'the governed classes', which must mean all the other citizens, and that the ruling class is not politically united but is divided into competing parties. Now this is what most political scientists mean by democracy, if we add components (which Mosca did not question) such as free speech, freedom of organization and an independent judiciary. The assumption of democrats is that competition for votes will force governing parties to take account of the views and interests of the majority of voters, not only during election campaigns but in between elections, because of what is commonly called the rule of anticipated reactions. Now, Mosca was writing in the infancy of political science as an academic discipline, one that in Europe was practically confined to the universities of Oxford, London and Paris, and he could not be expected to use modern terminology. But he indicated his understanding of this rule when he declared that in a representative system with a wide franchise 'wariness about giving offence will be much greater when every single representative, whose vote may be useful or necessary to the executive branch of government, knows that the discontent of the masses may at almost any moment bring about the triumph of a rival' (Mosca 1939: 156).

I therefore conclude that Mosca's book, though full of interesting and useful observations, does not add up to a theory of elitism which can be set against modern theories of democracy. He shows that government had in the past been often in the hands of self-serving elites, but he did not show, and did not even claim, that this must always be the case. To say that the reins of government must always be in the hands of a minority is a truism, and to call this minority a ruling class is a tautology. Political organizers and politicians in a modern democracy are a mixed bag of people, and giving them this label does not turn Mosca's ideas into a viable theory that is anti-democratic. As Bottomore has observed, 'in Mosca's theory an elite does not simply rule by force and fraud, but represents, in some sense, the interests and purposes of important and influential groups in the society'. My reading of Mosca leads me to the same conclusion that Bottomore reached, namely that Mosca 'is prepared to recognize, and in a qualified way to approve, the distinctive features

of modern democracy' (Bottomore 1966: 10–11). In his old age, in a book that was not published until 1949 (after the author's death), Mosca made this pretty clear. Writing about representative government, he said this:

> Of all types of government it is the one in which the rulers on the whole will be affected by the sentiments of the majority, the one which furnishes the best means of judging and debating governmental acts. In other words, it is a rule of freedom.
>
> (Quoted Meisel 1962: 324)

MICHELS AND THE IRON LAW OF OLIGARCHY

Michels was a radical socialist who was disappointed and understandably aggrieved because his political views prevented him from securing posts in German universities for which he was otherwise well qualified. However, when he wrote his book on *Political Parties* he turned his anger not against the German government or universities (which were controlled by the government) but against the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and against what he took to be the oligarchic tendencies of parties in general.

His book is somewhat rhetorical and repetitive in style, so it is important to summarize his argument carefully. The first section of the book maintains that, for technical and administrative reasons, bureaucracy and oligarchy are inevitable in political parties of any size. A party has to have professional organizers and it has to have leaders. To compete successfully in a system of representative government, its leaders must have freedom of manoeuvre: 'a fighting party needs a hierarchical structure' (Michels 1962: 79). In the middle of this section he introduces a much more general comment that does not fit there logically, but gives advance notice of arguments to come in a later section. 'For democracy', he says, 'the first appearance of professional leadership marks the beginning of the end' (Michels 1962: 73).

The second section of the book is on the 'psychological causes of leadership', and consists mainly of a parade of deeply cynical remarks about the political capacity of the masses, including rank-and-file party members. They are, he maintains, inexperienced, poorly educated, apathetic, intellectually inferior to their leaders, and deferential (pp. 85–108). 'The incompetence of the masses', he concludes, 'is almost universal throughout the domains of political life, and this constitutes the most solid foundation of the power of the leaders' (p. 111). Despite all this, however, the masses are in some sense democratic, a term that Michels uses frequently but never defines. 'The democratic masses', we are told 'are compelled to submit to a restriction of their own wills when they are forced to give their leaders an authority which is in the long run destructive to

the very principle of democracy' (p. 111). This usage of 'democratic' is clearly incorrect, for the term refers to a process or system of decision making and cannot sensibly be used to describe a body of people. Its inclusion in the sentence quoted serves the purpose of showing that the author's sympathies lie with the masses in spite of his expressed contempt for their intelligence and political skills. It is a rhetorical flourish to indicate to socialist readers that his heart is in the right place, but it does not advance his argument.

Michels maintains not only that party leaders set themselves above their followers, but that elected representatives do the same. Members of Parliament become arrogant, make deals with other parties, and take it on themselves to depart from the ideological principles of their party in their search for support from broader sections of the electorate. It does not occur to Michels that appealing to the electorate is of the essence of democracy, for he was concerned with democracy within the party rather than with democracy within the political system as a whole.

Apart from one brief reference to the power of the caucus in the US Congress, all of Michels' numerous examples were taken from the socialist parties and trade unions of western Europe, and most of them from the German SPD. At the time that he was writing, the SPD was formally committed to a set of Marxist objectives but its leaders actually 'accepted the established order, social and political, and confined themselves to getting greater benefits inside it for their supporters' (Plamenatz 1973: 50). It was this apparent discrepancy between principle and practice that Michels regarded as undemocratic. A similar line of argument has been advanced by left-wingers in many European social democratic parties that started life with Marxist-sounding statements of objectives. They did so because this was the rhetoric of socialism in the early years of the twentieth century, but they moved towards advocacy of a mixed economy as the years wore on. In the British Labour Party arguments of this kind were heard as recently as the 1970s. One knows what Michels was saying and one can understand his sentiments.

In terms of the logic set out in the early paragraphs of this chapter, Michels is suggesting that this tendency in the SPD (and by implication in other socialist parties) is an example of proposition B, that members of the party elite substitute their own values and strategies for those that would be preferred by the mass membership. However, to show that the leadership departed from the ideological principles of the party is not the same thing. To demonstrate that this was elitist and undemocratic, it has to be shown that the rank-and-file members of the party would have preferred to keep to the principles. Michels makes no attempt to show this in regard to the SPD, and it is reported that most historians of the period depict the bulk of German workers as caring 'even less than their leaders did for the Marxist principles of the party they voted for' (Plamen-

atz 1973: 65). It must therefore be said that Michels failed to establish a case for elitism in this part of his argument.

In the last section of the book, Michels returns to this theme of the betrayal of revolutionary principles. We are told that 'organization leads to power, but power is always conservative'; that 'as the organization increases in size, the struggle for great principles becomes impossible'; and that this conservative, compromising tendency 'is reinforced by the parliamentary character of the political party' (Michels 1962: 333 and 334). He was clearly writing here not as a supporter of democratic procedures concerned about the impact of bureaucratic organization on them, but as a supporter of radical socialism concerned to point out that participation in the parliamentary process is likely to lead socialist leaders to moderate their policy commitments.

In the final eight pages of the book Michels attempts to cast his conclusions in the form of general propositions. He claims that these conclusions have the status of a 'scientific law' based upon 'analytic explanation' (Michels 1962: 364). The so-called law has two parts. The first part states that every sizeable political party develops organization, and 'who says organization, says oligarchy'. The second part states that oligarchy means leadership and 'every system of leadership is incompatible with the most essential postulates of democracy' (Michels 1962: 364 and 365).

What meaning and validity can be attached to these sweeping assertions? It may be allowed that every sizeable political party has a form of organization, a party bureaucracy, and a group of leaders. This most obvious of facts about parties would only make them undemocratic, however, if it could be shown that the leaders fail to reflect the views of the membership and cannot be held answerable to the members for this failure. Michels makes no attempt whatever to show this, not even in the case of his favourite example, the SPD, let alone for a sufficient number of parties to form a reasonable basis for a generalization for which he seems to be claiming universal validity.

Even if some political parties had leaders who failed to reflect the views of their members, this would not in itself make the system of government in which the parties operate undemocratic. Democracy is a system in which rival parties compete for the support of the electorate. If the parties themselves are only partially democratic in their internal organization, that may be a pity, but the system as a whole remains democratic so long as the choice between parties rests with the majority of adult citizens. It must be concluded that this book tells us very little about democratic government and suggests that the author did not really understand the democratic principle that governments are answerable to the electorate for their actions. This failure of understanding may, of course, have been the consequence of his limited experience. His choice of examples makes him

appear highly ethnocentric, and Germany did not acquire a system of responsible democratic government until eight years after the book was published. Under the German system before 1919 there was party competition in elections for Parliament, but the government was not responsible to Parliament. It is a pity that Michels did not study the practice of representative and responsible government as it had developed in Britain, the Scandinavian countries, Australia and New Zealand.

The book has been overrated by many political scientists, some of whom seem to have quoted the conclusions without studying the text. In so far as it has relevance beyond the historical and ideological context in which it was written, its contribution is to point towards one of the features of democratic systems of government that is widely regarded as a virtue. This is that, because parties have to appeal to a wide section of the electorate if they are to secure power, they tend to converge in their policies. The democratic process tends to discourage political extremism, because extremists are always in a minority.

What does this book tell us about the concept of elitism? It points out that political parties need leaders, that the leaders acquire more knowledge and experience of politics than their followers, and that they may acquire the ability to reshape the party's policy objectives in the course of their struggle for support among the electorate. It says nothing about conservative or liberal parties but asserts that the leaders of socialist parties are apt to moderate the radical policy objectives to which these parties were originally committed. It claims, but without adducing any evidence for the claim, that this process is undemocratic.

The famous 'iron law of oligarchy' that Michels produced is therefore much less significant than most of his admirers have claimed. It is of course true that every sizeable political (or non-political) organization chooses leaders, such as an executive committee and a president, to direct its affairs. It is often the case that these leaders, through experience, acquire a deeper understanding of the organization's problems than most rank-and-file members possess, and that this understanding enables them to guide and perhaps for a time to dominate the mass of members. However, it is also often the case that the people in leading positions respond to pressures from the mass membership and modify their policies in anticipation of challenges to their leadership if they fail to modify their policies. How often, and in what circumstances, the leaders of political parties acquire such power over their organizations that they may fairly be described as oligarchs is a matter for empirical investigation with a fairly large number of cases. Michel's generalization from one case, even if his conclusions were correct in that case, can only have the status of a hypothesis to be tested in other cases, not the status of a law.

It is arguable that the most interesting suggestion to come from Michel's book is the suggestion (which he did not formulate with any great care)

that electoral competition may lead political parties to moderate their policies. In 1957 one of the earliest attempts to use economic models in political analysis led the author to propose that in a political system with only two parties, where the electors can be placed in an ideological continuum from left to right, it would be logical for each party to frame policies at or very near the centre of the ideological spectrum (see Downs 1957). Political systems do not work exactly like this, but there is a discernible tendency of this kind. Since 1957 European social democratic parties have, one after another, moderated their basic policy positions to embrace welfare capitalism and abandon the objective of total nationalization of industry. The SPD took the lead in this conversion. However, this policy change was not actually an example of Michels' law, for it was decided upon not by a domineering group of leaders but by a large party conference at Bad Godesburg.

Another example of possible relevance is that of the German Green Party, which won seats in both state and federal elections in the 1980s, but refused to appoint leaders for fear that this might lead the rather extreme policies of the party to be compromised. The result of this was that the Greens were somewhat ineffectual, particularly at the federal level, and lost all their seats in the 1990 federal election. It has often been said that the Greens are romantics, and it might be said that Michels was also something of a romantic in 1911, generalizing rather wildly from his own disappointment that his favourite party seemed to be moving away from the idealistic brand of radical socialism that he preferred. However that may be, it has to be concluded that his book, though in some ways suggestive, does very little to establish elitism as a viable and helpful concept in political analysis.

C. WRIGHT MILLS AND THE POWER ELITE

Mills was concerned with the government of the United States as a whole rather than with the management of parties or groups within the country. His central thesis was both institutional and historical in emphasis. It was institutional in that he assumed power to be the ability to take decisions and give orders within the three 'domains' of industry, government and the military. It was historical in that he repeatedly asserted that the organization of these three domains had become increasingly concentrated and increasingly inter-related, so that, first, power within each domain was wielded by a much smaller number of people than had been the case in the nineteenth century and, second, there had been an increasing tendency for the powerful few to communicate with each other and to exchange roles by moving between domains.

'As the institutional means of power and the means of communications that tie them together have become steadily more efficient', he declared,

'those now in command of them have come into command of instruments of rule quite unsurpassed in the history of mankind' (Mills 1956: 23). He regarded the America of the 1950s as so dominated by this 'power elite' of powerful individuals that it did not deserve to be described as democratic, but he did not take the view that democracy was always and necessarily a sham or facade. On the contrary, he believed that America had been a democratic society in the nineteenth century, but had ceased to be so as a consequence of the increased scale and centralization of its main institutions.

Mills differed from Marxists in that he refused to accept that history is the product of social forces and insisted repeatedly that it is made by individual human beings holding positions of power. He asserted that in the United States these individuals are drawn mainly from the ranks of the upper classes, and he devoted about 40 per cent of the book to a rather journalistic account of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. His object in doing this was to illustrate the 'psychological and social unity' (Mills 1956: 19) that characterized members of the decision-making elite. This elite, he made clear, did not include members of Congress, apart from a few committee chairmen who might in some situations acquire a good deal of influence. Congressmen represent local interests, but are, in Mills's view, poorly informed and poorly organized when national issues are at stake. 'In pursuing their several parochial interests, accordingly, the Congressmen often coincide in ways that are of national relevance', but they occupy 'the middle levels of power', with the high levels being filled by the top members of the administration (Mills 1956: 255–6). It also emerges that the power elite is not thought to include members of the Supreme Court, who are not mentioned in the book.

By power, then, Mills means executive power, and his choice of examples indicates that he was thinking mainly of executive power in the fields of foreign policy and defence policy. He insists on p. 267 that power is located within the state machine, and it is said more than once (and particularly on p. 277) that he does not believe in the Marxist conception that political decision making is dominated by an economic class. The 'corporate rich' have a place in his triumvirate of elitists only in so far as wealthy businessmen move into top government jobs. His treatment of this topic is unsystematic, however; he gives numerous scattered examples, but does not attempt to produce any statistics apart from a figure showing the proportion of ambassadors drawn from outside the ranks of the diplomatic service, which is only of marginal relevance since ambassadors do not normally take executive decisions.

His emphasis on the psychological unity of the very rich suggests that Mills rests his case for elitism in the American political system on what I have called proposition A, that entry to top positions of power is restricted to members of a small and cohesive social class. However, on pp. 280–6 he

draws back from this position, saying only that the very successful in different walks of life come to know each other and to share certain values and attitudes. It is just as well that he was cautious about this, because the evidence would not seem to support a case for proposition A in American circumstances. The central and commanding figure in Mills's definition of the power elite is clearly the President, but only two of the ten post-war Presidents, Kennedy and Bush, have been drawn from the ranks of America's upper class. The other eight – Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Clinton – have all reached the top from ordinary lower-middle or middle-class backgrounds.

As Mills explicitly disavows the Marxist approach, formulated as proposition C in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, it is evident that his case must rest on proposition B, that the top decision makers formulate policy according to their own values and interests, without taking account of the values and interests of the general public. This is indeed his position, as he asserts in several places that the members of the power elite are apt to become cut off from public opinion and that from time to time they take decisions of momentous importance on which there has been no, or very little, public debate.

To substantiate this claim, Mills clearly needs to produce a fair range of examples and to show that in most of the cases cited the decisions taken were decisions with which the public might well have disagreed. It is therefore very unfortunate, for the sake of his argument, that he does no such thing. At various points he mentions Roosevelt's decision to enter the Second World War, Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan, the decision not to commit the United States to defend two tiny offshore islands near the Chinese coast against a possible Chinese invasion, and the decision not to use nuclear weapons in 1954 to save the French army that was surrounded by insurgents in Vietnam. These were all rather exceptional decisions, involving the President in his capacity as commander-in-chief of American military and naval forces. Roosevelt had no real choice but to enter the war, since Japan attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor and Germany then declared war against the United States. The other three decisions had, by their nature, to be taken in virtual secrecy, without public discussion. All four decisions would undoubtedly have been supported by the majority of the public if there had been a public debate. The examples therefore fail to provide evidence for proposition B, and in the absence of such evidence it must be concluded that Mills failed to establish a convincing argument for the elitist view that democracy is a sham.

To be fair to Mills, however, it should be added that his rather unsystematic book embodies an argument about American society and politics that has appealed to a number of American writers with a radical disposition. This argument is that the ethos of the business elite has an undue influence

on the shaping of American values and opinions. Members of this elite know each other as friends, neighbours and club members (Mills 1956: 281). They may be 'more important as informal opinion leaders . . . than as actual participants in military and political organizations' (Mills 1956: 292). They may collectively exercise a degree of power in the sense of manipulation, as mentioned in Chapter 9, so that corporate values come to have a rather dominant place in the effective value system of those who have most influence on political as well as corporate decisions.

The point to note about this allegation is that it is not one that radicals in other countries commonly make about their societies. British critics who have complained about 'establishment values' have normally described these as the values of the land-owning class rather than those of business. French critics have complained about the undue influence of 'technocrats' trained at the Ecole Polytechnique, the Ecole des Mines and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration. Critics in other European countries, or in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have had various targets, but very few of them have identified the corporate elite and corporate values in the way that Mills and other Americans have done. In the light of this, it may well be concluded that Mills's main contribution was not to contribute to the theory of elitism but to make an apparently valid descriptive point about a rather distinctive feature of American society.

THE ELITISTS REVIEWED

The foregoing summary of the four writers customarily grouped together as the theorists of elitism suggests both that they are a somewhat heterogeneous quartet and that none of them contributed a theory that offers a serious intellectual challenge to democratic theory. Pareto offered a conceptual framework rather than a theory. Mosca was a nineteenth-century liberal who might well have endorsed democratic ideas had he lived in a later age. Michels was writing about the ideological dilemmas of European social democratic parties rather than about democratic procedures, except very indirectly. Mills was writing only about the United States and did so as a man who was 'wholly alienated' from American society, hostile to its values, its policies, its economic system, and to 'the American condition as a whole' (Miliband 1964: 78). He is said by his friends to have been a non-voter and non-joiner with the temperament of an anarchist (Miliband 1964: 82–3), and his book reveals his own attitudes very clearly without providing a considered general argument against democracy as a system of government. To find such an argument we must turn to Marxist writings, which provide a much more substantial general theory than any of the works so far considered in this chapter.

THE THEORY OF CLASS DOMINANCE

Marxist theory is elitist in the sense that it depicts the holders of governmental offices not as guardians of the public interest or responsive to public opinion but as agents of the class that is economically dominant in society. This class was described as the ruling class in Part I of *The German Ideology* (written in 1847 but published later), where it was said that 'the state is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests' and added that in capitalist societies the state is 'the form of organization which the bourgeois necessarily adopt both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests' (Marx and Engels 1970: 80). In the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 it was stated that 'political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another' and 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Tucker 1978: 490 and 475).

These sweeping assertions were confirmed in Marx's 1851 article on 'the class struggles in France, 1848–1850', where it was said that the Paris insurrection of 1848 had compelled the bourgeois republic 'to come out forthwith in its pure form as the state whose admitted object is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery of labour' (Tucker 1978: 590). However, they were apparently modified in the following year, when Marx's pamphlet on *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* included the following passage:

> Under the Restoration, under Louis Philippe and under the parliamentary republic [the bureaucracy] was the instrument of the ruling class, however much it strove for power of its own.
>
> Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. As against bourgeois society, the state machine has consolidated its position so thoroughly that [Bonaparte] suffices for its head, an adventurer blown in from abroad, elevated on its shield by a drunken soldiery, which he has bought with liquor and sausages . . .
>
> And yet the state power is not suspended in mid-air. Bonaparte represents a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small peasants.
>
> (Tucker 1978: 607)

Much later, in his 1871 pamphlet in *The Civil War in France*, Marx emphasized the point that the power of the state in capitalist society was not necessarily and always just an instrument of the capitalist class. In France, he said, the 'internal dissentions' of that class had 'allowed the adventurer Louis Bonaparte to take possession of all the commanding points – army, police, administrative machinery – and . . . to explode the

last stronghold of the bourgeoisie, the National Assembly' (Tucker 1978: 621). However, Marx went on to note that in the end the policies of the new government encouraged industrial activity and actually enriched the bourgeoisie.

The transition in these quotations from a dogmatic assertion to a more circumscribed analysis is entirely typical of Marx and Engels, who were always willing to learn from history and whose theories became more refined as the years went by. It was not only from French history that lessons were learned, as Michael Evans has observed:

> As the century wore on Marx found it difficult to find a bourgeoisie acting as a genuine ruling class. The Whig oligarchy in England, the Second Empire in France, the Wilhelmine Empire in Germany; all these appeared to be examples of political rule on behalf of or even independent of the bourgeoisie.
>
> (Evans 1972: 138)

These regimes kept the workers in their place and helped the development of an industrial economy by such measures as the laws establishing limited liability and eliminating the duties on imported foodstuffs, to name two conspicuous examples from British history in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. However, the cabinets in these countries could not easily be described just as agents of the capitalist class; in Britain and Germany many, often most, ministers were themselves members of the land-owning class, who showed sensitivity to the interests of the aristocracy on one hand and the workers on the other, as well as to those of industrialists, financiers and merchants.

A good deal of Marxist theory was an extrapolation from the broad trends of European history in the period before and during Marx's lifetime. It was clearly true both that in pre-industrial society government policy had been dominated by the interests of land owners and that, with the growth of industrial capitalism, the interests of the rising middle classes were having a greater and greater influence on policy. However, the transition from aristocratic to bourgeois dominance over government turned out to be a long and intricate process, so prolonged that the interests and demands of the workers were having a significant political impact before the process was completed. Most historians would also say that, as the activities of the state increased and the institutions of government became democratized, the politicians and bureaucrats came increasingly to wield power in their own right, having a good deal of room for manoeuvre and not obviously and directly acting as agents of any economic group or class.

Democrats would of course add that the politicians in a democracy are responsible, in a meaningful and important sense, to the electorate and that they therefore act in what they conceive to be the interests of the

whole national society. Marxists and neo-Marxists do not accept this, as they regard liberal democracy as something of a sham, which gives the masses the impression of governmental responsibility to and for the whole society while actually masking the dominance of the interests of financiers, industrialists and their allies. However, modern neo-Marxists have moved quite a distance from the rigid economic determinism implied by statements in the *Communist Manifesto*, and this move was started by Marx and Engels themselves.

Shortly after Marx's death, Engels wrote a long letter to Joseph Bloch in which he was at pains to play down the element of economic determinism present in their early writings and seized upon by many of their supporters. Some sentences from this letter are worth quoting:

> We make our history ourselves, but . . . under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part . . .
>
> History is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life . . .
>
> Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle *vis-a-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.
>
> (Tucker 1978: 761–2)

It is obviously impossible to know exactly what position Marx and Engels would have adopted if they had lived long enough to observe governments in capitalist societies that fall under the control of social democratic parties, as has happened in Britain, France, Denmark, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand. However, contemporary Marxists have formulated a body of theory that goes by the name of 'the relative autonomy of the state' to cover this and allied questions. The main proponents of the theory have been Ralph Miliband in Britain and Nicos Poulantzas in France, but contributions have also been made by Claus Offe in Germany and several other writers.

THE RELATIVE AUTONOMY OF THE STATE

As the state comprises a whole set of sometimes conflicting institutions it is linguistically awkward to make it sound like a single political actor, as this term does. However, Marxists like to speak of the relative autonomy of the state rather than that of the government, because the latter term is

most frequently used to refer just to the executive, and Marxists contend that the legislative and judicial branches of the state apparatus are just as affected as the executive branch is by a concern to protect the capitalist system. They believe that what can be said about the way that the executive leaders exercise political power can also be said about the way that parliamentarians, senior bureaucrats, local councillors, police officers and judges carry out their functions. And what can be said, it has to be emphasized, is not so much that these people are relatively autonomous with regard to the capitalist class in their work, with which most non-Marxists would immediately agree, but that their autonomy is only relative, meaning that it is only partial.

Of the modern writers mentioned, Miliband is the clearest and Poulantzas the most sectarian. In the third of the latter's three books on the subject, he declares that the state 'represents and organizes the long-term political interests of a power bloc, which is composed of several bourgeois class fractions' and that 'the state maintains its relative autonomy of particular fractions of the power bloc . . . so that it may ensure the organization of the general interest of the bourgeoisie' (Poulantzas 1980: 127 and 128).

The implication of these sentences is that Poulantzas does not regard political leaders and public officials as partially independent of bourgeois class interests, as the label given to the theory might lead readers to suppose. On the contrary, he regards them as consciously committed to the promotion of these interests, with their relative autonomy with respect to parts of the bloc serving only tactical purposes. This seems to be a more extreme position than the one suggested by the later writings of Marx and Engels, which was that in the last resort economic interests would usually prevail. Poulantzas' position in most of his writings is that state institutions are essentially instruments of the capitalist class. This view, held by a number of European Marxist writers, has been labelled the instrumentalist theory by Cox, Furlong and Page, to whose work I am indebted in this section (see Cox *et al.* 1985: Chapter 3).

An alternative and more sophisticated interpretation of Marxism holds that the government has a real degree of day-to-day independence from the capitalist class, but is never likely to transform the capitalist system because the latter is protected by an ideological and cultural hegemony. The concept of ideological hegemony derives, in the first place, from *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels asserted that:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production . . . The ruling ideas are nothing more

> than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships . . . relationships grasped as ideas.
>
> (Marx and Engels 1970: 64)

This basic idea was developed in the 1930s by Antonio Gramsci, who coined the term 'cultural hegemony' and suggested that the consent of non-bourgeois classes to the capitalist system is mobilized by 'distorting beliefs, values, common-sense assumptions and popular culture' (Cox *et al.* 1985: 67). This persuasive and indoctrinating function is carried on not so much by the government as by the political parties, schools and mass media. The indoctrination, it is said, leads to the widespread acceptance of bourgeois values within society, in consequence of which the successful parties of the left are apt to be moderate in outlook, anxious to reform the system but not to transform it into a socialist system. They may indeed be able to use state power to pursue policies hostile to the interests of the capitalist class, but such reforming policies would be limited in scope.

In the twentieth century a number of capitalist societies have experienced government by social democratic parties that have introduced comprehensive schemes of social welfare, which are to some extent an economic burden on industry, and have also embarked on policies of state intervention in industrial affairs. Modern Marxists and neo-Marxists deal with the first of these matters by saying that social welfare policies have the effect not of challenging the capitalist system but of strengthening it, by increasing the legitimacy of the state and the whole social order in the eyes of those who have done poorly and suffered insecurity within the economic system. This view has been discussed in Chapter 3 above, along with the associated view that in the long run the burden of public expenditure on social services may, particularly in times of recession, create a fiscal crisis for the state.

The questions posed by policies of state intervention in industry have been discussed by Miliband. He argues that 'the *limits* of intervention, at best in relation to business, and particularly *against* it, are everywhere much more narrow and specific than insistence on the formal powers of government would tend to suggest' (Miliband 1969: 148). Business has the ability to withhold co-operation with government policies in ways that can be awkward. This ability 'is not such as to prevent *any* kind of economic policy of which business disapproves. The veto power of business, in other words, is not absolute. But it is very large, and certainly larger than that of any other interest in capitalist society' (Miliband 1969: 149). In the face of these difficulties, social democratic governments have tended to forego radical policies, and to reduce 'their own ambitions to the point where these have ceased to hold any kind of threat to conservative forces' (Miliband 1969: 101).

It should now be clear that the concept of the relative autonomy of the state is a fairly elastic concept that covers several distinguishable views about the precise relationship between the capitalist class and the institutions of government. The point has been made by Eric Nordlinger (see Nordlinger 1981) and it will now be helpful to summarize three different approaches that have been adopted by Marxist writers. The first of these is the instrumentalist view that the capitalist class not only has a collective interest but also behaves as a political actor in the sense that it is able to instruct or induce politicians, bureaucrats, judges and the like to act as servants of this interest and therefore as agents of the class. This is, of course, a somewhat simplistic way of expressing the matter, and Poulantzas has produced three volumes of tangled prose to express it in ways more challenging to the intellectual reader. However, I believe that I have summarized the essence of the argument, and I will say no more about it except that I think it is too crude to be a useful guide to the complexities of modern politics.

A view that is slightly more flexible, in that it allows more independence of action to politicians and officials, is the view that the governments of capitalist societies will invariably protect the interests of the capitalist system because leading politicians and public officials are themselves drawn invariably from bourgeois families and have invariably had bourgeois upbringings. However, empirical evidence provides only shaky support for this theory. In most capitalist societies, for instance, police officers are drawn mainly from the ranks of the working class, or the lower income groups in North America, but this does not make them noticeably more reluctant to uphold bourgeois values or the laws of private property than senior civil servants, who are usually drawn from middle-class families. At the same time, many radical socialists in western societies have been drawn from the ranks of middle-class families, as were Marx and Engels themselves, while some leaders of conservative parties have come from relatively humble origins, obvious recent examples being Reagan in the United States and Heath, Thatcher and Major in Britain. The correlation between class origins and subsequent political views is far from complete.

Defenders of this version of relative autonomy theory are apt to say that the police are socialized into bourgeois values by their training and successful politicians socialized in the same way by their experiences in climbing the political ladder. This may be true, but it turns the theory into a mere tautology. If all people who acquire influential positions in the government machine are said, by definition, to have been socialized into bourgeois values, it follows that there is no way of testing the proposition that the class origins of such people determine their behaviour when in positions of authority.

A third and more flexible view still is that politicians and senior officials are independent actors rather than agents of a class or prisoners of their

own upbringing, but are constrained in their choice of policies by the hegemony of bourgeois values in society and the perceived need to maintain the economy, which is a capitalist economy, in a healthy and productive condition. In defending himself in 1970 against one of Poulantzas' criticisms, Miliband said this:

> I repeatedly note how government and bureaucracy, irrespective of social origin, class situation and even ideological dispositions, are subject to the structural constraints of the system. Even so, I should perhaps have stressed this aspect of the matter more.
>
> (Miliband 1983: 31)

Miliband goes on to note that recognition of the importance of these structural constraints on governmental decision making should not lead the analyst into the mistake of 'structural super-determinism', in which the determinist view that government leaders are necessarily agents of the capitalist class is simply replaced by the determinist view that they are compelled to protect bourgeois interests by the requirements of the economic system. To adopt this kind of determinism, he argues, would lead the critic to under-estimate, or even to deny, the differences between conservative, social democratic and fascist governments (Miliband 1983: 32–3).

This third version of the relative autonomy theory, most clearly expressed in Miliband's various books, is directly descended from Gramsci's ideas. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci described the life of the state as 'a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria . . . between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point' (quoted Simon 1982: 31). It is in line with this that Miliband makes the following assertion in the opening paragraphs of his book on British democracy:

> Democratic institutions and practices provide means of expression and representation to the working class, organized labour, political parties and groups, and other such forms of pressure and challenge from below; but the context provided by capitalism requires that the effect they may have should as far as possible be weakened.
>
> (Miliband 1984: 1)

The left-wing Labour MP Tony Benn takes a somewhat similar position, from his different perspective as a Member of Parliament (and for some years a Cabinet minister) rather than an academic political theorist. His assessment of British politics between 1945 and 1987 includes the following statement:

> The history of the last forty years has been the story of one long

> attempt, by all parties, to save British capitalism, by the use of different policies each of which carried at the time a wide measure of public support. Of course the 'monetarist consensus' has been much the harshest, but when it emerged the crisis of British capitalism had become much more serious, and, if it was to survive, such measures were necessary.
>
> (Benn 1987: 304)

To a non-Marxist, like the present author, these assertions by Miliband and Benn seem to be perfectly reasonable and helpful comments on the situation that has been obtained in Britain since 1945. The question that they raise, however, is whether it would make any real difference if the words 'British capitalism' in the Benn quotation were replaced by the words 'the British economy'. With one or two small textual changes, would the message of this third version of the relative autonomy thesis be the same if references to the perceived need to keep business interests reasonably happy, or to protect the capitalist system, were replaced by references to the perceived need to protect the competitive position of the country in the world economy or to ensure a continuation of economic growth? If, as I suggest, these changes would make no real difference except to make the message more explicit, the conclusion may be drawn that modern neo-Marxist writers like Miliband have provided a very helpful insight into the economic constraints that policy makers of any party would face if in charge of the government of an advanced industrial society dependent on the export trade to maintain its standard of living.

Who benefits from a healthy economy is of course another question. It may not be a decisive question, because the fact of benefiting from a policy or situation is logically distinct from the fact of causing that policy or situation. As Nelson Polsby says somewhere, the fact that taxi drivers benefit from rainstorms does not mean that they cause the rainstorms. However, the question of who benefits is clearly relevant, even if not decisive.

Marxists would say that the capitalist class benefits much more than anyone else, while liberals would say that almost everyone in society benefits. Marxists would say that economic growth keeps the capitalist system and therefore the capitalist class in business, so that the constant pressure for growth can be regarded as an example of class dominance. Liberals would say that economic growth is wanted by most electors, is needed to alleviate various social problems and is in the general interest, so that the promotion of growth (and even more certainly the prevention of economic decline) is a national objective that has little or nothing to do with the alleged dominance of a class. This is a matter of evaluation that is beyond the scope of the present book, but it seems clear that the Marxist discussions mentioned in this section have raised questions about

the scope of the power enjoyed by government leaders that should be considered by all political scientists, however great or small their sympathies may be with Marxist objectives.

Having said this, it should also be said that recognizing the importance of practical constraints on governmental decision making does not necessarily involve acceptance of the Marxist claim that democracy is a sham. This would only be the case if it could be shown that the majority of voters within a democratic system wanted radical changes of policy that were frustrated by the constraints of the economic system. There is no evidence that this has been true of any established democratic system in a western industrial society. To be sure, a majority of voters have sometimes demonstrated support for trade-union values, featuring job security rather than market competition, but in these situations trade-union values have usually been embodied in new legislation or changes in the way the existing laws are administered.

When the British Labour Party won power in 1945, for instance, its leaders proceeded to pass the Catering Wages Act and the legislation establishing the National Dock Labour Scheme. The Catering Wages Act reduced profit margins in the hotel and restaurant industry, and has not been repealed by subsequent Conservative governments. The Dock Labour Scheme ensured that all registered dockers who turned up for work would be paid a wage equal to the national average wage for industrial workers, whether or not there was any work for them to do. This scheme made British ports more expensive to operate than other European ports and contributed to the running down of the two largest ports of London and Liverpool. It involved some economic loss to the country for the sake of security for the dockers, and was not wound down until 1989.

British Labour governments also passed laws providing workers with the right to appeal against unfair dismissal and forcing employers to make redundancy payments, related to length of service, to workers who are laid off. These and similar examples suggest that it would be wrong to describe British democracy as a sham. Labour election victories have clearly resulted in legislative changes helpful to workers but harmful to the interests of business. It is true that these victories have not resulted in radical socialist policies, but opinion polls have repeatedly shown that there would have been no majority for such policies, and democracy is about following the wishes of the majority.

IN CONCLUSION

The Marxist and neo-Marxist challenge to democratic theory is much more substantial than the challenge offered by the four writers reviewed in the earlier sections of this chapter. It is certainly true that there is no example of the democratic process producing a government which seriously

attempts to transform the capitalist system into a socialist system. The question is how to interpret this. If it is said that the state machine is inevitably a tool of the capitalist class this would be an anti-democratic argument, but one that goes beyond the evidence. If it is merely said that the perceived need to maintain economic growth places serious constraints on government policy this would be true, but not an anti-democratic argument unless it could be shown that the majority of electors are not interested in economic growth. Since all available evidence indicates that most electors give economic growth a rather high priority, Marxists have to fall back on the proposition that this preference is a form of 'false consciousness', contrary to the real interests of the workers and only held because people living in capitalist societies are brainwashed into accepting bourgeois values. Unfortunately, this proposition cannot be established by empirical evidence; it is a matter of faith for committed Marxists but is viewed with deep scepticism by everyone else. Because of this, Marxists and liberals cannot be expected to reach agreement on the issues raised in this chapter; the gap between them can be narrowed, as it has been by Miliband's work, but in the last resort a gap is bound to remain.

Chapter 12

Corporatism

DEFINITION AND HISTORY

Corporatism (not mentioned in the *OED*) may be loosely defined as a system in which national organizations representing industry and labour work in co-operation with government representatives to constitute an intermediate layer of interest aggregation and decision making between the state and civil society; and as a doctrine advocating this kind of system. The advocacy and practice of corporatism have gone through three distinct phases. The doctrine emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, largely as a branch of Catholic social doctrine; it was adapted and modified in the authoritarian regimes of Mussolini's Italy (1922–43) and Salazar's Portugal (1933–74); and in a somewhat different form it has re-emerged in the institutions of several European democracies in the post-war period under the ascribed title of neo-corporatism.

In the first half of the nineteenth century several European theorists reacted to the growth of industrial society by advocating some form of functional representation to take the place of, or to be alongside, representation by geographical area and social status (see Landauer 1983: 9–18.) Nothing came of these ideas, but in the last three decades of the century the Roman Catholic church and several Catholic writers took them up. The Catholic position in that period was that the Church approved of private property and the capitalist system, but disapproved of competitive individualism on the one hand and the Marxist idea of class conflict on the other. In a well-ordered society, it was thought, individual greed should be curbed, the authorities should ensure a fair distribution of income, and the various occupational groups should feel themselves to be part of an organic whole, linked by feelings of social responsibility, rather than divided into warring classes.

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical making clear that corporatism would be 'a Christian system and a possible solution for the agitation caused by the struggle between capital and labour' (Azpiazu 1951: 77). In 1931 Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical which followed the same line.

In 1951 J. Azpiazu, a Jesuit scholar, declared that 'individualistic liberalism is bankrupt', because it 'ignores entirely the social character of human works and acts', considering only personal profit (Azpiazu 1951: 45). Socialism is no better, because it promotes class warfare and has as its object 'the proletarianation of all'. The answer to both these doctrines is Christian solidarity (see Azpiazu 1951: 46–7), and this kind of solidarity would best be promoted by what the author called 'the corporative state'.

There is no space to mention several other theorists who took a similar line, but it should be noted that in France the Syndicalist movement (flourishing from about 1900 to 1914) and in Britain the guild socialist movement (flourishing from about 1912 to 1922) advocated functional representation of industry from a socialist viewpoint. In addition to the Catholic theorists, there were people on both the right and the left of the political spectrum who felt that the problems of regulating industry were too difficult to be left to a non-specialized Parliament that was also dealing with foreign policy, defence and a host of other problems.

The second phase of corporatism began in 1925, when Mussolini introduced the institutions of 'the corporate state' in Italy. Corporations were established for each major industry representing employers and (in theory) employees, and they were given substantial powers to run their industries, with guidance from the government and the fascist party. However, free trade unions were abolished and strikes were made illegal. In 1933 the Portuguese dictator, Dr Salazar (a professional economist) established institutions that were substantially similar, and this takeover of the idea of corporatism by right-wing dictators gave the doctrine a very bad name, so much so that political theorists ceased to advocate it. What has happened in the post-war period has been the growth of neo-corporatist arrangements promoted in a pragmatic way by politicians, administrators, business directors and trade unionists, without much input from political theorists.

NEO-CORPORATISM

The re-emergence of theoretical interest in corporatism and the adoption of the term neo-corporatism owes a great deal to the work of Philippe Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch, two students of comparative government. In influential articles from 1974 onwards, they have drawn attention to the fact that corporate arrangements by no means died with the end of the Italian and Portuguese dictatorships, but are alive and well in a number of liberal democracies, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Austria and Switzerland.

The essential elements of a modern neo-corporatist system are the existence of 'peak associations' of trade unions and organizations representing business, which have effective influence over the behaviour of their member associations and work in conjunction with representatives of the

national government. The three constituent elements then work together to produce strategies for industrial investment and incomes policy which both sides of industry agree to implement. In exchange for this kind of influence over economic policy, trade unions are expected to curb the demands that individual members and branches may make for wage increases in excess of the agreed norm for the period of the plan.

The actual details vary slightly between countries. The government may or may not offer subsidies to the peak associations or their members. It will generally discriminate between trade associations and unions in the degree of consultation it makes available, obviously offering more consultation to those associations and unions that agree to be bound by the tripartite planning system than to others. It may license associations and unions that conform to certain conditions. It will expect leaders of trade associations and unions involved in tripartite agreements to refrain from public criticism of the government's economic and industrial policies. In turn it will exercise party discipline to ensure that the tripartite plans are supported by Parliament and by parliamentary committees.

It is important to note that these arrangements do not always work with perfect smoothness. Indidivual trade unions and business firms may not always conform to the plans reached. Leo Panitch has pointed out that in Sweden, which has had a tripartite system of this kind since the late 1940s, individual union branches have staged unofficial strikes (Panitch 1979: 141). In 1980 the system broke down altogether for a time, as the unions organized a general strike.

It is also important to note that some countries have arrangements that have similarities to the model but do not conform to it completely. Germany, for instance, has a long-established system whereby industrial planning of the type mentioned is carried out by consultation and agreement between the peak associations representing industry and labour and the national banks (which in Germany control a great deal of industrial investment). There are only seventeen trade unions in Germany, each representing all the workers in an industry rather than being divided by trades; they are well disciplined so that unofficial strikes are rare; and the federation to which sixteen of them belong has a great deal of power to control their behaviour. Partly because of this, Germany has achieved very high growth rates with a relatively low rate of inflation. However, the system is not fully one of neo-corporatism because the government does not play a direct and open role in the system. It is also not immune from breakdown, as on one occasion when the large metal-workers' union, not content with the wage increases proposed, staged a prolonged strike for better terms. In a free society, occasional breakdowns are almost inevitable.

France is another country where two of the parties co-operate but the third gets only marginal consultations. In the French case the government's planning commissariat prepares five-year plans for the country's economic

development, after full consultation with representatives of industry but little consultation with the union movement. This is partly because the union movement is divided between three peak associations, one communist, one social democratic, one Catholic; partly because the largest of the three is communist and could not easily be co-opted into a consensual system of planning; partly because the union movement overall is very weak in terms of membership so that the planning agency has not thought it necessary to involve unions. The result has been a high rate of economic growth, but accompanied by more strikes and a higher rate of inflation than in Germany. The French system worked smoothly from the late 1940s until the middle 1970s, when the problems caused by a four-fold increase in the price of oil led the French government and Parliament to make repeated revisions to the five-year plans.

Italy is the other country in Europe that has a divided union movement with the largest association being in communist hands, and there too the unions have been left out of the consultations that have taken place (in a rather informal way) between the employers' associations (of which there are three), the Christian Democratic party and the government. In the first ten years after the war it looked as if Italy was moving towards a loose kind of neo-corporatism (Spotts and Wieser 1986: 209), but since then divisions in the business community have led to a system that is essentially pluralist. Italy has achieved high, though rather uneven, growth rates, accompanied by a high rate of inflation and the highest rate of industrial disputes of any advanced industrial society.

Britain is an interesting case of a country that tried to adopt a neo-corporatist strategy but failed. In 1962 the government established the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) with representatives of the Treasury, the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry. However, this body was an almost complete failure. The TUC could not control its member unions, the CBI had no power over its member associations, and the Treasury officials were not as knowledgeable about industry or as confident about planning as their counterparts in many other European democracies have shown themselves to be. Moreover, the relationship between unions and management in Britain is essentially adversarial, with little sense of a common interest. With little of substance achieved, the NEDC was wound down in the 1980s.

In 1974 the Labour government tried a different approach, entering into a 'social contract' with the TUC whereby the unions would get a good deal of influence over economic and social policy in return for accepting government guidelines on incomes policy. At first there was a period of very high inflation, reaching 25 per cent a year in 1975; then it seemed as if the social contract was having some success; but in the last months of 1978 several large unions revolted and led prolonged strikes against the government's policy on wages. The business associations were not involved

in this process, and the whole story seemed to demonstrate that Britain is essentially wedded to the pluralist model of political and economic bargaining, and unsuited to a neo-corporatist strategy.

It should be noted that some writers with social democratic sympathies, notably Andrew Shonfield, Colin Crouch and Peter Self, have argued that a move in the direction of neo-corporatism is a desirable strategy for all advanced industrial societies, and indeed that societies that appear to be pluralist are apt to have corporatist elements somewhere in their systems (see Shonfield 1965; Crouch 1979: 186–96; and Self 1985: Chapter 5). Self points out that British governments do not treat all interest groups as equal, but regularly consult some while giving the cold shoulder to others (Self 1985: Chapter 5). In some cases the government has established producer groups, such as the Milk Marketing Board and the Potato Marketing Board, while in the cotton industry all firms were required by law for many years to subscribe to the Cotton Board, which the government treated as the sole channel of communication between itself and the industry (see Birch 1964: 203–7). All this is true, and it demonstrates the complexity of modern government, but it would be weakening the utility of the model to regard all these ad hoc arrangements as steps towards neo-corporatism. It is essential to the neo-corporatist model that the peak associations should play leading roles.

ASSESSING MERITS

Schmitter indicates at one point that he and most of his colleagues who study neo-corporatism actually disapprove of it, but he does not explain why (Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979: 3). As the concept is evidently one around which normative controversies occur, it is relevant to outline what seem to be its merits and disadvantages.

Its chief merit is clearly that it seems conducive to high rates of economic growth. In his elaborate and exhaustive study of the factors that account for differential rates of growth in industrial societies, Mancur Olson found only one common factor that was generally significant. This is that societies with 'encompassing organizations' (i.e. peak organizations) for business and labour interest groups are more likely to achieve high growth rates than societies without them (Olson 1982). The countries that have neo-corporatist systems in Europe have mostly achieved higher growth rates in the post-war period than societies with pluralist systems of interest representation. The Scandinavian countries, Switzerland and Germany have all achieved high growth rates with controlled inflation. Italy and France have had more uneven growth rates with higher inflation. The pluralist societies of Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have all had lower growth rates. This is not exactly proof, but it is highly suggestive.

The second advantage of neo-corporatist arrangements is that they generally reduce the incidence of strikes. Now, strikes are sometimes discussed as if they were zero-sum games between workers and management. This is too simple a view, for in a wider perspective a strike is a game in which almost everyone loses. Society loses production; the firm loses revenue; its suppliers and customers suffer inconvenience; the workers lose wages; their families suffer hardship; and one result is usually bad feeling or bitterness between people who have to work together. In neo-corporatist systems the unions do not lose the bargaining power that comes from the threat of being able to call a strike, but the actual incidence of strikes is lower. It is noteworthy that the three societies with the highest proportion of working days lost by strike action in the past forty years are the pluralist democracies of Italy, Canada and Britain.

Those who dislike neo-corporatism approach the question from two very different perspectives, one Marxist and the other individualist. To Marxists, it serves as a way of co-opting trade unions into the capitalist system, of holding down wages in the short run, of protecting capitalism from its contradictions in the long run.

To individualists, it seems a rather bureaucratic system that largely bypasses Parliament. It is alleged to favour large trade unions and business associations over small ones. It is thought that neo-corporatist arrangements may work to the disadvantage of small entrepreneurs, of highly specialized and perhaps new enterprises, professions or unions, of breakaway unions, of non-unionized workers, and of non-conformists in general.

There are clearly valid points to be made on both sides of the argument and any assessment of the merits of neo-corporatist arrangements must depend partly on the political values of the commentator, partly on the way that particular national arrangements work in practice.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPT

Looked at one way, corporatism is a rather unsatisfactory concept. No political theorist has made it his task to produce a convincing set of arguments for corporatism which might become the basis of a corporatist ideology. There are no corporate parties or corporatist movements. It seems to be little more than a label. Even as a label, it has a rather fuzzy outline rather than a clear definition. There have been corporatist states that were authoritarian and are now universally regarded with contempt. There are some unstable authoritarian regimes in South America that have arrangements that might qualify as corporatist. There are neo-corporatist institutions in several western European democracies, but they vary in detail. There is also a case of semi-neo-corporatism in Germany and

one of temporary unsuccessful neo-corporatism in Britain. It all seems unsatisfactory to anyone with a tidy mind.

However, looked at another way, corporatism is a significant and helpful concept, because it draws attention to the fact that there are a number of democratic states in which the distribution of political influence cannot fairly be described as either elitist or pluralist.

As indicated in the last chapter, there is no adequate and convincing theory showing that democratic systems must always be elitist in practice. The best candidate is Marxism, but this has weaknesses that divide students of politics into a minority of committed Marxists and a majority of scholars and commentators who reject the doctrine as unreasonable. The other theorists who have been labelled as elitist turn out on inspection to be either not really elitist or not really plausible.

At the level of practical experience, elitism is a poor guide to politics in western Europe or Australasia, because all the countries in these regions have sizeable socialist parties representing the workers that either govern most of the time, as in Denmark and Sweden, or take turns in governing, as in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and (since 1987) France, or frequently form part of governing coalitions. This leaves Canada and the United States as possible candidates for elitist rule.

My personal experience and studies convince me that Canada does not in fact fit the elitist model. At the national level, much political conflict is regional in character, between central Canada (that is, Ontario and Quebec), the four Atlantic provinces and the four western provinces. Other conflicts are linguistic, between Francophones and Anglophones, which increasingly means between Quebec and the other nine provinces. Other conflicts again are ethnic, featuring the aboriginal peoples, the French, the British, and the numerous pressure groups for the Italians, Ukrainians, Chinese, Sikhs and so forth who contribute to the multicultural nature of Canadian society. Class divisions are rarely important and there is a large measure of consensus about social policy.

At the provincial level, four of the provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia) have had or now have social democratic governments; two of them (Alberta and British Columbia) have had social credit governments, the social credit parties being populist groupings dominated by small business proprietors, farmers and lower-middle-class elements; and Quebec has had a nationalist government devoted to strengthening Quebec's cultural distinctiveness and working towards its secession from the rest of Canada. This simply does not add up to a pattern of political elitism.

The only plausible candidate for elitism among liberal democracies is the United States, where the middle classes (if broadly defined) certainly seem to have a rather dominant role. However, as has been pointed out in Chapter 9, empirical studies indicate that the pluralist model is more

relevant than the elitist model when the actual process of decision making is analyzed.

The trouble with pluralism, if adopted as a label for all liberal democracies, is that it is sometimes misleading in its assumption that the state is independent of pressure groups and that all groups are equal in status when they jockey for influence. Pluralist writers do not claim that interest groups are equal in power, for it is acknowledged that some groups have more resources than others, but they do claim that they are equal in status. For better or worse, this is simply not true of those systems that have been labelled neo-corporatist.

It is therefore important to realize that the elitist/pluralist dichotomy is inadequate as a way of categorizing the distribution of influence in democratic systems of government. There is a third category, somewhat untidy in outline but important in practice, that is appropriately described as neo-corporatist. This category might be regarded as in a sense intermediate between the other two, and is not a watertight compartment. In regimes that are imperfectly democratic, like that of Japan, the boundary between neo-corporatism and elitism is rather porous. In fully democratic regimes elements of neo-corporatism may co-exist with elements of pluralism. In this way the untidiness of the concept may be said to be justified because it reflects the untidiness of the real world of practical politics.

Part IV

Styles of political analysis

Chapter 13

Towards a science of politics: positivism, behaviouralism and economic models

MAINSTREAM POLITICAL SCIENCE

Learned discussions about politics have been a part of the intellectual tradition of the western world from the time of Greek city-states until the present day. Until the 1870s, most of these discussions were speculative and philosophical, but there were also some intermittent attempts to do what we now call comparative government, most notably in Aristotle's *Politics*, Machiavelli's *Discourses* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. There were also some thoughtful attempts to bring general reflections about politics to bear upon pressing practical problems, most notably in the writings and speeches of the men who conceived and founded the American republic. However, political science did not emerge as a distinct academic discipline until the 1870s.

In that decade, courses in political science were introduced, more or less simultaneously, in the three universities of Oxford, Paris and Columbia. Significant contributions to scholarship were then made on both sides of the Atlantic, but America far outstripped Britain and France in making the subject a standard discipline throughout the country. By the 1920s it was on the syllabus in over a hundred American universities, but still largely confined in Britain to Oxford and London and in France to Paris. The American discipline acquired its professional association at the beginning of the century and the *American Political Science Review* began publication in 1906, whereas the equivalent developments in Britain and France did not take place until 1951.

In terms of scope and method, the discipline did not change very much between the late 1870s and the early 1950s. As W. J. M. Mackenzie pointed out in his UNESCO report, it revolved almost entirely around the affairs of the state, defined as the institution (or set of institutions) which 'claimed juridical and political supremacy' (Mackenzie 1971: 16). It dealt hardly at all with the politics of private associations. The discipline in this whole long period fell naturally into three sub-disciplines. The first of these (first because it had been studied by historians and philosophers before political

scientists took it up) may be called the theory of the state, consisting of the study of the philosophical justifications of state authority and the related problems of defining the nature and role of liberty, justice, political equality and political participation within the state. The texts run from Plato to the English Idealists of the 1880s, with little of equivalent scope and value being published since the 1880s to modify the character of this branch of study.

The second sub-discipline is the study of the government of modern states, being primarily studies of particular state systems but also including attempts to generalize about the similarities and differences between states. The third sub-discipline is the study of relations between states, beginning as diplomatic history in the immediate aftermath of the First World War and developing into a more systematic and generalized study of the international state system. Study in these three fields, which may be said to constitute mainstream political science (and will be described in that way in what follows), has continued with improvements but without essential changes into the 1990s, and may be expected to continue into the indefinite future. It has a focus that is primarily on institutions rather than on individuals; its method of study is largely historical; and normative judgements form an inseparable part of the subject. That governments should be consistent, efficient, responsible, representative and respectful of citizens' liberties are values that are built in to most mainstream analyses.

Some idea of the degree of continuity in mainstream political science may be conveyed by considering the longevity of textbooks. Take, for instance, the work of two brilliant scholars who happened to be friends, namely James Bryce of Oxford and A. L. Lowell of Harvard. In 1888 Bryce produced his very substantial text on American government under the title of *The American Commonwealth*. In 1933 an abridged edition of this great work was published for use in American colleges and schools, while in 1939 a new edition of the complete book was published to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the original publication. In 1908 Lowell reciprocated by producing *The Government of England*, which remained in print through the 1920s.

In the field of comparative government Lowell led the way in 1896 with *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe*, while Bryce responded in 1921 with *Modern Democracies*. This vast work, published in two volumes, contained fifteen introductory chapters on democratic principles followed by long sections on the political systems of France, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, followed by twenty-three chapters, comparative in nature, which summed up the conclusions that could be drawn from the study. In the post-war period a notable example of longevity is Merle Fainsod's *How Russia is Ruled*, first published in 1953, re-issued in 1979 under the revised title *How the Soviet*

Union is Governed, and remaining an invaluable text until the dramatic events of 1989–91 rendered it out of date.

Over a period of slightly more than a century, mainstream political science has accumulated more data, become more refined in its forms of analysis, but maintained its essential character. This character is of a discipline based upon historical study with an institutional focus, side-by-side comparative analyses, and built-in normative judgements, with no attempt to emulate the natural sciences. However, the 1950s saw the introduction of new methods intended to produce a genuinely scientific study of politics, and it is to this development that the remainder of this chapter is devoted. The development was anticipated in the writings of the scholars at the University of Chicago in the late 1930s, notably Charles Merriam and E. M. Sait, who argued persuasively that the discipline ought to become scientific. In Sait's words, the aim should be 'to turn the study of politics into a branch of positive science'. The use of the term 'positive' had the function of indicating that the author had in mind not the loose interpretation of science whereby any systematic accumulation of knowledge can be described as a scientific activity, but the more specialized interpretation whereby a subject can only be termed scientific if it is based upon methods similar to those of the natural sciences. The concept of 'positivism' has this meaning, and its history and character deserve a word of explanation before we turn to the political science research that, to some degree, emulated natural science methods.

THE CONCEPT OF POSITIVISM

While the term 'positivism' was introduced and popularized by the French philosopher Auguste Comte in the late 1830s and explained in his *Course of Positive Philosophy*, published in 1840–2, the positivist attitude towards human understanding was a product of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. It may be described as a combination of French rationalism and British empiricism. The spirit of positivism is essentially the spirit of the Enlightenment, and can be summarized as rational, secular, scientific, optimistic, progressive, liberal and associated with the belief in the inevitability of progress that developed in the eighteenth century and characterized much European thought until it was shattered by the events of 1914.

The writer who probably has the best claim to be described as the father of positivism is the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, writing between 1739 and the 1760s, an agnostic who has been described as a philosopher of common sense and experience. Things are what they are, according to Hume, that is what they seem to be by direct experience, not a manifestation of something that cannot be observed or experienced. Thunder is a noise in the sky, not a sign of the displeasure of the gods.

Law is what the courts enforce, not an expression of natural law or natural rights. Human beings have appetites, passions and desires, but not souls. They have minds also, but their reason 'is the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them'. Historical events are events, not the unfolding of divine will or what Hegel was later to call 'the world-historical spirit'. Hume's was a basic kind of philosophy, designed to puncture a good deal of metaphysical speculation.

The next fifty years saw the foundation of economic science by Hume's fellow-Scot, Adam Smith, and the development of Utilitarianism in France by Helvetius and Condorcet, in England by Bentham. In his *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789, Bentham stated that 'observation and experiment' are 'the sources of all real knowledge' and that the way to advance understanding was to 'take a number of . . . particular propositions; find some points in which they agree, and from the observation of these points form a more extensive one, a general one, in which they are all included' (quoted Manning 1968: 11).

It follows that Comte was not being particularly original when he announced in 1840 that this method should be the basis of all knowledge, but it was he who called it positivism and as he was also the first advocate of a discipline to be called 'sociology' he has his place in intellectual history as the first theorist to propose that the proper method for the study of society and politics was the method that we normally associate with the natural sciences. There are, declared Comte, three stages in the development of the human understanding. The first is theological; the second, almost equally useless, is metaphysical; the third and final is the positive stage. In the positive stage:

> the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws – that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance . . . What is now understood when we speak of an explanation of facts is simply the establishment of a connection between single phenomena and some general facts, the number of which continually diminishes with the progress of science.
>
> (extract printed in Aiken 1956: 125)

In saying this, and in going on to say that social investigation must follow in the methodological footsteps of astronomy, physics, chemistry and physiology, Comte was the first to suggest that the language of variance (to use Mackenzie's term) was the most appropriate for the study of sociological phenomena, including politics. Events should be observed, compared, correlated, and reduced to examples of a limited number of law-like generalizations, presumably of universal validity. Moreover, as he indicates in the last few words quoted, the progress of understanding

would reduce the number of generalizations needed for explanation, as simpler laws of wider applicability were constantly formulated. In saying this, Comte pointed to one of the basic differences between scientific explanation and modern concepts of historical explanation, as articulated most clearly by Michael Oakeshott; that progress in science is towards simpler and simpler generalizations whereas progress in historical understanding involves the uncovering and reconstruction of more and more complexities and details. Comte did not say this himself, of course, because he believed that human history could be subsumed under the umbrella of social studies and explained scientifically. There are a few modern philosophers of history who go along with Comte in this, for example Carl Hempel, but they are in a distinct minority and have had little influence on the actual conduct of historical scholarship. The methods of most historians conform to Oakeshott's account of them (see Oakeshott 1933).

While the positivist ideal has had little impact on the academic discipline of history, it has had a very considerable impact on both sociology and political science. In sociology it has been a dominant influence; an inspection of university calendars will reveal that courses in sociology departments are mostly based on the assumption of general regularities and laws. There are courses on the sociology of the family, the sociology of religion, the structure of industrial society, and so forth, rather than courses on religion in America, the family in modern Britain, and the like. In political science the influence has been more restricted. There are many mainstream courses on the American political system, British political parties, western European governments and so forth, while alongside them there are a smaller number of courses that Comte would have approved of, such as political propaganda, the psychology of political leadership, and bureaucracy in the modern state.

If we ask how far the study of politics has been turned into a scientific activity, gathering data to form general laws with predictive value, we are faced with three different answers. At the level of grand theory, there has been only one attempt to form an over-arching theory of political development, namely the work of Marx and Engels in the period of what may be called their early maturity, when they elaborated the theory known as dialectical materialism. At the ground level, there has been the use of quantitative methods of political research, beginning in the 1950s and continuing to this day, yielding low-level generalizations such as those about voting behaviour in particular countries. At the intermediate level, several models and partial theories have been formulated, notably those based upon the assumption that political actors are rational beings attempting to maximize their interests while minimizing their costs. Beyond these, there has been an ambitious attempt to construct a conceptual framework known as systems theory, intended to replace institutional analysis in the study of government. Each of these theories and developments will be

outlined briefly in what follows, together with the philosophical movement known as logical positivism that flourished in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AS THE FIRST SCIENCE OF POLITICS

This assertion is made about dialectical materialism rather than about Marxism, because Marxism is a house with several rooms. The Marxism of Marx's early writings consists of the loosely formulated views of a romantic idealist, a utopian socialist with a somewhat anarchistic vision of the future. Then followed a period of just over twenty years, from Marx's first collaborative work with Engels in 1845 to the publication of the first volume of *Capital* in 1867, when Marx and Engels produced and elaborated the theory of dialectical materialism that set out law-like generalizations about economic and political development. Marx's later years, until he died in 1883, were years in which he kept adding refinements and qualifications to his doctrine in the light of further study and further events, particularly the political upheavals in France. And in the long period since his death his various followers, of which the most notable were Engels, Lenin and Gramsci, have added to the whole corpus of Marxist theory in significant but not entirely consistent ways, with the tendency of many younger scholars since the 1960s being to play down the importance of dialectical materialism and to revert to the idealism of Marx's early years.

It is not part of my task to say that one period in the development of Marxist thought is more rewarding than another, but in the context of this chapter it is fair to say that dialectical materialism is the version of Marxism for which predictive value, and thus scientific status, was and can be claimed.

The character of dialectical materialism has been so thoroughly explained in scores of books that the briefest sketch will suffice in this chapter. The argument is that the driving force of historical development in all societies is economic. The pattern of production in any period determines the relations between classes, which are themselves defined in terms of their relationship to the system of production, and the relations between classes determine the distribution and structure of social and political power. In agricultural societies the land owners were inevitably the wealthiest class and their economic position enabled them to dominate the other classes, not only economically but also socially and politically. As industrial production grows in scale and comes gradually to exceed agriculture in its contribution to the national economy, so the new class of industrial entrepreneurs – the capitalist class – comes to grow in wealth and influence. There is a transitional period during which the land owners still control

the main levers of political power even though their economic power is slipping away, but there inevitably comes a time when the pressures of the capitalist class burst the chains of a land-owner-dominated regime and lead to the seizure of political power by the capitalists and their agents. This process was described by Marx and Engels as the bourgeois revolution.

Most of their examples were drawn from the history of England, because England was economically more advanced than any other country at the time they were studying and writing. In England the industrial developments of the last forty years of the eighteenth century, which were themselves the consequence of significant technological developments such as Watt's construction of the world's first steam engine in 1776, led to a transitional period in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century when the new bourgeoisie had acquired a measure of economic dominance but Parliament and the Cabinet were still dominated by land owners and their agents. This changed with the great parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, which gave bourgeois interests a controlling role in the political system and led to a series of reforms designed to help the development of industry and trade.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 abolished the age-old system whereby parishes had looked after their poor, thus releasing a flood of unemployed people who were forced to leave their villages to find work in the growing industrial areas. The introduction of limited liability enabled investors to shield their personal and family possessions from the consequences of industrial bankruptcy. The repeal of the corn laws in 1846 abolished protection for British agriculture and enabled cheap food to be imported for the industrial workforce. The opening of the higher ranks of the public service to entry by competitive examination ended the system whereby the land-owning classes had been able to put their younger sons into comfortable positions in the bureaucracy. One by one, reforms were passed that turned Britain into a land dominated by capitalists and capitalist interests.

How would this be changed? It would be changed because the system contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction. New methods of large-scale factory production were congregating large numbers of exploited workers into situations in which they would combine for their defence. Industrial competition would force capitalists to hold down wages, so that the workers would see themselves getting poorer. The trade cycle would produce large-scale unemployment. The more enlightened of the workers would educate their brethren in the need for revolt against the system. An understanding of the laws of historical development – that is, an understanding of Marxism – would enable the organized workers to recognize a revolutionary situation when mass unemployment or warfare produced a crisis, and to seize power from the capitalists and the capitalist

state. The revolutionary workers would then institute a limited period of proletarian dictatorship to reorganize the economic system, which would usher in a period of socialism based upon the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The state would then wither away, in its coercive forms, and the government of persons would be replaced by the administration of things.

Now, this programme was presented by Marx and Engels as inevitable. They had lived through the bourgeois revolution, they had understood the dynamic of history, and they predicted that – though not exactly when – the system would be transformed by the proletarian revolution. Britain was leading the way, but the British example would be followed by other countries as they too became industrialized. In the Preface to the German edition of *Capital*, Marx said plainly that the path followed by Britain would inevitably be followed by Germany also, only a little later. The British developments 'must re-enact on the continent':

> 'Intrinsically', declared Marx, 'it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future'.
>
> (Tucker 1978: 296)

Now, this is without question a deterministic view of historical development. Marx wrote repeatedly of the *natural laws* of development, of the *necessary* relationships between economic and political power, of the *inevitability* of historical change on the lines he mapped out. In this period of his life Marx was a positivist. In his later years he qualified his predictions with various refinements and words of caution. In intellectual terms this is interesting, but in practical terms it made little difference. It was the positivist theory, the grand design, that inspired generations of communists in numerous countries, imbued with the confidence that they understood the dynamics of social development and would be ready to strike a revolutionary blow when the time was ripe.

As a theory, it had much of the character of a theory in those natural sciences, like astronomy, in which no experiments under controlled conditions can be carried out. Careful study of economic and political events that had taken place led to conclusions about their inter-relationships and the construction of a model, on the basis of which predictions were made about future social and political developments. The weakness of the theory is that most of the predictions have been falsified by subsequent events. Large-scale unions of industrial workers were certainly formed, but instead of attempting to overthrow the capitalist system they bargained for increased wages and better working conditions within the system. Their

bargaining was largely successful, with the result that the living standards of workers improved and the prediction of progressive impoverishment was invalidated. Not one of the advanced industrialized societies has produced a communist revolution. When revolutions took place, they did so in Russia, which was only in the early stages of industrialization, and in the largely agricultural societies of Yugoslavia, Albania, China and Cuba. As a scientific and therefore predictive theory, dialectical materialism has been proved to be a failure. Nobody since Marx and Engels has attempted to construct a science of politics on such a grand scale.

THE BEHAVIOURAL MOVEMENT

The next attempt to introduce scientific methods into the study of politics started in a very different fashion, using statistical data about individual behaviour as the building blocks of theory instead of the historical experiences of national societies. The object of the behaviouralists has been to frame testable hypotheses about political behaviour on the basis of these data, which if validated by further empirical research could be turned into law-like generalizations which would have the status of empirical theories unless and until they were invalidated by later studies. This is the method of the natural sciences, as explained most clearly by Karl Popper in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Popper 1959) and subsequent books.

The particular trigger that set the behavioural movement going was the introduction of sample surveys and their application to voting behaviour. The technique of the sample survey was developed by social psychologists, not by political scientists, and was first used in political research by three sociologists who organized a survey of voting behaviour in the presidential election of 1940 in a small town in upstate New York (see Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944). The study was copied in another area in 1944 and has been repeated, in an increasingly elaborate form, in every presidential election since that date. Similar studies were made of voting in the British general election of 1950 (see Birch and Campbell 1950; and Benney *et al.* 1956); and these also have been replicated, with larger and then national samples and more complex questionnaires, in every succeeding British general election. (For national surveys, see Butler and Stokes 1969; and Sarlvic and Crewe 1983.)

The first object of these studies was to correlate voting behaviour with demographic variables such as the age, sex and occupation of the voters; the second was to analyse the behaviour of the floating voters and to explore their reasons for changing their vote; the third was to uncover the opinions of electors on a range of policy issues and to study the relationship between opinions and behaviour. Studies of this kind were followed by a content analysis of newspaper coverage of the elections (see Birch *et al.* 1956) and by studies of the impact of televised political

propaganda on political knowledge, political opinions and voting behaviour (see Blumler and McQuail 1968).

The consequence of this type of research, which has been carried out in most western societies, is that we know much more about elections than it was possible to know before sample surveys were used. Historians who have written about earlier elections have produced informed judgements about why this party lost ground and that leader won widespread support, but they do not actually know why those developments took place, so their judgements are always liable to be contradicted by other historians. In respect of contemporary elections, we do actually know why electors behaved as they did. However, these empirical studies are scientific in the sense that they use precise quantitative methods rather than in the sense that they have yielded predictive generalizations that have changed our understanding of the electoral process. Campaign managers have certainly learned something from the studies, and campaigns are more professionally organized than they were in the past, but betting on election results is still a risky business. After the event, scholars can explain why the results went the way that they did. Before the event, there is always an element of guesswork involved in predictions. It can be said that if electors turn against one of the parties in key areas of policy, then that party is likely to lose votes; but this is a generalization that was commonly made before election surveys were introduced.

Following this beginning, quantitative research methods were extended from electoral behaviour to the behaviour of legislators (see MacRae 1958; Wahlke and Eulau 1959; Wahlke *et al.* 1962; Miller and Stokes 1963); to the behaviour of judges (see Schubert 1959 and 1963); to the behaviour of state representatives at meetings of the United Nations; to the formation of Cabinets; to the behaviour of municipal politicians and group spokesmen; and to several other types of political behaviour.

If we ask what kinds of generalization have emerged from all this research, the answer is that we have been given empirical generalizations about particular political systems. From American electoral studies, we have learned about the loosening of party loyalties and the growth of single-issue voting. From British electoral studies, we have learned about the decline of the alignment between class status and voting behaviour. From American studies of the influence of television, we learn that American voters tend to watch only those programmes that favour their party or their preferred policies, and that the effect of the exposure is to reinforce existing views. From similar studies in Britain, we learn that viewers do not discriminate in this fashion and that repeated exposure to any one politician is more likely to increase scepticism about him than support for him. We learn about party loyalty in the British Parliament and its relative weakness in the US Congress. We learn about how many representatives in American state assemblies see themselves as delegates of their constitu-

ents and how many, in contrast, see themselves as trustees for the public welfare. We learn about the structure of political influence in American cities, as discussed in earlier chapters. For useful compendiums of behavioural research articles, see Eulau *et al.* 1956; and Eulau 1966.

Three things can be said about the empirical data and generalizations produced by this type of research. One is that they have added very greatly to our store of knowledge and understanding about political behaviour and processes in western systems of government, and have produced a number of low-level theories and descriptive generalizations. A second comment is that they involve only a little deviation from the conceptual frameworks used in mainstream political science. The research methods differ, but the general framework remains much the same. The techniques used by Dahl and his colleagues to measure political influence within a community were novel, but their result was a descriptive generalization about one city rather than a scientific law. The proposition that any American city with a plurality of interest groups is likely to enjoy a pluralistic dispersal of political power is not trivial, but it is too tautological to have a status similar to that of propositions in the natural sciences. Other empirical generalizations arising from behavioural studies have thrown extra light upon familiar questions rather than suggesting a new set of questions. The third point is that empirical research has tended to reinforce the assumption of mainstream political scientists that the most important variable in politics is the national variable. American and British television viewers, to take only one example, react in different ways when faced with political propaganda on the screen, and the differences between the two nations appear to be greater than the differences between sexes or classes within each nation. There is little support from these studies for the hope sometimes expressed that more scientific research methods might yield generalizations of more universal validity.

NEW MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS

A very different development of the 1950s and 1960s was the introduction of new models and conceptual frameworks. One of these was games theory, being a mathematical model-making approach to games and tactics in situations of conflict between a limited number of players. Distinctions were drawn between two-person games and multi-person games, for which the mathematics are different; and between zero-sum games, in which one player wins what the others lose, and non-zero-sum games, in which there is either an overall gain or an overall loss. Games theory does not involve any generalizations about politics, it should be stressed. It is based upon certain strict assumptions about the rationality, knowledge and objectives of the players and it tells the scholar how to assess the probable consequences of various possible tactics by the players. If the result of the use

of the model (for it is a model rather than a theory) has explanatory value in one situation, this may yield a prediction about what is likely to happen if the situation is exactly repeated, but it would be difficult to point to any general laws of predictive value arising from the application of games theory to domestic politics. In international relations it has been of greater value, leading to various generalizations that are usually grouped under the heading of strategic theory.

Another and rather different model goes under the name of public choice theory. This is a theory about how to assess the efficiency of the systems for providing public services which differs from the traditional methods used in the study of public administration, which adopt institutions as the main units of analysis. Public choice theory starts with the individual citizen, viewed as a consumer of public goods and services rather than as a participant in politics, and regards society as a collection of consumers who are rational and egoistical. Their aim is to increase their individual satisfactions at minimum cost, and the public interest is defined in a Utilitarian manner as the maximization of individual satisfactions.

The unit of analysis favoured by public choice theorists is the 'provision system' for the service being studied, which may include participation by national, regional and local government bodies and also by private suppliers of services. The institutional arrangements are regarded not as given but as variables. It may be that a provision system could be made more efficient, in the sense of increasing consumer satisfactions or maintaining them at lower cost, by changing the institutional arrangements. A common conclusion of public choice studies is that services are better provided on a local than on a regional basis, because consumers tend to favour neighbourhood police forces, school boards and so forth. Another common conclusion is that services like rubbish collection could be made more efficient by privatization, with the municipality putting them out to tender. Despite its title, however, public choice theory is not so much a theory about public administration as a methodology for studying it, albeit a methodology with so many built-in assumptions that its application to various problems tends to yield a pattern of somewhat similar conclusions.

Both games theory and public choice theory are forms of what can best be described as rational-actor models. The assumptions are the same as those made by most theoretical economists; that the players in a situation are entirely rational in their pursuit of measurable objectives, that they are possessed of equal knowledge about the alternatives available, and that their moves can be mapped without considering questions of emotion or moral values. Some theories about political behaviour by economists, notably Anthony Downs and Mancur Olson, have already been discussed in Chapter 6. Another theory or model is that put forward by Albert Hirschman under the title of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (Hirschman 1970). In this book the author posits an actor faced with a decline in the perform-

ance of his favourite company or political party and suggests factors that might lead him to decide between his alternatives of switching to a rival company or party (exit) and staying with it while trying to improve it (voice).

There is an interesting question about how extensively rational-actor models can profitably be used in the study of political behaviour. Some writers have suggested that there are a wide range of political activities which can be analysed in this way, while other writers are more sceptical. My own position is one of moderate, but not complete, scepticism. I do not believe that the value of rational-actor models in political science can ever approach the value they have had in traditional economic theory. The analysis of economic behaviour in terms of this type of model has two advantages over the analysis of political behaviour in similar terms. The first is that, although economic man is an abstraction, a sufficient number of people in advanced capitalist societies behave roughly in the manner of economic man for the theoretical models devised by economists to have considerable explanatory power. The second advantage is that most of the costs, benefits and profits of economic action can be reduced to the same standard of measurement.

In the case of political behaviour there are competing versions of 'political man', each unsatisfactory in different ways. The hedonistic man of Utilitarian theories is only of limited value because the assumptions on which this abstraction is based are over-simplistic. The power-seeking man of some theorists is clearly unrealistic, if intended as a representation of the ordinary citizen; he might do for a tiny minority of politicians, but where numbers are so small this kind of approach loses much of its advantage because the idiosyncratic variations of particular individuals fail to cancel one another out. The most plausible abstraction is probably influence-seeking man, but this has limitations. The Downsian theory of why people vote revolves around the assumption that political man is an influence-seeking creature, and the explanatory value of this theory is not at all great. There are undoubtedly some people who go to the polls only when they think their vote has a reasonable chance of influencing the result, and it is sometimes possible to trace a slight statistical relationship between turnout and marginality. But in most political systems the difference in turnout between marginal seats and safe seats in national elections is so small that it is evident that Downs's theory contributes very little to our understanding of the question. And this is not because Downs's logic is faulty but because his original premise does not hold good for the majority of electors.

The other problem about analysing political behaviour in this way is that the costs and benefits of political action cannot easily be reduced to a common unit of measurement, if indeed they can be measured at all. The difficulties of measuring happiness clearly weaken the value of the

Utilitarian model for empirical research (though that does not of course affect the value of Utilitarianism as a normative theory). The difficulties of measuring power and influence are very great, as has been amply demonstrated by community power studies and the methodological controversies to which they have given rise.

For these reasons and others it seems unlikely that the economic approach to the study of politics will ever cover such a wide range of problems as the historical or sociological approaches. However, so long as its limitations are recognized, the economic approach has advantages which claim our attention. It is clear and logical, and its models yield hypotheses which can to some extent be tested against evidence. Even if the evidence is unclear or the hypotheses are invalidated, the analysis may clarify the problem by illuminating the relationships that are under investigation. The use of economic models therefore offers some prospect of intellectual progress, even though they can only be usefully applied to certain areas and aspects of political behaviour.

In logical (though only partly chronological) terms, the movement towards a science of politics can be divided into three phases. The first phase of the movement was the use of quantitative methods to analyse individual behaviour in political situations and the second phase was the construction and use of rational-actor models. The third phase was an ambitious attempt to build a large-scale conceptual framework known as systems theory. Taken from the biological sciences, first formulated as a theory of politics by David Easton in the 1950s (see Easton 1953), and developed by Gabriel Almond and others, the main thrust of systems theory was to replace the state and its institutions as the central subject of political analysis by the political system and its processes. That is to say, the focus of study shifted again, from institutions in mainstream political science and individual behaviour in the first two behavioural phases to political processes in the systems-theory phase.

In the model that is central to systems theory, representative institutions such as elections, parties and pressure groups are replaced by the process of articulating and aggregating interests and values. The advantage of this change, it was claimed, was to provide a more suitable language for the analysis of politics on a comparative and international basis. Instead of talking about the US Congress or the British or French Parliaments, which have had no precise equivalents in communist party states or in the Third World, scholars should talk about the processes of articulation and aggregation, which occur in all political systems, democratic or dictatorial, national or international. Similarly, talk about administrative institutions should be replaced by talk about policy implementation, and the circular nature of all political systems should be indicated by the concept of feedback (borrowed from electrical engineering), meaning the process whereby the implementation of policies in one period leads to the articu-

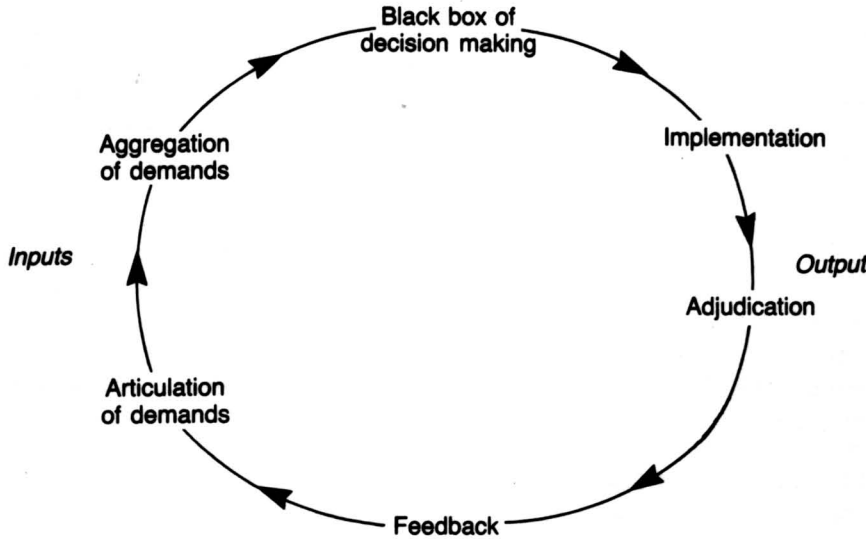

Figure 1 The basic model of a political system in systems theory

lation of revised demands in the following period. In outline, the political system can then be portrayed as composed of inputs (articulated and aggregated) into a 'black box' where authoritative decisions are made, outputs from the black box in the form of policies, and feedback from the society that is affected by the policies. The model is commonly summarized in the diagrammatic form shown in Figure 1.

This model (Figure 1) has some fairly obvious merits and most political science students in the English-speaking world are probably introduced to it at some stage of their studies. It tells the student what to look for when studying a system with unfamiliar institutions. It has the merit of emphasizing the circularity of the political process. At the same time, it has certain limitations. One is that the model does not have any logical place for the source of political authority. It is all very well to say that decision making within the black box results in the authoritative allocation of values for society, that is, that it produces authoritative policies, but what makes them authoritative? There is no place in this model for the crown, as the source of authority in Britain and other monarchies, or for the constitution as the course of authority in the United States and some other republics. Easton has tried to cope with this by adding public support on the input side of the model, but support for the system does not have the same logical status as the demands for policy changes that constitute the main inputs and in any case it cannot encompass the crown and the constitution.

Another weakness of the model is that it has no place for a bill of

rights or for a body like the US Supreme Court. The work of the lower courts comes under the heading of adjudication, but the US Supreme Court (and its equivalent in other countries) has the power to put aside decisions and laws emanating from the black box. This weakness further illustrates the point that it is impossible to explain a political system adequately without indicating the status and role of the key institutions that shape it.

Yet another weakness of the central model of systems theory is its democratic bias. The arrows point in only one direction, from the public through the articulation of public demands to the decision makers. In practice many policy changes, and by some definitions most policy changes, originate within the executive organs of government, either within the cabinet or within the bureaucracy. It is common for bureaucrats to persuade ministers of the need to modify policies or levy extra taxes, for the ministers to persuade elected representatives of this need, and for the elected representatives to sell the idea to the voters. In such cases the arrows would have to be reversed, which would make nonsense of the section of the diagram labelled inputs. In dictatorial systems of government, that is, in most contemporary systems of government, the great majority of policy initiatives originate with the central executive, so that the input side of the model is relatively unimportant. This fact somewhat undermines the claim made for the model that it provides a better basis than institutional analysis for the study of all political systems.

Taken together, these weaknesses considerably limit the utility of systems theory when applied to the study of politics. It offers a different language from the conventional language of mainstream political science and this has the merit of forcing students to think some things out afresh. However, the framework it offers is not really an improvement on more conventional frameworks and it certainly does not live up to the rather large claims that were made for it in the heyday of the search for a science of politics. Easton himself said this about it:

> When my volume, *The Political System*, was first published, there was a transparent need to argue the case for the construction of empirically oriented general theory in political science. It is an index of the gargantuan strides that have been made in the development of political science as a discipline that what was then an entirely appropriate subject for intense discussion has now come to be taken for granted.
>
> (Easton 1965: 3)

Easton went on to explain that by an empirically oriented theory he meant one 'that, in principle, can be reduced to testable propositions' (Easton 1965: 13). Now, what has to be emphasized is that systems theory can not be reduced to testable propositions. Certain of the rational-actor theories mentioned above can be so reduced, but systems theory cannot

be. It is true that in a later book Easton put forward some tentative attempts to generalize about the persistence or non-persistence of political systems, but he was not able to specify clear rules about how much change in a system can be accepted before it can be said not to have persisted. At one point he even suggested that there was something called the British political system that had persisted from the time of the Anglo-Saxon warlords to the twentieth century (Easton 1965: 84). It was this kind of theorizing that led Dowse and Hughes to observe that 'system non-persistence seems a highly elusive concept. The problem is that if everything may change and yet the system in some sense persists, what is the sense in which it may be said to persist?' (Dowse and Hughes 1986: 74). It must be concluded of systems theory that it offers a different language for the analysis of politics, but not a scientific theory about politics or even a set of testable hypotheses.

It follows that the modern search for a science of politics has not produced anything as ambitious as the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism. It has certainly come nowhere near validating the claim made by one writer (one among several, it should be added), that scientific predictions 'would appear to be as feasible in politics as in physics' (Sibley 1967: 60). However, it has had the advantage of bringing political scientists into co-operation with social psychologists and sociologists and thus opening the windows of the discipline to the ideas and methods generated by allied disciplines. A valuable summary of the work done on the frontiers (or common territory) of political science and sociology will be found in Dowse and Hughes, *Political Sociology* (1986).

The search has also had the merit of forcing political scientists to think carefully about the relationship between their work and their own political values. The claim of most political behaviouralists is that the scientific methods they have adopted force them to be more nearly value-free in their analyses than most mainstream political scientists have been. They have assumed that facts can and should be separated from values, which is a contention strongly supported by some schools of philosophy but strongly opposed by others. The modern philosophical movement which has supported it most strongly is logical positivism, which happened to flourish just at the time that the search for an empirically-based science of politics was getting under way. Herbert Simon declared in his famous book on *Administrative Behaviour*, first published in 1945, that 'the conclusions reached by a particular school of modern philosophy – logical positivism – will be accepted as a starting point' (Simon 1976: 45). In view of this, it will be appropriate in this chapter to indicate the central features of this philosophical outlook.

LOGICAL POSITIVISM

This philosophical movement started in Vienna in the 1930s and moved to England, where it was developed with such vigour that it came to dominate British philosophical thought for a generation. While it was never so dominant in America it was certainly influential there, partly because Rudolf Carnap moved from Vienna to Chicago and took his ideas with him, partly because American theorists were influenced by theorists in Oxford.

If David Hume can be regarded as the father of positivism, as was suggested above, he can also be regarded as the grandfather of logical positivism. The most central of the logical positivists' beliefs was the acceptance of Hume's division of theory into three categories, namely analytical theory, empirical theory, and moral or normative theory. A proposition is analytical if, like the theorems of mathematics or the propositions of formal logic, it is necessarily true. In the words of A. J. Ayer in *Language, Truth and Logic*, first published in 1936 and still in print in 1993, 'a proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions it contains' (Ayer 1946: 78). Such a proposition is devoid of factual content and cannot be either confirmed or invalidated by empirical data. It is true if the logic is correct and false otherwise. It is helpful because it demonstrates and encapsulates certain necessary connections and relationships.

An empirical proposition, on the other hand, is a proposition about factual matters that can be verified by observation. This verification principle can be expressed in either a strong or a weak form. According to the strong form, a proposition can be verified only 'if its truth could be conclusively established in experience' (Ayer 1946: 37). In Ayer's view, and here too he follows Hume, this is asking too much. As we cannot know what the future holds, it is unreasonable to demand or to claim complete certainty for an empirical proposition. Ayer prefers the weaker form of the principle, which demands only 'that some possible sense-experience' should be relevant to the task of establishing the truth or falsehood of the proposition (Ayer 1946: 31). Empirical propositions, in this view, can be invalidated by contrary experiences and evidence but can only be probably or provisionally or substantially verified by experiences and evidence that are compatible with the proposition.

In addition to the two categories of analytical propositions and empirical propositions, there are also metaphysical propositions and ethical judgements. Metaphysical propositions, such as have been the common concern of many schools of philosophy, are 'neither true nor false but literally senseless' (Ayer 1946: 31). This implies that much philosophical speculation has always been a waste of time, and Ayer makes it quite clear that

this is his view: 'The traditional disputes of philosophers', he asserts, 'are for the most part as unwarranted as they are unfruitful' (Ayer 1946: 33).

Ethical judgements are by no means senseless, but they have to be seen as the expression of personal emotions which cannot be justified or falsified in any objective way. A personal judgement cannot be justified by showing that it is commonly approved of, because there are some actions that are commonly approved of that may, nevertheless, be condemned as wrong by someone who holds a contrary view, as everyone is entitled to do. Nor can they be justified by showing that if everyone behaved in the way approved of by the person making the judgement, this would be likely to increase the sum total of human happiness, because there is no logical equivalence between the sentence 'x is good' and the sentence 'x is pleasant' (see Ayer 1946: 104–5). We simply have to accept that ethical judgements are in a category of their own and can never be proved true or false. Ayer explained his position as follows:

> In saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition.
>
> (Ayer 1946: 107–8)

Ayer describes this philosophical outlook as radical empiricism, and it is this empiricism that the logical positivists who dominated British philosophy from the 1940s to the 1960s had in common with the mainly American scholars who were seeking a science of politics in the same period. One of the central points on which they were agreed was the strict separation and independence of facts and values, as summarized in what became a catchphrase of the period, 'an "is" cannot lead to an "ought" '. If I observe that it is a bad thing that so many people in Ethiopia are starving, this is a conjunction of two quite independent propositions; the empirical proposition or assertion that many Ethiopians are starving and my personal ethical judgement that starvation is bad. Similarly, if I observe that it is a pity electoral turnout in the United States is low, this is a conjunction of an empirical assertion about electoral behaviour and a personal judgement that low turnouts are undesirable. Political scientists, to be scientific, should discover the facts and eschew the ethical judgements.

There is a good deal more to logical positivism than this, particularly the later development of linguistic analysis, but enough has been said to indicate its relevance for the attempt to create a science of politics. As a philosophical school, it had both a significant merit and two significant limitations. Its merit was to offer a simple guide to clear thinking, particu-

larly useful in a period when fascist and communist movements were justifying brutal dictatorships in terms of complex ideologies. In Britain it brought philosophical thinking within the reach of the ordinary non-graduate citizen, as evidenced by the fact that Ayer's book became a runaway best-seller and another logical positivist became a popular radio personality.

One of its limitations was that it contained no account of historical explanation, which is not mentioned at all in Ayer's book. Clearly, historians are making statements about the past that are based upon evidence but are not quite the same as the empirical generalizations produced by scientists, and the whole question of historical explanation (to be discussed in Chapter 14) was ignored by the logical positivists. Another limitation was its refusal to distinguish between various types of personal judgement. There are important differences between the statements 'I don't like plum pudding', 'I don't like Picasso's paintings', and 'I don't like to see human beings tortured', and it is really not good enough to reduce them all to examples of personal sentiments that cannot usefully be argued about. They may have a similar logical form, but there are more things to say about them than that. And in the end these limitations made logical positivism a passing phase in the history of philosophy, for it ascribed too limited a role to that discipline to satisfy academic philosophers for more than one generation.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

The only possible conclusion to this chapter is that political scientists have failed in the attempt to remodel the discipline on the lines of the natural sciences and to produce anything resembling a comprehensive science of politics. However, there is an old adage to the effect that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and it seems to be applicable in this case. The search for scientific methods has produced a number of interesting ideas and a mass of valuable data about political behaviour in various circumstances. (For a valuable guide, see Kavanagh 1983.) For this reason, we should appreciate its contributions, despite the fact that it also produced a certain amount of useless theorizing and a great many extravagant claims.

It can therefore be seen as unfortunate that in the United States it divided the political science profession, with university departments split down the middle between behaviouralists and the rest. In 1968 J. Roland Pennock said that in the previous twenty years:

> a large, productive, and able group (including the bulk of the recognized leaders of the profession) has more or less self-consciously as a group attempted to revolutionize our discipline, and that many (though by

> no means all) of the members of the profession who did not identify with them have resisted vigorously and sometimes bitterly what they often saw as a Philistine onslaught.
>
> (Pennock 1968: 40)

Political theorists, in particular, resented Dahl's much-publicized declaration that 'in the English-speaking world . . . political theory is dead' and that its students, like literary critics, are 'reduced to living off capital – other people's capital at that' (Dahl 1958: 89).

Given this kind of attack, and given that the behaviouralists and model-builders were ultimately unable to achieve their wider ambitions, an academic reaction to their work was probably inevitable. It came in the 1970s and 1980s, in the form of attacks from political theorists of the left, the right, and even (to some extent) the centre. In so far as such theorists have a common philosophical position, it is that they prefer historicism to positivism. There are a number of alternative schools of thought that will be identified, together with the concept of historicism, in the following chapter.

Chapter 14

Against a science of politics: values, historicism and hermeneutics

The attempt to create a science of politics, so popular in the 1950s and 1960s, has met with heavy criticism in later years. One line of attack has been that the claims of the behaviouralists to be value-free in their research were actually false claims, so that the result was to promote the author's values without any admission by the author that this was being done and without any reasoned normative arguments to justify the values. A second line of attack has been the claim that the values secretly promoted by the behaviouralists and model-makers are undesirable values. A third and much more basic line of attack has been the claim that it is a philosophical error to suppose that political behaviour can be properly explained in terms of empirical generalizations similar in form to those of the natural sciences. Each of these lines of criticism will now be examined.

BEHAVIOURALIST VALUES

The proposition that the work of political behaviouralists only pretends to be value-free was made as early as 1962 by Leo Strauss, arguably the most eminent American political theorist of his generation: 'The alleged value-free analysis of political preference', he declared, 'is controlled by an unavowed commitment to . . . a particular version of liberal democracy' (Strauss 1962: 326). Charles Taylor reached a similar conclusion in a more detailed and careful study of the work of leading behaviouralists (in particular, S. M. Lipset) published in 1967. Empirical studies of politics, he asserted, are based on conceptual frameworks which include some factors and exclude others; some of the excluded factors would be thought highly relevant by scholars approaching the same set of actions or recorded opinions with a different conceptual framework; and the choice of one framework rather than another is 'inextricably connected to a certain set of values' (Taylor 1967: 39).

Each possible framework of explanation contains or implies a 'value-slope', making some generalizations and evaluative conclusions more likely than others, and the only way in which empirical scholars can avoid this

kind of bias is by sticking to 'the narrow-gauge discoveries which, just because they are, taken alone, compatible with a great number of political frameworks, can bathe in an atmosphere of value neutrality' (Taylor 1967: 40–1 and 57). More tolerant than Strauss, Taylor commends the attempt to avoid bias, but believes that attempts to make generalizations that are significantly more ambitious than 'Catholics in Detroit tend to vote Democrat' are bound to involve the scholar in some kind of normative position.

Another careful analysis of the work of leading behaviouralists, this time focusing on Robert Dahl, was made by Quentin Skinner in 1973. He demonstrated that Dahl and his colleagues, hard though they try to be value-neutral, end up by describing the situation they analysed as democratic, which is necessarily to commend it, even though this involves using a particular definition of democracy which attaches little value to public participation (see Skinner 1973).

Other theorists have joined in the attack, and in 1976 R. J. Bernstein summarized it by saying that 'when we examine those empirical theories that have been advanced, we discover again and again that they are not value-neutral, but reflect deep ideological biases and secrete controversial value positions' (Bernstein 1976: 228). And it is impossible to read all these criticisms without concluding that their main thrust is justified.

The second line of attack has insisted not only that the work of the behaviouralists and economic model-builders embodied political values that were largely covert, but also that these values are undesirable. The lead in this was also taken by Strauss, who produced a veritable broadside against what he called 'the new political science'. This science, he alleged, strengthened:

> the most dangerous proclivities of democracy . . . By teaching in effect the equality of literally all desires, it teaches in effect that there is nothing that a man ought to be ashamed of . . . By teaching the equality of all values, by denying that there are things which are intrinsically high and others which are intrinsically low . . . it unwittingly contributes to the victory of the gutter.
>
> (Strauss 1962: 326)

This was clearly an attack from the right, but it was quickly followed by attacks from the left. It is a characteristic of contemporary divisions within the discipline of political science that the scientists tend to be in the political centre whereas their critics tend, with a few exceptions, to be either conservatives or radicals. One attack from the left was published in 1963. In this, Graeme Duncan and Steven Lukes argued that the empirical theorists of democracy had been led by their fear of totalitarian dictatorship to be unduly worried about ideological conflict and to place their highest value on a consensual political system in which most citizens were

content to choose between rival teams of leaders every few years. In this way, it was said, they were implicitly rejecting the participatory values elaborated (in different ways) by Rousseau and J. S. Mill and were led to a defence of political apathy. Not only did this slant destroy their claim to neutrality, it was also an undesirable slant with conservative implications (see Duncan and Lukes 1963).

This article was followed by a rather more radical critique by Christian Bay, who broadened the attack to include economic model-builders as well as empirical theorists of democracy. Much behavioural literature, he suggests, is 'profoundly conservative', not in the traditional way that Strauss is a conservative but in the sense that it contains an 'antipolitical dimension'. This dimension is the assumption that American politics 'is and must always remain primarily a system of rules for peaceful battles between competing private interests, and not an arena for the struggle toward a more humane and more rationally organized society' (Bay 1965: 44).

In the following year J. L. Walker joined the attack, declaring that empirical theorists of democracy had abandoned the basic ideals of what he calls the 'classical theory of democracy'. As has been pointed out in Chapter 4, this is a highly elusive concept, but Walker describes it as 'the familiar doctrine of popular rule, patterned after the New England town meeting' (Walker 1966: 285). The behaviouralists have replaced popular participation by 'stability and efficiency as the prime goals of democracy'. By doing this, they had incurred the danger of becoming 'sophisticated apologists for the existing political order' (Walker 1966: 289).

It cannot be denied that there is some substance in these criticisms. Even the work of Robert Dahl, so careful that it escapes most of them, has been described by Skinner as involving 'an act of political conservatism' in that it 'serves to commend the recently prevailing values and practices of a political system like that of the United States, and it constitutes a form of argument against those who have sought to question the democratic character of those values and practices' (Skinner 1973: 303–4).

Despite this, it is possible to question how damaging the criticisms are. There is not much cash value in Bay's wish that people should struggle for a 'more humane and rationally organized society'. Logical positivists could quite reasonably describe this as 'a hurray phrase', with no clear meaning. The New England town meeting that Walker takes to be a desirable model is not really a viable model for government in the modern state, particularly if we are discussing a state with over two hundred million citizens. It might well be argued that it is more helpful to base one's ideals on a model that is actually viable in the modern world than to hanker constantly after a dream that has been outmoded by history.

More generally, the suggestion that writers who do not criticize an existing system of government are implicitly defending it, and can therefore

be charged with conservatism, implies that political scientists should all be engaged in furthering ideological positions. Any decent university library contains hundreds of books, written by liberals and social democrats, that analyse systems of government and public administration without subjecting them to ideological criticism. Are all these liberals and socialists to be classified as conservatives because they did not think it appropriate to impose their personal political views on their material? It would be a sad day for political science if this were to become the rule.

THE TROUBLE WITH POSITIVISM

The third line of attack is more philosophical and more important. It is an attack on positivism itself, rather than on particular examples of research inspired by positivist beliefs. The logic of positivism is that social and political behaviour is determined by the interaction of objective factors that can be identified, so that if a particular combination of factors is repeated, the resulting behaviour can be predicted. The relationship between the factors and the behaviour can be expressed in law-like generalizations similar in form to those by which progress is made in the natural sciences. For this to be true, the social and political laws must be universally valid, like those of the natural sciences. They may be probabilistic, to allow for eccentricities of behaviour, but they must not vary in an unpredictable way over space or time.

Now, in practice, a great deal of social and political behaviour varies from one community to another and varies unpredictably over time even within the same community. If it is variable and unpredictable it cannot be bound by scientific laws. To illustrate the point, let us suppose that a shipping company plans to build a new cruise liner and appoints a naval architect to advise on the structural and external design of the vessel and a sociologist to advise on the internal design and fittings. Both advisers would rely partly upon the experience of existing cruise liners when formulating their advice. The naval architect would use laws about the relationships between a ship's displacement, hull design, engine power and stability. If these laws had been arrived at correctly, they would be correct for all ships and all periods.

The sociologist, in contrast, would find that the ideal arrangements for internal design would vary according to the nationality of the expected passengers. American passengers like to be offered lectures and religious services, so that an auditorium and some chapels would be desirable. British passengers like to gamble and French passengers to play bridge, so these tastes must be catered for. Italian passengers have no objection to noise and would expect to have loudspeakers in each cabin to tell them about the day's activities. There is no formula that indicates the ideal

arrangement for a national mixture of passengers. Judgement and even guesswork is required, not the application of scientific laws.

In addition to this problem, there are variations over time in the tastes of passengers. In the 1950s there was a general demand for accommodation to be divided strictly into classes, each with its own set meals, whereas in the 1990s the fashion is for one-class ships, though with variable prices in the restaurants. However, there was no scientific way of predicting in the 1950s when, or even if, this change in fashion would take place.

This example has a clear parallel in the problems of studying comparative government. It is useful to study similar systems of government side by side, or one after another, because the student gets to know what to look for and the differences between countries raise interesting questions for exploration. However, the number of cross-national generalizations with predictive value that have emerged from a century of studies in comparative government is absolutely trivial. Where significant constitutional similarities exist it may be possible to generalize about institutional arrangements that are made appropriate, as in K. C. Wheare's classic study of the institutional requirements of federal systems (see Wheare 1946). However, it is much more difficult to produce worthwhile generalizations about political behaviour. It could be said that a federal constitution requires a supreme court to settle conflicts of jurisdiction between the national and the state governments, but it is not possible to predict what judgements different courts will reach. In the 1870s, for example, it was not possible to predict that judicial decisions in the United States would make that federation progressively more centralized whereas judicial decisions in Canada would make that federation progressively less centralized.

The obvious difficulties of making cross-national generalizations about political behaviour have led students to concentrate on the more modest task of making generalizations that are confined to particular countries. Even these tend to vary over time, however, and thus not to have much predictive value. The safest kind of generalization to make is one about voting behaviour, because there are so many actors that individual peculiarities tend to cancel one another out. However, there are unpredictable changes in voting behaviour. It was true for about a century that most white voters in the southern states supported the Democrats because of memories of the civil war, but it has ceased to be true since the 1970s. It was true from the 1930s until the late 1960s that the great majority of Scottish industrial workers voted Labour, but it ceased to be true in the early 1970s when many of them switched to the Scottish National Party. Such generalizations often have explanatory value while they are true, but there is nothing scientific about a law stating that a given body of voters will behave in such and such a way until they change their minds.

These objections to positivism apply to all forms of social behaviour, but are particularly relevant to political behaviour because full-time poli-

ticians are few in number. Economic laws depend for their validity on the predictability of economic behaviour by vast numbers of consumers, merchants and industrialists. That they are somewhat unreliable, and thus not to be equated with the laws of natural science, is made clear by the repeated failures of economic policy that occur. Nevertheless, at least the number of actors involved is large enough for individual quirks and miscalculations to cancel out. The same might be said, though less certainly, about certain types of sociological generalization, such as those about the factors influencing divorce rates and suicide rates. In each case millions of people are involved, so that individual peculiarities are submerged in the mass and statistical correlations are based on large numbers. However, in the realm of politics the mass of people do little apart from voting and joining pressure groups, while governmental decisions are made by a handful of political actors whose personal ambitions and peculiarities often affect the decisions that emerge from their interaction. When we study the behaviour of Cabinet ministers we are not dealing with a random sample of a sizeable population, only with a limited number of rather unusual individuals.

All experience indicates that the behaviour of leading figures in political situations is only influenced, not determined, by objective factors such as their age, sex, class and economic circumstances. Political leaders have motives, emotions and personal ideals that influence their behaviour in ways that cannot always be predicted. Their perception of the options open to them in any given situation may not be identical with the perception that observers have of their options, and their choice is a personal decision. It follows that each political move is a unique event that cannot be understood simply as the consequence of the interaction of objective factors, important though these factors may have been. Political actors have intentions, and a full explanation of the event must include an account of the intentions of the actors.

Now, political scientists who study a succession of unique events are doing something closely akin to the work of historians, who also study a succession of unique events, for there is no philosophical difference between a unique event that took place two hundred years ago and one that occurred two months ago. The student of very recent events may have the advantage of being able to interview participants, but he lacks the historian's advantage of having access to diaries and letters. These are practical details that only marginally affect the character of the explanation that is given, and the essential point is that explanations by political scientists have much more in common with historical explanation than with scientific explanation.

Admittedly, there is one philosopher of history who minimizes the difference between the two types of explanation. Carl Hempel asserts that whenever historians point to a causal relationship between two events they

are relying on unstated 'covering laws' which have the character of scientific generalizations. Thus, if it is said that a Prime Minister called an early election because the polls showed that his or her party had a substantial lead, the historian is relying on two covering laws, namely that opinion polls are reliable guides to voting behaviour in subsequent elections and that Prime Ministers always put electoral victory above other considerations. However, most philosophers of history would say that Hempel's covering laws are not scientific laws at all, but merely appeals to common sense and common experience that may not hold good in every situation. To understand conventional views about historical explanation, it will be helpful to explain the concept of historicism.

HISTORICISM

Whereas positivism is derived from a combination of French rationalism and British empiricism, historicism has its origins in German romanticism. It is not so clear a concept as positivism, for it has been used to label two theoretical tendencies that are actually very different in character. One of these is defined by the *OED* as the 'tendency to regard historical development as the most basic aspect of human existence', the other as the 'belief that historical events are governed by laws'. This difference is itself best explained in historical terms.

The writer who has the best claim to be regarded as the father of the first type of historicism is J. G. Herder, who was also the father of the theory of nationalism. Writing in the 1770s and 1780s, Herder reacted not against positivism, for that had not yet been developed, but against the universalist assumptions of the theorists of the Enlightenment that were later to be taken for granted by positivists. Friedrich Meineche captured these well when he said that Enlightenment thinkers regarded individuals as rather like leaves in a forest, all separate but all predictably moved in the same direction by the wind. Herder's view of human behaviour was both more communalistic and more particularistic. People belonged to national groups, or *volks*, each of which had its own traditions, habits and values.

It was wrong of Enlightenment thinkers, who were mainly French, to believe that everyone in the world would behave (or ought to behave) like Frenchmen. On the contrary, Germans behaved like Germans and Italians like Italians. To understand their behaviour it was necessary to understand the history, traditions and values of their societies. And to understand the significance of historical events, it was Herder's view, as summarized by F. M. Barnard, that 'the historian had to re-live the past, to reconstruct and re-think for himself its thoughts and feelings, and thus to recapture the spirit of the age which he was studying' (Barnard 1965: 110).

This is the essence of the first type of historicism, as is the belief, also

expressed first by Herder, that national sets of values have to be understood and accepted for what they are, there being no universal set of values by which national values can be assessed. As Berlin has put it, Herder believed 'not merely in the multiplicity but in the incommensurability of the values of different cultures and societies', so that notions about an ideal society 'are intrinsically incoherent and meaningless' (Berlin 1965: 54). One implication of this kind of view is that the task of the historian who studies cultures other than his own is a difficult one of interpretation and understanding. At the end of the eighteenth century J. G. Fichte continued where Herder left off, giving this kind of approach a more overtly nationalist slant by stressing the importance of language in forming a national culture and then asserting that the German language was more pure and therefore better than other European languages. Fichte also took the view that history could be seen as in some sense the unfolding of divine will.

Fichte's ideas about a divine will are rather confusing, but they can perhaps be seen as a step towards the more elaborate theories of Hegel, who developed the view that the sequence of historical events in the life of a nation, which proceeds by a dialectical process of resolving contradictions, should be seen not as random but as the manifestation of the world-historical spirit as it unfolded. There is reason in history, declared Hegel: 'That history . . . is founded on an essential and actual aim, which actually is, and will be, realised in it – the Plan of Providence; that, in short, there is Reason in History, must be decided on strictly philosophical grounds' (quoted Popper 1962: 45). This attitude is at first sight mystifying, and there is no space in this book to attempt an explanation of it in philosophical terms. Its relevance to political science is not direct, for few political scientists take it seriously, but indirect, in that it played a significant role in forming Marx's ideas about dialectical materialism.

That the march of historical events had an inner logic was a fundamental constituent of Marx's thought, but instead of identifying the driving force of historical development as a world-historical spirit Marx identified it as the changing character of the economic system and the relations of classes to the means of production. There was indeed an inevitability about historical progress, according to the theories of the mature Marx and Engels, and it could be explained in terms that were not at all mystifying. The way they explained it has been summarized in the previous chapter. In Popper's early writings, this theory is said to be a form of historicism, closely related to Hegel's historicism and equally mistaken. (For Popper's attacks on this form of historicism, see Popper 1957 and 1962.) The cause of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge, declared Popper; we cannot predict the future growth of knowledge; and therefore we cannot predict the future course of history. It was put as simply a matter of logic.

Almost all contemporary scholars would agree that theories of historical inevitability are misleading, and this is no longer a real issue. The question that Popper's work raises is whether he was correct in calling Marx's theories a form of historicism. There was clearly an historical link, sketched out in the barest terms in the previous paragraphs, between the ideas of Herder and the ideas of Marx and Engels, but their beliefs were so totally different that it seems unhelpful to place too much emphasis on this. Because the link existed, it is not entirely unreasonable to describe dialectical materialism as a form of historicism, but if this nomenclature is used it is essential to distinguish between Herder's emphasis on understanding the spirit of the age in historical interpretation, which might be labelled historicism type A, and Marx's scheme of predictable historical development, which could be labelled historicism type B.

For my part, I would prefer to reserve the term historicism for Herder's version and to regard dialectical materialism as a form of positivism, as explained in Chapter 13. Theories of historical inevitability will be ignored in what follows, not only because it is confusing to describe them as examples of historicism but also because they are in practice quite unhelpful as a guide to the real world. Dialectical materialism, which is by far the most ambitious of them, has been shown to be wrong as a guide to practice. Other more modest attempts to predict the future have repeatedly been falsified by events. Nobody in the 1970s, to take only the most recent and obvious example, predicted that the Cold War would be over by 1989 or that the Soviet Union would have disintegrated by the beginning of 1992.

If we assume that the political scientist's task is to make sense of historical events and developments, what methodological conclusions follow from the assumption and what can be learned from the philosophy of history? One lesson that historicists draw is that cross-national analysis of political behaviour is an exercise fraught with difficulties. To understand political behaviour in a period different from that of the writer it is necessary to understand 'the spirit of the age', meaning the whole bundle of assumptions, traditions and values that shaped behaviour in that period. It is said to be equally true that to understand political behaviour in a society different from that of the writer it is necessary to understand the assumptions, traditions and values of that society. This can be done by the scholar who studies each country separately and acquires insights into each country's political culture, its assumptions about political authority and leadership, its beliefs about public participation in politics and individual rights, its readiness to tolerate some forms of corruption but not others. However, cross-national surveys rarely give full weight to national differences of political culture, and cross-national indexes are apt to conceal them. Most scholars who regard themselves as historicists believe that the whole field of comparative government has to be regarded with suspicion.

Another lesson that historicists draw is the difficulty of tracing cause and effect when studying political decisions. The study of historical documents like diaries, memoirs and letters reveals that political actors not only have a variety of motives but also differ in their appreciation of the significance and probable consequences of their actions. The academic historian is customarily cautious about drawing the conclusion that one event or development caused another, because his studies have taught him that between the first event and the second there were a number of individual decisions based upon mixed motives and imperfect understandings of the situation, so that the second event often appears to the scholar to have been as much a matter of chance as a matter of causal determination. It is argued that political scientists who draw conclusions about the causal relationships between very recent events are apt to be over-rational in their assumptions about the behaviour of the individuals who shaped the events.

For similar reasons, historicists deplore the use of economic models in political science. The models are based upon assumptions about the rationality and single-mindedness of political actors that are unwarranted, it is said. A study of history teaches one that people are not always rational about politics and often act from a mixture of motives. They may be calculating their personal advantage when they make decisions, but they may also be influenced by a sense of duty or an attachment to tradition. That they may have a confused sense of duty or a misunderstanding of tradition makes the assessment of their motives, and thus the prediction of their behaviour, even more difficult.

There are, of course, differences between historicists. Recent British thinking about historiography has been greatly influenced by the writings of R. G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott, who were philosophical idealists. Collingwood has said that 'all history is the history of thought' (Collingwood 1939: 110), meaning not that all history is intellectual history but that the essential task of the historian is to reconstruct what was going on in the minds of key political actors when they acted in the way that they did. Economic and social factors are deemed irrelevant unless the actor in question can be shown to have been influenced by his knowledge of them. Oakeshott has decried the tendency of political scientists (and some historians) to engage in a backwards look at history, assessing what happened in the light of what came later. The scholar should stick closely to the facts as they happened, not fit them into a scheme of his own. One should not say that 'the Pope's intervention changed the course of events', because the Pope's intervention was part of the course of events. One should not say that 'the effect of the Boer War was to make clear the necessity for reform in the British Army', because the Boer War was followed by all sorts of events and the reforms in the British Army had all sorts of antecedents (see Oakeshott: 1962 147–54).

This understanding of historical method is, however, not the only kind of understanding available. French historians of the '*annales* school' look for historical examples of changes in material culture and social structure. Historians in the Marxist tradition look for changes in the structure of the economy that were followed by changes in the relationships between social classes. It is important to learn from the criticisms and contributions of historicists, but better not to become trapped in one particular view of the philosophy of history.

HERMENEUTICS

This is an ancient concept, much older than historicism, that suddenly came into fashion among political theorists in the 1980s. The fashion may or may not be long lived, but the concept deserves our brief attention because it illuminates certain trends in post-structural and post-modern scholarship.

The *OED* defines hermeneutics as 'the art or science of interpretation, especially of Scripture'. The term carries with it the connotation of a text that is not simple or self-explanatory, but needs sympathetic and constructive interpretation to make its significance clear, to 'bring to light an underlying coherence or sense' (Taylor 1985: 15). It also carries with it the connotation of a particular audience for whom the interpretation is made; an audience using a particular language and living in a particular culture at a particular period of history. For hermeneuticists concerned with literary criticism – and the concept has become fashionable in this branch of scholarship as well as among political scientists – it is a mistake to think of a definitive interpretation of a text as if it were good for all time. Hermeneuticists are to some extent audience focused, emphasizing the act of explaining the significance of a text (or a body of texts, or a set of recorded actions) in such a way that the understanding of it by a particular audience will be enhanced.

The view that a hermeneutic approach is the best approach to the study of human social behaviour is associated with the name of Wilhelm Dilthey, a German historian and social philosopher who wrote in the later decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. He believed it to be a mistake to assume, as Comte had done, that the social sciences could be modelled on the natural sciences. Because human behaviour is purposive behaviour, it could properly be understood only by understanding what people believed they were doing and what questions they were responding to. For this reason, biographies may provide better insights into the past than more formal works of historiography. Dilthey emphasized the importance of *verstehen* in interpreting human behaviour, this being a German word that has no exact equivalent in English and is best translated as sympathetic and insightful understanding.

This outlook is entirely compatible with the outlook of Idealists like Collingwood and Oakeshott, but whereas they were concerned simply with the interpretation of historical events, as one followed another, Dilthey claimed that *verstehen* was the appropriate method for the entire range of human studies, including the study of social and political systems as whole working systems of relationships. Dilthey also believed that, as the categories we use to explain behaviour undergo subtle changes over time, history would have to be re-written for each generation. This would have the further advantage that it would enable the historian to assess the contemporary consequences of what had happened. Interpretation in the human studies should mean not only an assessment of the meaning of events in their own time but also, as H. P. Rickman put it in his introduction to one of Dilthey's works, 'an assessment of these events in the light of the historian's own age, that is, in terms of their consequences in time' (Dilthey 1961: 50). Dilthey, that is, encouraged the 'backwards look' at history that Oakeshott has dismissed as unhistorical, but which most social and political scientists believe to be illuminating and useful.

A contemporary hermeneuticist is the German philosopher, H. G. Gadamer, of whom it has been said that 'for him, the purpose of hermeneutics is not to put forward rules for "objectively valid" understanding but to conceive understanding itself as comprehensively as possible' . . . to understand 'more deeply, more truly' (Palmer 1969: 215). The contemporary move towards hermeneutics in various branches of scholarship can therefore be itself interpreted as a move towards a more humane and subjective, perhaps even romantic, approach to study, as distinct from the emphasis on rationality and objectivity that characterized scholarship in earlier post-war decades.

The emphasis on the meaning and purpose of human actions is repeated in the work of all social theorists who are sympathetic to hermeneutics. Thus, Taylor points out that for political behaviouralists a vote for a motion is simply that, a vote to be counted, whereas for hermeneuticists there is much more to explore: 'in voting for the motion I am also saving the honour of my party, or defending the value of free speech, or vindicating public morality, or saving civilization from breakdown' (Taylor 1985: 29). Ball has asserted that in practice political scientists are constantly engaged in the interpretation of actions, but that many of them do it less well than they should because of their commitment to a more scientific mode of explanation that requires them to downplay their interpretive skills in favour of using measurable data (see Ball 1987: 97–104).

Oakeshott, though he never described himself as a hermeneuticist, revealed his sympathy with this approach when discussing the ideal syllabus for courses in foreign or comparative government. He said that a foreign system of government could be regarded as a text to be interpreted, and he deplored the fact that most universities emphasized courses on the

Soviet system in their undergraduate syllabus, because this was a peculiarly difficult text to understand: 'Why should a School of Politics go out of its way to choose for undergraduate study particularly obscure and corrupt "texts" . . . when well-edited "texts", like the politics of France or Sweden or the USA or Spain, are available?' (Oakeshott 1962: 332).

In contemporary work in political science, a sympathy with the hermeneutic approach has led some scholars to emphasize the significance of what an older generation of scholars would regard as anecdotal evidence. If the concern is with welfare policies, for instance, a mainstream scholar would tend to concentrate on party programmes, welfare legislation, and the administration of welfare services; a behaviouralist might correlate patterns of welfare expenditure with social variables such as gross national product per head; and a radical hermeneuticist might be concerned to show how the services appeared to the actual clients, using long interviews with a single mother on welfare to gain understanding of her problems and attitudes to the system. Some would describe studies of this latter kind as 'counter-hegemonic', in that they view government from the bottom up, through the eyes of those on whom government acts, rather than from the top down, tracing the behaviour of people in power. Another way of describing them would be as attempts to provide contemporary 'genealogies', in the sense of the term used by Foucault, as explained in Chapter 9. They are perhaps best regarded not as alternatives but as supplements to institutional and behavioural analyses, adding an extra dimension to our understanding of the situation.

IN CONCLUSION

It is evident that in recent decades the divisions of methods between students of politics have involved philosophical disagreements of some importance. On the whole, this should be welcomed as stimulating and educative. It may seem unfortunate if academic departments become divided over methodological questions, but sensible scholars are generally able to handle such disagreements in an amicable fashion. What is important is to realize that differing approaches complement one another. It is one of the great merits of political science as a discipline that its students are expected both to be numerate and to be literate, and in addition to have some capacity for philosophical reflection. There are very few academic disciplines for which this claim could be made. Any attempt to impose methodological orthodoxy on the subject is therefore best resisted.

The source of most of the philosophical controversy has been the positivist claim that the study of politics, if based upon scientific methods, can become a predictive science. This claim is now pretty well exhausted. It has been thoroughly attacked by normative theorists, and in any case it has not worked. Political scientists have displayed only a very limited

ability to predict the future, not noticeably greater than some journalists and other commentators. An ironical example of this was provided by the student protests and riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when political science professors were often unable to predict how their own students would behave in the following month. After the event they were perhaps better than other scholars in explaining why the disturbances had occurred, but before the event they were not conspicuously better in foreseeing when or how they would occur.

Disappointing though this has been to some scholars, it should not be used to condemn behavioural research. The real object of all the social sciences is explanation, not prediction, and many of the behavioural studies have had considerable explanatory value. They have added greatly to our knowledge of how the political process operates, and it would be flying in the face of the evidence to pretend otherwise.

The claim that political science can be and should be value-free has also taken a considerable beating in recent years, almost as much as the claim that it can be a predictive science. The normative theorists have won this particular controversy. This is not too damaging to the discipline, however, for very few mainstream political scientists ever made the claim. We have to face the fact that in the English-speaking world most books and articles on political science are written by liberal democratic authors about the politics of liberal democracies for readers who are themselves mostly liberal democrats. In these circumstances it does not matter too much if the authors exhibit liberal democratic values. It is better if they admit this, of course, rather than pretend to an Olympian detachment. But what is important is not whether authors try to be value-free or are openly committed but whether they are honest and fair minded in the presentation of their material. Skilled readers can usually tell when an author is deliberately slanting his arguments and presenting only those facts that support his side of the case, and it is certainly one of the objects of an education in political science to impart this kind of skill to students.

There are, of course, differing emphases possible within a commitment to liberal democracy, and differing degrees of satisfaction with existing systems of democratic government. The claim of many critics is that the majority of writers are too complacent about the level of public participation in politics. This is a reasonable point of view, though the way it is presented is often questionable. It is no use appealing to a supposed classical theory of democracy, for in fact, as shown in Chapter 4 of this book, there is no such thing, only a variety of differing theories. It is equally useless to lament the passing of the New England town meeting, for population growth, urbanization and the increased centralization of government have combined to make that kind of institution irrelevant to modern needs. The case for greater participation needs to be based on an

examination of the various options that are viable in the modern state, and these have been discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, and more generally, I believe that all who write about politics and all who teach political science or civics should pay more attention than seems to be common to the conceptual confusions that are so evident in much political debate. A study of politics may or may not make people wiser than their contemporaries and it may or may not make them better at predicting the future, but it ought to add clarity to the way they present their arguments. It is to the object of promoting clarity that this book has been devoted.

Bibliographic notes

The scope of this book has been considerable and there is an immense literature on the topics it has covered. In the thought that some readers may want to pursue some of the questions further and would welcome guidance about reading, I have compiled the following brief notes on the books that in my view would be most helpful. The notes are arranged in the same order as the chapters of the book.

On nationalism, two elegant and insightful essays have been published in recent years, of which Elie Kedourie's *Nationalism* is strong on the philosophical bases of nationalist theories and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* is strong on the sociological bases of nationalist movements. A brisk summary of nationalist theory and a discussion of the case for and against nationalism and the nation-state will be found in Chapters 2 and 3 of Birch, *Nationalism and National Integration*. Chapter 4 of this book summarizes the process and problems of national integration. The best of several books on global interdependence is probably J. N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence*. On the highly topical issue of secession, Allan Buchanan's *Secession* is interesting and stimulating.

On Max Weber's classification of the types of political authority and legitimacy, the best brief guide is Chapter 3 of Frank Parkin's book on *Max Weber*.

On theories of democracy, a good selection of articles will be found in G. Duncan (ed.), *Democratic Theory and Practice*. There are numerous other books on democratic theory by academics, and in my judgement the following three are the most helpful guides to the issues involved.

In chronological order, the first of these is Henry Mayo's *An Introduction to Democratic Theory*. Mayo defines democracy in institutional rather than idealist terms, which some will regard as a limitation of his book. He says that: 'to define democracy in ideal terms . . . and to read into it all of our ideal ends, in all their diversity and conflict, is to rob the theory of all operational or empirical content'.

His justification of institutional democracy as the best practicable system of government for the modern state rests upon the claim that the insti-

tution and procedures listed can be expected to serve the following values. First, they provide for 'the peaceful voluntary adjustment of disputes'; second, they provide a method of peaceful change and an orderly succession of rulers; third, they protect diversity in society; fourth, they tend to minimize injustice; and fifth, they protect and promote human freedom.

This approach may be said to constitute a minimal justification for democracy. The claims are modest and sensibly expressed. They do not include claims about human equality, human self-development, civic virtue, or the maximization of the public interest, all of which may be regarded as possible candidates for inclusion in a book on democratic values. Most democratic theorists would agree with Mayo's book, so far as it goes, but many of them would want to go further.

A different approach has been taken by Jack Lively in a book entitled simply *Democracy*. Lively is more of an idealist than Mayo and states that democracy cannot be defined 'in terms of particular institutions or methods but only in terms of the ends which are to be maximized'. He goes on to discuss the importance of popular control of decision makers, of some degree of equality of influence between groups, of popular participation in public administration, and of the protection of minorities. His book, though short, includes thoughtful discussions of the democratic ideas of Rousseau, the Utilitarians, modern pluralists, and economic theorists. It is a penetrating little book, full of theoretical insights.

The third book I recommend is Giovanni Sartori's *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. This is the fullest, most sophisticated and most philosophical treatise on democratic theory ever written. All relevant issues are discussed and, while not everyone will agree with the author's views, all readers will gain from following his reasoning.

On political representation, H. F. Pitkin (ed.), *Representation*, gives useful extracts from the works of classical theorists which touch on the topic. Pitkin's own book on *The Concept of Representation* is the most thorough philosophical inquiry into the question, while A. H. Birch's *Representation* provides an alternative analysis.

On political participation, Geraint Parry's *Participation in Politics* is a very sensible collection of essays, Carole Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory* is the best argument in favour of extended participation, and the book on *Participatory Democracy* by Cook and Morgan provides a comprehensive and balanced treatment of both the arguments for and against this style of politics and the attempts to put it into practice.

On liberty and freedom, there are three texts that have become classics. John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* is the finest statement of the case for maximizing the liberty of the individual, liberty being defined as the absence of restraint. Chapter 4 of the essay explains a criterion for defining the proper limits of state action in a way that has never been bettered. The best presentation of the case for the alternative view, that a higher

form of liberty consists in the opportunity to make the most of one's potential, including the opportunity to participate in shaping the general will of society, will be found in Chapters 5 and 6 of Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. Finally, a scintillating account of the differences between the negative and positive views of liberty, which comes down firmly in favour of the former, has been provided by Isaiah Berlin in his essay on *Two Concepts of Liberty*, usefully reprinted in *Four Essays on Liberty*.

On the subject of rights there is a large contemporary literature, much of it vitiated by special pleading for the particular rights that the author favours, without presenting a sound theoretical basis for the assertions. I would include Dworkin's *Taking Rights Seriously* in that category, for reasons explained in Chapter 8 above, but it can nevertheless be recommended as an influential example of the several recent attempts to base liberalism on an assertion of individual rights rather than on the ideas of the British Utilitarians. For a discussion of the reasons why the idea of natural rights was attacked by the Utilitarians and was out of fashion in most of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, readers should consult Jeremy Waldron's *Nonsense Upon Stilts*. On the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the best short commentary is that by Maurice Cranston in *Human Rights Today*.

On the question of minority rights, much of the literature is confusing, but Buchanan's book on *Secession* contains a scrupulous discussion of the circumstances which may make secession morally justifiable.

On political power, there is a valuable symposium of the debates of the 1960s in Bell, Edwards and Wagner, *Political Power: a Reader in Theory and Research*. Part I of Bachrach and Baratz, *Power and Poverty* is also useful, and Kenneth Boulding has produced a thoughtful essay on the subject in *Three Faces of Power*. Steven Lukes, *Power: a Radical View* is essential reading, while Keith Dowding, *Rational Choice and Political Power* provides an alternative way of approaching the subject.

On pluralism, there are no recent books that I want to recommend, for it is more satisfactory to go straight to the sources of the concept. The first (and most influential) advocacy of American sectional pluralism will be found in Papers 10 and 51 of *The Federalist*, by Hamilton, Jay and Madison. The most influential source of the theory of pressure-group pluralism is David Truman's *The Governmental Process*, of which Chapters 1, 2 and 16 can be particularly recommended. The study which most influenced the debate of the 1960s on pluralism is Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*, in which Chapters 7, 12, 27 and 28 contain the essence of the argument.

On the theories of the so-called 'classical elitists', namely Pareto, Mosca, Michels and (later) Mills, there are two short books that are very useful. Parry's *Political Elites* is by a political theorist who is concerned about

how elitist theories can be tested and who discusses the relationship between elitism and pluralism. T. B. Bottomore's *Elites and Society* is by a sociologist who includes a summary of Marxist ideas on the topic and discusses the concept of a ruling class. On the Marxist theory that the state is largely a servant of the interests of the dominant economic class in society, the most thorough treatment is that in Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society*. Useful commentaries will be found in Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State* and in Cox, Furlong and Page, *Power in Capitalist Societies*, while Miliband provides a neo-Marxist interpretation of the situation in Britain in *Capitalist Democracy in Britain*.

On corporatism, the essential articles will be found in Schmitter and Lehmbruch, *Trends Towards Corporatist Intermediation*.

On dialectical materialism, the simplest guides are the *Communist Manifesto* and Engels's short book entitled *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. An important and original discussion of the doctrine will be found in Parts 3 and 4 of Robert Tucker's *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*.

On the behavioural movement, it is best to look at collections of research articles, to see what has actually been done, before reading commentaries on the movement. Two of the most useful collections are Eulau, Eldersveld and Janowitz (eds), *Political Behaviour: a Reader in Theory and Practice* and Heinz Eulau (ed.), *Political Behaviour in America: New Directions*. An assessment by a scholar broadly sympathetic to the movement will be found in Dennis Kavanagh, *Political Science and Political Behaviour*, and an assessment by a critic is given in Chapter 5 of David Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science*.

On rational-actor theories and models, a clear and sympathetic summary is available in Michael Laver, *The Politics of Private Desires*, while a more critical analysis will be found in Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*.

On logical positivism, the reader can hardly do better than read the most successful and influential example of this approach, namely A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*.

The tendency in recent years for political theorists to attack the assumptions of positivists and behaviouralists is well exemplified in the articles by Terence Ball, Quentin Skinner and Charles Taylor cited in Chapter 14. An interesting essay on the contribution of radicals to this reaction will be found in Chapter 6 of David Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science*. More generally, readers would benefit by sampling the essays collected in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*; Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*; and Quentin Skinner (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*.

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