Michael Freeden

The POLITICAL THEORY of POLITICAL THINKING
The Anatomy of a Practice

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The Anatomy of a Practice

MICHAEL FREEDEN

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To Irene, as ever

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Introduction

'Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician'[1]

If you access the online *Oxford English Dictionary* and type in 'politics', the first definition you see in that prime repository of the English language is 'a treatise on the science or theory of politics; *spec.* the treatise written by Aristotle'; in other words, politics is the title of a literary artefact. What Aristotle actually thought about politics is not revealed. The implication may of course be that we ought to read carefully what comes after the title—'meta-politics', as it were. But lest we immediately draw the conclusion that Aristotle is still the prime authority on the subject, and his illustrious tome its be-all and end-all, it may be noted that an identical definition—again admittedly not the only one—is to be found in the 1909 edition of the *OED*, whose compilers had emerged out of a cultural world in which Aristotle dominated the academic curriculum not only of philosophy and classics but of the science of politics, as it was then known. And yet, when we think again, there is something incidentally apposite in invoking Aristotle, as the first major integrator of the study of politics in both its normative and its empirical dimensions.[2]

The word 'politics' has an unfortunate reputational problem that will be discussed in Chapter One. But politics is not something vaguely unpleasant that occurs in a particular, remote place and is then superimposed on the rest of us. We should resist the avowal of writers, artists, and people from other walks of life that they are apolitical, or uninterested in politics, or that politics should be avoided at all costs. And when professional students of politics echo that refrain by commending 'anti-politics' they really ought to know better. Politics is far nearer than many people think: there will always be dimensions of human thinking and behaviour that are political. Nor is politics about one big thing, to recall the adage of the Greek poet Archilochus about the

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[1] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 86.
[2] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) and *Online,* http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/237575?redirectedFrom=politics#eid (accessed 14 August 2012).

hedgehog and the fox, recounted by Isaiah Berlin: it is about many things—albeit not about little things. It is not just about power, or antagonism, or conciliation, or decisions, or oppression, or enablement, or ruptures, or solidarity, or the public realm, though it is about all of those as well. It is about a series of distinct, fundamental, and crucial collective practices, including the thought-practices that accompany, foreshadow, and trail material and physical collective actions. This book sets out to explore a ubiquitous type of human thinking and language, one employed when we talk and write about one of our most important joint activities or practices, though it is also a language that may often not be conveyed verbally but through body language, architecture, cartoons, or music.

A propos titles, the title of this book is by no means intended to imply that its covers contain a definitive, exclusive, or comprehensive theory of political thinking. Instead, it identifies an area, or sets down a marker, that such a theory has a rightful, indeed a vigorous, claim on our attention as political theorists, that it deserves serious recognition, and that we should begin working towards its articulation. It does not propound '*the*' political theory of political thinking—that is humanly impossible and a sign of inflated hubris. Rather, the definite article indicates that there should be a body of knowledge called 'the political theory of political thinking'. We ought to be thinking in terms of a distinct set of understandings, pertaining to one of the most basic, ubiquitous, inspiring, and perilous kinds of human practice. The book singles out a lacuna, to which it wishes to draw attention, in much of what goes under the designation of political theory, let alone political philosophy. Political theory is not only a discipline involving the critical examination of human ends in society, or accommodating the abundance of challenging reflections on the human condition over the ages, or prescribing better ethical worlds, or even investigating the ideological patterns through which competitions occur over the control of political language. It is also—and from the perspective of scholarship should also be—about the analysis and interpretation of the rich and layered thought-practice referred to as political thinking, and engaged in by members of societies and partakers in cultures. By practice I mean 'the habitual doing or carrying on *of* something'; 'a habitual pattern of behaviour',[3] and I see no reason why not to attach it to thinking as well. I understand 'habitual' not in the sense of conformity but of recurrence. It is a fact that people think politically and that such thinking is normal and part of the human condition. This book maintains that certain regularities, or patterns, may be detected and established in such political thinking, even if its specific manifestations will differ vastly. In the following pages an attempt is made to give substance to that claim and to the implicit aspiration to move it closer to

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[3] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/149226?rskey=AW 9cjT&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed 15 August 2012).

the centre-stage of the discipline. There is still much to learn about the political, and in particular about what it can signify to those who give vent to it through speech, writing, and visual form.

1. THINKING POLITICALLY

Focusing on thinking politically needs to be distinguished from thinking *about* politics. My work over the past two decades had focused mainly on the latter: the ranges of views that people hold when their thoughts concern the central issues and challenges that societies encounter. Thinking about politics involves the formation of ideological frameworks—at different levels of sophistication—that operate within a world of essential contestability, vying over the shaping of political language through various decontesting devices that attempt to fix meaning, and frequently appearing clustered together in fluctuating family resemblance modes to which are given names such as liberalism, conservatism, or anarchism. That thinking takes place within contextualized semantic fields through which standard political concepts such as liberty, justice, or equality accrue meaning and directive force. Thinking about politics also contains strong moral and ethical elements—the desire for realizing a good or better society is a mainstay of human collective aspirations.

This study moves the object of my interest on to a more elemental dimension: the practice of thinking politically itself. The question it poses is simple: what has to happen in a person's mind for us—as observers, students, and analysts—to contend that she or he is thinking politically, not artistically, sexually, or historically? What are the thought-patterns to which the adjective 'political' can be allocated in a unique manner? What could actually be considered the various distinguishing features of thinking politically that need to be included *within* the ambit of the word 'politics' and, furthermore, how do people think with regard to *each one* of those features, both in isolation of the other features and in conjunction with them? In the broadest sense, our curiosity as students of society should be aroused by the generic practice known as political thought, and it requires reference both to what professionals and users of vernacular language believe the term 'politics' to indicate. One fundamental question we need to answer is therefore: what do people have in mind or imagine when they encounter the word 'politics'? But that is not the sole or main focus here. That focus is on the specific components from which that master thought-practice of thinking politically is assembled, whether or not those who think politically (almost everyone, as will be claimed) are *aware* of engaging in it.

Thinking politically expresses itself in innumerable thoughts, utterances, and texts such as 'economic productivity must precede the expansion of

welfare services'; 'the imprisonment of the Russian Pussy Riot women is disgraceful (or a lesson to others)'; 'it might be better to negotiate a deal with the work force to avoid a strike', 'I would never agree to relinquishing our national sovereignty to a bunch of foreigners', 'we would strongly advise you to accept this offer'; 'they need to solve this problem and to take it off the political agenda for once and for all'; 'the elderly deserve to receive state pensions', 'play it (again), Sam'; 'I can't be bothered to vote', 'I'm in a hurry, waiter, can we place our order now?', 'the success of the London Olympics is something Britain can be proud of', 'mind your own business', 'they've finally set up a new women's support group in the neighbourhood', 'keep off the grass'. However, thinking politically is usually celebrated, analysed, and echoed in its general, stipulative, and occasionally bombastic registers such as 'justice is the first virtue of political institutions', 'man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains',[4] 'we shall fight on the beaches . . . we shall never surrender', or 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'.[5] These too are crucial expressions of political thinking—the first two voiced by eminent philosophers, the second two by eminent statesmen—but they tend to attract too much scholarly attention and respect at the expense of the multiverse of political discourse. The following chapters will therefore embrace both qualitatively complex and representative kinds of thinking politically, not the least because the two rarely overlap.

Four immediate observations need to be noted here. First, many of those thoughts express ideological preferences, but all are examples of pointing sensitive antennae to certain happenings rather than others, of paying attention to or disclosing attitudes towards specific and prominent layers of social life. Hence, in the investigation of thinking politically it is frequently necessary to approach it through direct instances of thinking *about* politics, even if most forms of thinking politically are extracted through the interpretation of something less overt. Second, all of these thoughts are not *only* political thought-practices, of course, for they provide multiple seams of information relating to diverse human activities and many scholarly fields. But they are *also* political thought-practices, and that is why they need to be scooped up, scrutinized and grouped together in the disciplinary net that political theorists wield. Third, the political dimensions of human thought-practices, like their cultural and psychological dimensions, interpenetrate all forms of discourse, from the specialized to the common, from the professional to the vernacular, from the institutionalized to the informal, though their significance and impact will vary from instance to instance. What differs from case to case is

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[4] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 3; J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 49.

[5] W.S. Churchill, *Hansard*, 4 June 1940, col. 796; F.D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, 4 March 1933, http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-inaugural/images/address-1.gif

whether there is a high or low density of political thinking in relation to other kinds of thinking: the high density of political thinking in a parliamentary debate may be contrasted with its low—but not zero—density in participating in a auction, in which economic clout is marshalled to make a decision, to compete, and to attain an objective, even though the practice may be of greater interest to cultural anthropologists than to political theorists. Fourth, though some will no doubt claim the opposite, I hold that gender, race, and ethnicity (and age from the point where small children can express themselves) do not produce different genres of thinking politically, as distinct from the many ways in which they affect and shape the manner in which people think about politics.

Beyond that, and central to our argument, those are all ways in which we conceptualize our relationship with collectivities, large and small, by supporting, opposing, modifying, influencing, envisioning, deciding on, or undermining what they are and what they do. The language we use requires more systematic decoding, and a framework for that is on offer in Chapters One and Two. Some of that language is not even consciously employed as political, but the scholarly challenge is to identify and interpret it as such. To that extent these pages proffer a study not only of the *many* aspects but of the *micro* aspects of the thought-practice referred to as political thinking. It is 'micro' because single sweeping definitions, however common those pedagogically attractive, or ideologically motivated, or attention-grabbing formulations are, fail in their simplicity or one-sidedness to tease out some of the crucial aspects of political thinking. It is 'micro' in another sense, too, in that the following chapters will also examine a number of illustrative small-scale cross-sections of political thinking that emanate from different groups and became salient under varying circumstances.

Although, for reasons to be explained in Chapter Two, it is impossible to satisfy the complete individuation of political principles, and although we have to move between 'macro' and 'micro'—because they are both vested in the manner that political thinking presents itself to us—the kind of theorizing that builds up from manageable micro-instances should show three things. First, political thinking is fluid both at any moment in time and across space, and we constantly have to follow its mutations in order to account for it persuasively. Second, political thinking exhibits a morphology of patterned internal relationships through which such fluidity can be understood, even though the *precise* shapes of its conceptual interrelationships cannot be described, let alone predicted. Third, many forms of political thinking—due to the finality drive of politics itself and its search for conclusiveness in social affairs, of which more in Chapters One and Three—endeavour to contain that fluidity through decontestation devices that are highly typical of the practice of political thinking in attempting to hold meaning constant, even though

decontestation cannot be maintained durably. That was famously expressed in the exchange penned by Lewis Carroll:

> When *I* use a word', Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.' 'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is', said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'[6]

That need for semantic control, sometimes arrogant, sometimes desperate, is at the heart of the political (though even the semantic obfuscation often employed in political discourse is born out of the desire to control, as will be seen in Chapter Six with regard to negotiation). Alice's retort is the wrong one, however, for words *do* mean different things, yet a common political as well as philosophical fantasy is whether we *can* make them mean one thing. Humpty Dumpty sought to trump the many meanings words carry by the conferral of *his* meaning, indicating that human beings—and anthropomorphized eggs— like to exercise the choice to render further choice superfluous. That is one of the most prominent features of the political. Though doomed to fail, it perpetually rises from the ashes of its unattainability.

2. PATHS NOT TAKEN

An immediate consequence of the view of thinking politically advocated in this volume is to abandon the selective specificity of three alternative views of the political, all of which identify a unique property claimed to characterize it, either approvingly or critically, and then draw a set of conclusions from what usually is a circumscribed stipulative attribution. The first is binary, in which the political binds a Thing and its Other in an irreconcilable and antagonistic relationship, as expressed in some varieties of feminist theory, or in inclusion/ exclusion models such as friend/enemy. The second regards the political solely as the reasonable and constructive rejection or dismantling of such boundaries in the quest for human identity, whether individual or social. Its variants opt rather for movements across them, for syntheses, or for emphasizing the process of holding both difference, and its dignified acknowledgement, in some mutually recognizing balance such as agonism. The third portrays politics as displaying continual and revealing ruptures, and as a fundamentally pattern-less process of radically undermining the superimposed order of social life. All of those carry heavy normative baggage, assumptions about distortion and/or fantasy, and some commitment to egalitarianism and democracy, however vaguely conceived. And much as some of them disapprove of what analytic political philosophers are wont to practise, their predispositions either

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[6] L. Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 269.

coincide with the ethical tendencies of many such philosophers, or reflect the methodological essentialism of the analyst. Often both of these obtain. Those limiting approaches will be addressed in Chapter One.

A second consequence of ascending from micro-instances is to query the kind of political theory that descends from regulative macro-principles. It is common among political theorists and philosophers to propound the notion of a regulative principle as a normative attempt to offer political and ethical solutions that will stand the tests of time and space, perhaps even transcend them, or at least display considerable durability. Such principles are often offered as the most important contribution that can be made to the domain of political thought, and have lately been endorsed as aids to institutional design. For that reason I wish to dwell upon that approach a little longer in the following two paragraphs, because of the very different perspective on what political theory can attain that is adopted in this book.

Regulative principles exhibit remoteness from the actual manifestations of the political, with an attendant unrealizability and limited theoretical relevance, given the empirical proclivities of the social sciences. Unease with regulative principles in their actual application to political life was aptly expressed by the socialist thinker E. Belfort Bax:

> We can *define*, that is, lay down, in the abstract, the general principles on which the society of the future will be based, but we cannot *describe*, that is, picture, in the concrete, any state of society of which the world has had no experience. For into the *reality* of a society, even in its broader details, there enters a large element of contingency, of *a*logicality, of unreason, with which no general principles will furnish us. In consequence of this, the detail, the reality, has to be supplied by the Utopian romancer, from states of society already realised in the past or the present.[7]

Bax's diagnosis is convincing, though his utopian solution is not the route travelled here. It is, however, those philosophers who resort to 'regulative principles' in order to hold an argument together, and seemingly direct and apply it, who exhibit another kind of 'utopian' temper, quite ahistorical and nonempirical. They neglect to appreciate that in the final analysis what counts are the individuated instances of how (and if) the principle works at the minute level of thousands of different cases, not at the highest level of untested and, usually, inapplicable generality. Were the notion of a regulative principle simply to denote a framework of tramlines within which values, norms, and guidelines should be contained that would not pose a problem. But regulative principles are frequently employed as substantive benchmarks towards which all actual conduct and arrangements should strive.

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[7] E. Belfort Bax, Preface, *Outlooks from the New Standpoint* (1891), http://www.marxists.org/archive/bax/1891/outlooks/00-preface.htm, accessed 13.4.2011.

In that sense, regulative principles are amorphous, irregular, and incomplete in their application, to the point where they fail to deliver what their articulators intend them to deliver, unless they are merely intended to please philosophers—and ideologues. The constraints, the fragmentation, and the human messiness of political thinking itself cannot by their very nature permit that thinking to be elevated to the stratosphere of regulative principles, when the generalizations proffered by those regulatory attempts set standards that no concrete instances will ever meet. Arguably, in some cases they *should* not even meet those standards, in view of the multiplicity of cultural perspectives and contexts, where one regulatory size does not fit all. The alternative notion of merely approximating such standards panders to the illusion of bridge-ability between regulative principle and effective institutional and personal practice, an illusion that imposes an impossible burden on the shoulders of political thinking and distances it from the reach of proper understanding. Feuerbach's notion of God as alienated man is one example of an insight into such an illusion, proffering a yardstick intended to inspire people on, but having the opposite effect of demoralizing them in the face of the impossibility of the endeavour. That is not to argue that practices cannot be constantly improved but, as an alternative to cranking them up to an idealized level, we may instead start from their existing, or contextually possible, properties. But, ultimately and most tellingly, it is not enough to criticize regulative principles for failing to offer adequate guidelines to political practices. Rather, the criticism suggested here is that they deflect us from the richer nature of political thinking itself even as they themselves are, admittedly, one form of political thinking. The search for macro-regulative principles should not regulate or dominate what we consider to be the tasks of political *theory*, nor should their formulators assume that such principles can effectively get to grips with the multifarious world of political *thought-practices*. All that will be examined more fully in Chapter Seven.

What then is the political theory of political thinking about? The interpretation of the political mooted in these pages is one that does not attempt to limit politics against itself by legitimating some of its meanings and excluding others, as do the three alternative views alluded to above. It also does not, as some of those do, focus on chimerical essences. Nor does it regard the role of political theory to consist above all in detecting and elaborating all-embracing guidelines to the good life. All of these involve the search for distilled maxims, for imperatives, for the secular equivalents of the Ten Commandments or, conversely, the exposing of the Wizard of Oz's false powers. Instead the political theory of political thinking is an act of retrieval, anchoring politics in the social sciences of which it is a part, and counter-balancing the colonization and assimilation of the study of political thinking by other disciplines such as philosophy and history. That is not to suggest that politics has some primacy over other spheres of human conduct (except to contend that it sees

itself as possessing that primacy, as is shown in Chapter Three). Those neighbouring fields have of course crucial contributions to make to understanding political thought, but that ought not to happen at the expense of its *political* features. There is an unanswerable case for endeavouring to represent the multiplicity of thought-practices and interactions, both complementary and conflicting, that constitute the political discourses circulating in societies and that typify human thinking in that sphere, and for finding ways of decoding and making sense of their empirically observable utterances and texts. Those practices relate to the mutating spatial distribution of patterns of collective engagement and involve constant reconfigurations of the political that belie, but cannot obliterate, the aspirations of the ever-present finality drive to permanence. For example, one such process of competitive reconfiguration will be addressed in Chapter Four, which explores political thought-practices dedicated to ranking collective priorities. But it refrains from regarding ranking as desirable or undesirable. Rather, it notes the ubiquity of ranking preferences and the distribution of social significance as one of the ineliminable manifestations of actually thinking politically. Finally on this topic, although the insistence on the autonomy of the political has been reignited among others by Hannah Arendt, that is not the focus of this book, either. In Arendt's case, that autonomy is a substantive move designed to preserve the creativity and freedom of collective human life,[8] whereas I am above all concerned with a methodological autonomy that enshrines the sphere of political thinking as deserving of a close investigation of its unique characteristics and as firmly located in the mundane as well as the transcendental.[9] Arendt may have inspired programmes of radical democracy but her abstract normativity does not enlighten us on how to think methodically about politics, let alone about thinking politically.

3. THE MISSION IN METHOD

Striking the balance between universality and particularity in the endeavour permeating these pages is always a difficult task. Despite the scepticism I entertain about any universal features of political theory, and an even greater scepticism about conceptual essences, an underlying hypothesis of this book is that the most fundamental categories of thinking politically, which involve issues such as collectively directed support, ranking, or deciding, are indeed

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[8] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 7–78.
[9] For that distinction as a critique of much contemporary political philosophy, and in particular of the social weightlessness of recent radical theories of democracy, see L. McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

shared by all societies. They are therefore universal or nigh-universal, but the filling out of each category will be contingent and differ from case to case. The recent interest in the comparative study of political thought focuses on such diversity, while appreciating that the categories of comparison themselves may differ from culture to culture. Whereas the practice of political thinking may be ubiquitous, what counts for political thinking may or may not be so.[10] Moreover, within the general practice of thinking politically, the relative weight of each category vis-à-vis the others also fluctuates. The features of political thinking are ubiquitous and peculiar to that practice, but they invariably appear in different measures, intensities, levels of articulation, salience, and transparency. Nonetheless, even the categorization proposed in this work has to grapple with untidy and fuzzy features, each of which may be accompanied by phenomena that barely hang on to the proposed category or that are in the process of splitting away from it. We can never be certain whether the fluidity we elegantly ascribe to the contents of our categories does not in effect gloss over an underlying untidiness that the categories themselves obscure. And we can never be certain that the mental disciplines that we have absorbed and in which we have been trained can really detect, across the globe, the contending and contrasting understandings of what this book terms 'thinking politically'. I repeat, therefore, the qualifier I stated in my earlier work on ideologies: 'awaiting contrary interpretation', though I would now also add 'acknowledging different understandings'.

Hence, one of the chief methodological assumptions underpinning this book is that the investigation of thinking politically requires continuous navigation between theory, thought, and practice, all inextricably interlinked in the movement from *explanans* to *explanandum* and back. It is an attempt to theorize about a specific practice that is empirically determinable but it does so in the full recognition that such theorizing produces few truths and many interpretative positions and that empirical evidence is both selective and contentious. The actual world of thinking politically can never be described adequately for the simple reason that description is necessarily filtered through interpretation, and in that important sense ceases to be description. 'The facts speak for themselves', or 'each case should be judged on its merits' are self-deluding statements that disregard the ways in which *we* speak for the facts or *impose* the merits on a case. In instances such as these, the researcher needs rather to act as a decoder of thought-practices, hoping that such deciphering will be illuminating while accepting that it cannot be conclusive. Interpretative political theory decodes, without maintaining that a single code is revealed at the conclusion of that deciphering process. To the contrary, the material at our disposal discloses a number of plausible codes, and the

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[10] That question is explored in M. Freeden and A. Vincent (eds), *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013).

extraction of such partial information is never-ending. For human utterances and texts do not contain clear, single meanings—a point that hermeneuticists know, and that will be revisited in Chapter Two.

This book also serves as an appeal to narrow the divide between what is termed political science—or from a slightly different perspective comparative politics—on the one hand, and 'political theory' on the other. Their complex relationship is addressed in Chapter One and the perspective explored here respects the terminology as well as the evidential sources familiar to both branches of political studies. That said, such an enterprise must distance itself from narrow attempts to 'scientize' politics or its study, and it is far from employing the kind of positivistic thinking about the discipline prevalent since the mid twentieth century. Some of the political theory that emerged from the positivist quarter used empirical evidence in a mechanical way, collating attitudes and expressions of belief and subjecting them to the kind of statistical analysis that further misrepresented an already highly streamlined account of the actual political thinking in a society. A typical example that applies to this very day would be the omnipresent tendency in American social science to draw a crude distinction between liberals and conservatives, to apply numerical analysis to it, and then use that dual, almost dichotomous, distinction to characterize the main characteristics of American thinking about politics. Even though such analyses deal with trends and probabilities, they do not provide tools with which political theorists or analysts of ideology can feel comfortable.

We need to find alternative routes. Unpredictability and imprecision are at the heart of political thought and language, but patterned interpretation is not. We can identify conceptual complexity with clarity, if not precision, but stipulating the correct conception among those available or possible, as many analytic philosophers do, is not the nature of the project at hand. Rather, while moving away from the pronounced normativity and prescriptiveness of the political philosophy tendency within political theory, it gravitates towards an enterprise that is critical not of the world but of some of the ways in which the world is understood by scholars. We are still working out the consequences of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach in our capacity as political theorists. Having vacillated between interpreting and changing the world, we nonetheless need to do one of the things to which Marx was reluctant to devote too much time: interpreting one specific characteristic of the world, namely, political thinking—all too often dismissed by him and by Engels as ideology, to be disposed with by scientific truth or, as more recent philosophers prefer to contend, to be redeemed by authenticity. Interpretation, too, may change the world, and has already changed it immeasurably. Marx should not have enjoined us to choose between the one and the other. For interpretation is an intervention in discourses as well as a comment on them. As far as this book is concerned, interpretation is at the very least an intervention in specialized conversations about politics—with its own recommended maps

attached—though it is not inconceivable to regard it also as an intervention in the practices of thinking politically for those who, upon reading books such as this, care to consider what their own conventions regarding such thinking are. At the very least, then, such intervention is an attempt to wield influence, directed at reconceptualizing the ways of the world, not at improving them.

This approach is therefore to be distinguished from the substantive interventions in prevailing debates on policies or regimes that predominantly characterize much political theory, past and present. Those are the often challenging and profound interventions that inescapably spring out of, and reflect, the dominant epistemologies and ideologies on which much political theory, past and present, is nourished. The preponderant part of contemporary political theory, usually associated with political philosophy, is devised to improve normative argument and enrich its foci, not to change the direction of the ways we research, interpret and elucidate political thought, its features, grammars, and rationales. When defenders of the political role of philosophy, especially in the USA, make their case, they refer to the attempts of noted current philosophers to influence the values and ends of American politics. As Shapiro has put it, reflecting the dominant American tendency, 'political theory is best thought of as principled social criticism'.[11] But to identify that potentially admirable cause is not tantamount to demonstrating that American political philosophers have a profound and pervasive interest in the political, except as an arena in which to further collective, democratic, and just values. From a liberal and humanist standpoint that is certainly worthy, but it cannot tell the story of thinking politically on this planet. Revealingly, too, when the construction of political visions is the focus of discussion among most political philosophers, it is not to ask what is political about them by tracing and interpreting the properties and configurations of such constructions, but to participate in them following an ethical evaluation. That is also the case with recent post-structural political philosophy, including many of its French variants, that approaches the field from the different perspectives of rupture, performativity, the imaginary, or decentred subjectivity.

If many political scientists distinguish between theory as predictive or explanatory—in the sense of causal—while many political philosophers regard theory as ethical and rational and deem thought bereft of them as simply unpalatable, the preference in these pages for theory as interpretative is an updated version of the Weberian striving for *Verstehen*, inspired by numerous developments that succeeded him, tempered by the several insights introduced by the linguistic turn and its inheritors, and refined by recent developments in the study of ideology. That scholarly expertise is best indicated by the German term *Wissenschaft* (a body of knowledge) rather than the English term science,

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[11] I. Shapiro, *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 173.

with its hard science connotations. Weber talked both of the responsibility of the politician and of his own as the *Wissenschaftler*. But we have another obligation as well: to that part of our intellectual traditions that instructs us to challenge the assumptions with which we work as scholars, in particular our own. An interpretation is a suggestion for the reading and probing of information, and a strategy for accumulating knowledge, and it requires a distancing from source material that is the hallmark of both a critical and an imaginative viewpoint. That entails exploring angles and perspectives, trying out insights from other disciplines, and probing the flexibility and mutability of our own scholarly comprehension. Understanding political thinking is not a dry or remote undertaking. The process of understanding goes beyond representation, reconstruction, or even empathy. As long as we retain a soupçon of modesty and acknowledge the impermanence of interpretation, proffering 'may' rather than 'must', that approach should enrich our production of political theory and of political thought, including in its normative mode. In other words, as scholars we should not wholly embrace the finality drive ourselves, even though scholarship is itself not exempt from possessing political features, in claiming to apportion significance and in aspiring to persuade others.

Good political theory is thus an act of creativity in at least two senses, reflecting our dual duty to the discipline and to the world. In the first case normative political philosophy employs imaginative creativity to form clusters of ideas that could refashion our worlds, and its thought experiments are often highly and entertainingly inventive and fruitful, if conducted in socially isolated thought-laboratories as part of what might be termed philosophical, rather than social, engineering. In the second case, interpretative political theory employs imaginative creativity to tease out the manifold potentials contained in those worlds. It focuses on the 'could' as well as the 'is'—and on both of those rather than the 'ought'—while concurrently decoding and assessing the significance of the patterns that come to light. We should not underestimate how the dedication to interpretative clarification can offer political actors and thinkers, amateur and professional, alternative views of their practices. And we should embrace our own theorizing as a frequently enjoyable, even exhilarating, pursuit through which we offer something that provides us not only with intellectual but with aesthetic glimpses of social life.[12]

Alongside their commitment to academic rigour, and as well as engaging in solving or recommending substantive ethical issues, political theorists need to experiment more with theorizing about politics in an inventive way, as an art and craft form. The political theory of political thinking is also intended to

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[12] See M. Freeden, 'The Professional Responsibilities of the Political Theorist', in B. Jackson and M. Stears (eds), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 259–77.

contribute to a conversation on redesigning an intellectual practice, to the pleasure of investigating, shaping, and reshaping paths into unpacking political thinking, to seeing what can be done when we begin to ask questions both of our raw subject matter and of the methods of pursuing them. Our responsibility to scholarship lies in testing its limits, in jettisoning and adding, in perennial dissatisfaction and perennial hope, and in the certain knowledge of the inevitable fragmentary nature of our findings—to the point where the fragmentation and imperfection of political theory begins to be one of its defining characteristics and an 'accurate' way of addressing and presenting the political world itself. Lest the emphasis on imperfection be associated with a conservative fatalism, we need to insist on its opposite, just as John Stuart Mill in his time regarded the ephemerality and inconclusiveness of truth as a guarantor of progress.[13] In other words: the practice of crafting political theory is a productive pursuit, and it constitutes the means through which the empirical features of thinking politically should be constantly re-illuminated. We need to respect the skills of past and present professional journeymen, but in so doing we also have to carry forward a vocation whose constantly refined insights are themselves a main focus of what political theory is. Those who see this *merely* as dealing with methodology miss the point of the passion for theoretical creativity and for handling theory as a key that always opens new doors, affording glimpses of further comprehension. As do sculptors, we chip away at and hone our block of marble until it reacts with a shape with which we may—at least provisionally—be content, before we move on to the next engagement with our raw material.

On offer here, then, is a preference for another perspective—albeit a vital component—in the rich panoply of political theory. The investigation of the nature of political thinking it commends is not an attempt to exclude other dignified and prestigious genres covered by that array, whether coming to such thinking through a prism of radical critique, contentious realism, ethical desiderata, individual thinkers, or the illustrious history of political thought, more recently joined by conceptual history, with its numerous affinities with the study of ideologies and political discourses. And nothing in these pages should be construed as casting an aspersion on the vital importance of both normative and analytic political philosophy[14] as bedrocks of thought and theory since political language was recognized and recorded. But that is not to exempt some of their frameworks from criticism. Some critics prefer to do that through an internal assessment designed to improve or refine the

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[13] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XVIII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), ch. 2.

[14] On the complex boundary questions, and indeed substance, of analytic philosophy, see the edifying study by H.-J. Glock, *What is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

philosophy on offer, enabling philosophers to do what they do, but better. Many political philosophers are immersed in the arguments they interrogate and challenge; they operate *with* and *in* what they claim is a free-standing intellectual conversation. The interpretative and, broadly speaking, hermeneutic tradition[15] with which this study has affinity externalizes itself from the discourses it examines; it operates *through* and *away from* the conversations that it regards not as arguments per se but as contextualized containers of meaning. Hence this book opts for scrutinizing intellectual and scholarly spaces located in the main outside the conventional disciplinary practices of philosophy, through identifying approaches and themes that many political philosophers are not well-equipped to recognize by dint of their discipline. My approach has no claims to exclusivity, but only to plausibility; it respects other conceptualizations of politics even when arguing with some of them. Some scholars, particularly those critical of liberal political philosophy, endeavour to resolve the problem by attempting to reinsert the political into political philosophy.[16] I take the position that as investigative practices, as modes of study committed to their own methodologies, the fundamental practices of political theory and political philosophy differ. There are those who label the kind of enquiry on offer here as one that explores a second order of political thinking. Whether or not that label is useful, it identifies the conflation of normative or prescriptive discourse with the investigatory and analytical aims of political philosophy—both of which are deceptively located on a 'first order' level. In that conflation, the crucial triple distinction between the practice of political and ethical philosophizing, constructing political theories, and engaging with the social world is elided.

The analysis tendered in these pages regards normative or prescriptive discourse (including the formulation of regulative principles) not as free-standing but as grist to its mill, that is, as yet another *directly* revealing form of political thinking, but one that is only a segment of the broader practice with which we are concerned. Such discourse may be more sophisticated and more reflective than the typical political thinking produced by a general, engaged public, but it does not constitute a different category of thinking. The thinking of normative or prescriptive political philosophers must therefore be subject in principle to the same kind of analysis and decoding as do other manifestations of thinking politically. All that relates to our desire to understand society and its practices, not as a scholarly luxury, but because the interpretative mapping that will be produced should, among others, enable us to assess the role and success of pursuing normativity itself as a distinctive

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[15] Though unlike some hermeneuticists, most famously H.-G. Gadamer (*Truth and Method* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1979]), I am not attempting either to retrieve or to construct truths.

[16] See e.g. G. Newey, *After Politics: The Rejection of Politics in Contemporary Liberal Philosophy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

practice of political theorists. In so doing, the approach adopted here claims sufficient gravitas to stand alongside normative or prescriptive discourse, thus dismissing subtle implications that *studying* political thought-practices is somehow subsidiary to, or 'once removed' from, what political theorists really ought to be doing, and resisting the manner in which philosophers shrug off such analysis as irrelevant, and often inferior, to their pursuits.[17] To the contrary, the mode of study with which this book allies itself should be able to supply the complex tools without which political philosophy cannot navigate adequately in the *political* world; while in terms of scholarship its ambitions, standards, and revelatory potential are on a par with—rather than emulating—those of the philosophers' trade.

Two questions consequently need addressing. First, can one be a political theorist *and* a social scientist? That is what is at stake. Ethics and analytic political philosophy dominated, perforce colonized, political theory in the late twentieth century, and their concerns are still loud and clear. As John G. Gunnell has argued forcefully, resisting the authoritative tone of political ethicists, 'when the problem of the practical relationship between metapractical discourses and their object is approached as an epistemological issue, what continues to be missing is any direct confrontation with the practical issue of the relationship between social science and politics.'[18] Even in post-Marxist and other poststructuralist enterprises the search for a better world is still—as we shall note—at the heart of their insistence on unchaining human thought from the constraints and distortions of power and manipulative interventions. The project advanced in these pages is stimulated by the thought that we need to be curious about all the patterns of thinking politically that societies display, and we should endeavour to understand what is it that interacting minds produce in that sphere. We must welcome the kind of research that homes in on and magnifies certain human practices for heuristic purposes. Theorizing about political thinking is a significant enterprise among those whose self-defined role is to decode and illuminate social practices, and it must be developed further to take its place in the sun. Ultimately, the intention of this book is to suggest ways to enhance (not to colonize!) the range and purview of a discipline—the study of political thought—by investigating the practices the discipline should embrace. The 'should' here is not a normative ought, but a softer plea for a greater inclusiveness of interpretation. If there is prescription and recommendation in this book, it is directed to suggesting additional ways in which we should behave in the role of political

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[17] I have discussed that tendency of political philosophers with regard to ideology in M. Freeden, 'Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy', in G.F. Gaus and C. Kukathas (eds), *Handbook of Political Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 3–17.

[18] J.G. Gunnell, *The Orders of Discourse: Philosophy, Social Science, and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 211.

theorists as searchers for knowledge. It is a contingent and conditional mode of prescription: if what you want is *this* specific value, then *that* understanding of political thought may clarify what routes are needed to attain that goal, without pontificating on the desirability of the goal itself. That too is a legitimate and central task of what Wolin approvingly terms 'the theoretical imagination'.[19] That too is good enough to pass muster in serious scholarship.

Second, how can we counter the reasonable assertion that the focus on the particular practice of thinking politically is itself a form of abstraction? Well, scholarship inevitably entails abstraction. That kind of mild abstraction engaged in here—which nonetheless examines concrete practices of thinking politically while attempting to identify their internal architecture—seems to me methodologically justifiable inasmuch as we are interested in patterns of human conduct. Arguably, political theory has suffered from a counter-deficiency: it has all too often been insufficiently introspective about its own attributes and about the diverse functions of different types of abstraction. The issue is what subject-matter should be harnessed, and profitably abstracted from, in the search for deeper understanding of what goes under the name of political thinking.

A book such as this can never be exhaustive. It could wear out the labours of many scholars over innumerable years and yet remain forever unfinished. The task of accounting for the nature of thinking politically is an immense one, and all we can do is to attempt to traverse some of its main paths. I have chosen to excavate examples of the chief features of thinking politically explored in this study, moving across time and space and offering samples from the sites conventionally preferred by political theorists—the thinking of political and intellectual elites, such as politicians, scholars, and commentators—as well as investigating vernacular language from less conventional sources such as protest groups and 'ordinary' members of the public. My aim has been to establish the existence of the central forms of thinking politically, not to catalogue them, and it will remain for others to find better or more apposite examples of those practices, as well as to refine the theory that interprets them. One challenge such an enterprise poses is that of translation, not from one national or ethnic language into another, but within the same linguistic family. Professional political theorists cannot rest content with employing a singular language, understandable chiefly only to one another, across their investigations. They need to be able to relate ordinary language in conceptual terms that will not be too remote from its own modes of expression, while attempting to catch the ears of their fellow scholars.[20] From that perspective,

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[19] S. Wolin, 'Political Theory as a Vocation', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63 (1969), 1082.

[20] See the discussion of the Greenham Common women and the Wootton Bassett ceremonies in Chapter Five.

professional political theory and philosophy contain very specific languages whose peculiarity is intricacy, patterned formal constraints, a high level of articulation, and a deliberately limited circulation. Other political languages may not even be verbal but non-verbally vocal, silent, graphic, or plastic. The vernacular, in turn, may be partly fashioned by appropriations and misappropriations of 'elite' languages in this two-way movement. In presenting a particular argument I have often breached the conventional dividing barriers between the way academics, politicians, intellectuals, and broader swathes of the population express themselves, mixing and matching in a way that may offend purists, but which I regard as essential to the task at hand. That also entails departures from symmetry in the internal organization of chapters and in deciding what material to include for its evocative qualities rather than for the singularity of its genre.

Nor should we underestimate the emergence of new information technologies and attendant practices of internet and texting. They establish publics and lines of communication that track the features of the political in haphazard and fragmented fashion while possibly forming novel patterns of their own. They seem to constitute parallel, disjointed, and even haphazard, but not 'virtual', worlds, because what can be thought and conceptualized therefore *actually exists* as something to be recorded, explained, or interpreted. In those parallel cyber-worlds influence, support, or resistance clearly occur, often spread out and scattered, sometimes coordinated and concentrated. To that extent they are indeed political, even though some tweeting and blogging may well lack other conspicuous political elements such as competition over policy-making and, in particular, a drive to finality in social affairs as distinct from casual and ephemeral comment.

4. A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON 'REALISM'

I conclude the introduction with some remarks on the relationship between my approach and the trend in recent political theory known as realism. Until quite recently, and for the past generation, political theory was dominated by the Rawlsian family of theorizing which, despite frequent disclaimers to the contrary or allusion to realist utopias, engages in abstract thought-experiments and 'ideal-typing' while almost completely abandoning empirical evidence. Continental Habermasian approaches have claimed empirical and practical grounding but they too have summoned up the spirit of ideal speech and communications as an improvement on existing discourse. The Rawlsian project, furthermore, has also appeared to reduce the central issues of political thought to those revolving around justice—as a master-concept—and the stability that an ethically proper political procedure would bring in its wake.

It is grandly systemic, even when ostensibly referring to individual intuitions of fairness, and it is also methodologically non-pluralist in insisting on a unique 'super-concept' around which shared political argument should revolve and in suggesting that the power of reason possesses compelling force.

In the past few years, however, endeavours have been made to differentiate between ideal and 'non-ideal' political philosophy while maintaining the status of such philosophizing as 'context-independent'. Yet again crucially dependent on Rawlsian paradigms, such attempts seek to offer corrective measures of justice in societies that are unjust by Rawls's criteria, but they still are a version of ideal theory in their aspiration to raise such societies to externally constructed ethical standards formulated by philosophical elites, rather than examining the multiplicity of discourses that such societies harbour.[21] Other views develop what is now (once again) referred to as a 'realist' view of political theory. Rather than descending from a conceptual heaven, a more arduous climb from existing political institutions and their contexts beckons. While more sober about the nature of politics, those realists, as will be argued in Chapter One, nevertheless do not provide a dispassionate narrative about the political world. Thus Raymond Geuss, for all the merits of his approach, resorts to attaching a marked ethical tone to his realist analysis. We need, however, to be passionate about dispassion, while recognizing that passion is part of the political thought-process to be decoded, part of our subject-matter.

A second characteristic of the new realism is to search for a new basis of political judgement and morality, internal to the political, faintly echoing Machiavelli but without the cynicism that many have attached to the latter's directives.[22] A third is to swing the pendulum too far in the direction away from constructing a moral consensus. To see 'political conflict as ubiquitous, perennial, ineradicable', to focus on 'ineliminable conflict rather than reasoned consensus',[23] obscures the greater complexity of thinking politically, which combines a search for order alongside pointing out its continual disruptions in different and very fluid degrees. Both conflict and the search for order are ubiquitous; both are fragile and temporary; neither does justice to thinking politically on its own. For realists, it has to be said, there is something virtuous and ethical about conflict because it suggests a pluralism and a diversity at the heart of what is often lurking behind their arguments,

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[21] See M. Freeden, 'Comment', in 'Symposium: Contract and Domination', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 13 (2008), 239–43. See also A. Swift, 'The Value of Philosophy in Nonideal Circumstances', *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 34 (2008), pp. 363–87; and A. Hamlin and Z. Stemplowska, 'Theory, Ideal Theory and the Theory of Ideals', *Political Studies Review* 10 (2012), 48–62.

[22] B. Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[23] W.A. Galston, 'Realism in Political Theory', *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 9 (2010), 396.

a re-idealized conception of a radicalized democracy. That may well be so, but that is not quite the escape from the high-minded resonances emitted from philosophical liberalism that it professes to be. Much poststructuralist political theory shares this feature of assuming dislocation, rupture, and contestation as the norm, without appreciating that the logic of the finality drive of the political—and within that the rationale of ideology—attempts, however ephemerally or even unsuccessfully, to overcome or end contestation. Even when conflict is, not without implausibility, perceived as the default position of social life and that position is reflected in some fundamental features of the political; even if we accept—and we should—that we cannot 'tame uncertainty';[24] and even if, as shall be shown in Chapter Six, the practices of political thinking may harness indeterminacy to their advantage, there is a counter-current deeply embedded in political thinking that seeks to alleviate such endemic indeterminacy and contingency. For that too is a basic human need that the political endeavours to satisfy. Moreover, to identify realism as anti-utopian[25] may be a comment on a particular way of viewing political argument, but it does not contain the myriad ways of real-world thinking about politics, many forms of which *are* utopian and deserve acknowledgement as such by the analyst of political thought. If this book has a strong affinity with the new realism, it also differs markedly from it by calling for an interpretative, not a prescriptive, realism.[26]

It is to some of those micro-interpretations that we now turn. The first two chapters develop further the theoretical framework of my approach, as well as putting it into historical perspective. From Chapter Three onwards I employ a looser mix of theoretical arguments and case studies drawn from past and present academic and philosophical debate as well as from a plethora of illustrative examples that relate to specific, concrete instances of thinking politically. Utilizing a few dozen illustrations, some briefly, others in greater detail, is in one sense a random choice from an unfathomable pool, but the work with which it is charged is to suggest that wherever one looks, and from whichever sources one draws, the logic of thinking politically is discoverable and omnipresent: the accumulative weight of its specific thought-practices cannot be overlooked. From time to time, when an academic debate has been particularly salient in recent decades, I have devoted space to addressing and interpreting its relationship to thinking politically. In Chapter Seven I have also included a discussion—pertinent to that chapter—of the more general topic of failures of thinking politically. It serves as representative of the

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[24] L. Whitehead, 'The shifting balance between "risk" and "uncertainty" in a globalised world system', in *Future Risk* (London: The Chartered Insurance Institute, 2012), p. 33.
[25] Galston, op. cit., pp. 394–5.
[26] For that distinction, see M. Freeden, 'Editorial: Interpretative Realism and Prescriptive Realism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 17 (2012), 1–11.

widespread occurrence of such failures in all types of political thinking and theorizing, the understanding of which needs to be incorporated into any analysis of the thought-practice under consideration in this study. Every one of those chapters is intended to invite further study, an assignment regrettably beyond the time and energy at my disposal. Instead, throughout the book my aim is merely to give a taste of the issues, principles, and applications that should guide the political theory of political thinking—the anatomy of a practice.

1

Theorizing about Political Thinking

'Unless we insist that politics is imagination and mind, we will learn that imagination and mind are politics, and of a kind that we will not like'.[1]

1. THE FINALITY QUEST OF POLITICS

The underlying rationale of politics is the quest for finality and decisiveness in the affairs of groups, ends that are permanently frustrated by the slippery and inconclusive circumstances in which that quest occurs. One of the salient forms of human thinking is that associated with attaining ends, reaching conclusions, closing disputes, removing items from the agenda, overcoming uncertainties, or solving disagreements—all of those in conjunction with others. The finality drive is a quest rather than a realized journey because, at every stage along the projected or imagined route, the frequently displayed desire to marshal a group of people on that journey has to confront contingency, indeterminacy, and plurality, and make do with partial, temporary, and disintegrating arrangements, even when they are not immediately visible as such. Strikingly and in parallel, the entire *language* of politics—that is to say, political thinking as detectable through its written and oral articulation—is shot through with the vocabulary of finality.

The fundamental thought-practice of finality is the decision, and two of its features are pertinent here. First, decisions are present throughout many manifestations of political thinking, without of course containing all of the features of such thinking, the variety of which is the subject of this book. Second, although decisions are intended to precipitate material action and processes, they do not on their own involve *doing* something to someone; they are firmly located in the practice of *thinking* politically and expressing that thinking predominantly in utterance or text. What *follows* from that decision

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[1] L. Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1954), p. 104.

may well be a series of activities and processes in which social arrangements are crafted or altered, but the decision itself is located in the domain of discourse. Decisions may be overturned—typically by other decisions—although they may come to nothing and be allowed to wither on the vine and collapse, but even then they will already have appeared as a finality thought-practice. Not least, decisions are in high demand: societies are under pressure to produce them, and individuals are constantly confronted with the necessity of making them.

The aspiration of decisions to finality is indicated in a host of major political terms and ideas that range from the general to the specific, terms such as authority, sovereignty, rule, hegemony, order, legitimacy, electoral victory or defeat, the absoluteness and non-negotiability of rights, the devaluation of a currency, or the banning of smoking in listed places.[2] All those 'conclusive' devices are instances of the prime ideological feature of decontestation that underlies a decision. Decontestation is the attempt to control equivocal and contingent meaning by holding it constant, and in the realm of political thinking it precedes the ostensibly categorical and decisive actions and institutionalizations signified and assumed by the above list of concepts. Decontestation responds to the essential contestability of concepts and their complex morphology, according to which concepts contain more components than can be expressed in any definitional utterance or text, and there is no logical, impartial rule that determines the relative weight of each of those components.[3] Tellingly, decontestation is both a chimera and a semantic necessity. It is chimerical because, as shall be argued in Chapter Two, it imposes a fabricated certainty on inevitable ambiguity, indeterminacy, and vagueness. It is necessary because the human mind, in its political as well as other modes, is highly uncomfortable with indeterminacy and incapable of reflective action if it cannot engineer temporary, yet continual, escapes from uncertainty; and because the concrete world of politics, from the marginalized participant seeking to feed her children to the loftiest ruler burning to assert her will, demands—even when it cannot always supply—the crispness of clear-cut decisions. Those who insist only on conflict or rupture as the defining properties of the political, or who employ a particular distinction between 'politics' and 'the political'—the former repressing the inherent antagonism and democratic radicalism of the latter[4]—are ill-advised to ignore or underplay the endemic play-off between the languages of disintegration and of amalgamation in political thinking.

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[2] That is not to suggest that the vocabulary of political theorists displays similar dominant tendencies.

[3] For a detailed discussion of decontestation, see M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), ch. 2.

[4] See e.g. C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso 2000), p. 101.

Clearly, both the human agency of participants and the art of interpreting meaning by analysts are incapable of purchasing the closure of finality in the social world, even when they seem able to imagine it. The end of indeterminacy is no less misguided than the end of history or the end of ideology. That may be bemoaned by some as the tragedy of politics, but it may equally be its good fortune. For that reason, when the aims of political thinking are set too high, and given the drive to finality, its failures and frustrations are part and parcel of the political process. Such failures confirm the impossibility of fully attaining any possible conclusive definitional end-state of the key political concepts and ideas, and expose the over-optimism of much political argumentation that naively attempts to break through the barriers that inexorably constrain it. Finality perpetually confronts its ontological elusiveness and its epistemological contestation, a theme that will be revisited in Chapter Seven. But that sphere is exactly the locus of ideational activity, for politics and political thinking revolve around the struggles that occur on the never-ending and deceptive road to conclusiveness. For example, ranking and the distribution of significance, explored in Chapter Four, are attempts to establish a secure position, in a pecking order, for collective values and preferences. That order expresses the desire and need to register finality in terms of collective priorities, hierarchies, and urgencies designed to resist malleability, even as they are continuously subject to challenge. Negotiation, to take another example discussed in Chapter Six, is a possible result of the meeting of two or more routes to finality, when the need for a shared decision, as well as the craving for stability, overrule the intensity of the vision, plan or telos of each side and produce a third route. What is often facilely described as a search for a compromise is rather—from each side's perspective—the assertive search for an alternative route to a fallback finality, even if suspicion may linger that such finality is limited in time and space and that it too is merely a stepping stone to the next temporary conclusiveness. Negotiation reflects the fundamental need human beings possess—as social entities that think politically—to evade the impossibility of finality while making decisions under adverse or heavily constricted circumstances and under conditions of limited agency. Lest this be seen as a view of politics simply as an innocuous and well-meaning activity in pursuit of attractive yet elusive goals, politics is also frequently a game when a deliberately artificial finality is posited with the full knowledge of its promoters. In that mode conclusiveness is not sincerely pursued but merely serves as a tactic in setting up another, half-hidden, finality, though one that is no less illusory.

Yet if politics fails to secure lasting settlement, it nevertheless gravitates again and again towards resting points that exhibit a mixture of limited imaginations and ideational exhaustion. Koselleck has pointed to the concept of crisis as a point in time when a 'definitive, irrevocable decision' is required because a situation is believed to hover between 'success and

failure, . . . salvation or damnation.'[5] Change, transition and disruption need to be followed by relative calm, even inertia, unless continual crises or anomie are to bring a society down. Under a microscope that inertia is riddled with small changes, of course, but the slowing down of experienced time that has previously been intolerably accelerated can bring social and psychological relief. That frequent papering over of processes and mutations is not a pessimistic view of the nature of the political: reform, civilization, and morality exist even in small doses, and improvements to the quality of life are crucially dependent on quasi-determinate visions and collective good-will, however fragmented. *Verstehen* does not exclude sympathy towards reform and change. Consequently, this study lands on the side of durable rather than ineliminable dissent as a symptom of continuous change, from which pockets of transient and contingent conceptual and ideological stability—or quasi-stability—can be fashioned. The evidence of political thinking points in that direction. Hence the investigation of thinking politically must include the production of political visions as a constant reforming drive of the political mind, even when—as I shall argue in Chapter Seven—that drive often fails to deliver what it intends to.

The statics of politics consist of its arrogance in ordaining the ultimate; the dynamics of politics emerge in its seemingly persistent defiance and undermining of its own rationale. Seemingly is the operative word here, because even the dynamics are already located, ironically, in an oxymoronic world of *competing finalities*, finalities mirrored for example in the contending universalisms of pluralist and rival political visions, such as those promoted by secular socialisms versus religious prospects of a promised land. If, nonetheless, the dynamics of contestation are the more salient and striking feature of politics—the spectacles of disorder and transition, after all, attract greater attention—they only exist in the first place because they are powered by the quest for conclusiveness, both on rational and emotional dimensions. Even the most radical challengers of a social order—given half a chance—aspire to oases of stability and certainty: permanent revolutionaries or anarchists dream of establishing their own settled patterns. The contingency of contestation requires continuous containment by its own practitioners to prevent conceptual as well as behavioural chaos and entropy.

2. PINPOINTING THE POLITICAL

Because all too often political theory has insisted on the supremacy of ethical analysis and prescription at the expense of a broader palette of theorizing, it is

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[5] R. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 237.

not redundant to maintain that a study of the nature of political thinking has to recognize the importance of 'politics' or 'the political'. As the twentieth century entered its final third, processes began to replace institutions and demarcated political spaces as the loci of politics, and the phrase 'the political' began its unremitting ascendancy, after having been around for most of the century in a minor key. The adjectival noun was doubly useful, in intimating a vagueness that defied previous attempts at precision—lumping together activities, behaviour, institutions, processes, as well as signifying a domain—and in suggesting flux rather than stasis. We find a somewhat different demarcation in recent French political thought between 'le politique' and 'la politique'. For Foucault, la politique—politics and policy—refers to 'the practice of the political game,...as a field of experience with its rules and normativity' while le politique—the political—constitutes reflections on law, social organization, and the state that, in his view, can mask the power relations of la politique.[6] But the focus of this book is not on the political as a papering over of the power characteristic of politics, but as a re-categorization. In coming to serve as a replacement for the term 'politics' within political theory, 'the political' generated a shift—with justification, I contend—that now signified an entire domain of human interaction as well as the diverse practices that occur in that domain. This and the following chapters seek to build on that refocusing and to encourage two further shifts.

First, bridging a combination of understandings prevalent among political theorists as well as political scientists, my usage of 'the political' refers not merely to the substantive shaping of the public policy of states and governments, or to the substantive construction of political visions in the manner of some mainstream political philosophers, but also to the *practices* of pondering on, or having one's thoughts guided by, political concerns. Second, although 'the political' has been accorded a broader and more fluid remit in recent political studies, it is still widely employed in a manner narrower than that understood in this book, inasmuch as many explorations of 'the political' reduce it to an overarching and one-dimensional aspect. The central celebration of thought-practices and the diversity of the core political phenomena are twin themes of this study of the political.

A reluctance to entertain conceptual expansiveness may be discovered, for example, among those 'continental' political theorists who pursue a singularity of understanding of the political—a theme to which I shall return at the end of this chapter—but it is also to be discovered, for example, among historians of political thought. Thus, in attempting to distinguish between political authority and parental authority, Sheldon Wolin appeals to the historical activity of political philosophers, to 'centuries of political discussion' that have created

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[6] M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, ed. F. Gros (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmilllan, 2010), p. 159.

the field of politics.[7] In denying that the one kind of authority is political and the other not, I wish to pursue the analytical identification of unique political features, while recognizing—as suggested in the Introduction—that the density of the political elements, and the relative weight of each alongside other features of a complex practice, will vary considerably. For instance, authority may be one of the first things that strike one when investigating the language of a state or one of its central institutions, but in families no longer run on Victorian lines one would expect other practices such as love, companionship, and play to be the prominent ones. Nonetheless, families clearly engage in verbal political activities such as negotiation and bargaining, as well as in the wielding of authority. Chapter Three, for example, will take heed of the well-known despairing cry of the parental 'because I say so' as an invocation of an older, status-based authority model whose very articulation announces its hollowness in the light of more recent practices of justification.

Focusing on 'the political' in political thinking can be achieved in three ways. First, a stipulative definition or characterization of 'politics' and 'political thinking' may be tabled as a reasonable (or even 'correct') way of identifying the subject-matter. Second, we may wish to gather a body of evidence that informs us about the kinds of thing people think of when they use those two terms, evidence that may include the elite languages of professional scholars as well as those emanating from the intelligentsia in general or from more popular, vernacular sources. Public opinion surveys as well as discourse analysis proceed on such lines. Third, we could take a step back and hypothesize as scholars on what the political might entail specifically, by attempting to identify its main recurring features based initially on a large raft of gathered understandings. We could then proceed to investigate various micro thought-practices in a society and attempt to extrapolate from them shared or overlapping features that might be classified as political, presuming therefore that they are unique to a particular category of thought-behaviour. Following that, we could relate those features to existing understandings of 'the political' and agree with, dissent from, add to, or subtract from them in endeavouring to set out an interpretative field of that set of practices. In this case we would not merely concentrate on explicit grappling by other scholars and intellectuals with the terms 'politics' or 'the political' but try to assess the micro-thought practices from which the political aspects of human thinking may be extracted and decoded. The 'macro' is then loosely fashioned from endlessly fluctuating interlocking 'micros', but it never serves as a straitjacket for the latter.

This study chooses that third path, but it cannot be completely immune from the other two. We still need to examine the stipulative definitions and preferences of others in order to map this study onto an ideational context—

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[7] S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 2nd expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 5–6.

and ideational rather than social or economic contexts are those on which this book focuses. Nor can we entirely escape stipulation ourselves, or shake loose from the hermeneutic problem of the pre-understandings—in Gadamer's phrase, the prejudices[8]—with which we enter the conceptual thicket of political thinking, even though we may operate at a more concrete level than armchair philosophers (if such really exist) might do. But this book is directed at students of politics and it necessarily cannot, and should not, depart too much from the vocabulary employed within an already well-established discipline. What it may aspire to, though, is to reconfigure and recalibrate some of our existing understandings and to offer a set of methodological as well as substantive observations that may diverge somewhat from those currently in circulation. An understanding of political theory that has little, if any, relation to what other branches of political studies pursue will be a diminished one and curries no favours to the discipline as a whole.

That expansive approach to the political, however, is not the main focus of political theory as currently practised. When we examine salient writings on the political, many different themes emerge, but the expressed viewpoints—however critical they are of current practices in political philosophy—have not fallen too far from the trees that have nourished them. The preponderant characteristics of the animated and fertile conversations that have arisen over the past two decades lie in attempting to extract the meaning of 'politics' by means of a given scholar engaging with other intellectuals and academics who constitute the sources from whose ideas one draws, approvingly or critically. Following that, political theorists then pursue their traditional and laudable aim of intervening in public discourse, often through telling us what politics is. The luxury of such elite intellectual discourses is vital for stimulation, for originality, for honing and testing one's ideas. Indeed, this book willingly engages in some of those professional practices as well, including suggesting *what* politics is, though not *how* to practise it. But political theorists should also descend from those semi-private conversations to include the broader agora of political thinking as a ubiquitous and multi-layered site of both professional and vernacular practice, whose evidence requires careful interpretation and analysis. We do need a parallel conversation, currently underdeveloped and muted, about what thinking politically *is*, whereas what we continually get is a conversation on what it ought to be, given some ethical desideratum.

Politics, it has repeatedly and persuasively been pointed out, does not occupy a separate sphere of social activity. But it is a separate *form* of social activity. What applies to politics, applies ipso facto to political thinking. Not many political theorists are willing to recognize that, when we single out the

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[8] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), pp. 238–40.

practice we call political thinking, we need to identify what is peculiar solely to it. That cannot be done merely by ascertaining the location of that thinking—for example in the state or a focus group—but by associating the question 'what is political thinking?' with the question 'what thoughts do our minds conjure up when our thinking may be described as political thinking?'; that is to say, what kinds of thinking discharge, or aspire to discharge, certain effects that have something in common, something distinct from other forms of thinking, and something that can be usefully signified by the conventional term 'political'. Investigating actual political thought, as noted in the Introduction, explores two dimensions of such thought, building on what it sees as the crucial distinction between thinking politically and thinking about politics.[9] While thinking *about* politics always appears as an ideological semantic field transmitting substantive ideas, the categories comprising thinking *politically*—though they too may *carry* substantive ideological messages—cannot usefully be described as ideological per se. Rather, they are central and indispensable features of human thinking and its expression in language—as indeed is the very fact of ideological durability and the necessity of decontestation—and hence independent of the fluctuating content their specific manifestations adopt.

3. POLITICAL THEORY: OLDER AND NEWER CONTENDERS

How, then do we relate various forms of political thought to each other? To begin with, I have already set down a marker that this book is an instance of political theory: it is dedicated to the study of, and reflection about, political phenomena, crucially including political thought as one of those phenomena. That might appear pretty obvious, were it not the case that work such as this has occasionally been classified as ethnography by more traditional political theorists—an act of classification that is but another instance of hauling up the drawbridge in the face of broader agenda. For if by ethnography is meant a scholarly description of the customs and habits of a particular society that is far too constraining an attire for this study. The particular is important, but it is the path to establishing a degree of patterning, however fluid.

The implicit issue here is that it is customary to view political theory as concerned with the crafting of political ideas as well as with the construction of

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[9] Despite its promising title, Jean Blondel's book, *Thinking Politically* (London: Wildwood House, 1976), runs together empirical political theorizing and political thinking in the normative sense, and it does not deal with the study of political thought—as distinct from politics—which is the focus of this book.

political analysis. Hence when linked to normative political thought, it differs little from the creative, imaginative, and critical forms both of political philosophy and ideology, specifically when they offer theories intended to organize political life and settle some of its pressing problems through proffered frames of reference. Political philosophizing and ideologizing construct theories that aim at making sense of, and assisting in conducting, political life. For most political philosophers and ideologists, however, making sense implies a heavy emphasis on justifying and resolving rather than on interpreting— although many 'continental' political philosophers do both. Individuals who engage either in political philosophizing, particularly of the Anglo-American analytic school, or in ideologizing, regard them as free-standing 'first order' practices that can flourish independently of an introspective insight into the kind of approach they adopt. Naming their products political philosophy and ideology respectively is intended to distinguish them from what political philosophers frequently and often disparagingly term 'second order' theorizing. To be sure, philosophers tend to regard their thought products as being of a higher calibre than ideologies, but that internal rivalry depends entirely on which criteria we employ in assessing the work that political philosophizing or ideologizing accomplishes.

In previous work I have explored the concrete conceptual configurations that group together as ideologies, and that provide access to the actual structures of political thought found in present and past societies. Central to that enterprise were two arguments. First, we access substantive political thought only through ideological structures—it always appears within those formats, it is always shaped as a particular, contestable conceptual configuration, and it always competes over the control of political language. Second, political theory does not have to be normative in order to discharge significant explanatory and interpretative roles. Rather, political theory must include within its ambit the understanding, mapping, and analysis of concrete patterns of political thought, through ideologies and their segments.

This book extends that perspective to inquire into the general trans-ideological properties of political thinking that are transmitted, on manifold levels, to whatever ideological thought-practice we may wish to investigate, from what is implicit or explicit in political philosophy to its popular and vernacular manifestations. That creates its own set of demands on scholarship. First, because political thinking is expressed through language, we need to explore the pre-ideological attributes of political language that will accompany any expression of ideology. To remove any misunderstanding, I do not wholly subscribe to that trend within the 'linguistic turn' that regards language as completely constituting social reality. The relationship between language and the external, empirical world is more subtle than that. But language, as shall be suggested in the following chapter, has some fundamental attributes that inextricably shape the properties of political thinking. Language is about

words, syntax, and grammar, as well as emphasis, tone, and sequence and what is generally known as rhetoric. But language is also the site of a permanent struggle between precision and imprecision. And because political thinking, expressed largely—though not entirely—through language, is the focus of this study, we need to offer an interpretation of those aspects of language that colour the *political* aspects of our thinking.

Second, because political concepts are the building blocks of political language we should, as political theorists, be centrally—though not solely—interested in concepts, just as political philosophers are centrally—though not solely—interested in arguments, distinctions, or justifications. If, then, political ideas are always grouped in the conceptual morphologies that constitute ideologies, we need to focus, as a central analytical tool, on the underlying features of the political contained in the *political concept*, while unpacking that dual phrase. Political thought will embrace whatever we decide to bunch together under the term 'political', but it will equally be limited and guided by the properties of 'concepts' as units of meaning. We have of course to appreciate that concepts, too, appear at different levels of articulation, and we will need to recognize our own tendency as scholars of political thought to take highly articulated concepts particularly seriously, probably too much so, as the raw material of political language will not normally deliver them in that sophisticated form.

Moreover, we need to incorporate significant non-conceptual features such as rhetoric, emotions, or unreason, as well as non-verbal phenomena, in order to establish the nature of a political thought-practice and to answer the questions: what features does the thinking that we term 'political thinking' exhibit? What happens to its conceptual structures, to the relative weighting of political ends and functions, to the interplay between epistemologies and value-variance? What is this thing, this end-product, we call political thought? By what do we recognize it? How can we classify it? Which analytical perspectives on it generate which forms of understanding? And in attempting to confront those questions, we need all the while to address actual forms of political thought in our societies as evidence from which we may fashion tentative answers. To reiterate, the location of this enterprise in the field of knowledge is a part of the family of political science or political studies, but it concurrently includes considering how neighbouring disciplines may assist us in gaining a clearer purchase on our own scholarly endeavours. As students of political thought we will want to understand, categorize, and interpret such thinking, if only because we are fascinated with human practices, especially practices that are shared with others, or that relate to others. In sum, the general field of political theory as understood here recognizes that it significantly refers to normative and prescriptive theorizing, but it homes in on a different kind of political theorizing. It values the kind of theorizing that pertains to the two practices of thinking about politics and thinking politically,

analysing interpretatively the ways those practices utilize description, pre-
scription, and, in their own right, interpretation. Having probed the first of
those two practices in my *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual
Approach*, this book now focuses preponderantly on the second.

Political theory is a complex and reflective mode of conceptualizing political
thought. To make matters slightly more complicated, because some aspects of
political theory themselves display prescriptive preferences and biased inter-
pretative thinking and—that is to say, they themselves contain, often unwit-
tingly, ideological messages—and because political theorists, too, are limited by
the features of language (whether or not they recognize that limitation), good
political theory needs also to theorize about itself, that is, to be introspective and
self-critical. Hence one underlying epistemological underpinning of the ap-
proach developed in these pages is the variability that emanates from essential
contestability; another is the normality of engaging in political thinking; and a
third is the requirement to take all forms of political thinking seriously. These
underpinnings involve ideological and methodological constraints that could
be decoded and rephrased in terms of pluralism, inclusiveness, or an anti-
hierarchical stance. While the substance of such underpinnings is contingent
and contestable, the unavoidability of a theorist working within some form of
epistemological and ideological constraints is not.

The senses in which the political theory promoted in these pages assumes a
slightly different character to that currently at the centre of university courses
will become more explicit as the book progresses. We may begin by noting its
intention to question an observation such as Wolin's that 'although the
vocabulary of the political theorist carries the trace of everyday language and
experience, it is largely the product of the theorist's creative efforts.'[10] If that is
indeed the case, it is a matter for regret. For that observation both elided the
distinction between political theorists and political philosophers, and over-
emphasized the gap between amateur and professional political thinking,
while focusing on the latter. It also ignored a distinction between two kinds
of creativity in theorizing—that of interpreting as connecting, decoding,
unpacking, and reformulating; and that of critically advancing ethical and
ideological standpoints and improving the internal logic of political argumen-
tation. Furthermore, it presented the theorist-cum-philosopher as a socially
detached and solitary mind whose creativity is mainly self-concocted rather
than indebted to others, operating at a relatively unsullied and impartial
intellectual level, one distinct from the ostensibly plain, unsophisticated and
socially-influenced practices of vernacular thinking and *their* theorizing. That
blurring is common among philosophers, in particular those for whom, as
Bernard Williams disapprovingly noted, 'political theory is something like

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[10] S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision,* op. cit., p. 15.

applied morality'.[11] As John G. Gunnell expressed it some years ago, the practices of political theorists display 'a loss of theoretical autonomy resulting from the dependence of political theory on other fields'.[12] In contrast, this study relates specifically to theorizing about political thinking as a ubiquitous element of human thought with its own characteristics, at the same time empirical and analytical—both of which are also always held to be practices of interpretation.

The study of thinking politically is empirical in the double sense of leaving *evidential* traces (texts and speech) that it exists as a practice, and because it concerns *concrete* issues that preoccupy both 'professional' and 'amateur' political thinking. However, the choice over what the researcher deems to be empirically significant is a matter of interpretation, guided—up to a point—by the understandings of the thinkers being investigated. The study of political thinking is analytical because, although it investigates actual political thought, it does so with a view to arriving at systematic and critical conclusions, borne by interpretative insights, about the nature of that thought, rather than about the nature of good social life. To pursue that kind of political theory, albeit, impacts clearly on other kinds of political thought—including normative political philosophy and argument-constructing logical exercises—and challenges their self-understood status as free-standing practices. And most certainly, political theorists cannot be reduced to 'political philosophers employed within government or political science departments'.[13]

4. THINKING POLITICALLY AND ITS FEATURES

What, then, is the anatomy of thinking politically? Our thoughts—identifiable through our utterances, writings, and visual signs such as body language, art, or architecture—are complex sets of interwoven messages that will be picked up by many disciplines: psychology, cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, and linguistics are some that spring to mind. But they always also have a political aspect. That political aspect is activated when we constantly make decisions, act under orders we justify or resist, imagine a better life for ourselves and the groups to which we are attached, choose what is more

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[11] B. Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 2.

[12] J.G. Gunnell, *Between Philosophy and Politics: The Alienation of Political Theory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 3.

[13] Kelly's attempt to distinguish between political philosophers and political theorists on the basis of their departmental employment runs counter to the employment practices of most politics and political science departments (P. Kelly, 'Political Theory—The State of the Art', *Politics*, vol. 26 (2006), 47–53).

important or urgent when we have to attend to a number of concerns, find ways of adjudicating among competing claims on our principles or emotions, and seek support for our actions and the identities we adopt. Many of the above happen not only when we participate in dedicated and high density political thinking—political thought pertaining centrally to political institutions and processes such as considering for which party to vote, or political thought practised by those designated as evincing expertise in such thinking, whether university professors, seasoned politicians, or spin doctors—but also, say, when we conduct a choir or devise a cycling strategy for the Tour de France, involving less striking expressions of political thinking. The thought-practices, processes and structures that we call 'political' are to be found generally in human conduct and intercourse,[14] though the political aspects of thinking may be thicker or slighter, more significant or less so, in different settings.

If, as has been claimed above, politics is not a single grand thing, nor a practice that can be reduced to a macro-characteristic, the alternative lies in assembling its micro-components, albeit components that are closely interlinked. In order to express the ideas in the previous paragraph more rigorously, it is instructive to match the components of the general category 'politics' or 'the political' with its equivalents in the realm of thinking. In addition, in view of the generally accepted centrality of power as a political feature, we may note how the power element of thinking politically intersects with all the other categories of thinking politically, as well as constituting one of those categories itself.

I submit that we tend to allocate the term 'politics' or 'political' to the following features of social conduct:

A. Appropriating the locus of ultimate decision-making, including determining, parcelling out, and regulating domains and boundaries of competence among social spheres.

B. Distributing material and symbolic goods.

C. Mobilizing or withdrawing public support.

D. Organizing the social complexities through which stability or conflict and disruption are manufactured.

E. Policy-making and option-selection for collectivities.

F. Wielding power (which cuts across the above five categories).

To those six features correspond six forms of thinking and discourse pertaining to collectivities, and it is those forms only, strictly speaking, that can be labelled *political* thinking. As suggested at the outset of this chapter, the archetypal thought-practice cutting across those features is the decision: a practice intended to secure finality in collective affairs, whether for the short or long term.

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[14] See A. Leftwich (ed.), *What is Politics? The Activity and its Study* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p. 15.

Political thinking, then, is all such thinking that

a. Affirms or aspires to the exercise of ultimate and antecedent superior systemic control and jurisdiction in social affairs and overrides and limits the competences of other social spheres and agents by constructing a symbolic sovereign collective identity.

b. Distributes significance by ranking social aims, demands, processes, and structures in order of importance or urgency.

c. Accepts, justifies, criticizes, or rejects collective entities, and their procedures and activities.

d. Articulates cooperative, dissenting, competitive, or conflictual conceptual and argumentative arrangements for groups.

e. Determines policy, constructs and directs collective plans and, more ambitiously, projects collective visions.

f. Is expressed and conveyed through intensities and skills of persuasion, rhetoric, emotion or menace that pervade speech and writing and—in part—non-verbal communication; as well as through deliberate silence. Such discursive, argumentative and expressive attempts to exercise power permeate the other five spheres of political thinking without capturing their entirety, being specifically evident as:

　(α) The *self-defined incontestable* exercise of decision-making as *trumping* and the *assertion* of the capability and (additionally) right to *exclude* individual and group claims from consideration, or *subordinate* them to criteria emanating from the political sphere; or the *controlled suppression* of such claims prior to their articulation.

　(β) A listing of priorities that strives to be *indisputable*, and the *elimination* of other priorities.

　(γ) The *expression*, *eliciting*, or *utilizing* of the flow of consent, acquiescence, or opposition towards political systems, processes, groups, and leaders.

　(δ) The *regulation*, *stipulation*, or *dislocation* of spatial social relationships among groups.

　(ϵ) The attempted *control* over future social time.

Although power has a special significance among the features of the political, the latter cannot be reduced to manifestations of power alone. The italicized words in (α) through (ϵ) indicate in what form we are likely to find empirically detectable expressions of power-imbued discourse in the vocabulary of political thinking.

I recognize that the above features of the political might be subject to some disagreement, say, from the perspective of theorists of jouissance or of spectacle. My rejoinder would be that what I have identified cannot, on reflection, be

dismissed as core elements of the political without rendering that field absurd or reinventing it completely. That is to say, those elements are ineliminable features, and ones that most schools of interpretation would have to take on board, though they might translate them into other conceptual arrangements, and no doubt identify a couple of further features that will compete over core status. That said, as is the case with the intricacies of ideological morphology, we confront the fact of quasi-contingency: those features are necessary aspects of the political, but their concrete manifestations in any given instance may mutate, their relative weighting vis-à-vis each other will differ and, occasionally, truncated forms will be found in which one of the features is faint or absent.

But let us return for a moment to the charge of ethnography.[15] Is the consequence of an approach that regards thinking politically as a ubiquitous practice, and that locates it to a considerable extent outside its conventional sphere, to dilute the discipline of political studies? After all, ordering from a menu is a culinary and cultural practice, and the decisions, influence-wielding, and negotiations involved in that activity appear to transfer the study of politics to the domain of cultural studies or psychology—not to mention gastronomy. While it is correct to argue that the latter domains have political features (and the political, in turn, intersects with economics, history, anthropology, and linguistics), the features of thinking politically they contain are nevertheless predominantly of interest to students of politics. Regulating the boundaries of social life, distributing significance, mobilizing or withholding support, engineering social stability or instability, constructing collective visions, and wielding power are principal features of political life and thought that are inseparable from the core concerns of the discipline, however illuminating they may be in the study of other domains of knowledge, and however dispersed among other human practices they may be. They are the omnipresent and underlying thought-practices in which we should be interested specifically as political theorists, independently of our thinking about their conceptual translations or manifestations through familiar political terms such as liberty, justice, or obligation—the rich substances with which normative political philosophers or ideologists work. Those practices may be collated from wherever they occur, bearing in mind the contexts in which they are found.

5. COMPETING METHODOLOGIES

Reflecting about methodology goes in and out of fashion with great regularity. Political thinking makes sense to the extent that it is accompanied by

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[15] See also the comments on Tully in Section 10a.

considering how we practise it; in other words, to the extent that we theorize about such thinking. Ontologies and epistemologies, traditions, ideologies or—put slightly differently—philosophies, histories, and discursive and conceptual patterns, are the bedrocks on which political thinking is grounded. If it is the case that—knowingly or otherwise—we often pick our methods to fit our substantive goals, it is equally the case that our substantive goals are constricted and directed by our methods and by the knowledge-strategies that we embrace. Here a considerable gap has opened up since Wolin wrote his memorable 1969 article, echoing Max Weber, entitled 'Political Theory as a Vocation'. Wolin criticized the then-dominant behaviouralists for their method, a desire to acquire scientific knowledge about politics as dependent on the acquisition of certain techniques.[16] 'Method' was specifically denigrated as the uncritical adoption of predictability.

In another take on method, Ian Shapiro has offered a number of reasonable criticisms of contemporary political science and political theory, but he bases them on a stark distinction between 'problem-driven theory and method-driven theorem'.[17] That is not a standpoint adopted in these pages. Problems and methods interact constantly: certain methods alert the researcher to specific problems, while revealing or obscuring particular facts and paths of analysis. Rational choice, for example, may uncover strategic options available to a state, while underplaying the role of cultural prejudices as problematic in shaping governmental decisions. Certain problems engender different solutions that hinge on manifest or latent methodological positions: the welfare state as a tool for reducing economic hardship may seem either unduly interventionist or as freeing human potential, depending on whether methodological individualism is in play or not. Moreover, for some political theorists and philosophers methodology is regarded as an optional and rather distracting externality that deflects from the normative or genealogical concerns that grand theory should pursue. But at an unintentional level at least, such a deflection has never taken place, nor is methodology a side-issue of relatively little significance. To the contrary, political theory has for most of its existence been heavily influenced by historical temporal trajectories, theories of development and evolution, teleologies with a deterministic bent, narratives of philosophical anthropology, or foundational myths that have chaperoned social thought. And for much of its existence, once again notably in the concluding third of the twentieth century, political theory has had recourse to philosophical models and thought experiments that have focused on

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[16] S. Wolin, 'Political Theory as a Vocation', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63 (1969), 1063–4.

[17] I. Shapiro, *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 11.

universality or, at least, on the ideal consensus that rational and politically virtuous agents might attain.

Some of those methods have had deleterious effects, particularly when exceptional individuals have been the foci of study, often cut off from each other and from their social milieu at the expense of group, collective, and cultural tendencies, and to the detriment of exploring normal, or typical, political thought, let alone its qualitatively impoverished variants. Indeed, for some philosophers the abhorrence of the normal in favour of the superior has been a badge of honour. Debatable methods, however, should not entail the eschewing of sensitivity to method in research generally. *If* political thinking is a ubiquitous human and social practice, just as thinking about income or friendship or sex is, and *if* we believe that students of society—commonly known as social scientists—should be interested in all facets of social conduct, including thought-practices that have a profound impact on the political world and that constitute it to a considerable degree—a vista that many of them prefer not to contemplate—then we require as broad as possible an understanding of political thought, accompanied by the proper methods to extract that understanding. Those two 'if's are transformed in these pages into guiding assumptions, without which our comprehension of social life, and specifically of politics and of political thinking, will be seriously compromised.

Of course, there *is* a method in the approach developed in this study as well, arising from the incompleteness of our scholarly knowledge not about politics (around which most methodological debates take place), but about thinking politically. Such knowledge—however partial or provisional—needs to be acquired. But it should be augmented not by emphasizing techniques of objectivity, precision, and verification in a crude imitation of once-standard scientific methods, but through acquiring a conceptual and interpretative understanding of the forms and modes of expression that thinking politically adopts both conventionally and unconventionally. It aspires to the discovery of patterns, constraints, and enabling devices, but not of immutable regularities and trajectories, certainly not of final words in theorizing. Unlike the uncritical stance of which versions of behaviouralism or positivism have been accused, interpretation is itself a form of analytical critique as well as exploration, and that in turn is a significant form of explanation.

Consequently, the kind of scholarship advocated here is not centrally concerned with the scientific end of ascertaining causality, let alone asserting predictability. Interpretation invokes understanding through identifying meaning, and such understanding is as valid an end of research as is establishing causation.[18]

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[18] I. Shapiro, op. cit., p. 42, sees the role of realism in the social sciences, a role he endorses, as that of 'describing causal mechanisms'. But causality is not the only rendering of the real social and political world. Another rendering is the emphasis on uncovering its structures, complexities and indeterminacies; that is, on analysing the features that typify it.

Causality in a hard sense cannot apply to studying the formation and configurations of political ideas in the first place, as distinct from their genesis, because at any given point one of the central characteristics of political thinking is its fundamental indeterminacy as distinct from—at best—overlapping and complementary causality. And if concepts are indeterminate and their meaning is essentially contestable, attempts to elaborate them and spell out their attachment to complex political arguments may reveal multiple alternative paths. Theories of path dependency are themselves highly selective in singling out a specific past route among a spate of contenders. A softer and more appropriate form of 'causality' looks at logical and cultural constraints as shutting out certain options, while encouraging the use of others. But the complexity of political ideas does not permit the construction of a clear causal chain to begin with, and we are more likely to gain analytical traction and insight into the nature of political thought by reference to loose patterns and Wittgensteinian family resemblances.

Ongoing conversations about the political and political theory have a long pedigree, which is characterized by a remarkable lack of consistency and the inability to construct an agreed body of understanding. True, various trends have insisted on the supremacy, even monopoly, of their points of view but in historical perspective any unity is exposed as chimerical. Rising and declining fashions have either formed the bases of current discourses or have led to culs-de-sac. The following sections examine some of those approaches and schools in order to throw some light on where we stand now.

6. CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL: THE POPULAR AND THE PROFESSIONAL

In setting out the fundamental and ineliminable elements of the political and of thinking politically, we cannot ignore the historical environment from which many current understandings emerged. Competing and frequently confusing conceptions of the political have influenced our thinking over the past century or so, since 'politics' and 'the political' began to crystallize not only as a practice but as a discipline that investigates that practice. Exploring some instances of British thought-practices over that period yields edifying findings. At the beginning of the twentieth century, just as politics, or political science, was coming into view as a distinct academic domain, the *Oxford English Dictionary*—after dutifully noting Aristotle's *Politics*, as mentioned in the Introduction—offered a spate of definitions of politics. It began with 'The science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organization, and administration of a state or part of one'. It then went

into detail: 'political actions or practice: policy' and 'political affairs or business: political life', from there to 'political principles, convictions, opinions of a person or party'—close to what we now term ideology; and ended with a more figurative meaning: 'conduct of private affairs; political management, scheming, planning.'[19]

The distinction between science and art within social philosophy and the study of society used to be a common one. But the inability of the *OED* to distinguish more sharply between the science and art of government was revealing. To make matters worse, the normally rich English language is particularly unhelpful—especially in UK practice—in failing to differentiate between politics as the *explanandum* and as the *explanans*, as the name of a series of practices as well as the name of the body of knowledge that results from their study (as in 'the department of politics' rather than 'the department of political science'). Studying the nature of politics was not what was meant by the phrase political science (or far more frequently at the time, the science of politics). As a science, politics was a technique of governing, reflecting an older search, to be found inter alia in Hume and Adam Smith, for the rules of statecraft and the appropriate machinery of legislation.[20] That intersected with the term 'Political Economy', which alluded more specifically to the professional administrative application of laws and policy that regulated economic and commercial affairs in particular. In addition, the science of politics was also partly shaped by the utilitarian administrative tradition, a set of practices in which rational and benefit-maximizing techniques of decision-making, investigation, and influencing were applied both in the British Empire— India is the obvious case—and in the UK, as on issues of health and education.

As an art, politics was something practised to the best of its participants' ability. It had a vision but it seemingly lacked a method. J.A. Hobson, the liberal progressive, economist and analyst of imperialism, had attempted to differentiate between 'Social science and social art' in the somewhat broader context of an analysis of social values and policy. He referred to the 'collection of masses of ordered and measured social facts', to formulating rules and establishing quantitative standards of human well-being, but he also warned that the laws deriving from that information needed to be guided by a 'larger organic plan or vision' that would stamp human values on the acceptance or rejection of a scientific proposal.[21] Both the 'science' and the 'art' of politics tellingly referred to the practice, not to the discipline.

When detached from its conceptualization as an applied science, the term 'politics' was often taken for granted in three senses. The first is the working

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[19] *Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit., 1909, p. 1074.

[20] S. Collini, D. Winch, and J. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 14–15; 30–1.

[21] J.A. Hobson, *Work and Wealth* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 322, 348.

out of ethical codes and beliefs, the principled governing of people; the second is an allusion to the cut and thrust of conflict between political parties; and the third is the subjugation of the field of government to distorted and underhand tactics, or at least to 'politicking', a term imported from the USA and signifying a slightly manipulative sense of campaigning and 'doing the rounds'— sometimes that too has been incorporated in the French term 'la politique'. To add to the confusion, much of the sphere of politics was unquestioningly subsumed under the state, often in upper case, and some of it was reallocated to the arena of the social, where a formal but awkward distinction between the political and the social came into play, as with the terms 'political reform' and 'social reform'. The one usually referred to the machinery of government— extending the franchise, fairer democratic representation, or local government reform—and the other to the redistribution of scarce essential goods aiming at improving the lot of the disadvantaged. Certainly very few thinkers and writers were either capable of rising, or willing to rise, above their own conventional understandings of politics as something happening merely within their own British sphere of experience. The result was a general tendency to navigate around the word 'politics'. In ways redolent of the fate of the term 'ideology', politics had a serious reputational problem and simply could not discharge the rhetorical work that was required of it.

Hence, at the *explanandum* level, one of the main causes of the unease with any proper investigation or clarification of 'politics' may well have had something to do with the rise of mass politics intruding into what had been perceived to be a gentleman's elite activity on the one hand, and with the growing preference for 'social reform' as a umbrella term for progressive politics on the other.[22] These two strands were of course typical of very different ideological positions, the one to do with the loss of an old world, the other with anticipating the new one. At the *explanans* level, a main cause was the relative novelty of the emergence of politics as a domain in its own right, in contrast to the conflation of a number of different disciplines, ideologies, and *Weltanschauungen* at the end of the nineteenth century. Between them, political economy, utilitarianism, and social philosophy had swallowed up most of the conceptual space that might otherwise have been available for an independent or autonomous recognition of politics as a broad realm of human activity, not just of politicians and states. As social philosophy, in the words of the *OED*, politics was 'public or social ethics, that branch of moral philosophy dealing with the state or social organism as a whole'[23]— note the organic metaphor so typical of the times. Indeed, on the academic level both sociology—as the empirical study of society—and political science

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[22] See M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

[23] *Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit.

were still to be found under the aegis of social philosophy. Here politics emerged as an ethical enterprise, not least in order to remove it from the encroachment of the increasingly narrow, gloomy, and morally disheartening precepts of political economy.

As the social philosopher J.S. Mackenzie put it in an acclaimed book,

> the term Politics may be interpreted in a very large sense, so as to include not only Social Philosophy but also Ethics and the Philosophy of Art and Religion. In a more restricted sense we might use the term as an equivalent for Social Philosophy [by which he meant 'the application of philosophical principles to social questions', or 'principles for our guidance in the conduct of social life']. But the term is usually and most conveniently used in a sense somewhat narrower than this, to signify the science which deals with what we might call social machinery. . . . Politics, in this restricted sense, is clearly one of the departments of Social Philosophy. At the same time it must be remembered that it is only in so far as Politics can be treated as a necessary element in the rational development of mankind, that it falls within the sphere of Social Philosophy.[24]

Aristotle was not forgotten. A rather less sophisticated political commentator and essayist, W.S. Lilly, simply contended that 'Properly speaking, politics—the word is used in its old and only worthy sense, not in its modern acceptation of vote-catching—must be considered a branch of ethics.' It was 'a chapter in the philosophy of right . . . the organic whole of the outward conditions of a life according to Reason'.[25] It is no less instructive to read, in an 1891 article on teaching at Oxford by the liberal idealist philosopher D.G. Ritchie, about 'lectures on political philosophy (which does not differ much, if at all from political science, except in name)'.[26] The curriculum of political and social science that year reflected precisely the eclectic conception of the study of politics, including lectures on constitutional law, political philosophy, political economy, and Aristotle's ubiquitous *Politics*. The lectures, one can only assume, had been attended by members of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s staff!

The common separation of political from social reform voiced by practical reformers, replicated half a century later in T.H. Marshall's famous distinction between political and social rights[27] was therefore edifying but misleading. Among liberal thinkers the distinction was retained but its boundaries were breached. It was breached because social reform was shorthand for politically-managed reform in the spheres of economic and social betterment. L.T. Hobhouse wrote: 'Towards the close of the last [nineteenth] century we

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[24] J.S. Mackenzie, *An Introduction to Social Philosophy* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1890), pp. 1, 49, 369–70.

[25] W.S. Lilly, *First Principles in Politics* (London: John Murray, 1899), p. 8.

[26] D.G. Ritchie, 'The Teaching of Political Science at Oxford', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 2 (1891), p. 89.

[27] T.H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1964), pp. 71–134.

used sometimes to hear that the work of political emancipation was now substantially complete, and that the time for social emancipation had arrived.'[28] It turned out, he argued, that the removal of social barriers to the effective exercise of the franchise and to democratic representation signalled a new view. It departed from an earlier liberalism that believed that 'political society was a more artificial arrangement, a convention arrived at for the specific purpose of securing a better order and maintaining the common safety'.[29] By default, a new view of the political included social reform as the responsibility of the state—the political entity par excellence. After all, who would claim from the vantage point of the twenty-first century that measures of social reform such as national insurance, the annual budget, or a system of old age pensions are not to be included within the domain of the political? Yet reformers at the time were reluctant to say so in so many words. The term 'politics' still had too narrow or technical a meaning with which they were not at ease, while the ideological benefits of a new, and relatively radical, category of social reform could be exploited to immense political advantage. In having recourse to the organic view of society, Hobhouse insisted on the interconnection between the domains of politics, economics, and personal life, society being 'a whole which lives and flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts.'[30]

The second commonplace sense of politics alluded to the everyday functioning of the British governmental system. A Liberal party handbook on politics effectively equated politics with party government, the preserve of the specific democratic system of the UK. It was therefore concerned with the contest between two rival political parties, each experiencing in turn the vicissitudes of the wheel of fortune. The author, Sydney Buxton, a well-known second-ranking Liberal politician, still retained the sentiment that politics was nonetheless a moral enterprise, for if party government based on the truth of one's opinions were impossible, 'politics would remain a chaos without form and void'.[31] As for the third sense of politics, its current practice was described by Hobson as a 'dirty trade'.[32] The *Oxford English Dictionary* listed one of the meanings of 'political' as 'in a bad sense, partisan, factious', and portrayed a politician as 'chiefly in a sinister sense, a shrewd schemer; a crafty plotter or intriguer.'[33] And Buxton complained that, contrary to ideal

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[28] L.T. Hobhouse, 'Government by the People', in L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, ed. J. Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 135.

[29] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, op. cit., p. 26.

[30] Ibid., p. 65.

[31] S. Buxton, *A Handbook to Political Questions of the Day* (London: John Murray, 1903), p. xvii.

[32] J.A. Hobson, *A Modern Outlook* (London: Herbert & Daniel, 1910), p. 286.

[33] *Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit., pp. 1074–5. For a recent critique of the view of political discourse as a particular kind of 'enunciation regime' that typically produces untruth and distortions—but judged on criteria external to it—see B. Latour, 'What if we *Talked* Politics a Little?', *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 2 (2003), 143–64.

expectations, 'prejudice and passion too frequently warp the feeling and conduct of politicians',[34] as if politics could normally be neutral and dispassionate.

The first decade of the twentieth century consequently saw in a number of changes. Graham Wallas's *Human Nature in Politics* seems to signal a double breakthrough: the rise of new specialized disciplines in the social sciences and the recognition of the normality of the non-rational features of politics. Though Wallas began conventionally with interpreting the study of politics as related to 'the best form of government', now settled in favour of representative democracy, he went on to assert that 'political science is just beginning to regain some measure of authority', after the failure of utilitarianism and political economy.[35] The problem still was, however, that students of politics analysed institutions rather than human beings. Wallas sought a counterbalance: 'Whoever sets himself to base his political thinking on a re-examination of the working of human nature, must begin by trying to overcome his own tendency to exaggerate the intellectuality of mankind.'[36] But even in that pioneering work, emphasizing the importance of impulse and emotion, there is hardly any explanation of what politics is. We read about political philosophy, political programmes, and practical politics, about politicians and political parties; in short, we are simply supposed to know what politics is when we see it.

Why, then was there relative silence with regard to the meaning of politics? Politics was ubiquitously present as a word but usually absent as a concept that required explanation, analysis, or definition. Instead it was surrounded by partial substitutes that were semi-consciously assumed to do its work. Foremost among those were 'government' and the 'state'. Government signified the specific institutions of the state and the locality, as well as the art and techniques of legislating, policy-making, and administration, the aim generally being to attain 'good government'. The state possessed a complex pedigree at the nineteenth/twentieth fin-de-siècle. Hegelian and Idealist understandings, according to which the state was the highest rational and ethical form of human organization, still abounded. But among progressives more concrete views of the state existed alongside those philosophically abstract and perfectionist ones, particularly as the instrument for securing the conditions under which its citizens were 'able to win by their own efforts all that is necessary to a full civic efficiency'.[37] Those extended duties, we might conclude, were what progressive politics was about, but the word 'politics' could not on its own deliver the required connotations. Since then, dictionaries notwithstanding,

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[34] Buxton, op. cit., p. xviii.
[35] G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable & Co., 1908, 4th edn. 1948), pp. 1, 13.
[36] Ibid., p. 21.
[37] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, op. cit., p. 76.

'politics' has undergone a major transformation, with the divide between vernacular and professional meanings increasing all the time. Academic conceptions of power, collective social visions, contestation, antagonism, support-mobilization and exclusion, decision-making, conflict-management and even social rupture are regular features of what we now tend to call 'the political'. That conceptual unpacking of the components of politics was hardly salient in the minds of specialists a century ago, let alone in ordinary discourse.

7. CONSENSUS MEETS CONFLICT

Rather than offer a detailed historical survey, a comparison with the 1960s—a particularly fecund decade with respect to rethinking the political—is enlightening. The most obvious change, of course, was the growth of the study of politics as a discipline. The balance of discourse shifted towards professionals, and even the world of journalism became roughly educated in some of the better-known theories, whose proponents have in recent times often been afforded the quasi-celebrity status that the media are so good at conferring. And whereas debates about the nature of politics were far and few between a century ago, over the past half-century they have been found mainly among academics, though not to an overwhelming degree either. The other change has been the internationalization of the discourse, so that it would no longer make sense to talk of a British understanding of the term. While actual discussions about what people understand by the word 'politics' have not moved forward (as in President Obama's quip 'I didn't take on health care because it was good politics'[38]), and in the so-called West general understandings do not seem to be particularly innovative; within the broad field of academic discourse there have been frequent attempts to (re)define the practice.

It is unedifying to talk about the present without taking account of the plethora of discourses on politics throughout the twentieth century, particularly given that some earlier twentieth-century thinkers such as Carl Schmitt have been rediscovered over the past twenty years. Nonetheless, the 1960s were a focal point of tendencies, divisions, disagreements, and oddities about politics and political science. Two books may serve as markers for the following discussion, both published in the UK in 1962, both republished in Penguin books: the political theorist, biographer, and policy adviser Bernard Crick's *In Defence of Politics* and J.D.B. Miller's *The Nature of Politics*, Miller being an Australian political scientist who taught for many years in the

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[38] Barack Obama, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/28/us/politics/28obama.text.html?pagewanted=1

UK. From today's perspective, Crick's is one of the most peculiar approaches, though not atypical of the extraordinary impact of the Cold War on political theory, from Isaiah Berlin to Jacob Talmon to John Rawls and numerous others. Crick's definition of politics is strongly imbued with the ethical drive towards a good society, with an Aristotelian search for the point of balance that underpins order, also evident in far more recent projects to secure stability such as Rawls's. Crick saw politics as 'the activity by which government is made possible when differing interests in an area to be governed grow powerful enough to need to be conciliated ... politics is simply when they are conciliated—that solution to the problem of order which chooses conciliation rather than violence and coercion'.[39] Things get considerably hairier in a chapter entitled 'A Defence of Politics against Ideology', which includes the statement that 'not all forms of government are political'. Reflecting the mood of the mid-century as well as the post-war Butskellite British focus on ostensible consensus politics, Crick associated ideology with totalitarianism, and then went on to associate totalitarianism with 'anti-politics'. He then summed up as follows: 'Politics is the way in which free societies are governed. Politics is politics and other forms of rule are something else.'[40] We are not told what that something else is.

Miller offered a completely different take, reversing the emphasis. Getting to the point immediately; his opening sentence was 'What do we mean when we say something is political?' He dismissed the 'vulgar answer' to that, much in the nineteenth-century British tradition: 'activities connected with the political parties'. Politics was not *just* about government, because 'political situations arise out of disagreement' whereas the routines of government were not characterized as political. In sum, 'Politics ... is about disagreement and conflict, and political activity is that which is intended to bring about or resist change, in the face of possible resistance.' The dynamic force behind politics was a diversity that engendered discord and dissent. But politics also required government as a means of resolving disagreement.[41]

Crick's approach may have been idiosyncratic and exaggerated but his mood was closer to that of political theorists in the 1960s and 1970s, while Miller is more compatible with the 1990s and beyond, even if more simplistic. Miller also tellingly regarded politics as 'non-moral'[42] whereas, most strikingly, the need to include ethical normativity as an integral part of the political—if not in quite such a partial way as Crick's—has not abated but has continued in parallel with other developments in both the consensus and the conflict variants. That is perhaps the most surprising thing about still

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[39] B. Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 30.
[40] Ibid., pp. 34, 55.
[41] J.D.B. Miller, *The Nature of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 13–16, 24.
[42] Ibid., p. 23.

existing conceptualizations of politics and of its study among political theorists, conceptualizations that continue to drag it away from the social sciences. The politics as consensus mode became predominant among 'Anglo-American' political philosophers. Take Wolin's above-mentioned article 'Politics as a Vocation', in which he berated political scientists for constructing 'unpolitical theories'. They were unpolitical in offering 'no significant choice or analysis of the quality, direction, or fate of public life'.[43] That understanding still seems to be a central summons: political theorists craft visions of the political and in so doing they believe they discharge their fundamental social responsibility as befits a noble calling. Note for instance J. Donald Moon's query a generation later: '... one may wonder what the point of theorizing is, if it involves endless arguments ...?' The possibility of theorizing about the nature of those arguments is excluded from that question, because political theory, following Rawls, is conceived of as 'reconciliation to a political world that realizes a realistic utopia, in which some of the divisive political conflicts can be narrowed or even overcome'.[44] Rawls elsewhere made his position on 'the political' very clear:

> To say that the political is determined by a people's politics may be a possible use of the term 'political'. But then it ceases to be a normative idea, and is no longer part of public reason. We must hold fast to the idea of the political as a fundamental category and covering political conceptions of justice as intrinsic moral values.[45]

Conflict may, in those versions of universal morality taking possession of the political, be a feature of politics, but it is an ephemeral and ultimately unethical, even perverse, one; theorizing about it is therefore an enormous waste of energy. That mood is reflected in theoretical and ideal-type exercises in deliberative democracy, which have been skilfully criticized by Norval.[46]

Reducing conflict is a laudable end and political philosophers ought to be heavily involved in pursuing it, but that should not exhaust our understanding of political theory. We may speculate on why those tendencies came to be: perhaps because political philosophers have grown to regard themselves as pedagogues, or because many of them went through radicalizing personal experiences in their youth, or because they aspire to be intellectuals who make a difference to societies they see as flawed, or because they have been trained in

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[43] S. Wolin, 'Political Theory as a Vocation', op. cit., 1063.

[44] J. Donald Moon, 'The Current State of Political Theory: Pluralism and Reconciliation', in S.K. White and D.J. Moon (eds), *What is Political Theory?* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp. 17, 13; J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 4.

[45] J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 174.

[46] A. Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the primacy of appealing to ethical imperatives, or because the crusading allegiance to vague notions of democracy powerfully informs the ideologies of the society in which most political theorists are concentrated, the USA. Whatever the cause, many political philosophers wish to change the world, indirectly taking to heart Marx's admonishment in his theses on Feuerbach. However, analysts of political thought—and of ideologies, as I have observed elsewhere[47]—need first to understand the world; specifically, they need to understand its politically discursive patterns. For Marx that would have been a retrogressive step; but there is little point in changing what you do not properly understand, or professedly understand only through the prism of outrage and condemnation. More accurately, there is little point for professional theorists to act or recommend action without understanding the conceptual and argumentative constraints endemic to political thinking, especially as such thinking is a necessary preliminary to changing the world sensibly. And the ubiquity of political thinking is a further consideration that requires us to take not only philosophers and intellectuals seriously, but also the ordinary thinking engaged in by collectivities of people.

8. POLITICAL THEORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

There is of course another political theory: the political theory that accompanies the study of government and governance in comparative politics and international relations is what many term empirical political theory, namely, the analysis of political processes, structures, and events. For instance, how students of comparative politics construct frameworks through which to explore correlations or causal links between budgeting and presidential power produces highly specialized and technical theorizing about politics that is only marginally informative about the nature of political thinking as a general phenomenon, while chiefly informative about the nature of institutional practices and conduct. That is not the brief of this book. However, general governance theories applying to complex networks of political activity and processes, and more specific theories of multi-level governance, plainly resonate with the conceptual extension of the practice of political thinking to incorporate multiple locations, sources, articulatory capacities, targets, aims, and flexible reformulations—all within discernible patterns—that guides this book. In particular, empirical political scientists in the USA, contemporaneously to Crick and Miller, possessed their own illuminating understandings and divides over the meaning of politics.

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[47] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., p. 42.

From within the social sciences a significant endeavour was offered by David Easton in the 1960s, succinctly put as the 'authoritative allocation of values', wherein authoritative also includes their binding nature, a feature that for Easton 'distinguishes political from other types of allocations'. To some extent this mirrored Harold Lasswell's *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*, the emphasis of both scholars being not on politics as the consensus-forming process of free individuals but on its distribution-determining function, as well as the special capacity of the authorities to 'mobilize the resources and energies of the members of the system,'[48] with Easton focusing sharply on the formal effectiveness of the feature. In using the term 'values' Easton was not bowing to the impact of normative philosophy but merely indicating anything to which a value could be attached. Yet normative wishful thinking nonetheless seeped into such empirical definitions of politics, as if Aristotle were, in effect, still a commanding presence. For Easton, as for Crick, a statist and 'political system' bias was still built-in; after all, he saw his work as a form of systems-analysis, based on the behavioural interaction of individuals and groups. Political life was for him an open and self-regulating system,[49] in which order prevailed over disruption. Politics did not include non-authoritative allocation, such as that found in active protest, looting, or revolutions, or even in pluralist competition—frequently uncoordinated and even chaotic—among different sets of values. Those were sources of stress and disturbance to the equilibrium that political life was expected to produce, and in response it would simply adapt its 'regularized procedures and structures for authoritatively allocating values'.[50] It now seems odd, to say the least, not to recognize that politics has *always* included challenges to prevailing authority claims, and that allocative practices can quite normally fail to be binding, or fail to allocate the values they wish to allocate, and still be political practices.[51]

Contrary to such standard views of the location of politics, Robert Dahl's work in the 1960s was seminal in excluding prescription from his investigations. Importantly, that was achieved through his notion of polyarchy, which extended the concept of politics beyond the constraining straitjacket of the state, whose agencies could thus no longer be purveyors of the unitary good life, and offered instead an insight into a generalized practice. While Easton recognized the presence of political life in groups and organizations (still somewhat formally), he had confined the political system to society as a whole, referring to less inclusive systems as 'para-political'. Dahl, however,

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[48] D. Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 50, 54.

[49] Ibid., p. 48.

[50] Ibid., pp. 79–83.

[51] Cp. J.G. Gunnell, 'The Language of Democracy and the Democracy of Language', in H.P. Bang (ed.), *Governance as Social and Political Communication* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 172.

offered what he then described as a 'bold' definition of what is political: 'a political system is any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule, or authority.'[52] Politics was about changing people's anticipated course of behaviour and it could happen anywhere, including in dictatorships, clubs, and families. Echoes of Max Weber's conception of power were evident ('"politics" for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distributing of power'[53]), though without Weber's focus on states and groups. Thus, long before the heyday of feminist theory, Dahl had broken down the distinction between public and private, as well as that between institutions and processes, and between power and authority. Contrast that with Hannah Arendt insisting in the late 1950s and early 1960s in her own special way that the political was public, not private.[54] Power—or in Dahl's idiosyncratic usage—influence, was undoubtedly the master concept in his understanding of politics, and it was still famously operative only at a cognitive level, as reflected in the debates about the various faces of power in the 1960s and 1970s. More commonsensically, though, unlike Crick or Easton, authority as legitimate power or influence was carved out of the larger category instead of filling it completely. And contrary to Crick, Dahl had no value-preference for conciliation or for the pursuit of freedom.

The mid-twentieth century emerges as the heyday for academic grappling with politics both as a phenomenon and as a concept, and a number of features of those discourses emerge that stretch down to the present day, displaying both ideological and methodological preferences. First, while many political scientists have extended their purview of politics to embrace potentially any form of collective interaction, political theorists and philosophers hold out for a narrower ideological domain that clings mainly to liberal democratic politics. They have, if anything, heightened their sense of mission in recent decades, seeing political action as an ethical desideratum and the political more generally as a field of public human endeavour and potential achievement, rather than one of corruption and self-interested antagonisms. Second, both political scientists and political theorists initially evinced a salient tendency to approach politics as a macro-phenomenon, as something systemic that can often be captured in a single pithy phrase or sentence. The possibility that politics is a combination of micro-features that co-exist in different and fluctuating proportions; that it may be a cluster of properties whose threshold can be crossed in diverse ways, and with various critical masses in operation, was not in evidence. Political scientists have now moved on beyond systems

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[52] R. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 2nd edn. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 6.

[53] M. Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation' in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 78.

[54] See e.g. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 28 and *passim*.

theory and polyarchy to appreciate the micro-phenomena of the political. But many political theorists and philosophers still tend to assume that the political has one dominant characteristic. Even in the oft-mooted distinction between state and civil society, the latter has often been understood as depoliticized.

The growing rupture between political theory and political science constitutes to this date one of the fundamental weaknesses of the discipline. It requires urgent addressing if the discipline is to survive in all its potential richness and if political theory is not to be abandoned to philosophers at a heavy cost to social scientists. The key to rescuing political theory for the study of politics may rest in an approach that mirrors the micro-concerns of many political scientists but endeavours to do so with the methods and finesse that the study of actual political thinking can offer. Although the various 'turns' that characterize political science exhibit a similar logic, they do so within a different conceptual framework from that employed here, let alone operating very much in isolation from conventional political theory. The inspiration I have sought for that broader perspective comes less from empirical political science than from the insights into political thinking that have been nourished by my abiding interest in the nature of ideologies. Their analysis, too, requires empirical observation, though one knowingly sandwiched between pre-interpretation and selection and the subsequent superimposition of interpretative layers. Among the many things we learn from the analysis of ideologies is that they are rarely, if ever, entirely state-produced and unitary, that they are not normally cohesive but loose and shifting, and that they provide in parallel both consensus-building and consensus-undermining discourses. The re-evaluation of the role and nature of ideologies in recent decades has paved the way for a similar reconsideration of thinking politically.

9. THEORIZING ABOUT MAINSTREAM PRACTICES

I wish briefly to adumbrate how the political theory of political thinking may relate to political philosophy and the history of political thought. Studying the methodology of either sub-field has of course mined a rich seam. But what do we observe when the theorists go about practising their craft? The activity of political philosophy as itself an object of study and theorizing involves the investigation of a number of practices that political philosophers undertake. One is the analysis of concepts—defining, honing, and distinguishing. That practice is shared with political scientists, though their viewpoints may differ, and consequently political concepts may perform different roles for each sub-discipline. Another is testing theories and arguments in terms of their coherence, validity, articulatory cogency, and succinctness or elegance, including sometimes their ontological and epistemological weight and persuasiveness.

A third is making recommendations, often of a universal normative nature, about the right, or the true, or the best, or the reasonable way of organizing collective life and about the choice of pertinent values. A fourth is engaging in the ethical justification or critique of arguments and policies. All of those employ methods of critical rational assessment, linked either to an appeal to general human ethical intuitions, or to processes of reflective deliberation. Many of these are also imaginative, envisioning alternative futures.

All but the testing role intersect with ideologizing practices, inasmuch as ideologies too engage in argument about the good life, about prescriptions concerning what is publicly right for collectivities; and inasmuch as political philosophies too engage in decontestation. The relationship between political philosophies and ideologies also overlaps in another sense, as ideologies inhabit a complex world on a number of continua: from the more rational to the emotional and deeply rhetorical; from elaborate to oversimplified presentation and debate; from the universal to the local; from the dogmatic to the pluralist. Even if political philosophers have a clear view about where they stand on those continua, in effect their relative location is more mobile than most of them concede. But a crucial dissimilarity is that the observer/participant distinction is elided among ethicists pursuing their focus on normativity, while that distinction is saliently in force among students of ideology and should be similarly present among students of thinking politically.

The term 'normative' frequently obscures a vital difference between normative and prescriptive political thought. Prescription is a statement of preferences that do not necessarily have to be ethical, nor do they have to aspire to the universalism, or at least generality, of normative theory. Jürgen Habermas has suggested a distinction between norms as 'exceptionless obligations' or 'oughts' that are unconditional and universal, and values as identifying desirable conduct attained through purposive action and that 'fix relations of preference which signal that certain goods are more attractive than others', doing so while competing over priority.[55] That distinction holds as long as we regard a value as essentially a non-ethical concept, prescribing something accorded appeal by its promoter (as was the case with Easton), and that can even express 'immoral' preferences. Thinking about politics, conceived as ideology, quite clearly and ubiquitously contains both normative and non-normative prescriptions and, if we wish to adopt Habermas' distinction, 'values' that an ethicist would regard as good or bad. Bearing that distinction in mind is important in the analysis of ideologies, an analysis which should be *neither* substantively normative *nor* prescriptive.[56] In fact, once political

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[55] Cp. J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 55.

[56] There is another sense in which political theorists prescribe or recommend what they regard to be good methodological perspectives, but that is not directly an involvement with values of the good collective life.

analysis adopts prescription and recommendation, it transforms itself into either ideology or political philosophy, occasionally into both.

In sum, there are many dimensions in which theorizing about how political philosophers think and how ideologists think will not be categorically different, because political philosophers display overt and covert ideological features, and because most ideologists broach questions of profound philosophical concern. Rousseau's conception of the general will may be a philosophical and methodological approximation to establish social truth, but it is also a belief in the unity of reflective thought, an emphatic statement about the power of community, altruism, and reason, a justification for force, and a preference for equality over liberty. Mill's philosophical exploration of the domain and features of liberty is equally informed by the ideological postulation of human beings as developing entities and as the best guardians of their own interests, and of liberty and its institutionalized defence as the apex of a civilized society. On another dimension, British political party manifestos are replete with allusions to the promotion of liberty, community, rights, and the national interest. All these should elicit overlapping analytical responses from political theorists. But theorizing about ideological practices will also utilize some of its own distinct rules of assessment in investigating ideological discourse. The test of an ideological text must be whether it meets the purposes and functions ideologies are intended to achieve, even when those purposes are revealed as partisan (which they will always be), illusory, or misleading. Actual political thinking may exhibit different assets from the ones analytic philosophers are accustomed to identify: it may be more useful, relevant, revealing, inclusive, or inspirational, as well as hold its own in the realm of ideational complexity. And in its ideological mode it may be more geared to influencing the actions of groups, to preserving the appeal of major ideological families or challenging that appeal, to directing public policy or to covering up some of its implications. Different disciplinary viewpoints plunder the same material to extract diverse readings.

The actual study of political thought also diverges somewhat from what historians of political thought engage in. Although they too follow an empirical discipline and also share interpretative approaches to their subject-matter with the study of ideologies, historians of political thought focus mainly on the study of temporal sequences and ruptures, cultural contexts and authorial intentions. Their perspective examines normative thinking as a temporally fluid practice reconstructed in narrative form or in relation to other cultural markers. A concern with change and evolution, discontinuities and contextual situating are among the features of this analysis. Alternatively, political philosophers adopt the methods, if not the persona, of historians of ideas, and employ—as Tully recommends—philosophical investigations of past languages and practices which stand 'in a reciprocal relation to the present, as a

kind of permanent critique' of political thinking and acting in general.[57] This 'utilitarian' approach to the history of political philosophy as providing a critical and dialogical handle on current problems and deficiencies is again an enterprise dissimilar to that pursued in these pages.

However, the recently burgeoning field of conceptual history has also identified the concept as the unit of meaning, emphasizing its mutations on a diachronic trajectory as its synchronic contexts change.[58] That trajectory is seen as future-oriented and focused on political and cultural transitions, and it associates modernity among others with the increased complexity and abstraction of political and social concepts. Second, it regards concepts as subject to continuous contestation with respect to their meanings, with the implicit polysemy such concepts carry. Third, it too importantly sanctions the investigation of vernacular as well as 'élite' languages. Here considerable common ground is shared with the enterprise pursued in this book, as long as conceptual historians can be weaned away from their focus on the history of solitary concepts towards an acceptance of the constant interaction among concepts and the consequent impossibility of completely disentangling one concept from another.[59] The arena of thinking politically is a field, not just a time-line, and the narratives it contains are not single threads.

10. FRAGMENTATION, DIVISION, OBFUSCATION: THE POLITICAL CONFRONTS INDETERMINACY

It is no accident that the linguistic turn impacted considerably on the reinterpretation of the political. It reinforced a number of trends that insisted that the study of the political could be augmented not by emphasizing techniques of objectivity, precision, and verification, but through acquiring conceptual and interpretative understanding of the forms and modes of expression that political conduct and political thinking adopt. One might have thought that the linguistic turn would refocus political theory on Weber's *Verstehen* enterprise and legitimate the exploration of language and of meaning as an equally respectable element of the sub-

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[57] J. Tully, 'Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity', *Political Theory*, vol. 30 (2002), 533–55.
[58] See e.g., R. Koselleck, *Futures Past* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); R. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); M. Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); W. Steinmetz (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); J.F. Sebastián, (ed.), *Political Concepts and Time: New Approaches to Conceptual History* (Santander: Cantabria University Press and McGraw-Hill, 2011).
[59] See M. Freeden, 'Ideology and Conceptual History: The Interrelationship between Method and Meaning', in Sebastián, ibid. (ed.), *Political Concepts and Time*, pp. 73–101.

discipline. That things didn't turn out that way was not only because the long shadow of the Rawlsians had obscured political theory by replacing the 'political' with the 'ethical' at a level of abstraction that emulated grand systems theory itself. Instead—particularly in the USA, rapidly becoming either the home of lost causes à-la-Strauss or the arena of the rediscovery of continental theory with a twist—the proselytizing culture of American public morality could not be shaken off. That is not to argue that we should not constantly strive to improve public life; it is simply to say that such striving is itself only one of the many complex features of the political, if our undertaking and responsibility, not as activists but as students of politics, is to attempt to offer a more complete picture.

a. 'Real' politics

There has been a spate of excellent and provoking books on the political over the past twenty years, powered mainly from three sources. The first is an appeal for a 'realist' political theory that returns to context and contingency. The second arises from a series of radical democracy projects that recognize and exalt the existence of conflict and difference. The third is largely the product of French poststructuralist theory that deconstructs the political and often challenges its conventional existence. The reharnessing of political realism, as in the work of Raymond Geuss alluded to in the Introduction to this book, or in James Tully's recent work, differs from previous manifest-ations of Realpolitik. Although Geuss laudably detaches himself from a macroscopic ethical desideratum applying 'one single dimension for assessing persons and their actions', he retains a strong belief in politics as the prescrip-tive pursuit of the good, he still regards relations of power as the *overriding* feature of politics, and he still refers to ideology as distorting and as the target of correction by political philosophy, thus removing a major form of political thought from serious consideration.[60] Geuss's realism is very specific in its siting and its acknowledgement of human imperfection: it focuses on the variety that historical contextualism reveals in competing over 'what is good in a particular concrete case by agents with limited powers and resources',[61] but it does not aspire to offer a searching response to *what* politics is, as distinct to *where* politics is located in the here and now. It is not that Geuss is wrong, but that he stops halfway. Indeed there is little to be found on the actual world of political thinking in his argument. Instead, he downgrades the

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[60] R. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 30–1, 37, 39, 52.

[61] Ibid., p. 31.

investigation of such thinking by claiming that 'the study of politics is primarily the study of actions and only secondarily of beliefs'.[62]

Time, space, and particularities are indeed central to the analysis I proffer, and they are referred to *en passant* in this chapter, but that does not tell the entire story. Another engagement with political realism was that of Bernard Williams'. He too saw political thought as constrained by historical conditions, and he too believed that political convictions 'have obscure causes and effects'. He also extended a welcome to audiences [sic] of pamphlets alongside 'utopian magistrates and founding fathers', and in his discussion of political decisions he rejected the idea that the party against whom the decision goes is morally wrong; rather, they have simply lost the argument. Nonetheless, once again we are offered a glimpse of a political realism that cannot shake off moral purposes. Echoing Crick's position, Williams, unlike Geuss, asserted that coercive power is not political, because inherent in politics is a 'basic legitimacy demand' that requires justification. His aim was to create a foundation for liberalism, not for political theory in general, and the basic legitimacy demand that liberal societies needed to meet hinted at ideal-theory expectations.[63] In Williams' own words: 'Now and around here the Basic Legitimacy Demand together with the historical conditions permit only a liberal solution: other forms of answer are unacceptable.'[64] In doing so, Williams recalled Weber's ethic of responsibility, and though he did focus on order as the 'first' political question,[65] he excluded many familiar kinds of thinking politically. Tellingly, William's non-realism was illustrated through his rejection of 'mythical' legitimations, thus ignoring the actual discursive power of politico-ideological language.[66]

Tully's stated aim is to craft 'an interlocutory intervention on the side of the oppressed'.[67] Interpretation alone cannot deliver, in his view, a critical or transformative theory. He detaches the activity of interpretation from political theory and demotes it by renaming it as an 'ethnographic thick description that aims at clarification and understanding for its own sake'.[68] Yet interpretation is not, as Tully suggests, simply for its 'own sake' (not that there is anything wrong with that), it is also a resource that can be deployed for other scholarly purposes, not the least prescription itself—for as realists of all stripes

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, op. cit., p. 4.

[64] Ibid., p. 8.

[65] Ibid., pp. 3, 6, 12–13. On the strong prescriptive elements in Williams' arguments, see R. Flathman, 'In and Out of the Ethical: The Realist Liberalism of Bernard Williams', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 9 (2010), pp. 77–98.

[66] Williams, op. cit., p. 7.

[67] J. Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Vol. 1: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 17.

[68] Ibid., pp. 16, 28–9.

agree, there is little point in prescribing what cannot be realized. In other retreats from so-called 'ideal theory' Charles W. Mills dismisses 'an ideally just state' as 'unattainable since that would be a state with no past history of injustice. So what we're trying to adjudicate is what corrective justice (by definition "non-ideal") now requires to eliminate or at least reduce past injustice.'[69] These versions of political realism espouse an ethical mission to reclaim ground never before trodden by the dispossessed, a highly focused critical realism in its objective of improving the empirically demonstrable plight of the unequal and the marginalized, but not a realism in allotting due scholarly concern, say, to the multiple voices—in various registers—of the 'oppressors', the apathetic, or the misinformed, for they too occupy space in the 'real' world. In their very different ways, approaches such as Geuss', Tully's and Williams' underscore that what has so far been missing in the literature on political realism is a clear distinction between prescriptive realism and inter-pretative realism. The latter kind of realism underlies the perspective offered in the pages of this book: that is to say, the challenge of decoding patterns of concrete and actual political thinking independently of their ethical assess-ment, or of a desire to offer improvements, or of using them in order to support a particular type of politics or political system.[70]

b. The democratic mission

A second revival of the political is a movement to be found particularly among American political philosophers. George Kateb exemplifies the sense of prescrip-tive and normative mission with which some of those philosophers drape them-selves. Stipulating that among the basic questions of political theory is 'what form and spirit of government . . . may arise that is morally admirable . . . when the necessities [of government] are placated?' he goes on to assert, following Hannah Arendt, that 'the best politics is thus the kind that satisfies the political theorist when the theorist approaches political phenomena with the mentality of an aesthetic judge'.[71] Bonnie Honig takes a more nuanced view. She no longer separates the ethical mission she assigns to political theorists from a background of permanent ideational and ideological conflict. Rather,

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[69] C. Pateman and C. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 21.
[70] See M. Freeden, 'Editorial: Interpretative Realism and Prescriptive Realism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 17 (2012), 1–11, in which some of the above points have been elaborated; and M. Humphrey, 'Getting "Real" about Political Ideas: Conceptual Morphology and the Realist Critique of Anglo-American Political Philosophy' in B. Jackson and M. Stears (eds), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 241–58.
[71] G. Kateb, *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 18, 156.

she embraces a broad ambit of the political through her astute distinction between virtù and virtue. Honig has charged virtue theorists, whose aim is the overcoming of dissonance and conflict, with the displacement of politics and with an aversion to the important disruptions that the sphere of politics hosts. And she has looked to the disruptive aspects of virtù to strengthen democratic politics, while retaining a keen awareness of the dangers of over-disruption. Thus, while clarifying distinctions that have become increasingly salient in the practices of theorizing about political thinking, she too advocates a substantive value-recommendation. She ends up with an explicit and wholehearted commitment to ethical conceptions of the political; she is engaged in offering an alternative way of shoring up a 'radical democratic politics of augmentation'.[72] Honig's later work bears out that important commitment.[73] Critique and exposure, with their normative underpinning, remain a notable—and highly respectable—end even of those who persuasively reject the streamlining aims of conventional normative political philosophers. It is very difficult to do otherwise in an academic climate where normative creativity and critique are the expected products of political theorizing.

Some genres of that revival also subscribe to diversity and pluralism as inescapable, while hoping to revitalize them with forms of radical democracy, but do so from a more emphatic and agonal post-modern approach in partial association with the accentuation of difference.[74] Behind that, as Hauptmann has observed, affective dispositions towards 'the political' among political theorists surface either as aversions or as warm expectations of its positive potential.[75] However, having feelings for and about our subject-matter is perfectly normal and not, as it was for some twentieth-century behaviouralists, a matter for complaint. The reduction of the study of political theory to the promotion, or blocking, of values simply misses out on vital additional information and knowledge we may glean about political thinking, without which we would be selling the political world short, and our understanding of it shorter. Among North America political theorists, in the USA and in Canada, 'the political' and the attempts to fathom it revolve almost entirely around democratic politics and ideals of various kinds, whether within constitutional frameworks or as expressions of popular challenges to elites and of an inclusionist embrace of the marginalized. That predominant containment of the

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[72] B. Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1–17, 210, and *passim*.

[73] B. Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); B. Honig, *Emergency Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[74] For a lucid account of these various approaches to the political, see N. O'Sullivan, 'Difference and the concept of the political in contemporary political philosophy', *Political Studies*, 45 (1997), pp. 739–54.

[75] E. Hauptmann, 'A Local History of "The Political"', *Political Theory*, vol. 32 (2004), 34–60.

political to the sphere of democracy and the celebration, rather than the noting, of diversity rules out a proper comparative political theory that would take seriously non-democratic forms of thinking—without necessarily endorsing them—and, more absurdly, without expelling them from the domain of the political itself.

One of the most important strands of the second form of revival frequently traces itself back to Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, which has become a focus of much recent academic popularity, despite offering a strangely partial or truncated view of the political, and despite Schmitt's remoteness from promoting democracy. Four central points emerge from Schmitt's discussion. Three of those relate to the determination and control of boundaries as constituting the political, a theme that will be taken up again in Chapter Three. First, the much reiterated antagonistic friend–enemy distinction associates politics with the formalization of bellicose contests over inevitable and dichotomous differences among significant social groups. Second, the notion of sovereignty accentuates the dominance of the political over other social categories as the creator of boundary decisions. Third, a marginal and hierarchical political pluralism is permitted inasmuch as subordinate political groupings may have their own rights, or possess transferred rights, to make such decisions.[76] The fourth, however, is of particular importance for the purposes of this study. It identifies the political as the locus of (collective) intensity,[77] thus implicitly characterizing the political as a combination of the rational and the emotional, and emphasizing the bonding aspect of politics. Beyond that, in its bid for the macro-characterization of the political, it remains silent on many of the indispensable features of politics such as ranking, negotiation, or the construction of collective visions, features that, however indirectly linked they could be to Schmitt's attributes, require the kind of separate treatment he denies them. The ultimate weakness of Schmitt's approach is revealed in its removal of liberalism from the orbit of the political by definitional fiat.[78] Nor is Schmitt's book, strictly speaking, about the *concept* of the political. It is, rightly or wrongly, about the political itself as a particular collective activity and how it relates to 'real-world' phenomena.[79] It does not explain how the concept is *structured* or the part it plays in how people *think* about the political. It offers only two insights into the *practice* of conceptualizing the political and the variegated impacts of that practice on political theory and political discourse. The first insight draws attention to the ideological inversion of words, such as invoking humanity or

[76] C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 26–7, 43, 45, 47.
[77] Ibid., pp. 27, 30.
[78] Ibid., p. 70.
[79] Schmitt rejects pure models or ideal-type thinking concerning morality or justice (pp. 52–3).

securing peace, in order to dehumanize and outlaw the enemy. However, Schmitt regarded appeals to a global entity as tantamount to a utopian depoliticization, a contention that overlooked the integral role of vision-constructing in thinking politically.[80] His second insight links the friend–enemy political nucleus to a rejection of 'anthropological optimism',[81] of the goodness of people, and thus unintentionally underpins his theory of politics with a specific, ideological, view of human nature, despite its aspirations to neutrality. Beyond that, theorizing about political thinking is not Schmitt's concern.

Contemporary poststructural and post-Marxist views generally build on Schmitt's legacy by retaining and developing the idea of conflict. Thus Glynos and Howarth regard a demand as political 'to the extent that it publicly contests the norms of a particular practice or system of practices in the name of a principle or ideal'.[82] The onus placed on the term 'public'—is it any group or collective interaction or only one that is transparent, accessible, and widely-communicating—remains open, but the hallmark of that school of thought is to disregard consensus-formation as of interest to political theory. One of the most vigorous proponents of antagonism as a core element of politics has been Chantal Mouffe. Crucially, she too has approached politics as the domain in which democracy must needs thrive, but in so doing she has insisted that this should be through creating 'a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted.'[83] Attached to that approach is a laudable sociological awareness that the provision of channels through which to express dissent legitimately, and to convey the normal passion of such dissent, is both an ethical require-ment that enshrines human differences—following Schmitt's identification of antagonism as constitutive of politics—and a means to attain political stability without having recourse to liberal models of harmony and consensus. To the notion of antagonism as an attribute of the political—in which Mouffe adapts Schmitt to a cause he did not pursue—she adds the Gramscian notion of hegemony, developed by her and Ernesto Laclau into a second attribute, namely, the imposition of a contingently articulated order on the deeper contingency of social relations.[84] Indeed, for scholars such as Laclau the political is characterized by naming and the construction of identities where none exists—the crafting of political subjectivity.[85]

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[80] Ibid., pp. 54–5.
[81] Ibid., p. 64.
[82] J. Glynos and D. Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2007), p. 115.
[83] C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.
[84] Ibid., p. 17.
[85] E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 101–8.

The deliberate placing of this approach in the non-liberal camp is itself a major ideological statement about what politics should contain for, as with Schmitt, Mouffe rules out the consensualism of liberalism as anti-political. It is therefore puzzling that Mouffe criticizes the liberal theorists of democracy for playing out the political 'in the *moral register*', when she herself—perfectly within the realm of intellectual legitimacy—clearly subscribes to the notion of an ethically desirable recognition of pluralism and affect at the heart of the political, including the idea of a multi-polar international equilibrium.[86] At stake, she maintains, 'is the very future of democracy'.[87] In sum, critical as her argument is of the inadequacies of many mainstream political theorists, hers is another instance of the prescriptive construction of a political vision that is so centrally a characteristic of thinking politically, as distinct from theorizing about it. In Mouffe's case, democratic pluralism is not strictly speaking *part* of the political but *imposed* on it, via agonism—a moderate form of antagonism in which the conflicting parties recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. It is politics 'tamed'.[88] For her that is the difference between the associative space that is 'the political' and the raw set of conflictual practices and institutions that is 'politics'. One aspect of the above literature is the manner in which it has transcended the conventional historical division of the political into 'left' and 'right'.[89] Although that distinction or, often, continuum, was predicated on an idea of endemic conflict in the domain of the political, it always was an intra-systemic distinction that parcelled up the political rather than exploring its boundaries; and it captured a notion of thinking about politics rather than one of thinking politically.

The above comments on the illuminating work of theorists such as Mouffe and Honig are not intended to serve as criticism but as an indicator of the scholarly space still available in the study of political thinking. Their approaches are certainly not to be 'displaced' by the perspective advanced in this book, but their conception of the political might be made more generous. What emerges from all this is a demonstration of the notable reluctance of political theorists more generally to abandon the role of prophets, or alternatively of Cassandras, into which ethical scholarship has thrust them, rather than adopt an interpretivist analytical perspective concerning the nature of political thinking, shorn of the desire to offer their personal solutions to the

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[86] Mouffe, op. cit., pp. 5–7.

[87] Ibid., p. 9.

[88] Ibid., p. 20. It is not clear why that taming should not itself be contingent and temporary, and embedded in sedimented beliefs prevalent in current societies.

[89] See S. Lukes, 'The Grand Dichotomy of the Twentieth Century', in T. Ball and R. Bellamy (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 602–26; N. Bobbio, *Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); J. White, 'Left and Right as Political Resources', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 16 (2011), 123–44.

malaises they have discovered. It is not only that there are those who see politics as a shared, public, ethical enterprise, as against those who see it as an area of perennial contestation and difference. For the latter group, too, needs to be split between two tendencies: those who bemoan the contestation, conflict or, in some cases, oppression that only a critical theory can expose and remedy—Tully is one such instance—and seek to transcend those pernicious states of being; and those who regard the ruptures they generate as normal and inevitable, if interspersed with provisional and mutating islands of limited consensus, as is the case with some recent French political philosophers. The role models of 'conceptologist' or analyst of the features of political thinking, it would appear—are rejected, as they seem to lure political theorists further than some of them would like into the domain of 'empirical' political theorists, misleadingly associated far more with comparative government than with political theory. The acceptance of those role models would compel ethicists to confront the good, the bad, and the ugly without eliminating the latter two—an impossible disciplinary requirement from their standpoint. And to return to the significance of hermeneutics, the investigation of actual political theory adumbrated in these pages can never be descriptive, and always needs to be imaginatively interpretative. But it is primarily critical and analytic, and refuses to cede exclusive ownership of those two terms either, in turn, to post-modern theorists or to analytic philosophers.

Nonetheless the friend–enemy, insider–outsider, or inclusionary–exclusionary conceptualization of the political is currently so ubiquitous and powerful an image that it requires further attention. It is certainly the case that the identification of the merits of a social group in contrast to what is not part of it is a common practice of political thought. But there is no way in which political thinking can be reduced to, or contained in, that specific dichotomization. Rather, inclusion-exclusion can be further broken down into some of the more elemental political features discussed above—for which it is often simply a generalized shorthand—without expressing the richness and complexity of any of those features. Thus, it is underpinned by many of the ways societies think about mobilizing support for the social groups in their sights, through constructing an entity, real or imagined, against which such mobilization can be encouraged. That identity-adumbrating thought-practice is the partial flip-side of support-mobilization, though any discussion of exclusion needs importantly to take on board different intensities of exclusion: religious, gender, immigrant and ethnic groups, or disabled individuals, may be the target of variable intensities and impermeabilities. It is also fashioned by the feature of competence determination, a feature that has frequently included the type of thinking that claims entitlement to remove certain groups, internal or external to some recognized spatial boundaries, from the accepted domain of symbolic collective identity. It is, further, one aspect of the stabilizing practices that are necessary to handle diversity and contestation. Finally, it

assists in ranking significance with regard to collectivities, notably so in the superiority claimed by nationalist or ethnocentric ideologies.

c. Disrupting the 'political'?

The third revival of the political may be found among French political philosophers. I refer here only to one instance, that of Jacques Rancière, to illustrate a broader root-and-branch assault on conventional notions of the political emanating from the poststructuralist camp. Rancière continues the mode of identifying an overriding feature of the political, but does so with the agenda of challenging and rupturing its received meanings. We have here a radical, stipulative and idiosyncratic attempt to get to the heart of a practice of domination. Rancière strives to prevent the effacing of 'the litigiousness constitutive of politics',[90] and objects to diverse attempts to reconstitute a consensual good in social life. He names the very concepts of ruling and domination as that which politics undermines. Politics hence requires 'a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions "proper"' to exercising power and being subject to power; and a denial of the opposition between the political and the social.[91] Or, as Rancière puts it elsewhere: 'Politics is the art of suppressing the political',[92] 'achieving philosophy "in place" of politics'.[93] Therefore, 'democracy is *the* regime of politics' not in the sense of a constitution that distributes different political roles, but in the sense of equality and participation, concepts at the core of Rancière's approach.[94] The distinction between police and politics that underpins Rancière's analysis relates to that between partition and exclusion on the one hand and struggle for spatial reconfiguration on the part of the 'no-part': 'the people, the workers, the citizens'. That is construed as 'an intervention upon the visible and the sayable', that is to say on what is currently sense-evidence or discursively dominant,[95] by promoting dislocative cacophony.[96] Indeed, as Chambers has argued, such dislocation takes place anywhere, even within the institutionalized space of the police itself.[97]

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[90] J. Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory and Event*, 5:3 (2001), Thesis 9.

[91] Ibid., Theses 3, 9.

[92] J. Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 11.

[93] J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 63.

[94] Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', op. cit., Thesis 4.

[95] Ibid., Thesis 7.

[96] D. Panagia, 'Ceci n'est pas un argument: An Introduction to the Ten Theses', *Theory and Event*, vol. 5:3 (2001).

[97] S.A. Chambers, 'Jacques Rancière and the Problem of Pure Politics', *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 10 (2011), 319.

Rancière's generalization of politics to any social locus is insightful. It presses further forward the purview of social scientists who have extended the domain of politics, even though it is in randomized and anarchical form. But it is hardly completely indeterminate. At the very least the refiguring of space offers a new arrangement; even a fluid and chaotic arrangement is a patterned decoding of what happens in social space. Moreover, Rancière's reference to politics is specific in its identification of democracy as the only regime of politics due to his stipulative sleight of hand in excluding order and non-radicalism from his conception of politics. The problem is once again one of naming, and his choice of names is conspicuously ideological and partisan, even as he exposes the arbitrary character of existing ideological decontestations. His project is thus doubly radical: radical in his ethical preference for inclusion and egalitarian, disruptive democracy; and radical in his indifference to the discipline of political theory. If Rancière's question is 'How are we to reinvent politics?',[98] his response leaves something to be desired. Faced with his predilection for inclusion and discursive openness, one might query the exclusion of so many voices and registers through which thinking politically is practised, in particular the absence of vernacular understandings to which, given his democratic radicalism, he might have been expected to be partial. A strong normativity, as well as methodological preferences that are not easily sustainable, weaken the force of his argument to define politics 'on its own terms'.[99]

However vital the reforming zeal implanted in political theory, and however necessary such zeal is in the unceasing impurities of the here and now, we return to the observation that political theory cannot really function without a strong empirical grounding. Exploring and investigating the actual and potential patterns of political thinking are both a precondition for and a limit on what philosophers and ethicists can then recommend. Some knowledge of the properties and the conduct of the materials with which one is working seems an obvious prerequisite to doing something sensible with them. Granted that there are political theorists who have devoted much time and effort to exploring and understanding politics and the political, they are strangely reluctant to illuminate the dualism of the practice in whose investigation they specialize: the twin practices of thinking politically and thinking about politics—whether the latter is their own thinking or that of the members of a polity in general. Of course, concepts are themselves suggestions for the organization of information and knowledge at nodal points—they do not exist out there in the way that a mountain does—and they too are malleable and mutable and appear in fluid forms. But historical and comparative evidence confirm that, to date, certain recurring conceptual patterns—say, a

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[98] Quoted in ibid.   [99] Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', op. cit, Thesis 1.

concern with liberty or with power—offer some ideational stability in a general sense, even as the concrete manifestations of each concept vary in temporal and spatial contexts. That is not to suggest that those patterns are natural; it is to suggest that they are ubiquitous.

There is another aspect of the contemporary study of politics that deserves mention. It has become common to encapsulate politics in an event (say, a spectacle such as a televised debate or a military parade), a person (say, a leader or a hunted terrorist), or an idea (say, the clash of cultures or globalism). But these are all stand-ins for the complexity of the actual and conceptual properties of politics and political thinking, and they channel the parallel complexity of theorizing required to do justice to those actual conceptual properties. These encapsulating theories often develop another kind of intricacy, in which the representative stand-in property is itself subject to considerable ersatz sophistication in lieu of the complexity of the political itself. There is often much to commend the insights and inventiveness of such theories. Alain Badiou's focus on the theatricality of events and the theatre-politics isomorphism is such an example.[100] But those stand-in properties rarely usher in wider-ranging attempts to get to grips with the political—Davide Panagia's recent work on the aesthetics of politics is an exception.[101] In some cases they might better be described as fleeing the political, with which intellectuals and analysts have a very uneasy relationship, reminiscent of the long-lasting 'dirty hands' perspective.

Instead of ersatz phenomena substituting for the political, we also find some direct features of political features magnified to crowd the others out. As noted above, much existing literature evinces a tendency to identify the political through a single attribute: collective decision-making, power, the public domain, consensus, harmony or commonality, plurality, democracy of some form or another, just constitutional arrangements and public reason, friend–enemy, rupture—all those have competed over the position of fulcrum, just as the study of ideologies has frequently and mistakenly replaced multidimensionality with unidimensionality, going for one central belief of each ideology. In similar fashion to the decontesting device of ideologies, that reductionist view operates as a simplifier that attempts to eschew the indeterminacy of the political sphere. It endeavours to illuminate the political by seizing on a striking feature that is not present in all instances of the political, and whose lustre may displace other equally crucial political components from its purview. For while each of the above has a claim to be located in the inner sanctum of the political, none has a claim to exclusivity. Perhaps those very

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[100] A. Badiou, 'Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Discourse', *Theatre Survey* 49:2 (2008), 187–238.

[101] D. Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

generalizations permit excessive vagueness; certainly many of them clearly emerge from an identifiable ideological standpoint. In contrast to such gravitation towards unidimensionality, the singling out of the finality that is attempted in decisions for collectivities is not a replacement for the far greater complexity of political thought-practices. Rather, the finality drive is a practice that bisects the more intricate ones, which are emphatically irreducible to it. The political is always a cluster of practices and thought-practices that may be malleable, intertwined, overlapping, and mutually interacting, but each of which identifies one of the multiple elements peculiar to that field.

2

Language, Emotion, and Political Thought

'The tongue of man is a twisty thing, there are plenty of words there of every kind, the range of words is wide, and their variance.'[1]

1. BEYOND LOGOS AND LOGIC

The illustrious history of studying political thought has long focused on single authored texts as the sites where innovative and influential thinking has taken place. That should not be in dispute. If scholarship about human thinking is drawn to its creative and cutting edges, to its ambitious range, its critical acumen, and its zeal for the reform and refashioning of societies, men and women of originality and occasional genius have generally set the parameters in which the exploration of the political—and of its ethical dimensions—has flourished. That is reflected in these pages: it would be folly not to acknowledge that a political theory of political thinking can sidestep the cultural and philosophical signposts set up by past and present individuals. But it is not enough. Political thinking is a far wider phenomenon than that expressed in canonical texts, or even in the new rivals to such canons set up in recent decades. The tendency to equate political thought or political theory with political philosophy was noted in the previous chapter, but the palette of political thinking that interests political philosophers has too few colours, and the issues that escape their attention—or are deliberately ignored by many of them—are often of considerable significance, as will be argued in Chapter Five. Hence that equation has seriously constrained the study of political thought, among scholars and in university curricula alike. What philosophers do is highly pertinent to the investigation of political thought, and that vital activity needs to be maintained and developed as part of what we term political theory. But it has also channelled the expectations of what

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[1] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 20, lines 248–9 (translation by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago 1951) http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/homer/ (accessed 23.12.2012).

political theory ought to examine in a manner that is not conducive to the political study of societies, or to what should excite social scientists.

We have already maintained that the occurrence of political thinking is potentially to be found in any interaction among human beings, either in relation to the unit they form, or in relation to the wider units they consider and on which they reflect. It appears in the vernacular; it appears among articulate people who are not professionally trained as philosophers and who do not define themselves as such; it appears among political practitioners and activists; and—not least—it is rarely the product of one individual, however salient or gifted, but emanates instead from groups. Those groups may themselves be internally discordant about the political, or they may speak in an internally dominant voice. But how is that voice shaped? First, political thought has traditionally been textual, ordered and articulate, and that still should remain the chief understanding of its students. Correspondingly, this book will accord written texts preponderant weight, but it fully concedes that texts are variably articulate. Thinking politically is a set of practices to be found in, or decoded through, myriad kinds of human conduct and artefacts, many of them intentional and, equally, many of them inadvertent, at least as purveyors of explicit political messages. Searle contended that, 'meaning is more than a matter of intention; it is also at least sometimes a matter of convention.'[2] And, we may add, unintention. Numerous political thought-practices involve writing, many of them are oral—though occasionally including sounds that are not associated with standard language, such as groaning or hissing—and not a few are neither written nor oral. Our understanding of art, culture, architecture, and movement has opened up new horizons, to be ignored at the peril of under-conceptualizing the domain. Chapter Five will include forays into scrutinizing visual and non-verbal examples of such thinking. They demand different tools and an intellectual toleration of the extent to which political thought appears in forms that have normally been excluded from its study.

Second, it is now increasingly recognized that political thought is a combination of rational and non-rational forms of expression, including emotion and passion. It also contains unintended meaning that is non-rational in the specific sense that it is not knowingly controlled by the agent in question, yet it is interpreted as meaningful by its recipients and consumers. Concurrently, almost all types of political thinking are infused with rhetoric not only as deliberate hyperbole—as rhetoric is sometimes exclusively and mistakenly thought to be—but as innate to the structure and presentation of an idea, story, or argument. These themes will be scattered throughout the following

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[2] J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 43.

chapters, but they will also acquire special status in the exploration of power in Chapter Eight.

Third—now limiting the discussion to written and spoken political thinking—we alight on an important contention: Whatever features language possesses in general, political language will also possess. For what language is incapable of delivering, political thought cannot express. Thinking politically cannot vault over its linguistic limitations. Obvious as this may seem, it has not been a guiding beacon for political theory as a whole. Nor can nontextual communication, with all its potential inventiveness and creativity, serve as an adequate alternative. It is simply too remote from most people's awareness and purposes as a major means of communication, however omnipresent it is. That applies also to silence. Hence it is to the properties of language that we now turn, as a meaning-shaping substratum that inevitably moulds important aspects of thinking politically.

2. THE INTERPRETATIVE FLEXIBILITIES OF LANGUAGE

Among the linguistic and semantic features that guide the operation of political concepts, and that have immediate bearing on the structuring of political debate, theory, and action and on the attribution of meaning—with all of which the study of political thinking is pivotally concerned—three are of central significance: ambiguity, indeterminacy, and vagueness, while a fourth feature—inconclusiveness—affects the narrational staying power of an argument. In political science literature, policies have often been depicted as ambiguous.[3] Ambiguity relates to more than one reading of a practice, image, or text by its consumer. As Empson suggested in his classic work, ambiguity is 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language'.[4] But implicit in ambiguity is the possibility of redressing that 'defect'. Ambiguity seems to imply the possibility of clear choices among fixed and finite meanings, meanings obfuscated through lexical duality ('bank') or through structural fluidity ('I saw the man with my binoculars'), or through insufficient information-cum-context (Wittgenstein's duck-hare). The multiple interpretations of an ambiguous message are potentially dealt with through disambiguation: a rephrasing

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[3] See e.g., J.G. Marsh and J.P. Olsen, *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Bergen: Universitetsvorlaget, 1976); W.E. Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

[4] W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p. 1.

aimed at removing all meanings but one. Crucially for politics, ambiguity may be intentional as well as unintentional. Moreover, as will be noted in Chapter Six, ambiguity is often a device that is deliberately harnessed to political ends such as the negotiation process. While its presence can be confusing and disorienting in respect of one feature of thinking politically—distributing significance, its absence may occasionally be catastrophic to another such feature—promoting stability.

Ambiguity is often confused with indeterminacy. But indeterminacy is a different attribute, one central to all political concepts. First, it is a function of their considerable morphological complexity. We can create a world in which ambiguities are removed, but that would be one based on exceedingly simple premises. 'The prime minister is the leader of the Conservative party' is a statement where the office, its holder and the official status of leadership are subject to clear and generally accepted semantic rules and, contextually, party does not denote some kind of festive celebration. 'This state is democratic' allows for no such disambiguation, because 'democracy' is not ambiguous; it is indeterminate. It would be impossible to construct a sentence in which all the components of democracy would be sufficiently disambiguated for an uncontroversial meaning to emerge, for the simple reason that democracy is what may be termed a super-concept. A super-concept is not a concept with elevated import but one that embraces a number of otherwise separately identifiable constitutive concepts, each of which has an important historical and contemporary existence on its own, but each of which can be decontested in multiple ways. To illustrate, democracy embraces the concept of liberty, decontested as self-determination; the concept of equality, decontested as one person one vote; the concept of participation, decontested as active contribution to decision-making; and the concept of community, inasmuch as democracy cannot pertain to an individual but only to a collective. Certain conceptions of each of those concepts are grouped together, but their selection tells us nothing about their relative weight in the conceptual concoction known as democracy. As minor shifts in such relative weighting can significantly alter the meaning of the concept of democracy, and there are no agreed rules that determine the 'quantity' of each of those constitutive concepts, democracy must remain indeterminate, thus legitimating, or at least affirming, a large number of competing conceptual agglomerations.

Second, indeterminacy refers to an inevitable and ineliminable contingency of meaning that includes uncertainty and unpredictability. In the past the assault on certainty came from value-nihilist positions, or from those subscribing to the accidentality of historical contingency, or from theories of risk. It is now increasingly perceived to emanate from the unavoidable indeterminacy of thought and conceptualization: a prior ontological standpoint about the impossibility of arriving at fixed, determinate interpretations of certain concepts and about the logical (though not cultural) arbitrariness of meaning.

That is a fundamental hermeneutical issue,[5] and it entails a rejection of still-prevalent tendencies among political scientists to assume homogeneity and similarity in individual conduct.[6] Epistemologically, the uncertainty engendered specifically by ambiguity does not rule out future certainty (say if information improves), because uncertainty is thought to be the consequence of lack of clarity, or of imperfect knowledge.[7] *Uncertainty*, then, is deemed to be the contingent feature. Much rational choice theory follows that line. But whereas statistical probability can be assigned to uncertainty through risk theories, indeterminacy offers no such refuge, as it *rules out* the certainty of determinacy or even its statistical approximation. Indeterminacy can merely be countered spuriously through conceptual decontestation that produces temporary 'determinacy', engineered (1) by the suspension of disbelief in the possibility of determinacy, and (2) by the political awkwardness of belief in the necessity of indeterminacy.[8] The suspension of disbelief relates to the need people often evince to assign clear meaning to some of the characteristics of the world around them, to conjure up a Gestalt, to have maps through which to navigate. In every society and in most epistemologies there is always a quest for a mythical determinacy. The psychology of security coalesces with the nature of decision-making and the ideological imperative of ideational mapping, with its spatial layout that offers decontestation parameters. It is a broader case of the finality drive that threads through the political.

The awkwardness of belief in indeterminacy could encourage both political paralysis and a frustration of expectations, however unrealistic, levelled at decision-makers, with a consequent decline in support. Unlike ambiguity, indeterminacy is not just a consequence of changing and unpredictable temporal and spatial contexts, though those contexts may still have something to do with it; nor is it a symptom of confusion and half-baked beliefs; nor of an impoverished vocabulary at the disposal of a language. In political thought indeterminacy is a basal property of language and thinking.[9] That observation confirms the empirical fluidity and mutability of political thought, mediated through subjective and often transitory understandings superimposed on indeterminacy. Political discourse, and political theory too, however, are often manifested or presented as a counter-measure—an exercise in the

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[5] Cp. T. Bahti, 'Ambiguity and Indeterminacy: The Juncture', *Comparative Literature*, vol. 38 (1986), 209–23.

[6] A. Schedler, 'Mapping Contingency', in I. Shapiro and S. Bedi (eds), *Political Contingency* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 59.

[7] Cp. G. Majone, *Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 88.

[8] On this specific point, see M. Freeden, 'Editorial: Essential Contestability and Effective Contestability', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 9 (2004), 3–11, 225.

[9] See also M. Freeden, 'What Should the "Political" in Political Theory Explore?,' *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 13 (2005), 113–34.

limiting of indeterminacy—because that is a normal feature of conceptual morphology. Occasionally, they attempt to abolish indeterminacy: science and religion have been harnessed to that end. More often, cultural constraints are employed. One such constraint is the appeal to truth—the elimination of indeterminacy; another is to morality—the delegitimization of indeterminacy through constructing rankings of the goods of human conduct; another to pluralism—the validation of legitimate variance, while sketching out cultural parameters beyond which indeterminacy is illegitimate, hence meaningless: for instance, with respect to disagreement on the universal nature of human rights.

Some theorists regard the phenomenon of indeterminacy as transparent and obvious, but most people engaged in thinking about politics do so either while ignorant of the principle of conceptual and argumentative contestability or—and that also applies to those theorists and philosophers who are in denial about such contestability—do so with the aim of curtailing indeterminacy sharply, if not completely, often in the name of the absoluteness of ethics. At the same time, to accept indeterminacy is not to put one's signature to a manifesto for the extreme kind of relativism in which 'anything goes'. It implies rather that 'a number of things go'. That constrained relativism is limited by human experiences of what might create more (or less) beneficial, or reasonable, or acceptable results for individuals and for collectivities— although those assessments might well be modified over time and space. Thus Lukes, in the course of a critique of strong moral relativism, commends its one surviving appeal as 'the idea that there is no single best way for human beings to live; or . . . there are many such best ways.'[10] Nor does relativism rule out human agency in shaping language and meaning—both in formulating the subjective understandings of political conceptualization and in the active creation of choices, over which a contest of ideas may occur.

The indeterminacy from which decisions—those political *ur*-acts—emanate is a structural corollary of the notion of essential contestability, a notion that also underpins political pluralism. Decisions create the illusion that indeterminacy does not exist, though that illusion will also crucially depend on the style, rhetorical force, or self-persuasion attached to the decision. Given indeterminacy, decisions are contingent 'closures' that permit policies to be formulated or justified against a multiple path background of possibilities. If we accept that position, the substantive issue-oriented political thinking that occurs in a political community will be an explicit or implicit competition over the control of political language. That area can be identified as the characteristic domain of ideologies. Such control is attempted through the most necessary feature of the ideological act: the decontestation of the essentially

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[10] S. Lukes, *Moral Relativism* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 141. See also Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 91–5.

contestable. As noted in Chapter One, decontestation is the process through which a decision is both made possible (accorded an aura of finiteness) and justified (accorded an aura of authority). Within the internal logic of politics that is both a heuristic necessity and a practical one, as decisions *must* be taken and they then need either to be legitimated, or enforced without sufficient legitimacy. The control over language is an endeavour to monopolize the meanings concepts carry. Legitimation and coercion are two methods of establishing monopolies of meaning, however fleeting they may be.

That control—that act of assertive selection—is a basic feature of thinking politically. In general terms, the political act here is the bestowing of finality, however ephemeral, while the ideological act is the justificatory practice supervening and reinforcing that finality, appealing to ontologies, epistemologies, and value-judgements, however culturally contingent. Logically, as will be argued in greater detail in Chapter Three, the pure political practice precedes the ideological one, but as a complex conjoined practice they are intertwined, as the ideological basis of the decontestation is also employed to effect the decision itself. When, for example, a decision to levy a tax on bankers is taken following a public debate on its merits and demerits, that attempted act of determinacy and finality (irrespective of its durability) is made possible because of a general, if unspecific, concurrence that governments are in principle authorized to make decisions or, at the very least, are a conventional locus of decision-making. Those decisions constitute the prior control over language that enables the assigning of collective decisions to a recognized agent, and that is the *political* thought-practice. It is then bracketed together with a subsequent *ideological* thought-practice with regard to the issue on which the decision has bearing, namely, that it is justifiable to grant governments a restricted monitoring power over banking activities. The core ideological feature of that practice lies in the substantive control over the messages imparted by language. That subsequent control adds a layer both of authority and of legitimacy to the prior and principled entitlement that governments claim to possess, namely that of making decisions. As for decisions in other fora, those decontestation attempts may equally strive for finality, but the grounds for claiming authority and legitimacy will be far more varied, resting for instance on traditional conventions, on conceptions of individual privacy, or on specific power relationships backed by explicit or implicit threats.

The third property of language that exercises a marked impact on political thinking is vagueness. Vagueness pertains to three kinds of boundary problems that apply to concepts: to their intension, to their detail, and to the discursive movements that regularly cross conceptual categories. Is libertarianism located within or outside the family of liberalisms? Are both communism and the welfare state, for the purposes of a specific political argument, simply two instances of excessive state control? What is the difference between liberation and emancipation? Is the free-market a sub-set of capitalism or can

it be detached from the latter and reattached to forms of democratic socialism? And does that then begin to vitiate the distinction between capitalism and democratic socialism, or are we looking instead at a plethora of ideological configurations as characteristic of real world political discourse, many of which shade off into others? Borderline cases can only be settled, even in theory, if they vary on one dimension alone. Complex political concepts vary on more than one dimension, and not necessarily in the same direction: they are confronted with multiple borders on different and frequently cross-cutting planes. Hence, even if democracy established a clear border with regard to participation, that very success in establishing that border might disable its capacity to outline a border with respect to making acceptable decisions.[11]

The blurring of boundaries of meaning is often inescapable, but it may also be an intentional means of recruiting support—a principal theme of Chapter Five. Controlled and delimited vagueness is a typical and indispensable aspect of political thinking among decision-making elites, especially if in a particular instance the desperation to generate support overrides the requirement for authoritative semantic pronouncements. 'We will do something to provide the elderly with medical assistance', or 'we can neither rule in nor rule out a rise in value added tax' say the political parties before an election, while resisting the pressure to deliver the kind of specificity that will enable their opponents to demonstrate the unfeasibility of their plans. Decision-making may generate support from admirers of decisiveness, but it is also a loss-maker in terms of the ideational groups it alienates. Accuracy of language (to the extent that it is possible) is an advantage only if 'precision' is needed to corner a particular market of ideological support. Whereas ideological specialization should produce strong decontestation for those already committed to a cause, it also entails a limiting of ambition with regard to potential support or, alternatively, a reliance on coercion.

Both ambiguous and vague expressions of political thinking cannot just be dismissed as inferior thought-products, a tendency to be found among certain political scientists or political philosophers. If they are dismissed, we miss out—as interpreters of the domain of the political—on identifying major political phenomena and impoverish our understanding of the variety and subtlety of political thinking at the disposal of a society. Vagueness and ambiguity are not only the inevitable by-product of the slippery nature of the meanings words contain, but a recipe for political co-existence and, as such, deliberate and importantly functional forms of political thought. And although the general public may see them as confirmation of the bad name given to politics, their elusiveness is not simply dissimulation, trickery, or slack

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[11] For a discussion of vagueness with regard to boundaries from a legal viewpoint, see J. Waldron, 'Vagueness in Law and Language: Some Philosophical Issues', *California Law Review*, vol. 82 (1994), 509–40.

thinking—though it may be any of these—but often the deliberate harnessing of an existential feature of political language in order to achieve one of the main ends of politics.

There is a fourth constraint on the way we think, but it is more of an attribute of the nature of argumentation than of language directly. If essential contestability and decontestation pertain to the constantly fluctuating spatial relationships among the components of a concept, inconclusiveness pertains to its weight and to its temporal expression, its unfolding. It proffers additional grounds for exposing the finality of decontestation as ephemeral. Inconclusiveness is important in two different senses. First, it relates to the point where competing appraisals of arguments or of policies cannot knock each other out—they are not conclusive in the sense of qualitatively and substantively ending an argument—and no further improvement can be made on that situation. The persuasive, ethical or emotional strength of different claims made through various assertions, whether or not through the assembling of evidence and reasoning, cannot always be sufficient to win the day. This refers to the unfeasibility of definitively assessing and weighing the components of competing arguments, which results in a failure to eradicate alternative positions; not, as with ambiguity, to the absence of clarification of definitional meaning. It attaches itself to distributing the significance of collective values and ends, a feature of political thinking discussed in Chapter Four, and it highlights the temporary life of such rankings alongside their necessity. As we shall see, one typical area of inconclusiveness involves zero-sum clashes among incompatible values and preferences: Instances of those are pro-life and pro-choice on the issue of pregnancy termination; animal rights versus animal sacrifice or hunting; animal rights versus scientific research; the compulsory wearing of head scarves versus sartorial secularism that supervenes on the question 'which choices made by women are free choices?'.

But there is another sense of 'inconclusive'—*lacking* a conclusion, for it is normally impossible to reach an end point in an argumentative chain or string. That aspect addresses its illusory opposite, 'conclusive', in its now rare meaning of 'forming the end'.[12] Say I am an egalitarian who favours greater equalization of wealth, from which I deduce a scheme of public transfers such as graduated taxation, and then have to consider whether to permit voluntary transfers from one member of a family to another, and then ask whether the use of such transfers should be controlled in terms of the goods they purchase, all down to the specific case of Mrs Appleton of Hyacinth Avenue, Bolton. She is a widowed ex-terrorist awaiting a hip replacement, whose neighbour is playing very loud music on Saturday nights when she wants to sleep and who has therefore had to hire expensive taxis to ferry her to

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[12] *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, accessed 19.12.2012.

her sister once a week in order to seek peace and quiet, while her neighbour maintains that his need to practice is reasonable as he is a professional musician. Mrs Appleton consequently requests a cash-strapped municipality to rehouse either her or her neighbour, claiming a case to be recognized as a disadvantaged individual for that specific purpose, even though in the not-distant future she is highly likely to inherit a large sum of money from her aged uncle, etc. There comes a point where, due to argumentative overload, to the inability to conceptualize, to the inefficiency of policy-producing results, or to sheer ennui, such a chain needs to be stopped (or, more likely, it peters out) even though it can still produce endless variations. Those stoppage points may be conditioned by moral paradigms, by conventions of argument, by demands of efficacy, or by other cultural practices.

The logic of progression of those arguments is interminable as well as proceeding on myriad parallel routes. But it tapers out into the unfathomable infinite. Hence decisions of commission or omission are inevitable and, crucially, while their point of intervention will be logically arbitrary it will be culturally significant. The inexorable potential of that narrative logic cannot either pin down or channel such sequences without resorting to stipulative, and ultimately unsustainable and contingent, constraints. Here the progression and detailed path of an argument, rather than the internal components of its parts, are curtailed by complexity and the limited resources of mental and emotional energy in the face of infinity! The problem of regulative principles, mooted in the Introduction, raises its head once again. As Bader and Engelen have observed, 'For rules that become as specific as the cases they are meant to regulate, simply lose their regulatory power. This is true for all norm-setting rules and principles. Normative principles too are structurally too under-determined to prescribe specific institutions or practices.'[13] While some political philosophers are content to support principles of justice as highly useful regulative ideals, such regulative ideals simply cannot do the work that is required in the actual design of political practices, a theme that will be re-examined in that part of Chapter Seven that examines failures of political thinking. Whereas to counter uncertainty one needs to take risks about the likelihood of the consequences of action, to counter inconclusiveness one needs to make a judgement about the relative attractiveness of the solution, about the proportion of significance to allocate to each factor, and about the rapidly decreasing marginal returns in pursuing an argument indefinitely from generalities to particulars.

From the perspective of analysing political thought, indeterminacy is the most salient of these attributes of, and constraints on, language. Associating the indeterminacy of political concepts and ideologies with ambiguity holds

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[13] V. Bader and E.R. Engelen, 'Taking Pluralism Seriously', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 29 (2003), 380.

out the possibility of specific answers through simple acts of disambiguation, while associating it with vagueness cannot generate specific answers.[14] Decontestation is easiest to achieve through disambiguation, but even then there is no possibility of eliminating the inevitable underlying tension between the desire for decontestation and its unattainability, due to the 'surplus of meaning' any act of linguistic closure carries.[15] The construction and enunciation of ideologies as well as analytical political philosophies endeavour to provide safe havens from indeterminacy. In the first case, they appear to be attempts to impose a map of understanding and consequent action on concrete political happenings and to counter indeterminacy as far as possible wherever it exists. In the second case, they are often dislocated experiments in thinking—laboratory tests of argumentation designed to eliminate indeterminacy as far as possible before it emerges. But even strong decontestation ('The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way'[16]) cannot endow political language with precision, and will be open to many interpretations, unanticipated as well as anticipated. Particularly for ideologies, competing as they do over political power in societies, both certainty *and* elusiveness are two requisite features, fundamental to the political process. The two serve as preliminaries to producing decisions. Liberal polities, especially, are positioned between the need of politicians to deliver confidence-generating results, and the requirement of liberal ideologies to be flexible in reassessing the meanings and applications of polysemic political vocabulary, as well as to mobilize the pluralist support believed to be structurally distinctive of modern, multiple-identity societies. Sometimes certainty can pay, if a very specific policy is in the making; and the rhetoric and style of certainty are themselves redolent with the wielding of political power. At other times, and more typically, elusiveness of meaning is the key to generating consent. But resorting to elusiveness is not the same as tolerating or even welcoming multiple meanings, and it is in those latter spheres that liberal thinking—in its relative openness to ideational change and debate—is epistemologically the most hospitable to indeterminacy.

Let's put this slightly differently, in the context of recent attempts by political philosophers to attain overlapping consensus and undistorted communication in a society. Devices to attain consensus, whether of the Rawlsian thin type (involving a veil of ignorance under which shared moral principles would be formulated), or the Habermasian thicker type (involving an ideal speech situation with agreed rules), are proffered by those philosophers as a

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[14] R. Sorensen, *Vagueness and Contradiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 23, 112.

[15] P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 55.

[16] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XVIII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 226.

solution to the existence of political disagreement, or as the framework within which only reasonable disagreement can persist and be controlled. Perfect harmony may, of course, be posited through utopian thought experiments, and overlapping consensus through an appeal to ostensibly free-standing shared intuitions and moral capacities. But politics, based on past and present observation, is the site of durable dissent as a structural inevitability, some of which is heavily disruptive, and some both fruitful and healthily normal. Articulatory and augmentative precision therefore *exacerbate* the destructive potential of dissent, as positions are sharply marked out not only methodologically but substantively. Imprecision and the elision of meaning are advantageous and desirable, when different priorities among political values would otherwise lead to strife. The tolerance of words in containing multiple, connected but not identical meanings, is important to the adequate functioning of political and ideological orders. In the legal profession, too, 'in documents like contracts ambiguity is readily acknowledged as a shortcoming, but the law writers explain that ambiguity is a virtue in a constitution or even in a statute.'[17]As Becker sagely observed, 'unfortunately, we cannot make our concepts precise and at the same time keep the full range of evocative meaning they have acquired in ordinary discourse'.[18] But among political theorists, various schools of thought employ different means for increasing precision. Some political philosophers identify *irrationality* as the source of imprecision and counter with *logic* and *close argument*. Some empirical political scientists identify *sloppiness* as the source of imprecision and replace it with *measurement*. And some post-structuralists identify *obscuring* and *fantasy* as the source of imprecision and replace them with *unmasking*. The precision so highly sought by some theorists may signal the kiss of death for political processes. But then, as Sorenson shrewdly notes, '"precise" is a vague term'![19]

The features of language also have bearing on major ethical desiderata directed at political actors. One of them pertains to the transparency element of accountability as a measure of good government. But transparency, too, has its limits. The illusory aspect of its pursuit lies in the assumption that what is revealed has unambiguous and unequivocal meaning; and that what is intended cannot be hidden, even to the actors/producers themselves. The concept of transparency in political theory thrives on what is considered to be its opposite and from which it seeks protection—*manipulation*—rather than either *privacy* (the liberal ideal of areas shielded from public control and knowledge), *semantic overload* (the surplus of meaning issue), or *indeterminacy*,

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[17] S.A. Scheingold, *The Politics of Rights* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 30.

[18] H.S. Becker, 'Notes on the Concept of Commitment', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 66 (1960), 40.

[19] Sorensen, op. cit., p. 74.

as its alternative opposites. The notion of privacy invokes deliberate invisibility without being manipulative. As for unintentional invisibility, it is part and parcel of the semantic complexity of language, rather than the result of agents wielding deviously calculating power.

A vital contrapuntal feature of language, and of the rhetoric it embodies, is silence. We are particularly familiar with the role of pauses and silences in the performative arts, in music, theatre, and dance, and the expression of political thinking is a performative act as well. Some silences are, of course, manipulative and dissimulative, but other forms of deliberate silence in spoken language are a rich resource. As a caesura, silence contains anticipation and the drawing out of uncertainty, with the agent momentarily suspending the possibilities of future meaning. That tempo of delivery of language cannot be captured by analytical philosophy. One role of the analytical philosopher is to tap into already existing meaning, and one of the main instruments for that is the resort to logic. Logic supplies a mechanical immediacy of meaning that, strictly speaking, lies outside the control of the thinker, whose task is simply to refer the reader to its irrefutable existence. But when we regard political language as an act of creativity, of navigating among uncertainties and silences, bending some of them to our will and skirting around others, we can appreciate such thinking as the attempt to control meaning and understanding in preferring one logical path over another or even in dodging logic—attempts furnished with their attendant leeway and always superimposed on unpatterned raw material.

3. LINGUISTIC PLURALISMS AND SEMANTIC INTERCONNECTIONS

In the political thinking that underpins the various instances of ideological conceptual configuration, the features of the political may themselves be evident in different proportional strengths and they may cut across each other with reinforcing or diminishing effect. The core idea of each political feature may be expressed through a variety of words, each of which decontests that feature in slightly diverse fashion. That will be shown specifically in Chapter Five, where the features of collective support are spread across terms such as obligation, allegiance, loyalty, commitment, bonding, or trust, each of which cuts the cloth differently, but all of which supply a political entity with the energy without which it cannot generate a set of vital goods. But the other political features all have their typical vocabulary as well. Words closely associated with the finality drive of decisions are truth, self-evidence, reason, authority, or sovereignty. Words closely associated with ranking are

priority, urgency, superiority, or hierarchy. Words closely associated with stability are compromise, negotiation, conciliation, or harmony. Words closely associated with visions are universality, teleology, utopia, or determinism, and with planning are reform, centralization, or leadership.

In sum, given that indeterminacy, ambiguity, vagueness, and inconclusiveness are fundamental constraints on and characteristics of political argument and its conceptual components, political theory needs to explore the influence of those attributes on the political process. How do they structure political discourse? How should that knowledge of the nature of political language shape our understanding of the political and of political thinking? Acknowledging those properties as generic to political thinking, as to any other kind of social and historically based thinking, propels to centre-stage a view of the scholarly analysis of political theory as sensitive to change, not only in what it observes but in its self-understanding of political theory itself. For the study of political thinking needs to be predicated on the impermanence of conceptual content, and must be responsive to the fluctuating interchange of conceptual structures with the world of practices and thought-practices, embracing Skinner's observation that 'acts are also texts',[20] and the obverse assertion that could previously be derived from J.L. Austin, that texts are also acts—speech acts and writing acts—a subject to be examined in Chapter Eight.

The approach adopted here is not centrally concerned with the *reasons* or *conditions* for change as with its ideational *manifestations* and *consequences*— the varied conceptions of key concepts that combine to form patterned yet plastic theories and understandings. Exploring reasons and conditions for change is immensely important to understanding the world of political thinking, but it is already well-practised by scholars and employs methodologies different from those this book endeavours to emphasize. Instead, examining the product we call political thinking, and probing the work it discharges and the constraints it imposes on our comprehension of the world, is quite another kind of enterprise. Its epistemological underpinning in indeterminacy does not signify a flaw in our conception of the world, a temporary stage on route to truth and knowledge, or an inability to trace the path of influence from which a political discourse emerges, but singles out the very locus of human choice (and hence conceptual flexibility) itself. That choice, to be quite clear, may be exercised by individual agents or may be the result of group preferences and interactions. Nor is it perfect 'free' choice, but choice mediated through cultural and social filters and constraints. Indeterminacy, it appears, is a vital resource that holds out the promise of infinitely rich combinations of ideas from which societies may draw. Methodologically, it underpins the pluralism

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[20] Q. Skinner, 'The Rise of, Challenge to, and Prospects for a Collingwoodian Approach to the History of Political Thought', in D. Castiglione and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds), *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 186.

that guarantees that political thought, political ideologies, and theorizing about either, will never die out. It is also far more in line with the view of human nature that recent welfare theory has identified—not one based on a nineteenth-century belief in the certainties proffered by human reason and in the determined forcefulness of practical entrepreneurship, but inspired by an awareness of human frailty and vulnerability, and hence normally susceptible to unpredictable as well as planned change.[21] That is why building on the existence of pluralism does not signify that political theory can only deal with liberal premises and frameworks. True, liberal pluralism is particularly pertinent to the pliability of language because, as has just been observed, it is consciously in tune with the internal structure of political argument, itself composed of various fluid ideational combinations. But pluralism is ingrained in all political thinking, and neither ideologists nor philosophers can remove that attribute for any length of time, however much they chop, trim, smooth, cajole, or coerce.

Another feature of structural pluralism directs us to a further insight germane to the political theory of political thinking. Politics obviously focuses, among other things, on the study of interrelated individuals and groups, recently rephrased in the political science community through terms such as 'networks'.[22] That existential interdependence is matched by the conceptual interdependence evident in the thought products of political thinkers. It is not only words that come in combinations of phrases and sentences; that is also the case with concepts. Despite the proclivity of analytical philosophers for exploring concepts in isolation—a necessary exercise when the tolerance and range of a concept is, quite reasonably, subjected to logical and argumentative testing; and despite the similar tendency of conceptual historians to investigate the transformation of a single concept through time, concepts incessantly clash with and bump into each other, and lose or accrue components, always appearing in clusters that are mutually defining, sustaining and, for that matter, constraining. Those patterns are established through empirical evidence, mediated via the interpretative facilities of the researcher, but superimposed on a spinal conceptual structure that reveals the options available to political thinkers in a given time and space frame. Take Mill's *On Liberty*, an

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[21] See M. Freeden, 'The Coming of the Welfare State', in T. Ball and R. Bellamy (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 7–44.

[22] See, e.g., R.A.W. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy, Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997); M.A. Hajer and H. Wagenaar (eds), *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). However, a network must be distinguished from an ideological map. A network is a series of points of contact, a set of interactions that constitutes a loose holistic structure; a (ideological) map is also a holistic structure, but in addition it is a symbolic evaluation of the significance and meaning of networks, and an indication of preferred paths within such networks.

essay that is patently not on liberty alone, not even on liberty as a super-value. As Mill makes abundantly clear, he is arguing for the 'free development of individuality'—a cluster of concepts that elicit out of each other specific conceptions and that form a particular cultural package chosen from a number of logical possibilities.[23] Thus, the conception of liberty he endorses is one that contributes to the development of individuals; other conceptions of liberty are structurally ruled out by the engineered proximity to the adjacent concepts of individualism and development; while the conception of development is made to include self-development, whereas development not undertaken by free individuals is excluded.[24] We thus encounter a virtuous circle, an instance of complex holistic relationships, bearing three features. First, any concept is a means to any other (the circle may be entered into at any point on the conceptual compass). Second, some conceptions of any concept may also intersect with, or constitute, part of another concept: here complex boundary problems emerge, in this case due to an interpretation of liberty as an unfolding of mental and moral faculties over time rather than just the freedom to act or talk. Third—a normative apparel—the configuration of concepts has been constructed so as to constitute collectively a desirable, or attractive, set of human and social circumstances.[25] Those are typical ways in which political language and thinking present themselves.

Interdependence, applied to the world of political thinking, is not tantamount to an all-embracing wholeness. In a world of conflicting and competing conceptual arrangements, its macro-form appears as competing holisms, while its micro-forms appear as knock-on effects that one mutating concept has on others in its idea-environment. One salient shape these competing holisms adopt is that of ideologies, which are consequently to be viewed as all the concrete forms of political thinking in a society that feature either some grand conceptual configuration or, more modestly, a partial one. Each ideology offers a prevailing pattern of the conceptions of a set of concepts, bound together as a particular discourse. Such holisms are of course not really complete, for two reasons. First, the issue of inconclusiveness noted above leaves wide gaps: arguments have no clear end points. Second, in a holistic structure ideas and policies are interconnected at many points and on many dimensions. Those nodal linkages reflect cultural understandings of how and why these connections are, and should be, made. But no holistic political structure can host all possible linkages and paths. The interdependence of any given cluster of political thought lies rather in its particular selection, or

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[23] Mill, *On Liberty*, op. cit., p. 261.

[24] I have argued this in greater detail in *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 145–7.

[25] These possibilities do not exhaust Mill's text. The umbrella concept of well-being acts—on this interpretation—as a collective name for the cluster of named goods, but may also, as Mill implies, contain further goods, or further 'leading essentials'.

presentation, of certain sequential conceptual paths and in some configuration of mutually-sustaining circularity. Disparate nodal linkages vie with each other in giving diverse holistic readings (= alternative ideological interpretations) of the political practices that are being signified.

If such structural interdependence has bearing on thinking about politics, it also affects thinking politically. The six features enumerated in Chapter One reflect the interconnectedness of language, not as formal syntax but as logical and cultural adjacencies. It has already been pointed out that the first five features are bisected by the sixth, power. But the five also interlink among themselves, and their variable combinations produce what we may call different meanings of politics and political thinking or, put more emphatically, different meta-ideologies of what politics is about. Ranking social aims entails decision-making, or alternatively the projection of future visions that redistribute the significance of social ends. Visions themselves may occasion decision-making at the start of a subsequent uncontrollable process, or they may deflect decisions to an indeterminate future. The monitoring of social conduct and claims in different spheres and the assertion of the superiority of the political over other forms of human conduct is itself a type of establishing its trumping quality as a ranker of collective ends. To the extent that ranking produces hierarchies it evaluates the inputs from different social spheres, puts them in their place, and also attempts to impose order and stability.

Some forms of support generate stability and order, but instability can be engineered by versions of order jostling with each other, or by preaching violence and discord and limiting support to an exclusive ideational group. The issue of stability is not only that of addressing the thought-practices that enable the arrangements under which group life may function or flourish. The act of decontestation, so central to the finality to which, on one level, all political thinking aspires, is itself inherently unstable, and the theorizing it engenders cannot escape that precariousness. Decontestation is subject to continuous reformulation over time and space. Essential contestability prompts slippage as a consequence of the internal flexibility of positions and the impossibility (and political undesirability) of holding linguistic meaning constant. There always exists a decontestation continuum, in which subtle reformulations (negotiated or unprompted) are marshalled in order to remain in the competition over the control of political language, in a manner rather different from the notion of equivalence developed by Laclau and Mouffe.[26] While for the latter equivalence is an obfuscating means of transferring the same meaning to different phrases,[27] in this case we are dealing with similarity

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[26] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 127–34.

[27] E. Laclau, 'The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 1 (1996), 201–20.

rather than equivalence, so that small changes appear to uphold the perceived integrity of the decontestation. One example would be the shifts in the meaning of welfare: as individual or small-scale well-being, as collective policies associated with the welfare state, or as a system for supporting the less deserving marginal members of society. The word remains constant while the conceptual arrangements within its intension alter considerably. That desire for monopolistic ideational control is the hallmark of ideologies in their competition with one another, but on the meta-level—to reiterate—it also is the more fundamental political-thought feature of claiming ultimate sway over the contours of collective life—the specific finality of the wish for power, if you will.

4. THE EMOTIONALITY OF THINKING POLITICALLY

Language is also a vehicle of emotion, though emotions are not transmitted only through language. But as Reddy has suggested, 'emotions are the real world-anchor of signs . . . there is a feeling that goes with every sign; emotion generates *parole* against the background of *langue*'.[28] Emotions have long been released from the exclusive domains of psychology, physiology, literature, and the fine arts and have been co-opted, among others, into the study of ethics— sympathy and friendship having being classified as moral sentiments, from Adam Smith through Graham Wallas and Harold Lasswell to Rawls.[29] Ethical norms are thought to trigger powerful emotions.[30] That suggests that emotions are more than 'part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning';[31] they are to be assessed politically in their own right irrespective of whether their possessors use them consciously, or to ethical purpose. For emotion also often slips in almost uninvited into political language. The fact that emotion attaches itself to ordinary discourse, to parliamentary debate, manifestos and other kinds of political literature, as well as frequently to scholarly discussions, is yet another decisive argument against the possibility of political neutrality.[32]

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[28] W. Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 38, 3 (1997), 331.

[29] See e.g. Adam Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982); J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 476; G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable & Co., 1948); H. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930). See also S. Okin, 'Reason and Feeling in Thinking about Justice', *Ethics*, vol. 99 (1989), 236, 247–8.

[30] N.C. Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics', *International Security*, vol. 24 (2000), 122, 154.

[31] M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1–4.

[32] See also S. James, 'Reason, The Passions, and the Good Life', in D. Garber and M. Ayers (eds), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1362.

For students of political thought, the incorporation of emotions into their subject-matter is still a relative novelty that poses problems. Philosophers have long been ambivalent about, if not outright opposed to, the significance emotions should be accorded. The fact that language is a conveyor of emotions as much as of reason has not infrequently been seen as a defect in the construction of argument. Political philosophy is still strongly wedded to the superiority of reason over emotion, both as an appraisal of their relative value in human conduct and, more specifically, as an injunction for establishing the criteria of good scholarship. It is not only that emotions—and more so, in past philosophical treatments, passions[33]—are held to be a hindrance to rational thinking; they are also thought to reflect intellectually inferior and often socially and morally irresponsible attitudes and forms of conduct. That is especially true of passions, often held to be particularly uncontrollable or intense—overlooking the vital sustenance they can give to visions and beliefs. All that obtains despite Hume's valiant and well-known effort to redress the balance, when he wrote: 'Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates.' But for Hume, reason could never oppose passion in the direction of the will; famously, it 'is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions'.[34]

That view has hardly percolated into current political theory or philosophy; moreover, Hume still allotted considerable significance to reason, and his argument relates to moral judgements, not to the application of emotions to politics. Cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, on the other hand, have written persuasively about emotions in a way that political theorists might learn to appreciate. Thus Jasper has insisted that 'to categorize [emotions] as rational or irrational . . . is deeply wrongheaded'[35]—though a purist might retort that it may be rational to employ emotions as *arational*, not *irrational*, partners of rational argument. But in political theory two areas are still underdeveloped: the dependence of conceptual meaning on emotions, and the immediate role of emotions in producing thinking that is political. Emotions make a difference to political thinking in two areas of central interest to the student of political thought. First, they constrain the meanings available to the individual or group engaged in political thinking and hence act as

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[33] S. James, 'The Passions in Metaphysics and the Theory of Action', in D. Garber and M. Ayers (eds), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 914.

[34] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), pp. [23, 25] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm#link2H_4_0075 (accessed 19.12.2012).

[35] J.M. Jasper, 'The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements,' *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13 (1998), 398.

decontesting 'agents' alongside, and often cutting across, logical and cultural constraints. Although, as with all decontestation, the precise representation of an emotion is elusive and will ultimately fail,[36] emotions—both cognitive and unintentional—add a layer that curbs the flexibility of the discourse in question. Second, they supply political thought with crucial qualities that pinpoint its nature as *political* thought. Whether emotions are motives, feelings, moods, or psychological dispositions,[37] is not as important to the political theory of political thinking as is the nature of some emotions in playing a direct political part in any discourse in which they are expressed. Indeed, in relation to collective conduct, and in particular to social protest movements, 'there are systematic pressures to have well-defined emotional responses and affective ties in certain contexts'[38]—an observation that could be generalized to collective responses to violations of human rights, for example. By contrast, the stripping of political argument from emotion, which some philosophers and theorists endeavour to attain, involves the creation of an odd form of language, although its aridity may itself elicit emotional as well as rational responses among its consumers. If, as Suny phrases it, 'emotions are involved in preference formation, in choice among preferences, in moving people to action, in forming allegiances and affiliation',[39] then not only are they patently parti-pris, but they sustain many of the fundamental features of the political. Political language does not present itself emotionless. The uninhibited freedom of choice to express or not to express emotion is simply not available to political discourse, and the political theory of political thinking must recognize that.

This book is not concerned with the questions 'what are emotions?', or 'what are the functions of emotions?' The core issue for the purposes of this study is 'what makes emotions political?'—what is it about emotions that feeds into the *political* features of human communication? The focus here is not even on what some philosophers and ethicists have now come to acknowledge, namely, the valid point that the use of reason depends on emotion, replacing the need for a dichotomous choice between them.[40] It is rather on ways in which emotion is transmitted into, and constitutes part of, the political, whether or not it intersects with rational argument. Nor should that focus rest content with the general expression of emotion *in* and *through* texts, or with its performative bearing. We need to take a

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[36] Reddy, op. cit., 331–2.

[37] A. O. Rorty, *Mind in Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 105.

[38] Jasper, op. cit., 404.

[39] R.G. Suny, 'Why We Hate You: The Passions of National Identity and Ethnic Violence', Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (2004), p. 29. http://iseees.berkeley.edu/bps/publications/2004_01-suny.pdf

[40] See e.g. G.E. Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotions in Democratic Politics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 47.

further step and investigate how emotions contribute centrally as a matter of course to political thinking and discourse. In broad terms, emotions perform three morphological tasks for political thought. They arrange the *space* available for a particular concept through emphasizing it—that is, they accord it a larger segment in the morphological arrangement of a discourse, argument, or ideology. They *discriminate* among concepts through according them relative salience. And they *weld* concepts together or prise them apart, that is, they augment or diminish the cohesion, even the equivalence, among them.

The first role is political in the basic sense that thinking politically is a way of conceptualizing human relationships in a bounded space, and important aspects of those relationships are permeated, and shaped by, the emotional regard for the political concepts and ideas at the disposal of a society. According to Burkitt, 'we can recognize the communality to our structures of feeling' because they are socially articulated.[41] If communal pride, or resentment, or social compassion are defining or overriding collective emotions of the society in question, that will have a knock-on effect on the features of thinking politically with which they are made to tie in, as well as on the horizontal conceptual arrangements of the ideologies that reflect thinking about politics—that is, which conceptual compatibilities does a given emotion permit. Emotions are more immediate appraising elements, alongside intellectual appraisal, whether positive or negative: they induce both an evaluation of the worth of a concept or idea and an assessment of their location in (and exclusion from) a conceptual configuration. The second role is directly a core political feature, inasmuch as distributing salience or significance is a fundamental political phenomenon. Emotions thus attach additional weight to the already existing weight a feature may accrue through rational means or traditional usage. As will be sees in Chapters Four and Eight, this impacts on the relative vertical ranking of social goods. The third role cements or disengages groupings of conceptual arrangements, forming or disrupting associations of thought—though whether they create or rearrange such configurations or merely support or undermine those that already have intellectual roots is an unsolved, and perhaps insoluble, issue. Thus, pride and loyalty directed inwards, welded with hostility towards out-groups, may influence the expression of belligerence or ideas of social justice that affect the channelling of political support.

Thinking about politics—thinking ideologically—reveals itself not only as a perennial competition over the control of political language, but as a contestation over the political mobilization of emotion. As a result, on the underlying dimension of thinking politically, emotions shape the semantics of political

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[41] I. Burkitt, 'Complex Emotions: Relations, Feelings and Images in Emotional Experience', in J. Barbalet (ed.), *Emotions and Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 154.

language, and its production and consumption, at all levels of sophistication. That is not to underplay the central importance of cultural and logical facets of decontestation, even if basic emotions are pre-cultural.[42] Indeed, it is undoubtedly the case that the eliciting of emotion and the kinds of emotion pressed into action in the political and public spheres are also culturally constructed or, at least sifted through cultural filters.[43] Griffiths notes that, although all emotions are 'irruptive motivational states', one kind is insensitive to culture, while the other differs across cultures (and, we may add, within cultures).[44] Or as Rorty observes, contextual causes may even be sufficient to explain emotions. For example, folk psychology about emotions cannot be ignored, as it influences the construction and interpretation of political language.[45] Culture may consequently overtly privilege some emotions over others—consider exhortations to anger when two societies compete over territory, or national elation at sporting achievements, but it may create unconscious emotional manifestations—consider the visceral shock induced by criticizing or mocking hallowed religious figures.

Indisputably, also, there is no universal set of emotions that caters to all the features of thinking politically, inasmuch as the cultural and epistemological filters through which the transmission of emotions relevant to those features may differ entirely, or at least overlap but not coincide. Thus, displays of military power will generate pride in one society and anxiety or repulsion in another. Although emotions are not culturally dependent per se, the interrelationship between political language and emotion is heavily mediated via particular families of ideologies and epistemologies. Moreover, the language through which these different values, ideas, and policies is transmitted will be fashioned in various ways by the authors of words and texts: thus the location of freedom and democracy in different ideological morphologies, and with diverse decontestations, will engender sundry methods of seasoning them with the requisite passion to influence the selected audience or readership of those discourses. Ultimately, recent studies of emotions fortify the focus of this book on normal as well as exceptional political thinking for, as Barbalet has observed, 'emotion is central to and not deviant in the everyday operations of social processes.'[46]

All that does not simply mean that some emotions are the product of groups—they are always possessed by individuals—but they do often pass through group filters and can be managed to produce collective force, and to

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[42] See the discussion in J. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 45–6.

[43] Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics', op. cit., 125.

[44] P.E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 16.

[45] Rorty, *Mind in Action*, op, cit., p. 118.

[46] Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*, op. cit., p. 3.

establish the discipline of what Reddy terms an 'emotional regime',[47] or what we might call the laboured extraction of support. At any rate, group emotions, like group ideas, may be misinterpreted, differentially consumed, and entail 'surpluses of emotion' or 'deficiencies of emotion'—in parallel with Ricoeur's surplus of meaning. The reverse is also possible. Emotions already held by the actor may shape the consumption of political concepts and language. Anxiety about one's own life-chances could be displaced onto immigrants, and that may predetermine conceptions of equality, rights, and nationality, by ruling some conceptions out and others in through refusing to give them rational consideration or being incapable of doing so. In that manner emotions can often override logical constraints on the meanings of concepts. Even in a culture of declared egalitarianism, some groups may nonetheless be singled out for unequal treatment (positive or negative) because of fear or empathy. In that case an emotion may constrain the claimed universalism of a concept's application.

The analysis of political concepts must also include, as a matter of course, rhetorical as well as emotional dimensions—for much rhetoric also resonates with emotional import and has been described as the 'art of arousing the passions'[48]—along which concepts and their components move, interact, and accrue relative weight. Both rhetoric and emotion assist in rendering the intensions of some concepts, or some components of a concept, more 'sticky',[49] stable and constant than others and less liable to rotate among meanings. They often—as the 'fast food' of politics—have a more immediate effect than does rational argument. Not least, at the level of scholarship, as Weber contended, the analysis of meaning—the interpretative act itself—'can be of an emotionally empathetic or artistically appreciative quality'.[50] Even if we dissent from the 'basis for certainty' that Weber believed both rationality and emotionality could provide, we may applaud his humanization of the nature of research.

The analytical vocabulary at our disposal as political theorists is heavily biased in favour of texts of a certain kind. The language of poetry, which can work wonders for emotion, mood or tone, may contain political ideas but is ill-suited for political theory! But written texts in general are inadequate conveyers of emotion. They omit the body language that emits emotional force. They are also cut off from the additional emotional registers that accompany speech—inflection, intonation, emphasis, voice level—which is

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[47] W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 114–18, 124–5.

[48] S. James, 'Reason, the Passions, and the Good Life', op. cit., p. 1380.

[49] S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 11, 13.

[50] M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds), vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 5.

why electronically synthesized speech grates so much on the ear. Emotion is much in evidence in the stressing techniques in parliamentary and public debates, though here again cultural differences play a role. The conferring of significance through emotional language might backfire in a culture habituated with low-key emotional expression, just as it may backfire in professional discourses where the semblance of calm, rational debate is essential. In such cases concepts and notions attached to strong emotional appeals may lose their impact. Imploring someone to accept the logical validity of an argument cuts little ice in academic debate.

The relation of emotion to thinking politically is particularly germane to the features investigated in Chapters Four, Five, and Eight: the distribution of significance, the mobilization and withholding of support, and the power to be found in expressing political thinking, where emotions act as intensifiers in the dissemination of persuasion and menace. But each of the various features of thinking politically may attract and develop different sets of emotions that reinforce and amplify the specific characteristics of that feature, and emotions will thus figure sporadically throughout the rest of this book. Emotions are of course ubiquitous, not just the province of protest politics. Thus Lyman has argued that anger is not just a loss of emotional control but an expression of intolerance of ambiguity that may be used in defence of a political order[51] (or, perhaps more accurately, in defence of some of its manifestations, actual or desired). However, emotions are not merely those of anger, frustration or disgust with reference to the political, even though those may invite more scholarly attention. They will equally have highly positive contributions to make towards conveying and sustaining the political ideas and arguments in a society. Excitement, pleasure, or communal devotion also add considerable weight to the concepts, ideas, or arguments to which they are attached. Some emotions are explicitly manipulative; in other cases genuine emotion may trigger political understanding. Emotion appears, of course, in the language of urgency, when calls to arms are couched in stirring tones (the Kitchener recruitment poster of World War I with the slogan 'Your country needs you!'). It supplies much of the fuel required for social cohesion and solidarity through facilitating bonding. Political visions, as well, undoubtedly attract strong emotion as forms of hope, or fear, or imaginary and comforting escapes from reality. Martha Nussbaum has contended that 'emotions involve judgments about the salience for our wellbeing of uncontrolled external objects'[52] but they also secure judgements about the sequence and ranking of argumentation and of the distribution of scarce resources, material, and symbolic. And failure, the flipside of the projection of political visions and the attempts to

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[51] P. Lyman, 'The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 7/2 (2004), pp. 133–6.

[52] Nussbaum, op. cit., p. 2.

finalize decisions, may have a powerful emotional cost, so powerful that various strategies may be devised in order to avoid or ignore it—a theme we shall return to in Chapter Seven as well as in relation to the practices of negotiation in Chapter Six.

One could of course hypothesize even more specific political manifestations of emotion. Thus anger is related both to dissent and to injustice; loyalty related to political obligation; bonding, compassion, fellow feeling, and care to interdependence, mutuality, solidarity, and community; pleasure, security, and happiness to welfare; pride and resentment to nationalism; and frustration or collective grief to political failure.[53] The generic attributes of emotions also deserve attention: persistence and stickiness can facilitate support or deep opposition; possessiveness can protect political space, and volatility can facilitate change and negotiation.[54] To conclude, the attributes of language and the uses to which emotion is put unravel a complex story that can only be adumbrated in these pages. Its underlying message is the scholarly urgency of reassessing both familiar and unfamiliar perspectives in exploring what makes thinking political.

[53] See e.g. Nussbaum's discussion of compassion, ibid., pp. 367–8, 384, 403.
[54] Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 14–15, notes a distinction between short- and long-term emotions.

3

The Arrogance of Politics

'The political entity is by its very nature the decisive entity . . . it is the supreme, that is, in the decisive case, the authoritative entity.'[1]

President Truman, as is well-known, had a sign on his White House desk that read 'the buck stops here'. As he observed in his farewell address in 1953, 'The President—whoever he is—has to decide. He can't pass the buck to anyone. No one else can do the deciding for him. That's his job.'[2] More recently that premise has been reformulated by President Obama. Shadowed by an American journalist, Obama is reported to have said: 'Nothing comes to my desk that is perfectly solvable. Otherwise, someone else would have solved it. So you wind up dealing with probabilities. Any given decision you make you'll wind up with a 30 to 40 percent chance that it isn't going to work. You have to own that and feel comfortable with the way you made the decision. You can't be paralyzed by the fact that it might not work out.' And the journalist, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, added tellingly: 'On top of all of this, after you have made your decision, you need to feign total certainty about it. People being led do not want to think probabilistically.'[3] Whether effective and ultimate decisions are being made is not crucial to thinking politically, as distinct from political efficacy. Responding to that need for certainty, however, and accepting the role of disseminating it, is a characteristic indicative of such thinking.

'The buck stops here' is a deep political sentiment, but what underlies it is a proposition of far greater significance and intensity: the inseparably conjoined implication that the capacity to stop bucks, or to appear to stop them, is indispensable to collective life. And if that capacity is indispensable, then an identifiable area of discourse is required to conceptualize the existence of a domain of human conduct that *arrogates* that capacity to itself, otherwise

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[1] C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 43–4.

[2] Harry S. Truman Library, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm (accessed 4.8.2009).

[3] Michael Lewis, 'Obama's Way', Vanity Fair, 11.9.2012 http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/10/michael-lewis-profile-barack-obama (accessed 16.9.2012).

social life is both impossible and inconceivable. That is what I shall call the *arrogance* of politics. To arrogate, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, is to 'appropriate, assume, or claim to oneself unduly or without justification'. Its two vital features, self-assumption and the absence of justification, permeate every aspect of the stipulative self-elevation embedded in this characteristic of thinking politically. 'That's his job' is not a justification; it is a statement of inevitable fact, over which there is no external sway. That arrogance is not optional, nor even as delusory as it might seem at first blush, but it is not undue either. The role of closing debate, of curtailing inconclusiveness, of allotting functions, of regulating and containing competences, of cutting the social cake, has to be crafted, and assigned, for collective life to be possible. And to avoid infinite regress, human thinking and its verbalization have to weave a narrative about a *point d'appui*; in effect, about an act of self-creation. Politics and thinking politically cannot, of course, be reduced to their arrogance—that is why this chapter should not be read apart from the others that together attempt to assemble the complex and varied messages that the political imparts—but it is a prominent element of political thinking and quite unique to it.

In this chapter, two analytically different, but complementary, components of the arrogance of politics will be assessed. The first section considers the notion of ultimate finality in the affairs of social groups as constituting a temporally-bounded path. The second section examines the consequent assumption of the apportioning and regulation of the spatial boundaries and competences of other fields of human interaction, given that thinking about spatial boundaries is already permeated by considerations of temporal finality. The third section explores some interplays between the two through the concepts of sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy.

1. FINALITY AS TEMPORALITY

a. The political as Godly

We have been used to consider questions of ultimate control as spatial, relating to territorial borders and what happens in them, outside them, at them, and to them, as well as incorporating some spatial fluidity.[4] While maintaining the importance of spatial boundaries, the argument here is that they cannot on their own contain the central political concern with finality,

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[4] See e.g. C. Rumford, 'Introduction: Theorizing Borders', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9 (2006), 155–69.

which has prior recourse to temporality as the determiner of the 'last resort' feature of the political. Although time and space often operate in tandem in the language of political control, the fundamental idea of political finality should be conceived of as a claim to monopolistic *primacy*, couched in broadly temporal (originary and subsequent), not spatial, terms. Time has the edge over space as the conceptual baseline of political discourse, when in its assertiveness mode. Even the notion of sovereignty, which in common parlance is often considered to be a dual *spatial* attribute of states or kingdoms— the one facet denoting an exclusive control over what happens in a given territory; the other facet being a top-down and potentially undemocratic assertion of institutional hierarchy—also encompasses a complex notion of temporal finality, as will be seen below. The notion of temporality explored here refers not simply to an historical argument anchored in a hallowed past, but to conceptualizing the control and delimitation of groups, large and small, through a thought-practice in the form of a trumping decision literally without precedent.

That fundamental trumping capability of thinking politically is secured over time and abstracted from historical change, by postulating an inaugural act of social creation that cannot be anteceded or superseded. In political discourse and argument it is closely linked to authority or, more accurately, to the further practice of wielding some aspects of authoritative power as unconditional—another thought-practice that discharges a social need without which societies flounder. But finality is not coterminous with authority. The right to wield power and its authoritative use are add-ons to finality; through ideological frameworks they moralize and justify it or, at the very least, they render the insistence on finality palatable within the normal range of expectations of political language. The unconditional claim to finality may as a rule don the clothing of authority but as a practice it is analytically distinct. When that unconditionality, either of finality or of one of its offshoots, legitimacy, weakens in institutional practice and in thought-practice, as it invariably does and has done, the definitive trumping facet of political thinking is faced with possible failure. That is usually bundled together as a multiple failure: of deciding, of subsequent acting, and, not least, of producing a discourse that attracts attention and respect.

To begin with the idea of self-assumption, we confront here one of the most potent and intriguing features of thinking politically: it encompasses all thought practices that engage in *self-designation* as the *first and final* source of social order and of decisions that possess an ultimate trumping quality. Notably, in this case the *ending* of debate relates to establishing its *commencement* rather than its temporal conclusion—not the end of (political) history but the beginning of political time. Finality refers to the reversion back to a starting point, rather than the working through to a close: not the finality of ends or solutions but the finality of initiation, thus controlling a trajectory now

anchored in the present by tracing back its imagined or symbolic formation.[5] Beyond that symbolic temporal boundary it is conceptually impossible and methodologically illegitimate to ask 'what happened before that?', or 'what caused that?' or—to bring in agency—'who is responsible for that?' In similar fashion, astrophysicists have no conceptual framework for answering the question: 'what happened before the creation of the universe?'; and some of the major religions have no conceptual framework for answering the question: 'What happened before God?' We are facing the 'big bang' of the political, though unlike its cosmic counterpart it is the product of will, either human or—in religious idiom—divine.

With regard to the affairs of collectivities, the self-assuming, or self-anointing, or self-privileging instances of human conduct—and the parallel thought-practices that enable and sustain that conduct—are important components of what we choose to term the political domain. The temporal boundary, then, is not inserted to distinguish between two consecutive time periods, in the manner that spatial boundaries distinguish between two contiguous zones, but indicates the site where the construction of the political commences, and towards which political thinking must gravitate as the anchor point of its subsequent and further assertions regarding the allocation of social competences. Sometimes this is articulated in the language of temporal precedence, factual or metaphysical; sometimes in the language of logical necessity. While the historical point of inaugural time may rarely be identifiable, the discursive allusion to the capacity for self-invention is not fictitious; it *exists* as a prominently necessary, if not sufficient, attribute of the political; it is one feature of what thinking politically *is*. It is the moment of freedom as the generalized political property of instigation.

All this begins with the idea of God—especially in monotheistic religions—for whatever else God is, he is an undiluted political entity, signifying the idea of the political as *fons et origo*, at least with regard to human conduct and social affairs. That is starkly asserted in the New Testament: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'[6] The triple sequence in which temporality is associated with language, language is associated with divinity, and then in a process of ultimate fusion is *identified* with God, denotes that aspect of thinking politically that brooks no defiance and that is the subject of this chapter. In the words of one commentator, '...when God "spoke", the creative act took place', for the logos is 'the satisfying rational principle for understanding the universe'.[7] If logos in general serves to make sense of the world, the specific logos of God constitutes

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[5] As is contended in the section on failures of political thinking in Chapter Seven, that finality cannot be delivered with respect to future visions.

[6] John 1:1.

[7] J. Marsh, *Saint John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 96–7.

and orders it: it is the political act of constitution-making par excellence, the verbalization of what cannot be gainsaid or overruled by any speech-act located at a previous temporal point, because no such prior speech-act exists or can exist. To emphasize, that is not a simple historical sequence; it is metaphysical political time dressed up in myths that pursue the aura of persuasiveness. And it identifies the process of naming as pivotal to the political power of discourse itself. As Nietzsche shrewdly observed: 'The seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say "this *is* so and so," they set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it, as it were.'[8] Decontestation—the attempted semantic control of words—is hence an instance of the political urge to fix and finalize.

The political thus involves the primal control of words and language, a feature especially salient in the typical competition of ideologies over such control.[9] It is notable that in so much of the history of political thought, God provides the primordial instance and model of boundary-setting, of the conceptual—and temporal—initiation of finality. This Godly role of boundary-setting suggests that the idea of God plays a crucial part in underpinning prevalent, and possibly indispensable, ideas of the political. Such an interpretation of the Godly is hardly the kind of view we find, say, in Feuerbach. For Feuerbach attributes activity, joy, and creativity to God, and his discussion of alienation from a God constructed by human beings relates to the content of what God stands for: the embodiment of reason and intelligence, also the highest good, the essence of man and of human virtues.[10] If for Feuerbach the idea of God is a projection of what is best about human beings, the claim here, rather, is that that idea of God—or, as we shall see, its secular equivalents— invoke a social and architectural necessity without which human beings cannot live an organized or meaningful life. If God does not exist, the very notion of finality that anchors the political would have been undermined from the earliest days of civilization and its strongest version exposed as illusory, something that political language, in its many varieties, cannot countenance and has to obscure. Hence the idea of God is a way of capturing a very complex social attribute. It throws light on part of the nature of the political by means of the structural *location* of God as a pure political morphological fact. It is not that God specifically creates matter, or that God is good, or that he establishes

[8] F. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 11.

[9] See M. Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 55.

[10] See L. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1986), pp. 6–12, 45–8; M.W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 322–3.

an intrinsically constraining morality that may include limits on himself,[11] but that—logically prior to constructive creativity, or to the setting of a high bar of virtue—he is the anthropomorphized embodiment of the constitutive and regulative elements of human thought, of the *ex nihilo* role of the political. Notably, the God of scriptures is conceived of as a concrete actor, not as the representation of those abstract regulative elements. Yet the generalized regulation of time (as well as space), applied to the sphere of human interaction, is quite profoundly a striking aspect of what we mean by 'the political'. The political appeal to a higher authority is an appeal to concrete temporal initiation, to an *ur* thought-practice that is always expressed through its particularity, through a series of specific decisions.

That aspect of the political exists independently of and prior to any constraint that may subsequently be imposed by ethical sensibilities; it is amoral or pre-moral. In Tertullian's words, 'We are committed to something, not because it is good, but because God commands it.'[12] As Francis Oakley has observed, God's creative act 'is conceived to be entirely groundless and arbitrary in itself.'[13] However, what appears *morally* arbitrary, an act of pure will, is *politically* highly significant and necessary. If that notion of divine will makes no moral sense in its inscrutability, it makes excellent political sense. For when morality is contested, it needs be resolved through the decisions of a Solomon occupying a pre-and extra-moral position; and when it is not, it subsumes the finality of politics *within* itself. Although the arrogatory features of thinking politically cannot contain the full richness of that practice in its totality, and in any given instance may not be particularly apparent, they are one of the conspicuous and unique linchpins of such thinking.

In considering the ultimate absence of justification as a feature of the arrogance of politics running alongside self-assumption, we gain further evidence from sacralising narratives. Take the marvellous example of the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. God commands an act that is by most standards unethical and nowhere does Abraham query that. Nor does God justify his command, or apologize for it; it is explained as a test of the awe that God requires—or, we may say, explained by respect for an overwhelming instance of the finality of the political. The Bible lays down that key political principle early on, in chapter 22 of Genesis, because it is such a fundamental buttress of the social order. The chronologically and culturally far later

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[11] For this latter treatment of the relationship between God and sovereignty, see J. Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), pp. 1–5.

[12] 'Neque enim quia bonum est, idcirco auscultare debemus, sed quia deus praecepit'. Tertullian, *De Paenitentia*, p. 149. http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_paenitentia.htm (accessed 16.4.2013).

[13] F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order: An Excursion in the History of Ideas from Abelard to Leibniz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 44 (quoted in Elshtain, op. cit., p. 34).

protestations of Job: 'the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me' are ethical and emotional grievances that have no place in the earlier pure enunciation of the political in Genesis. 'Theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die', wrote Tennyson of another example of intensely political sacrifice. Any two-way dialogue between commander and complier comes later, if at all; any dialogue begins as a monologue.

This structural finality is trenchantly illustrated in Islamic thought, one interpretation of which illustrates this Godly aspect of boundary-setting in crisp clarity. As the Islamic scholar Abul A'ala Mawdūdi put it, 'God is the absolute sovereign and has absolute authority to issue whatever command He might will.' Crucially, it is not the wise contents of God's ordinances that demand obedience; a believer obeys 'simply because they are the ordinances of his Lord'.[14] Here too God is the political absolute with regard to decision-making, not because of the messages he imparts but because of the indisputable finality that his decisions possess. The *pure* political property of that Godly finality is epitomized by its being presented as the device through which the regulation of human conduct ends conclusively and unconditionally, a feature that in other, lesser, decision-making and boundary-establishing processes can only be a fanciful aspiration, or benchmark, whose durability and impact are variable, limited, and defective. This rather puts secular boundary-setting in its place, as all humanly and socially contrived finality-determining arrangements pale in comparison, leaving the preponderantly secular domain of the political relatively flawed on that count. Hence, and quite apart from the other elements of what is currently known as 'political Islam', Islam displays at the heart of its teachings one of the definitive instances of a *political* feature. The political is deeply embedded in the concept of divine sovereignty. Concretely, as Mawdūdi argues, all ideologies possess symbols that require unconditional respect from their followers: flags, uniforms, crosses, turbans, the hammer and sickle, or the swastika.[15] Muslim rites merely constitute the equivalent symbol, in this case that of an exclusive devotion to God. That should be appreciated separately from the more earthly notion of the political which, as Sachedina sums up, insists that 'Islamic society emanates from an indisputable foundation . . . the absolute necessity of political power to manage human affairs', so that 'religious public order cannot be achieved without secular public order'.[16]

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[14] S.A.A. Mawdūdi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, vol. II (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1989), p. 128.

[15] Ibid., p. 129.

[16] A. Sachedina, 'Forms of Political Participation in Muslim Political Heritage', in M. Freeden and A. Vincent (eds), *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013), p. 136.

The finality argument from God has of course undergone philosophical evolution, and that is no more evident than in Hegel's writings, when a concretized Geist permeates the world, rationalizing and ethicizing it. For Hegel, one of the three moments of sovereign power is 'the moment of ultimate *decision* as the *self-determination* to which everything else reverts and from which its actuality originates'.[17] Here too the arch-decision is invariably 'socialized' and transmitted on various levels of concrete particularity. The actualized will of the state is embodied in the monarch and the constitution. Important here is the emphasis on self-determination as the logical, not temporal, starting-point, and the association of such self-determination with the exercise of the rational will qua a decision. We have thus two fundamental aspects of the political in the same moment of logical necessity: its self-assumption of power, as 'the apex and beginning of the whole', and its emphasis on will-cum-decision as an 'ultimate self-determining certainty',[18] with its obvious imperviousness to indeterminacy. Hegel's system, as well as his choice of language, weds the finality of originary self-determination to the finality of the idealized, and subsequently concretized, political decision. Though time and history play a vital role in Hegel's argument, the historical rhythm is in its essence a logical one. The only valid historical beginning is one that reveals the movement of reason through time, a movement which hereditary monarchy reflects; any other attempt at 'beginning' would be arbitrary. Plainly, too, the spatial understanding of sovereignty is bypassed in favour of the temporal.

There exist critical positions that would disengage from the above analysis. Rancière, for example, takes objection to that analogy between the theological and the political. He maintains that 'it dissolves the question of politics into that of power and of the grounding event that is its fundament. It redoubles the liberal fiction of the contract with the representation of an original sacrifice.'[19] But those are the facts of political thinking, even if not, for Rancière, their desiderata. And such facts, such thought-practices, do indeed contain fictions, as they always will. At best political discourse, in vernacular or professional modes, enjoins us to move from one fiction to another. And as students of political thought we need to understand fictions and the ideational role such fictions play. Nor does the analogy dissolve politics into power; it notes that power is a central feature of politics but by no means does it imply that it is the only one, or that it could be entirely removed in any social arrangement, even one converging on anarchism. The analogy with godliness

[17] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 313 [#275]. Emphases in original.
[18] Ibid., pp. 308 [#273], 320 [#279].
[19] J. Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory and Event*, vol. 5, 3 (2001), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/toc/tae5.3.html (accessed 16.4.2013).

drives home not the power of an *act* or an *event*, but the enormous force that political *thinking* derives from its ubiquitous appeal to the idea of origination.

b. Earthly Gods: echoing the 'big bang' of politics

Nietzsche famously wrote in his *Genealogy of Morals* about ' . . . the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good, I mean first-rate, in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was from this *pathos of distance* that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names.'[20] And Foucault spoke of a 'founding precedence': 'For there to be a relationship of sovereignty there must be something like divine right or conquest, a victory, an act of submission . . . or there must be something like birth, the rights of blood . . . something that constituted its definitive foundation.'[21]

In the history of political thought, Godly finality has often been transferred to human beings. The divine right of kings was an established European tradition that flowered in particular in the seventeenth century. Of that divine right, J.N. Figgis observed astutely, 'large numbers of men may embrace a belief without good reason, but assuredly they will not do so without adequate cause.'[22] We may observe, a propos, that good reasons may not be entirely intellectual or rational, and that reason and cause may require supplementing by the role that beliefs have in shaping a proper understanding of the political. 'Nor again', continued Figgis significantly, 'can the doctrine be dismissed as the work of an isolated thinker. . . . It was essentially a popular theory, proclaimed in the pulpit, published in the market-place, witnessed on the battlefield.'[23] Finality has a vernacular and diffused existence in social life—a theme vital to an expanded conception of the political.

The divine right of kings was predicated on a key temporal principle: Hereditary right is indefeasible. Obedience to a sovereign is underpinned 'by a fundamental hereditary right of succession, which no religion, no law, no fault or forfeiture can alter or diminish.'[24] It too demonstrates that the idea of sovereignty cannot just be reduced to a 'top-down' concept concerning superiority and inferiority, or to exclusive territorial control, as it is often portrayed. It also contains a 'first-subsequent' dimension, whose temporality is logically prior to its spatiality. But in addition to God being the model of self-creativity

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[20] F. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, op. cit., p. 12.
[21] M. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, ed. J. Lagrange (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43.
[22] J.N. Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 2.
[23] Ibid., p. 3.
[24] Ibid., pp. 3, 7.

at the beginning of time—an attribute frequently mimicked by earthly sovereigns—the will of God ordains a mortal ruler with a 'real-time' irreversible sequence in which the dual notions of 'primogeniture' and 'succession' determine the authority of rulership.

One assured propagator of the divine right of kings was Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, tracing that right to God, 'by whom authority has been exercised since the beginning of the world'. As Bossuet explained: 'This absolute empire of God has, for its original title and foundation, the Creation. He has drawn everything out of nothingness . . .'. God is also the first ruler over men, and he 'publicly exercised a sovereign empire over his people in the desert. He was their king, their legislator, their leader'. Hence all these forms of governing succeed from an original, God-fashioned, moment. The parental and paternal logic is uppermost: 'God having placed in our parents, as being in some fashion the authors of our life, an image of the power by which he made everything . . . the first idea of command and of human authority has come to men from paternal authority', but this meshes with the establishment of kings by God, so that 'the judgments of sovereigns are attributed to God himself'.[25] Likewise, Robert Filmer contended in *Patriarcha*, 'There is, and always shall be continued to the end of the world, a natural right of a supreme Father over every multitude.'[26] This is not a teleological story about ends, however, but about the weight carried by a beginning. The founding moment stretches on to infinity. The self-reflexive nature of paternal authority is sealed by Bosssuet's assertion that 'against [the Prince's] authority there can be no remedy except his authority'.[27] In sum, the buck is stopped through establishing the *source* and temporal persistence, not the *scope*, of the buck stopper's power. After all, the territorial, well-bordered nation-state was still in its infancy. Even on an historical dimension, as Filmer expressed it, 'a proof unanswerable for the superiority of Princes above laws is this, that there were Kings long before there were any laws'.[28] Here legitimate power derives from precedence, from an unchallengeable beginning of the power to decide conclusively. Although the direct succession from God's will was increasingly filtered through an appeal to the natural, this did not diminish the process of harking back to what had to be self-generated. As Figgis observed, 'since God is the author of nature, whatever is natural has his sanction'.[29]

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[25] J.-B. Bossuet, *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 39–42.
[26] R. Filmer, *Patriarcha* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 62.
[27] Bossuet, op. cit., p. 82.
[28] Filmer, op. cit., p. 96.
[29] Figgis, op. cit., p. 152.

c. The secular originary

Hobbes, moving to more secular ground, attempted to emulate Godly or kingly omnipotence through his Leviathan, tellingly described as a 'mortall God, to which we owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence'. The reduction of the wills of all to that of the sovereign positions the latter strategically at the only core political site where actions and judgements become law, due to the *structural* provenance of their authorship. Consequently, 'the Soveraign is the sole Legislator . . . none can abrogate a Law made, but the Soveraign; because a Law is not abrogated, but by another Law. . . . Nor is it possible for any person to be bound to himself; because he that can bind, can release; and therefore he that is bound to himself onely, is not bound'.[30] That quality of making the law while being free from it is just another expression of temporal primacy: the absence of being bound to a *preceding* will.

Exclusivity, supremacy, and finality are much more direct indications of the political character of the sovereign than mere power or the content of civil laws, but supremacy—often seen as the central aspect of sovereignty—depends on primacy. The exclusivity of the political is embodied in the dual uniqueness and inclusiveness of the leader in a manner evoked by the depiction of the monarch on *Leviathan*'s celebrated frontispiece, but it is cemented by the sovereign not being a party to the social contract, for that would of course undermine the originary position he occupies at the moment of the creation of the political. Remarkably, Hobbes's theory of authorship as the source of authority invokes a prior starting point, a sequential chain, where the right to speak in the name of others is conferred (and, significantly, conferred totally and irrevocably): 'Every Subject is Author of every act the Soveraign doth; so that he never wanteth Right to any thing, otherwise, than as he himself is the Subject of God, and Bound thereby to observe the laws of Nature.'[31] That act of authorization is a discursive *transfer* that, in a logically instantaneous chain, generates the claimed unconditionality and irreversibility of the political moment. The originary moment has thus two simultaneous features, involving the subject and the sovereign. In a variation on the commencement of *political* time which, in religious mythology, is coterminous with creation, Hobbes locates his Leviathan not at the beginning of time, but at the end of 'natural' time. Put conversely, by establishing the sovereign Hobbes believes that the political is created.[32] Political time moves on from this constitutive starting

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[30] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 227, 313.

[31] Ibid., p. 265.

[32] It is of course the case that the state of nature possesses some of the features we would now term political, in particular the exercise of power in the shape of conflict and war. But it lacks the regulation of competences and the appeal to finality.

point, a point that crucially, for Hobbes, cannot be revisited. Although the political big bang is preceded here by a psychological and emotional world of individuals, it is not a social world, and the birth of the political is the permanent solution to the chaos—real or imagined—that such a world would display on its own.

It was again Figgis who shrewdly noted that contract theory does similar work to that of the divine right of kings.[33] Although political theorists are habituated to regard the social contract as a form of promising that sets up politico-ethical obligations, or that is the basis of a deep framework consensus that undergirds social arrangements, and whereas it will be suggested in Chapter Four to consider the social contract as part of a more extensive family that hosts the diverse languages of political support, here a different issue arises. From the perspective of the constitutive component of thinking polit-ically, social contracts may be read as more 'modern' or 'secular' devices that parallel the older ones in determining the unchallengeable origins of authorita-tive regulation. Complex and differentiated as the theories of the social contract are, the most ambitious among them contain both the idea of origin and the idea of self-arrogation, and it is those features specifically that require extracting in the context of this chapter. In Rousseau's version of self-arrogation, 'The sovereign . . . is in the position of a private person making a contract with himself, which shows that there neither is, nor can be, any kind of fundamental law binding on the people as a body, not even the social contract itself'.[34] Hence the democratic variant of self-determination—often seen as a member of the conceptual family of liberty, freeing a political grouping from external intervention—works in parallel as a popular or national version of constitutive self-arrogation by 'we, the people'. That property of the body politic replicates the constitutive powers of the divinely ordained king, except that God is no longer included in Rousseau's secular formulation. Locke, who famously argued against the right of succession affirmed by Filmer, had therefore to distinguish between paternal and political power. That did not prevent Locke from a comparable temporal exercise in deriving political power 'from its Original', namely, the power every man has in the state of nature and gives up into the hands of society, through 'Compact and Agreement'.[35] Of course, Rousseau's real device for finality is the rational unity presented through the general will, illustrating that political decontestation is achievable in many ways. The general will, however, is a particular substantive contrivance for finality couched in post-constitutive terms, as a deliberative process of attaining truth and also as an incontestable support-mobilizing device.

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[33] Figgis, op. cit., p. 1.

[34] J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 62.

[35] J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, Second Treatise*, #4, #171 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 309, 428–9.

Its totality is one form of ethical rather than political finality, supplying the subsequent justification that elicits political support.

The comparison with secular state authority as well as with parental authority is instructive. Though as a powerful narrative the deification of political finality has been a particularly formidable method of promoting that notion and of stemming objections to that method of entrenching the political, it has undergone various secularizations, if not quite as effectively. Diverse social systems establish different 'big bangs'; some may be more recent than others, some may replace prior ones—as is the case when claims to popular sovereignty have supplanted feudal sequences of attributing finality; but each acts as the starting point for its own irreversible practices of arrogation. When such claims are vague, or in competition with each other (e.g. national versus international or regional authority) the ultimate decision-making aspects of political thinking become fragile. In an historically prominent practice the state is the structural solution to the problem of conflicting authority claims, as it fills the gap for identifying an agency whose decisions are ipso facto final. That agency expresses the political need for decontestation through establishing a body whose pure function it is to produce self-assumed pronouncements and acts or to 'resolve'—in a substantively arbitrary manner—the kind of zero-sum intractable disputes to be examined in Chapter Four. Such secular political arrogance was magnificently and dramatically symbolized when, in 1804, Napoleon crowned himself rather than accepting the authority of the Pope to do so. That form of secular political thinking does not rule out systems in which the periodical revising of decisions is part and parcel of their rationale and their ethic. To the contrary, when such fluid systems insist on the requirement for revision and reflective reassessment as a sine qua non of social and political life, that is their take on finality. But it is the finality of a necessary and justifiable *procedure* that is itself the subsequent product of a constitutive decision, and it is finality without the drama that the political needs to deploy again and again as a performative expression of power, including the power to shock and awe.

Human and institutional fallibility, however, require that further tests of legitimacy be put to the political core from time to time. When exasperated or tyrannical parents revert to the similar 'godly' formula 'because I say so', one that conspicuously abandons justification while they wave their hypothetical *fons et origo* certificates in their children's faces, it is more likely now to be seen as a declaration of the bankruptcy of their authority and of their rational persuasive abilities than as an appeal to the trumping sanctity of parental status. Stark self-arrogation may make ethicists uneasy. Our ethical sensibilities lead us to expect a series of justificatory explanations before parental frailty reverts to the pathetic failure embodied in that act of communicative finality, because we have been socialized in the liberal tradition to regard that phrase as a verbal instance of dialogical failure, ethical insolvency, and

discursive unreasonableness. That our conventions, ethical expectations, and ideological competitiveness require us to dress up that arrogatory necessity in finery is, nonetheless, a different dimension of political language. Putting the cart of ethical justification before the horse of political finality is an attempt to mitigate the logic of the political. But justification can only come consequent on the prior possession by societies of an ultimate competence setting and regulating mechanism. You can only justify, or condemn, if there exists a previous capability to fashion social arrangements. That capacity will exist irrespective of whether it is justified or condemned; justification is simply not part of it. The point here is not that justification is considered superfluous per se, but that justification is an ethical and ideological, not a political, exercise. 'Because I say so' is the purest form of the ineliminable arrogance that the political must possess. This parental (formerly known as paternal) under-standing of sovereignty, this raw effrontery, intersects with power not because of its impact or its persuasive capacity, but because it halts in its tracks any process of seeking alternative authority, or allowing a non-hierarchical chal-lenge to a finite chain of command.

In this contentless form of 'presidency' the buck stops yet again, stops in the sense that an impassable point of source has been identified. In effect, 'the buck *starts* here' is the real structural message of political arrogation. On the other hand, the *personification* of finality we find in either God or a parent is notably absent from the ultimate rationale of the arrogance of politics. The personification of such arrogance in the political realm, whether by a Napo-leon or a Truman, is rather the particularization of a diffuse quality of human thinking which in the last resort has little to do with the idealization of the *substance* of agency and will and much to do with the social need for assigning mechanisms of decision and regulation as an imperative of communal life. Even the concept of leadership is split between its personification or particu-larization—Il Duce = Mussolini, der Führer = Hitler, Weber's charismatic leader—and the acknowledgement of leadership as a necessary locus of pro-active decisions for a collectivity.

The Abraham and Isaac sacrifice story is but the literary expression of a deep-seated social inevitability. Transcending such narratives we uncover them as the epitome of the raw necessity of the pre-adorned, pre-ideological, pre-ethical nature of politics. Their subsequent secularization simply no longer enables the political to hide under the shadow of God. It emerges into the open in all its rawness, and although the self-assumption of its regulatory pre-eminence remains the only option, it is an ontologically weakened one that requires ever more elaborate—and more easily contestable—alternative temporal narratives. And those narratives, while not always justificatory, begin to incorporate some form of reason for the pre-eminence of the political. If, nevertheless, we do wish to have resort to justification, it is structural, not substantive: somewhere, something or someone has to be discursively

identified as the agency or agent of finality; otherwise entropy beckons. No matter that all concrete manifestations of finality claim an illusory durability; the category they contingently inhabit is nonetheless indispensable. That view is well put by Nagel from an analytic philosophy standpoint that invokes the dictates of reason: 'In order to have the authority it claims, reason must be a form or category of thought from which there is no appeal beyond itself— whose validity is unconditional because it is necessarily employed in every purported challenge to itself. This does not mean that there is no appeal against the results of any particular exercise of reason . . . '[36] In this case, reason itself becomes the manifestation of the purely political. But far from being the 'last word', as Nagel suggests, it is the 'first' word, the source from which all valid argumentation emanates. It is in that murky area that this important aspect of the political resides—in its inevitable yet questionable insistence on certainty— for once the lack of finality seeps through, the political dissolves. We shall encounter that in our discussion of political obligation in Chapter Five, for Locke knew that well when asserting that government and law simply *exist* when people partake of 'enjoyment' of movement or residence within the dominion of the former.[37] For Locke, that manifests itself in allegiances that override any other human activity, in monitoring gently or ruthlessly all areas of human conduct, reminding us that the super-boundary of the political encompasses all.

Hannah Arendt famously observed that the active political life is the realm of freedom but not of necessity and that human action involves *archein*, 'the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities'.[38] Moreover, 'this character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins'.[39] Yet *pace* Arendt, strictly speaking, political action as freedom applies only to the moment of arrogative creation and initiation. For although the *ur*-political act is in one sense unconstrained and willed, it is simultaneously unavoidable, and its enactment does not guarantee the subsequent freedom Arendt aimed at. That is what Rancière points out, albeit critically, when he complains that 'the logic of *arche* presupposes a determinate superiority exercised upon an equally determinate inferiority'.[40] While Rancière wishes to abandon *arche* in favour of an egalitarian participation that redefines politics as 'a specific rupture in the logic of *arche*' (and politics is thus inaugurated as a disruption), *arche* nonetheless remains one of the empirically ubiquitous features of thinking politically,

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[36] T. Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 7.
[37] Locke, op. cit., #119, p. 392.
[38] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 9, 13.
[39] Ibid., p. 172.
[40] J. Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', op. cit.

whether or not it attracts Rancière's normative approval. However, what does follow from Arendt's important concept of natality in terms of the actual thought-practices involved is far more likely to be a continuation into the second component of arrogation, as an ordering, marshalling, and boundary-setting process. In that process the human and social objects of that initiation no longer have recourse to that unique and singular moment of origination, but are instead bound by its consequences. Of course, from time to time new acts of initiation may replace older ones, but those revolutionary situations are nonetheless uncommon.

Arendt focuses on the miracle of human agency, epitomized in human natality, but she recognizes that such unpredictable action may be frustrated. The arrogance of politics, too, identifies a ubiquitous political practice that initially reflects such agency but is consequently designed to frustrate it. If that practice ultimately belongs to the sphere of necessity, it is not in an Arendtian sense, but in the sense of the inescapable and systemic logic of the political. For although particular instances of arrogation may be temporarily thrust aside or annulled, they are destined to be replaced by another such act. Recall, we are looking at the normal and the typical in order to understand and decode political thought-practices, not to praise, bury, denounce, or replace them.

d. The case of nationalist ideology

Unsurprisingly, certain strands of nationalist thinking saliently display some of the characteristics of political arrogance. As one scholar has observed with reference to sovereignty, 'nationalism and constitutionalism are the two major political ideologies that have determined the modes of the principle of sovereignty in the modern age.'[41] In Fichte's address to the German nation, the attribute of self-creation is located in a people rather than a leader: 'the totality of men continuing to live in society with each other and continually creating themselves naturally and spiritually out of themselves, a totality that arises together out of the divine under a certain special law of divine development. It is the subjection in common to this special law that unites this mass in the eternal world, and therefore in the temporal also, to a natural totality permeated by itself.'[42] The eternal—that is, the extra-temporal—is evident in temporality, and that combination of time imposed on, bordering, and imbued with, timelessness, so typical of the arrogance of politics, is seen as natural.

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[41] H. Shinoda, *Re-examining Sovereignty: From Classical Theory to the Global Age* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 19. I would not regard constitutionalism as an ideology, though, but as a component of a number of ideological families.

[42] J.G. Fichte, 'Addresses to the German Nation', in O. Dahbour and M.R. Ishay (eds), *The Nationalism Reader* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), pp. 63–4.

Divinity renders the existence of the people unchallengeable, eternity makes them irremovable, and temporality identifies 'the Germans as an original people'—a society whose prime political feature resides in its having been initiated divinely and in its subsequent practice of self-re-initiation. Fichte then contends that 'this love of fatherland must itself govern the State and be the supreme, final, and absolute authority'. The sentiment of permanence and eternity embedded in a people's self-creation is transmitted to the more formal political entity and its finality pervades the latter. Significantly, in the higher object of the state as governed by love of fatherland, there is 'at the helm of the state a truly original and primary life, and at this point, and not before, the true sovereign rights of government enter, like God . . . ' This initiating process is contrasted by Fichte with traditional constitutions and laws that lack an 'original decision', 'merely repeat[ing] a life that once existed'.[43] Origination, self-creation, the impossibility of having recourse to an earlier precedent or decision—those are the qualities vested in a higher patriotism. Permeating Fichte's discourse, that elemental political theme precedes the state itself, and the state's role becomes the affirmation of that elevated and primeval attribute.

For Treitschke, it is the state rather than patriotism that captures the crucial moment in political time. The state is the legal embodiment of the people which implies 'that the State is primordial and necessary, that it is as enduring as history, and no less essential to mankind than speech'. The state, like man, 'subsists from the beginning'.[44] Such juridico-philosophical appeals to an ontological beginning may, however, be replaced by ideationally simplistic versions in extreme vernacular variants of nationalism, as when a beginning is merely shrouded in the mists of time. Thus, a publication of the British National Party (BNP) alludes to 'the indigenous peoples of these islands in the North Atlantic which have been our home for millennia . . . whose ancestors were the earliest settlers here after the last great Ice Age'.[45] 'The buck stops here' is replaced by the vaguer notion of first occupation (incongruously adding the Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Norse to the list of approved immigrants), and that is considered sufficient to override the later claims of contemporary migrants to the fundamental political demarcators of territory or membership. Bizarrely, a migrational narrative—rather than, say, a story of cultural or ethnic superiority, which is probably conceived as unmarketable— is employed to construct the case against present immigration. Substituting for the hard and fast boundary supplied by the political 'big bang' theory is the idea of exclusive and unchallengeable prior ownership, to which

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[43] Ibid., p. 66.

[44] H. von Treitschke, *Politics*, vol. I (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1916), p. 3.

[45] British National Party Manifesto, 24 May 2008, http://www.bnp-chronicle.com/2008/05/bnp-manifesto.html (accessed 23.9.2009).

the demographic shifts that have established the origins of effective social time are entitled.

Generally speaking, *jus sanguinis*—the inheritance of the status of citizenship—is a practice common to many polities. In Germany, for example, it has operated as the prime criterion for full social membership (initially following paternal descent) and refers to the temporal sequence of which one is part, namely, a right based on an ancestral blood line, rather than *jus soli*, based on the space within which one is born. Inasmuch as being a citizen denotes a superior status of membership of a polity, usually including the role of participation in decision-making, the recourse to temporality chimes in with the political obsession with antecedents. In a sense, it reflects the generalization and democratization of the divine right of kings—including its rendering in vernacular and populist idioms—once again concerned with the legitimation of a succession: what happens next in the sphere of political status and activity is the product of what happened before.

The first part of this chapter has focused on the arrogance of politics as found in the literature on states, kings, and nations and intimated how those were carried on in democratic, republican, and nationalist discourses. While it is most common to find expressions of self-arrogation among those with a claim to wield power, that claim is paralleled by a general desire in contemporary politics as well as in past practices to identify institutions and devices that dispense such (reassuring) finality. That finality may be transferred to institutions that themselves are not self-appointed. Thus, the US Supreme Court is often seen to discharge a necessary function depending both on 'a supreme expositor upon the constitutional distribution of power *and* popular acceptance of its decisions'. Its obviously political, rather than juridical, role involves the question 'whether a few judges appointed for life or the elected representatives will better exercise the ultimate, uncontrollable power of determining which rules shall prevail'.[46] And 'ultimate', coming to an *end*, is once again really an appeal to an umpire, behind which there is nothing to *begin* with.

The capacity of delivering finality through self-arrogation may have decreased in its intensity, particularly as its sustaining myths have become more complex with secularization, democratization, and the relativization that comparative purviews bring in their wake. The starkness and simplicity of self-arrogation have diminished, and confusion and disillusionment with the place of politics in social life have added to its attenuation in practice. But the underlying urge remains at the heart of the political impulse.

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[46] A. Cox, *The Role of the Supreme Court in American Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 13–14, 29. Italics added.

2. THE SPATIAL PARCELLING OF COMPETENCES

a. The discursive management of social conduct

The spatial dimension of the arrogance of politics concerns not temporal initiation, but the management of areas of social conduct, in which territoriality plays only one part. Even so, a component of that feature of the political may also be referred to as constitutive,[47] not as the location of the initial and incontestable act of social creation explored in the previous section, but as the ensuing continuous redefinition of those regulative and monitoring rules that shape social structure and interaction as an ongoing process.

Spatial competence regulation is a higher order manifestation of the unavoidable need in principle to recognize, monitor, legitimate, undermine, or re-establish the existence of boundaries. It reflects the acknowledgement that the social world is a world of demarcated spheres of thought, action, and interaction, however laxly defined, and that without such monitoring it would dissolve both into conceptual entropy and into behavioural chaos. The invention of boundaries and their subsequent affirmation, reinforcement, breaching, and reconstituting are prima facie political thought-processes, both as a way of perceiving the world and of attempting to manage it. The grammar of competence regulation appears most commonly in spatial terms (mine and theirs, inside and out, inclusion/exclusion, higher and lower). Underlying those distinctions and others, thinking politically in its spatial mode affirms the superiority of the political over all other social, cultural, and individual spheres. That superiority is discharged through the discursive and delimiting act of boundary-construction, the oversight of what happens within other spheres, and the asserted capacity to block spillage from and between spheres, as well as to enable cross-boundary movement, or to abolish or reshape boundaries. Crucially, thinking politically does not just *happen* to involve the claiming of exclusive boundary control over the various areas of social activity. To the contrary, boundary control and sphere regulation need to be recognized, alongside the 'self-constitution' of the previous section, as components of an ipso facto core political-thought practice.[48] That has been well-expressed by Agamben, elaborating on Carl Schmitt's notion of states of exception, in which the sovereign is both inside and outside the juridical order, capable of suspending the constitution[49]—the constitutive flipside of creating it.

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[47] For an analysis of the connection between that constitutive function and sovereignty, see D. Philpott, 'Usurping the Sovereignty of Sovereignty?', *World Politics*, vol. 53 (2001), 297–324.
[48] See M. Philp, *Political Conduct* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 10, 52–3.
[49] G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 15–29.

When Schmitt wrote that 'the political is the total, and . . . any decision about whether something is *unpolitical* is always a *political* decision',[50] he properly identified its regulating and controlling function, but a proviso needs to be added. Such 'totalism' is part of the political imaginary, rather than a depiction of facts 'on the ground'. The competence-management feature of the political does not necessarily or even ordinarily entail prescribing the content and determining *what* other spheres of human activity discharge, though it may enforce or prohibit their activities. For competence regulation and spatial boundary control involve a further distinction between what happens within the area that is marked out by boundaries, and the structure and role of the boundaries themselves. The regulated areas normally have their own criteria for what they produce and how, in thought and deed—be it art, material goods, or religious rituals—while the domain of the political patrols, recognizes, and legitimates the boundaries of existing social spheres and their interfaces, though it will also (re)establish and modify those boundaries from time to time. Hobbes termed the competence-allocating power as propriety, which is 'the whole power of prescribing the Rules, whereby every man may know, what Goods he may enjoy and what Actions he may doe'.[51] Pizzorno, to take a contemporary representative example, appears to express that notion as follows: 'politics can be seen as the type of activity entitled to dictate the *rules* of conduct for all relevant social activities'.[52] And rules of conduct are not tantamount to substantive creativity.

Pizzorno's statement, however, requires another kind of fine-tuning. The problem is not that he refers to politics rather than to thinking politically—that adjustment can be made for our purposes. More importantly, the political feature of competence-regulation and boundary monitoring also applies to the additional features of the political *itself* that are explored in the other chapters of this study. We have encountered the germ of that idea in the previous section, when sovereignty is construed to include the self-regulating and self-constricting authority of the Prince. And second, we need to clarify that the entitlement to which Pizzorno refers is not itself a view of politics as normative, but an acknowledgement that normative properties can be empirically discerned as integral to much political thinking and hence become an object of our investigative remit—and that will be further explored in Chapter Seven. At any rate, the crux of this feature of the political is not that politics is *entitled* to dictate rules but that it simply *does* it.

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[50] C. Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 2. Italics in original.

[51] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, op. cit., p. 234.

[52] A. Pizzorno, 'Politics Unbound', in C. Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 27. My emphasis.

To clarify, the above should not be construed as suggesting that only salient political institutions such as states, regions, municipalities, or international organizations are boundary determiners and monitors. Other institutions, such as families or the kind of intermediate institutions to which Durkheim drew attention, which could include the medical profession, universities, or churches, are also very adept at such demarcation and controlling. In all these cases we are looking at a shared mode of thinking, not at a shared institutional locus—a mode of thinking that in every instance locates a political feature within a far broader network of practices that cannot in themselves be captured by the political alone.

In its typical preoccupation with competence regulation rather than totalism, thinking politically does not include the validation of Einsteinian physics, or approving an image of the afterlife, or the recommendation of sexual practices, or a debate about the merits of Picasso's ceramics, *unless* something in each of those areas is subjected to a politicized interpretation; that is to say, it is thought to undermine one of the other basic features of the political, such as disrupting social stability, challenging a vision of social harmony or co-existence, or significantly altering power relationships. For example, religious purism bent on banishing certain practices from the world is acting politically, not religiously, when in that mode. When that is perceived to be the case, an argument for spillage avoidance and competence regulation is constructed through the very ideational trumping authority of the political that societies need to establish in order to settle disputes or to try to eschew disorder. Thinking politically then manifests itself further as the drawing up of new boundaries, intended to re-organize social competences, and it may even include occasional incursions into the content of the produce, in the name of those other features of the political.

There is another aspect to competence regulation. It may well be that the self-arrogation claim to finality, voiced by a ruler or aspirant to governing status, involves controlling the discharge of the other features of thinking politically. Those in charge of competence regulation may wish to restrict or promote aspects of political mobilization, or suppress certain political visions that emanate from other sectors of society. But what they cannot do is eliminate those categories as such, because they remain part and parcel of the political; they can only contain their impact and define the parameters through which they may be expressed. Indeed, they themselves will concurrently engage in mobilizing support for enunciating their visions.

What then about totalitarian conceptual frameworks and their allied practices? They are often thought to dismantle such boundaries altogether and permit the central power wielders to roam freely across social territory in determining the conduct, content and produce of human interrelationships. That is not quite the case for, although such substantive intervention is

particularly intrusive, new—most likely arbitrary boundaries—will be imposed, and then possibly changed again. When under Nazi rule particular forms of art were defined not only as degenerate, but as socially subversive,[53] the following had to happen: (1) those who a society designates as trumping agents of such decisions do in fact conceptualize a piece of art as subversive; (2) that sphere of imaginative creativity is deemed to be subversive because it is portrayed as corroding public order, or stability, or the mobilization of support; (3) the competence boundaries of artistic production are redrawn so as to remove those activities and products from what is considered to be art. In the Nazi case the issue is not that the boundary-establishing practice concerning art was essentially illegitimate but that the agents of that decision-shaping were suspect, the procedure of hammering out the boundaries was deviant, and the degree of control and regulation was excessive in proportion to the perceived seepage. Objectors to those political practices condemn them from ethical and aesthetic vantage-points, but their resistance is clearly political as well. In non-totalitarian societies, political agents also constantly intervene in art, when it is thought, for example, to underpin current understandings of criminality—say the portrayal of what some consider to be a paedophilic act; or when it is offensive to national identity—as in the case of the furore over a Turkish toilet sculpture employed in 2009 to depict Bulgaria in the Council of the European Union building in Brussels. It is more likely in those instances that on occasion the ethics of such milder intervention may come under scrutiny.

In sum, thinking politically with respect to spatial boundaries has three elements: (a) the initial claim to the right either to monitor all social domains within a geographical (often, though not necessarily, a state) orbit, or to exclude them from its sway, including the claim to determine what the area of political competence is—which might be challenged by other self-arrogatory political entities (the spatial arrogation principle). From that emerge two subsequent elements: (b) the insistence on possessing the status of the general regulator of boundary clashes and overspills of the jurisdictions of all social spheres, including the self-reflexivity of controlling the internal political boundaries that regulate the relationships among the other features of the political enumerated in Chapter One (the border monitoring principle); (c) the insistence on deciding which practices are socially and culturally acceptable, as well as expedient, from the viewpoint of the determining political agents, *within* each social sphere, while refraining as a rule from attempting to control all aspects of those practices, and even more commonly from defining or establishing them (the domain regulating principle).

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[53] See T. Clark, *Art and Propaganda* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), pp. 63–5.

b. Drawing the line

The spatial dimension has, most saliently, been associated with notions of (state) sovereignty and the closely-linked question of borders—who draws them up, who controls them, who may traverse them, and what they demarcate. The physicality of state territory offers a paradigmatic concrete instance of boundaries that have been central to defining nation-states and their interrelationships. Particularly in international relations, state borders have been relatively easy to conceptualize and assert—though not without challenge. They have conventionally been associated with the stability of political systems, and with the assumed constancy of the Westphalian system, although that view has been profoundly disputed over the past thirty years with the increasing advent of state fragmentation, or attempted fragmentation, alongside the processes collated under the umbrella term of globalization.[54] So the task at hand is not to fall for the most obvious boundaries in common discourse. Because many of us have been nourished on the notion of a spatial boundary as depicted in a map or atlas, or concretely at a border-crossing, we may have an inadequate view of what such a boundary is within the practice of thinking politically: it does not possess the properties of a wall, or of an obstacle, or even a of clear separator, nor does it merely safeguard geographical, national, ethnic, or cultural entities. Even physical boundaries—when observed under a powerful microscope—may be seen to dissipate in the absence of solid separation between entities or objects. Indeed, in more carefully articulated language, the postulation of solid spatial boundaries is rare and atypical of political thinking, even if not always intentionally so, and it is up to the analyst to identify and decode its more nuanced forms.

Yet boundaries now occur everywhere, and in increasing frequency they attract criticism not because of their supposed impermeability but because they are held to articulate crude binary distinctions—such as those between public and private, or between state and civil society, as well as between state and state—that need to be overcome, challenged, or redrawn, when they are wrongly set out, restrictive, misleadingly dualistic, or simply fabricated. In that mode current post-structuralist theories have been no less fixated on boundaries than have the physical conceptualizations of borders been imprinted on traditional political thought.

As an example, the common postulation of a public–private boundary offers a particular challenge to the notion of political thinking expounded in these pages. Its interpretation of social space rhetorically and ideologically transposes the argument of this chapter, by portraying the political as

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[54] See e.g. J. MacMillan and A. Linklater (eds), *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations* (New York: Pinter, 1995), pp. 3–5.

occupying a core public realm side by side with a non-political domain that is external to that realm and is designated as a no-go area for the political. The political appears here the constrained factor, whose boundaries are drawn by the imagination and autonomy of individual self-determination and development, and the 'private' becomes the preponderant arm of the pairing. A typical province of liberal ideologies, it too is, of course, a political competence-allocating division, but one through which liberal ideologies—always embarrassed by the political, particularly by its power-wielding dimension—ostensibly undertake upon themselves to release large swathes of human thought and conduct from most forms of collective monitoring, though never from all. The state–civil society boundary produces a different asymmetry. It provides a more particular structure on one side of the divide—the state, no longer the sole occupant of public space, but the most salient; and a more general structure on the other side—civil society which, at least on a Hegelian understanding, is as comprehensive as the state in terms of its membership, and is to be distinguished from the most prominent inhabitant of the private sphere, the family.

The assertion of the need for neutrality among different private or group conceptions of the good is in effect another reformulation of the public–private boundary. Irrespective of the factually inaccurate standard it proffers when identifying the ideal-type position of the liberal state in political philosophy, it concerns boundaries by signalling a refusal to enter an area where a standpoint is required and, more to the point, inevitable. The boundary imposed by the idea of neutrality is chimerical not merely because the state cannot but hold to an ideologically decontested idea of the good,[55] but also because it is always the political domain that sets up *its* preferred area of non-intervention in the competences assigned to private lives, or to cultural group choices, by determining which practices are to be given the neutrality treatment. The postulation of neutrality is itself a profoundly political act of imposing a specific value on a society.

Both the public–private and the state–civil society pairings are portrayed as predominantly dichotomous distinctions, anchored in given, conventional, and historic divisions, and focused on institutional and behavioural structures and activities.[56] At best, they are very particular instances of the general practice of boundary-drawing; at worst, they misrepresent a more complex commonality. In any event, the question of boundaries explored here cannot be contained in these two significant pairings, because the focus of this chapter

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[55] See the discussion in Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 259–75.

[56] Hegel of course assigns the state the ultimate rational control of all social spheres in removing the antagonisms that initially pertain between civil society and communal forms of organization. This form of political sovereignty is imbricated with what may be termed ethical sovereignty.

is on identifying a distinctive thought-practice possessing permanent concrete ramifications. The frequent recent attempts to abolish the public–private divide—as in the feminist assertion that 'the personal is the political'—cannot eliminate the unavoidable political thought-practice of establishing and managing boundaries per se. Whether particular boundaries are good or bad, ethical or unethical, successful or inefficient, sharp or vague, impenetrable or pervadable, ephemeral or durable, dualistic or multilateral, the drawing up of boundaries is a universal human collective practice, centrally anchored in the domain of politics.

A related problem is that, inevitably, it proves difficult to patrol boundaries successfully even when they are set up. When we examine at a high level of magnification any boundary set up in political theory or discourse, it will appear permeable, porous, and jagged. Religious beliefs may pervade the language and culture of a society even if religious practices are formally excluded from the public domain of governance, as in the United States. Alternatively, conceptual and discursive boundaries may not be set up crisply to begin with and we are reunited with the vagueness problem raised in Chapter Two. As Sainsbury maintains, 'almost all concepts lack boundaries' inasmuch as there is no demarcation of 'the things that fall under [a vague concept] from the things which do not'.[57] The Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblances is helpful here in providing a valuable shift of focus from a boundary to a pattern, by delimiting areas with shared features that cannot be mistaken for a different family of properties. On that understanding boundaries are the border *zone*, rather than the *line* or *point*, where one pattern permeates and mutates into another and where we move from one sphere of family resemblances into another. The family of liberalisms, for instance, mutates into that of socialisms on many parallel dimensions, and is not in a mutually exclusive relationship with the latter. Boundaries may be seen as belonging simultaneously to two areas-cum-categories, as does Wittgenstein's renowned duck-hare. That location is significant. After all, it stands to reason that spatial boundaries are positioned in geographical and occasionally even cultural peripheries, not in cores. They are always at the far end of something. They both link and disconnect domains whose peripheries are less sharply perceptible than their cores.

In actual political thinking, however, the discursive assertiveness of the political language of boundaries, in its diverse ideological manifestations, more often than not glosses over situations that are far more complex and eschews any intimations of Wittgensteinian vagueness. In the vernacular, political discourse commonly indulges in a thought-practice that postulates mutual exclusiveness, a conceptualization also endorsed by serious political

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[57] R.M. Sainsbury, 'Concepts without Boundaries', in R. Keefe and P. Smith (eds), *Vagueness: A Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 252, 257.

theorists. There is therefore no justification for abandoning the investigation of boundaries as expressed in thought and speech. True, normal instances of political thinking may deliberately obfuscate boundaries to seek political advantage, as when the rhetoric of 'one nation' is employed as a rallying cry. But those normal instances also constantly introduce hard and fast categories that sustain the pretence of vigorously decontesting boundaries as rigid, a pretence that underpins the ceaseless quest of political thinking for fixity in whatever area is regarded as a key buttress of social organization and stability. As an analytical tool that may be questionable or inappropriate, but boundaries are irremovable from thinking politically. For irrespective of their being social constructs, imagined, mythical and culturally sanctioned divides play an important concrete role in shaping political thinking. While *what* they imagine may be fanciful, it is empirically verifiable that individuals and societies imagine boundaries as a routine thought-practice and then go on to affirm or replace them. Thinking about boundaries, of course, is itself sufficient to establish a boundary and a space as a conceptual given. In that sense, boundaries are not entirely contingent, as some post-modernists would argue, but they are quasi-contingent: the category is necessary but its occupants, its lines and zones, are interchangeable.[58] As Varzi has noted, 'boundaries are part of the ontology of common sense'.[59]

That is not to argue that boundaries are not constantly perceived as under threat; conceptualizing that threat, formulating it or reacting to it, are equally parts of this domain of thinking politically. Nor, *pace* post-modernists, are spatial boundaries just binary, because any field may be delimited by numerous boundaries. And they are not only horizontally contiguous, side-by-side boundaries, but also stacked up in the form of hierarchical divides: class being one of the most familiar types and gender another. All those properties are present in actual political discourses. One could extend this argument to encompass the theorizing by scholars about their subject-matter, for they too construct boundaries—among conceptualizations, and between disciplinary fields. Indeed, that is part of the rationale of this book. But that meta-discourse merely points out the necessary ubiquity of boundaries as well as their inevitable interpretative suppleness. When thinking politically assigns temporal and spatial delimitations, it perennially vacillates between precision and fuzzy and fainter adumbrative qualities.

Even with regard to geopolitical boundaries, the rejection of the realist view of international relations, among others under post-modernist assaults, does not mean that we can dispense with the notion of boundaries as a constituent of what is political and of thinking politically. Both fragmentation and

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[58] See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 65–6.
[59] A.C. Varzi, 'Boundaries, Continuity, and Contact', *Noûs*, vol. 31 (1997), 30. This article contains a useful discussion of the ontological nature of boundaries.

globalization come with their own variants of boundary: in the first case, it is a question of redrawing traditional spheres of state or sub-state sovereignty; in the second, of constructing parallel global systems with their own, often competing, functional boundaries: capitalism, the ecology, religious expansion, cultural interpenetration, or global justice. Nor should we mistake appeals to global social justice that extend beyond political borders as undermining the political finality enshrined in the idea of national sovereignty. Quite the reverse may be the case: Cosmopolitanism, internationalism and globalism still evoke discourses about the ultimate authority of justice that acts to control the impact of other social features, and about the nature of efficient, co-ordinated and committed decision-making within statist, national, or regional power-structures.[60]

Recent scholarship on geopolitical borders affirms the fluidity of that concept. The increasingly common practice of moving border-crossings to a point outside the state or territory in question, as with passport or ticket control, has introduced further flexibility into the notion of a border, but concurrently reaffirmed the salience of borders as a way of thinking politically: filtering immigration, screening potential terrorists, and monitoring drug crime. Hence the elasticity and even the monitored porousness of boundaries must also be considered to be processes of political assertiveness, demarcation, and decision-making. As Newman suggests, fluid movement may have to be politically enforced, and 'drawn up by the societal managers', not just enabled.[61] That itself becomes another way of regulating social order.

In effect, removing the rigidity of one kind of boundary (say state or economic) introduces other boundaries around new categories (say mobile individuals, multi-lingual people, or tourists). Stringent rules may still exist for crossing certain boundaries—membership of a religion, for instance,[62] or adopting a new nationality. A multi-cultural or multi-religious space is also one that is allowed or encouraged by the political sphere, which has then to rearrange the relationships among its constituent parts. The Indian notion of secularism relates to the re-entry into the public arena of 'Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes' by offering them all equal rights and duties. Minorities are 'interwoven into an innate unity by the common thread of national integration and communal harmony'[63]—another instance of the political thought-practice of

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[60] For a succinct account of those globalisms, see M.B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[61] D. Newman, 'Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9 (2006), 175, 181.

[62] Ibid., 178.

[63] National Commission for Minorities, New Delhi, http://ncm.nic.in/constitutional_prov.html (accessed 22.9.2009).

prescribing the optimal relations among social spheres, as well as an example of the striving for social stability discussed in Chapter Six.

3. SOVEREIGNTY, AUTHORITY, AND LEGITIMACY

a. The compelling ubiquity of sovereignty

The formation and defence of boundaries appeal, as is obvious, to two major concepts in the political lexicon: sovereignty and authority. The one is often described as a legal fiction concerning ultimate and supreme control and independence, located in the sphere of constitutionality; the other as the rightful or legitimate wielding of power, located at the interstices of morality and power. Indeed, the term sovereignty is as much at home in legal language as in international political discourse; whereas the notion of authority bestows a modicum of ethical justification on those who evoke it. The combination of those understandings—legal, ethical and power-centric—often link sovereignty and authority.[64] But how do the two fare as distinct *political* concepts? Yet again, many of the ideas contained in the two terms are expressed through a variety of words, and the burden of conversion from one to another leaves room for much interpretative leeway. But some nettles, though they sting, have to be grasped. If the unavoidable indeterminacy of political concepts applies to sovereignty and authority, it applies all the more to words in common parlance that have not been accorded careful professional thought. We are therefore steering through an area of sensible or plausible interpretative approximations. Let us recall that the focus here is not on the construction of reality through discourse, but on the parallel reality of discourse itself. Language *is*, its connotations *are*, and we need to explore them to get a grip, however tenuous, on political thinking.

Taking sovereignty first, that tricky concept—as the previous discussion suggests—straddles the dual notions of space and line, of what happens inside a given area and what happens at its boundaries. Domination inside an area is conceptually fundamentally different from control and exclusion at its limits. Sovereignty's conceptual status as a legal fiction reinforces the complex conceptualization of boundaries in political thinking. A legal fiction has been defined as 'an assumption that something occurred or someone or something exists which, in fact, is not the case, but that is made in the law to enable a court to equitably resolve a matter before it'.[65] The dubious factual backing of legal fictions such as sovereignty, nonetheless, need not affect their centrality

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[64] See e.g. F.H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (London: Watts, 1966), p. 26.
[65] *JRank*, http://law.jrank.org/pages/8149/Legal-Fiction.html (accessed 12.10.2012).

as organizing principles of political thinking. It is certainly not a fiction, or an illusion, that the notion of sovereignty as a thought-practice performs important functions in conceptualizations of the political. As against other political entities, it signifies the legal independence and separateness of the sovereign body, and that links up with conceptions of liberty and autonomy, as well as with the assumed normality of geo-political divisions among states, even as a condition for identifying the concept of a state.[66] Through applying sovereignty to the international domain, values such as independence and autonomy—esteemed by liberals, nationalists, and conservatives alike, albeit in different ideational contexts—are appropriated by the political sphere. Consequently, sovereignty in the political sense is endowed with an extraordinary salience as the privileged position of the safeguarding and firming up of collective identity.

In numerous analyses of politics, identity in the form of naming or interpellation has become a central theme. Accounts of sovereignty qua self-determination, however, shift the emphasis onto group, not individual, identity—though, of course, individuals also construct their identities through group affiliations that may either be acquired or believed to be natural. Collective identity is a set of deep-rooted cultural, religious, gender, and ethnic attributes relating to belonging, and thinking in terms of sovereignty is their political incarnation, serving as a legal and formal, as well as mythical, consolidating and protecting framework. In particular, the idea of sovereignty acts as a container and justification for the privatization of social and cultural space. *Within* that sovereign space, however, visceral competitions over such collective identities may be as marked as attempts to hold at bay the 'infiltration' of *external* group identities or, in the worst case, subjugation by aggressive nationalisms beyond sovereign space. Those conflicts over collective identity are spurred on by different ideological worldviews. In the first case, plural communities claim visibility, recognition, or even monopoly, of collective identity, a topic sometimes subsumed under the heading of identity politics. But they often are more fundamental struggles over the very essence and uniqueness of a society. Thus, minorities cultivating visions of dominance will operate alongside rural communities nourishing their own brands of nostalgia. In the second case, a national sense of community in the singular is wielded—often across those divides—to provide a shield from encroachments on the familiar by strangers. Indeed, those national identities are constructed by default, as it were, from the outside as much as from the inside. It is, however, rare to construe a collective identity as directly political, rather than have it run for the shelter that the arrogance of politics appears to provide.

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[66] J. Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 47.

Internally, sovereignty is a way of signifying the superiority, or supremacy, of the political—particularly but not solely the state[67]—or of the agents of the political: whether that be the monarch in more traditional understandings of sovereignty, the legislature in the idea of parliamentary sovereignty, or the people as a whole in notions of popular sovereignty. But the purpose of this section is not to pursue a general analysis of sovereignty, or of its moral and ideological underpinnings, or its specific identifications of legitimate authority, or of the individual, group, office, or practice in which it is right and proper to locate it—all questions of considerable import and fluidity. Rather, it examines the area where the notion of regulatory finality intersects with the concept of sovereignty as the latter's raw *political* component. The fuller properties of internal sovereignty lie partly in the ethical sphere, and partly fall within other categories of the political which other chapters discuss: the mobilization of support, the exercise of intense power, and the kind of visions in which a society may indulge. In particular, the notion of limited and accountable sovereignty has emerged as a counter-balance to its pure competence-determining side; or put differently, in many (liberal) societies that particular circumscribed rendering of sovereignty *enhances* its capacity to regulate and monitor boundaries through its implicit association with legitimacy.

Philpott's discussion of sovereignty notes persuasively that, at least in the international system, 'constitutive rules define sovereign states'. Sovereignty, he argues, is not just a matter of securing compliance, but is instrumental in establishing what a polity institutionally is.[68] One might go further by contending that expressing a defining thought-practice or speech act that sets out the morphology of social interaction—in this case, asserting the significance of constitutive rule-making and upholding—is a key (though not sole) attribute of political thinking. While Schmitt and later Agamben identified the unique feature of sovereignty as the capacity to declare a state of emergency or exception, others such as Habermas or Connolly have reformulated the issue as that of a founding act that triggers off a process of emergence. That 'politics of becoming', in Honig's words, is characterized by unstable futures and pasts, and in a particularly astute move she substitutes emergence for emergency.[69] That said, in order to capture the purely political aspect of sovereignty it is the *moment* of emergence, or of inception—not its future history—that has to capture our imagination. Hence the ultimate issue behind the acknowledgement that sovereignty is constitutive is that it paves one major discursive route towards satisfying the search for the 'big bang' effect of the political. And, of

[67] See e.g. H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 8.
[68] Philpott, op. cit.
[69] B. Honig, *Emergency Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 12–13, 44–9.

course, expressing that idea does not mean that it is successfully realized, even though that act of expression creates its own kind of reality. The bundle of *ideas* contained in the shorthand term 'sovereignty' has itself become a constitutive feature of thinking politically and does not depend on the emergence of states or on a 'Westphalian state system' let alone a form of democratic politics. That does not imply that all boundary and regulatory thinking veers to the absolute; it may deliberately or unintentionally fall short of such sweeping claims, or apply in varying degrees to the society in question. But we are still well within the ballpark area of constitutive thinking, control, and competence-shaping: they exert a gravitational pull. Nor, of course, is it the case that assuming the capacity to create a state of exception, or to found organized social life, or to instigate its emergence, is itself in any way exceptional. To the contrary, it is a completely normal and elemental feature of the political. At any rate, sovereignty cannot be reduced to declaring states of exception. It is also vitally linked to establishing intractable time-lines.

With a few notable exceptions, the temporality of sovereignty is buried under its spatiality. One of those exceptions is Bartelson who comes close to the theme of this chapter when writing of sovereignty as a 'primitive presence' claiming 'ontological primacy'.[70] Notwithstanding, sovereignty or its circumlocutions are not just a primitive ontological presence but an empirically observable constitutive component of political discourse. Another is Walker, among the few theorists of sovereignty who sees it engaging 'with the politics of origins, with the fixing of a temporal moment as a source of power, authority and ambition, and specifically with the tendency to treat claims about state sovereignty as the initial point from which all contemporary trajectories can be measured and controlled.'[71] But that contention is not followed up. Walker refers only to state sovereignty and to state boundaries; he does not focus on the underlying political principle of self-arrogation and the superiority claims of which sovereignty is merely one instance; and he tends to dismiss sovereignty as an elegant but metaphysical concept rather than a discursive speech-act that needs to be unpacked for what it is. Schmitt is the most famous exception in maintaining that 'The sovereign decision is the absolute beginning, and the beginning (also in the sense of arche) is none other than the sovereign decision. It springs from a normative nothingness and a concrete disorder.'[72] But Schmitt's analysis, too, is weakened by referring to the state as the arena of origination, as well as by the tension he finds between an absolute beginning and the existence of prior disorder on which

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[70] Bartelson, op. cit., p. 24.

[71] R.B.J. Walker, 'State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time', *Millennium*, vol. 20 (1991), 448.

[72] C. Schmitt, *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 2006), pp. 23–4.

the sovereign imposes his will, and which, on more recent understandings, already contains other features of the political. The focus in these pages, to reiterate, is not on pinpointing a concrete act of sovereignty, not on the state or on the legal system, not on 'the buck stops here', but on the buck-stopping attribute of the political imaginary, on the type of thinking that has resort to the idea of an absolute beginning and invests the political with it, a beginning preceded by nothing, not even chaos. Sovereignty in its legal sense undoubtedly refers to the highest, the final, and the supreme authority.[73] But sovereignty is merely one way of capturing the larger idea that the political refers, among others, to an indisputable occupation, indeed colonization, of an originary temporal moment in the life of groups and societies.

The common rhetoric of sovereignty often approaches finality differently. When sovereignty is portrayed as possessing the feature of absoluteness, in the sense of being present rather than absent with no intermediate possibilities,[74] and when that absoluteness is considered to relate to 'the scope of affairs over which a sovereign body governs within a particular territory',[75] it is an actual expression of political mythology, a logical rather than temporal mythology through which the origin of political finality is asserted. Moreover, the potential arbitrariness of command is dressed up in the finality of authorization, not of origin.

Bartelson lists the attributes of the state underpinned by the idea of sovereignty as indivisibility and unity.[76] The claim to be indivisible—while factually contestable—is a protective device that secures the political against attempts to undermine the principle of the ultimate primacy and singularity of decision-making and competence determining. Thus, when Krasner argues that sovereignty is a form of 'organized hypocrisy', it is because he accuses states of using it as a label of convenience from which they may deviate when their interests demand it.[77] That does not dispose of the need of political agents to resort to the *terminology* of sovereignty in their quest for finality, if it discharges the finality job well. The confusion here lies in assigning attributes such as supremacy and indivisibility to a set of political institutions as a response to the question 'who governs', instead of appreciating that the finality invested in the notion of sovereignty is a basic property of thinking politically and its discursive articulations, and is therefore anchored in a pre-institutional

[73] C.W. Morris, *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 177.

[74] A. James, 'The Practice of Sovereign Statehood in Contemporary International Society', *Political Studies*, vol. 47 (1999), 463.

[75] D. Philpott, 'Westphalia, Authority and International Society', *Political Studies*, vol. 47 (1999), 571.

[76] Bartelson, op. cit., p. 28.

[77] S.D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 9, 63–7.

fulcrum. Hence recent perceptions or theories of divided—in contrast to contested—sovereignty diminish the uniqueness and performative force of the two-pronged *fons et origo* and competence regulating feature of the political.

For theorists of politics and international relations, indivisibility may be a core component of sovereignty. But 'indivisibility' is not ordinarily salient in general discourse; it belongs to the professional language of scholars, not of politicians, nor is it common in vernacular usage. Rather, the supremacy, authority-cum-power, and self-contained, unique, and hallowed existence of the people, of the nation or of their government and leaders (as representatives of the state) are the de facto features of sovereignty that stand out in the public eye, and those may be applauded, disapproved of, or accepted with resignation. Rhetorical acclaim is one manner of arrogation—not through a physical act of origination, but through a speech-act: the oratorical verbal power of self-declaring primacy. Exploring political thinking requires the acknowledgement that the belief in, or assertion of, sovereignty moves from the constitutional to the rhetorical sphere, becoming a central thought-practice that moulds understandings and expectations of the political, even when employed in a questioning form. To that end, sovereignty is not most interestingly a normative concept[78] but one of many interpretative assertions casting light on how the realm of politics is perceived both in professional and in vernacular languages.

Examples of such acclaim are unsurprisingly found in declarations of independence, whose rhetoric veers between the temporal and the logical claims of sovereign finality. The 1835 Maori Chiefs Declaration of Independence (later overtaken by events) spoke—in originary terms of arrogation that melded temporal and spatial perspectives—of sovereign power and authority that would 'reside entirely and exclusively in the hereditary chiefs and heads of tribes in their collective capacity, who also declare that they will not permit any legislative authority separate from themselves in their collective capacity to exist, nor any function of government to be exercised within the said territories, unless by persons appointed by them, and acting under the authority of laws regularly enacted by them in Congress assembled.'[79] And, although not a statement of self-arrogation but of colonial bestowal, the Nigerian Independence Act 1960 evokes an absolute temporal political beginning when it states that 'No Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed on or after the appointed day shall extend, or be deemed to extend, to Nigeria or any part thereof as part of the law thereof'. On and after that day the power

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[78] As asserted by R. Jackson, 'Sovereignty in World Politics: A Glance at the Conceptual and Historical Landscape', *Political Studies*, vol. 47 (1999), 431.

[79] *Maori Chiefs Declaration of Independence, 1835*, http://www.waitangi.co.nz/declarationindependence.htm (accessed 30.7.2008).

to legislate is transferred from the 'law of England' to the 'law of Nigeria'.[80]
The Israel Declaration of Independence in 1948, emphasizing historical an-
chorage, stated that 'the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is
irrevocable. This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of
their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.'[81] Consti-
tutions, too, refer to origins and past time. For example, the Venezuelan
constitution simultaneously invokes a new beginning and a historical path:
'The people of Venezuela, exercising their powers of creation and invoking the
protection of God, the historic example of our Liberator Simon Bolivar and the
heroism and sacrifice of our aboriginal ancestors and the forerunners and
founders of a free and sovereign nation', and continues with a listing of
superior and inalienable values: 'Independence, liberty, sovereignty, immun-
ity, territorial integrity and national self-determination are unrenounceable
rights of the Nation'.[82] Recall also the famous Year One of the French
Revolution, in which political time was restarted as a new beginning. In
those indicative instances, the thought-practices that highlight exclusive tra-
jectories of control, non-negotiability, and the potentially unlimited exercise of
regulatory and governmental functions appear as the key themes of drawing
up the independent and competence-establishing boundaries of the political.

The state, of course, benefits greatly in public perception as its boundaries,
at least its geographical ones, are far more sharply demarcated than that of any
other political entity, particularly in the conventional nation-state. What
happens inside it is generally, though far from universally, considered to be
within its legitimate ambit as long as it does not contravene certain standards
of ethical conduct towards its population or extend its control over other
groups asserting their own right to political finality. Those boundaries parallel
the ones traced by liberals around the private sphere of individuals, permeable
only in a state of emergency that permits breaking the glass, extracting the key
and unlocking the door (or occasionally simply breaking it down). But
contrast that liberal view with a more compellingly political conception of
state boundaries in Roman practice: private boundaries that governed prop-
erty relations were circumscribed by law, but the public domain had no
boundaries.[83] In other words, the political nature of the state is believed to
reside in its superior authority, if not always the power, not only to etch its

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[80] *Nigeria Independence Act 1960* (*c*.55), http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/8-9/55/
schedule/FIRST (accessed 27.12.2012).
[81] *Israel Declaration of Independence, 1948*, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/
Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/Declaration%20of%20Establishment%20of%20State
%20of%20Israel (accessed 30.7.2008).
[82] *Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, preamble and article 1, http://www.
venezuelaemb.or.kr/english/ConstitutionoftheBolivarianingles.pdf (accessed 27.12.2012).
[83] F. Kratochwil, 'Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality', *World Politics*, vol. 39
(1986), 36.

own boundaries in stone or barbed wire, but to expand them at will: the epitome of empire. The relative fluidity of space is countered by the rigidity of the claims to its control.

Irrespective of conceptions of global justice, many notions of a political community tend to see its ethical boundaries as coterminous with its formal or national ones[84]—a major trend in the history of political theory—or at least as a question of the spatial and temporal tapering off of the boundaries of social responsibility. Traditionally this was linked to solidaric notions of a nation or to optimistic theories of the state as the agent of a general will; more recently the demand for increased democratic accountability and participation has resurrected the need for a viably-sized political entity as the locus of ethical social interrelationships. Tapering off—a diminishing conceptualization of the possible or desirable intensity of control over increasingly distant spaces or increasingly remote futures—is also a property of the centre–periphery relations that figure prominently in the spatial and temporal analyses of political entities. One finds that in applied theories of responsibility towards future generations, when nearer futures overshadow distant ones, as well as in the distribution of resources for the poor of the earth, when responsibility for 'one's own' effectively precedes responsibility for far-flung 'strangers'. In general, competence-determining may be less effectual at the periphery: sovereignty is after all exercised on a vast plurality of social structures and behavioural patterns at a very uneven intensity of control. Its monolithic and unitary pretensions belie the variability and partiality that characterize the discursive regulation of a political entity in a given domain.

b. Authority and legitimacy: the pursuit of political gravitas

The concept of authority is more difficult to classify, for it does not centrally belong to one of the six features of the political identified in this book. It is of course a concept closely related to power—not as a form of power but as a way of exercising it and of rhetorically enhancing it—but then all political concepts have a power aspect. Authority will frequently entertain a moral dimension of power;[85] it also has stabilizing connotations. But with the perspective of this chapter in mind, Scharpf's observation that 'hierarchical authority creates a capacity to override the preferences of other actors' is particularly pertinent. It combines the role of ranking policy preferences that will be addressed in the following chapter with that of the substantive trumping quality of political

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[84] S.C. Pepper, 'The Boundaries of Society', *Ethics*, vol. 32 (1922), 423. See also D. Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[85] R.B. Hall, 'Moral Authority as a Power Resource', *International Organization*, vol. 51 (1997), 594.

action (and prior to that, the ideational and discursive locating of that capacity in an agent or institution). Rational choice theory sees the hierarchical mode of interaction as desirable 'since it reduces the transaction costs of concerted action and thus offers the potential of coordinating policy choices from an inclusive, welfare-maximizing perspective.'[86] Reducing transaction costs (irrespective of that more doubtful welfare-maximizing role) is another way of assessing the imaginative attractiveness of the dual finality and competence-management feature of societies. Because the political is the domain charged with making decisions for collectivities, conceptualizing the locus of such decisions in an authority structure becomes an important aspect of thinking politically, by attempting to remove the attraction (or legitimacy) of all rival organizing and decision-making routes. And resisting such authority paths usually includes—even in some anarchist types of thinking where implicit authority is vested in 'spontaneous' communities—the parallel endeavour of envisioning alternative loci of decisive authority, whether enduring or transient—one of the subjects of Chapter Five.

Properly, this chapter should end with a brief nod in the direction of Max Weber's contribution to its theme. Weber's insistence on the autonomy of the political sphere resonates with the idea of internal sovereignty. For him, the nation-state afforded 'the ultimate criterion for economic policy, as for all others' through the notion of 'reason of state'. He demanded that 'the economic and political power-interests of our nation and their bearer, the German nation-state, should have the final and decisive say in all questions of German economic policy, including the questions of whether, and how far, the state should intervene in economic life.'[87] Weber's importance as a *disciplinary* boundary setter has often been recognized, as when Wolin hails his 'act of demarcation that indicates the subject-matter peculiar to the science', placing the study of politics within the ambit of social science. Wolin holds that the act of founding 'attempts to prescribe what shall be considered legitimate activity in a particular field', a view paralleled to some extent by Weber himself.[88] In this chapter, as throughout this book, the significance of that observation lies not in its endorsement of prescription as such. Rather, it lies in the recognition that prescribing the rules of legitimacy, both for what is political and for what the political arranges, is a concrete political thought-practice that itself calls for analysis and interpretation, always remembering the caveat that we need to factor in *all* activities and conceptualizations that pertain to the field, whether legitimating or not.

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[86] F.W. Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 172.

[87] Max Weber, *Political Writings*, ed. P. Lassman and R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17.

[88] S.S. Wolin, 'Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory', *Political Theory*, vol. 9 (1981), 401–2.

Unlike the specific properties of legitimacy that Weber attached to the monopolistic status of the state, legitimacy is ultimately not merely the result of some form of recognition such as that incurred by the gravitas bestowed by tradition, or the rational legality of a procedure, or the popular faith, either rational or emotional, in the personality of a leader.[89] Those types of rulership are logically subsequent, and chronologically later, optional justifications of a primordial legitimacy, a legitimacy called up—though not necessarily delivered—by the ineluctable social impulse for an ordering device, by the enjoyment of 'the prestige of being considered binding, or, as it may be expressed, of "legitimacy"'.[90] As a category, it exists prior to its particular occupants—another case of quasi-contingency. It is the non-justified and self-proclaimed legitimacy embodied *in*, not *through*, the mythical concept of the starting point. Legitimation remains, of course, a central mode of political thinking and argument. However, the latter do not only incorporate substantive preferences for a well-run polity. At a more fundamental level they articulate a language of legitimacy, designed to accept and endorse certain claims about institutional and personal superiority.[91] The success or failure of such attempts, their conceptualization, and their epistemological and discursive underpinning, are key aspects of what political theory should be exploring. The approach in these pages differs from Pierre Bourdieu's interpretation of the language of legitimacy. He is convincing in characterizing legitimacy as deriving from a social language 'likely to be recognized as acceptable' rather than possessing ethical validity, and in identifying it as a practical commitment to the value of a language game and its stakes. But his sociological perspective regards it as dependent on the status of the speaker, rather than as a symptom of the prior ontological property of societies to seek and offer political certitude.[92]

In particular, we should not be taken in by Weber's assertion that the monopoly of the legitimate use of force[93] in a given territory is actually the defining feature of politics, or even *a* defining feature, rather than something at or near the top of the political menu. The issue is, rather, that legitimacy signifies the supremacy that determines the *chain* of command or decision-making, and that upholds the exclusivity of the political in allocating power

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[89] M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds), vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1978), vol. 1, pp. 36, 215ff.

[90] Ibid., p. 31.

[91] See the chapter on 'Layers of Legitimacy', in M. Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp 78–93.

[92] P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 55, 58, 68. See also N. Uphoff, 'Distinguishing Power, Authority and Legitimacy: Taking Max Weber at his Word by Using Resources-Exchange Analysis', *Polity*, vol. 22 (1989), 295–322.

[93] 'Gewalt' incorporates both force and violence, but Weber never intended to focus only on the latter.

and competence to, or withholding them from, the spheres of social practices. The allocation of competences does not debar other entities from performing power-wielding roles, while legitimacy can embrace an indication of the *actual* use of trumping powers, one not necessarily endowed with moral standing, as with Hobbes' Leviathan.[94] Substantive or ethical legitimacy is therefore measured through the eyes of the specific supreme political actor—whether God, the priesthood, the Leviathan, the general will, Parliament, or anyone assumed to occupy that exalted apex of the political domain. Those are particular instances of the idea of legitimacy itself.

Weber's pioneering methodology may guide us to a more dispassionate extraction of political theory from the domain of politics. His treatment of authority and of leadership still remains central to any discussion of the superiority claims of the political. Past mistranslations of *Herrschaft* as authority rather than de facto rulership (yet again with an implied soupçon of divinely inspired obedience[95]) do not diminish the elitist perspective that emerges from identifying thinking politically as an activity concerned with territorial control, attempted monopolies of legitimacy, and regulation of the use of force—jointly or as alternatives. Irrespective of the normative pursuit of greater equality through political theory, thinking politically will inevitably also involve thinking hierarchically. That is reinforced by Weber's notion of leadership, in which a gifted, oft-charismatic, individual stands at the helm of a polity and steers it among the pushes and pulls of impulsive democracy and routinizing bureaucracy. Whereas the concept of authority is part of the staple diet of current political theorists, leadership has not occupied an equivalent position, sitting uneasily as it does with liberal-democratic theory while nonetheless remaining central to actual political discourses, even liberal-democratic ones.

The epitome of Weber's understanding of modern leadership, in a era of mass politics, is the leader who invokes rhetoric and emotion in order to establish his style of Caesarism—among others through the plebiscite, 'a confession of "belief" in the vocation for leadership of the person who has laid claim to this acclamation.'[96] Weber sees instances of Caesarist leadership both in Bismarck and in the American Presidency, and even the office of the British prime minister contains Caesarist elements. So although parliamentary democracy is set up against Caesarism, and it too produces leaders, Caesarism as a mode of rulership is becoming ubiquitous and to some extent desirable.[97] Important as this contention is for appreciating the relationship between the

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[94] See also the discussion of political obligation and legitimacy in Chapter Five.

[95] See P. Pombeni, 'Charismatic Leadership between Ideal Type and Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 13 (2008), 44.

[96] Weber, op. cit., p. 221.

[97] See P. Lassman and R. Speirs, 'Introduction' in Weber, op. cit., pp. xx–xxi.

rendering of support to be discussed in Chapter Five and a belief in personal qualities, leadership is not a separate feature of the political. Leadership, rather, focuses on the assignment of competence and control to an individual and on that individual's agency, responsibility, commitment, and vision. It does not refer to an office or structural and systemic position as indicated by President Truman's sign. The notion of leadership connotes centralization, obedience, and a future-oriented vision or movement inasmuch as the leader leads, and inasmuch as the vocation is presented as a claim, not as a fact. Its place in the public imagination is merely an element in many features of thinking politically. True, leaders are positioned at the nodes at which crucial decisions for collectivities are held to be taken, a perception sustained by a mixture of fact and myth. True also that leaders are frequently the embodiment of personal arrogance in their appropriation and discharge of their role, particularly—though hardly exclusively—in non-democratic regimes. But that only entails *self*-arrogation when the divine right of kings is invoked, or when the ruler is believed to *possess* charismatic attributes rather than being endowed with them. Otherwise leadership is a *product* of the collective need to self-arrogate, a need that necessitates the inescapable hierarchical and decision-oriented contribution of the political to social discourse and organization.

To sum up: A central feature of thinking politically is the insistence on the existence of a constituting moment for the practices and thought-practices *about* collectivities[98]—a moment more often than not fictitious rather than real—to which decision-makers and claimers of ultimate competence on collective affairs can refer back. What is definitely not fictitious, though, is the expressed imperative need for such a moment, as one of the characteristics that transforms discourse into *political* discourse, whether that is deliberate or unintentional. For the positing and conceptualizing of that absolute moment of inception—and the parallel thought-practice of seeking to colonize and monopolize that point in time and its subsequent time-line in an attempt to exercise indisputable control over a uniquely authenticated temporal path— creates a defining aspect of the practice called political thinking and stamps its nature on a genre of human language.

In Chapter One I discussed the drive of thinking politically towards finality, and in this chapter a thicker understanding of finality begins to emerge. The pursuit of finality as a *future* consequence of thinking (and acting) politically is bolstered by conceptualizing a finality anchored in an imagined *past* so as to provide double indemnity. In whatever cultural and ideational context we encounter it, we are in the presence of a ubiquitous mode of thinking politically. Specifically, it takes the shape of a discursive device through which the

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[98] This relates back to the distinction in Chapter One between thinking politically and thinking about politics, the latter being the engagement in substantive choices and values.

normal plurality of the debates surrounding collective decisions is closed, by endowing such finality with the singular authority without which societies cannot generate necessary decisions. That authority—even when couched in languages of virtue and legitimacy—is primarily based on evoking a mesh of insurmountable temporal and spatial constraints that are applied to collective human thought and action. The discursive competence derived from that anchoring in time is then transmitted to control over space, as the authority initially bestowed by the privileged time-line is converted into the superiority of the political over other spheres of human activity. That is to say, it is transferred to a particular kind of decision, one regulating the boundaries of collective decision-making itself, and in so doing preserves an order of decisions that protects against social chaos and disintegration. While the spatiality of identity and inclusion/exclusion[99] has been thoroughly investigated as a form of the power embodied in politics, the resort to temporal origination is closer to the heart of the finality that political thinking seeks, claims, and over which it competes. Not least, whereas space is always shiftable, an appeal to the past—whether in the form of an event, a symbolic being, or a procedure—involves a moment in time that cannot be dislodged, overturned, revisited, or paralleled. It is hence effectively impossible to reoccupy, and as a conceptual device it is a godsend (sometimes literally), indispensable to collective decision-making in a world of contending contestations.

None of what has been contended in this chapter implies that we live in a world of political certainties. I have argued strongly in Chapter Two that indeterminacy rules the roost in the political sphere. But the languages of determinacy—in particular the political languages of finality and the ideological languages of decontestation—display an almost permanent endeavour to gloss over the fragility, malleability, and slipperiness of much social knowledge. Sometimes they succeed, often they fail. Either way they exist as an indisputable human thought-practice. The arrogance of politics and the practices it engenders might be construed as praising illiberal forms of government à la Schmitt, but we need to recall that it is only one constituent of the cluster of features that is the political. It can be offset, though not eliminated, by some of the other features that may well serve as vehicles for liberal humanitarianism and pluralism.

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[99] A. Gamble, *Politics and Fate* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 7 and *passim*.

4

Ranking and the Distribution of Significance

'That political science concentrates upon the influential does not imply the neglect of the total distribution of values throughout the community.'[1]

1. THE CHOICE OF VALUES AND THE VALUE OF CHOICE

Thinking politically always involves the distribution of significance within, and for, collectivities. The human world reverberates with utterances such as: this is crucial; that is urgent; those are important. To distribute is to share something out among a number of recipients. But because significance is almost always distributed unequally—it being a scarce resource and an expression of the preferences and evolutions in which we all engage—it will entail ranking. To rank is to put in order:[2] this is of *greater* consequence than that; that is *more* pressing than this. The scarcity of significance necessitates the application of selectivity, prioritizing, and weighting to political and ideational goods, to demands, visions, policies, and procedures. From a political science perspective that is well expressed by Majone as follows: 'different institutional arrangements affect differently the position and power of various policy actors by altering the relative importance of the resources they possess'.[3] In this chapter the focus is on a particular kind of relatively positioned resource: ideas and concepts. The meanings of concepts, arguments, discourses, and symbolic goods are filtered through assessment frameworks employed deliberately or unwittingly to establish qualitative differences that assist in expressing and validating preferences, in entrenching

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[1] H. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 26.
[2] *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 15.7.2010).
[3] G. Majone, *Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 116.

positions, in stating urgencies, or in resolving social and ideational competi-
tions. Simply stated, thinking politically is a system of triage.

Political theorists are familiar with distributive definitions of politics, epit-
omized by the pithy title of Lasswell's famous book *Politics: Who Gets What,
When, How*. But politics—and thinking about politics—as the distribution of
significance is more elemental than politics as the (just or unjust) distribution
of goods. Recent political philosophy literature has extended the idea of
distributive justice by exploring the difference between redistribution and
recognition, as two forms of social justice. The first relates to the question of
poverty or lack, and the second to respect for persons and for their identity-
forming environments, cultural, religious, or ethnic.[4] But the notion of signifi-
cance is more encompassing and pertains not just to questions of justice, or to
their normative evaluation, however extensive the conception of justice
employed. Significance relates more generally to meaning and to importance,
and in the context of this chapter denotes the thought-processes of highlight-
ing and of rendering salient something that societies and individuals adopt.
That is occasioned by the need for a *vade mecum* when orienting themselves to
the various fluctuating environments, patterns of behaviour, institutions, and
events they encounter.

The Rawlsian dictum 'justice is the first virtue of political institutions'[5]
ought therefore to be preceded by another: 'the distribution of significance is a
prime feature of thinking politically', not the least because Rawls's assertion is
itself a particular case, applied to the idea of justice, of the broader thought-
practice of prioritizing goods and values. Political scientists are also familiar
with Easton's famous definition of politics as the 'authoritative allocation
of values' discussed in Chapter One,[6] where the parallel possibility of non-
authoritative distribution was raised. Much political thought—even more
openly within democratic systems—is a challenge to prevailing authority
claims, or resides in the twilight zone of authoritativeness, rendering Easton's
approach to allocation frustratingly restrictive.

Long before we can engage in prescriptive political ethics, long before we
can explain decisions and dissent, we need to be equipped with the map of
diverse significance that applies to our field of study, a reflection of irreducible
diversities of opinion and appraisal. An ineliminable property of the notion of
significance is that it cannot be flat-lined or equalized without annihilating it
and eradicating the possibility of discrimination and evaluation—as is also the
case with the concept of power, whose equalization would engender discursive

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[4] See e.g. N. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (London: Routledge, 1997); and N. Fraser and
A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso,
2003).

[5] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 3.

[6] D. Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965),
p. 50.

and behavioural paralysis. Some significance-ranking exercises have a strong ethical element relating to a particular substantive content, in the absence of which the concept and its cashing out are regarded as devalued. In that case, notions of the good or the better outweigh and push aside notions of the bad, the worse, or the indifferent. Reasonable and justifiable advocacy are the means through which such ranking is achieved, employing distinctions such as good–evil, moral–immoral, just–unjust, fair–unfair, transparent–manipulative, liberating–oppressive, and the like. Another kind of ranking exercise relates to the interests of individuals or groups; they conform to what is profitable, satisfying, or fulfilling to the interest articulator or bearer. Of course, those two types may coincide. On a morphological level ranking exercises are necessitated by the broad range of the intension of a political concept that holds more components than that concept can embrace in any particular instance. Yet again, the essential contestability of concepts requires a selection of pertinent or desired conceptions while others are excluded and hence 'demoted' with respect to the case at hand. The perennial tension here reflects once again the divide between the political search for fixity and the political reality of time and space variability. Ranking is a fluid and constantly mutating process, even though its practitioners frequently seek to hold that mutability in check. It may rely on ethical cosmologies, on the expression of popular cultural preferences, on brute acquisitiveness, on the conjuring up of teleological visions of the future, or on the pressing exigencies of war, disease, or budgetary constraints. Even when ranking is relatively flexible, as evinced in liberal as well as in opportunist thinking, that flexibility is put to the service of overriding values and ends.

Ranking is a specific form of choosing. From one viewpoint choice becomes a necessity of decontestation, without which meaning cannot be bestowed on an utterance. From a second, choice as an option becomes endowed—as in liberal ideologies and in much ethical theory—with a value of its own as a desirable practice, irrespective of its substantive yield, or because its substantive yield is assumed to be benign when it is the product of a specific, *reflective* kind of contemplation and assessment. From a third viewpoint, choice is presented as an intentional and calculating rational act of stating preferences, analytically detached both from necessity and from a moral register: not all preferences express something valuable.[7] That distinction is well-known to students of utilitarianism. From a fourth perspective, choice is not really choice, but an unintended or unreflective plumping for an option where individual agency is at a minimum and structural constraints dictate the outcome. All four viewpoints are to be found in political thought, and all

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[7] On that distinction, see R.M. Williams, 'Change and Stability in Values and Value Systems' in B. Barber and A. Inkeles (eds), *Stability and Social Change* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), p. 127.

four, specifically, may result in ranking. It is the practice of ranking, however, that will concern us in this chapter, not the meta-theories of choosing.

The distribution of higher and lower significance as an attribute of thinking politically displays a number of permutations. A value—by which is simply meant something that people value—may

(1) serve as a framework value that validates and legitimates the other values, concepts and practices it contains;

(2) be a specified substantive value that, while non-negotiable, is also conditional for the realization of further values;

(3) be accorded absolute status on its own;

(4) compete repeatedly over a particular position on the ranking scale vis-à-vis other values, resulting in lexical indeterminacy;

(5) require pressing attention that bumps it to the top of a queue, sometimes irrespective of considerations of intrinsic merit.

All five types will figure in the following pages.

Ranking the significance of values ensures that a built-in inequality of goods and values in the form of value-hierarchies will always characterize political thinking. On the other hand, though ranking may result in hierarchies and in the elitism often seen to be a hallmark of political structures, there is nothing intrinsic to ranking that entails *permanently fixed* social hierarchies, certainly not if they are construed as expressions of differential and institutionalized social status, or as the validation of personnel and offices that receive superior consideration. At any rate, one consequence of ranking is that arguments for neutrality—even state neutrality—founder yet again. In earlier chapters we have seen neutrality defeated by its inevitable clash with the role of emotion and with the boundary-constructing practices of thinking politically. Here neutrality comes to grief when confronted with the impossibility of overcoming the scarcity of significance and the corresponding ubiquity of choice-making and preferences. Expressing preferences, stating prescriptions, and affirming norms are all forms of delegitimizing any pretension to neutrality, even when the language of neutrality is itself used to distribute significance, as it has been in the recent advocacy of some models of liberal political philosophy.[8] Put more emphatically, the ranked distribution of significance is a normal, everyday practice without which meaning cannot be attached to ideas. It is also a thought-practice without which the fundamental political feature of decision-making cannot be exercised, because we need to 'know' what to do first and what next.

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[8] See e.g. R.E. Goodin and A. Reeve (eds), *Liberal Neutrality* (London: Routledge, 1989); S. Lecce, *Against Liberal Perfectionism: Defending Liberal Neutrality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

This chapter will not consider the quasi-mathematical or logical modelling approaches to ranking prevalent in some rational choice theory. Suffice it to say that the distribution of significance opens up gaps between the intentionality assumed in rational choice and perceptions of significance by the consumers of that intent, as a consequence of which it becomes exceedingly difficult to come up with agreed pecking orders. However, some rational choice theorists have made helpful suggestions relevant to this chapter. Thus, Puppe has commented on the disjuncture between the vagueness of the preferences people have and the exactness, or precision, of choices that need to be made.[9] That is no other than a restating of the tension between such vagueness (or perhaps more suitably, indeterminacy) and the necessity of decontestation noted in Chapter Two. More generally, such observations must cast doubt on the fundamental rational choice assumption that a single preference ordering can be rationally established, an assumption strongly linked to the manufacturing of clear outcomes that does not reflect the contestability and indeterminacy of political thinking, or the incapacity of non-professional political thinkers (and perhaps even professional ones) to organize ordinally a large number of complex variables. It is not only that moral preferences are often incommensurable and non-tradable for each other, and that we occasionally get lost in 'moral mazes'. It is also the case that the complex morphology of political concepts renders conclusive rational ranking impossible. The fact that such ranking is nonetheless continuously engaged in suggests, at the very least, that emotional, cultural and ideological factors may produce those rationally challengeable distributions of significance, each of which may include preferences for goods or values whose priority is non-negotiable from the holder's perspective.

There is a respectable philosophical case that applies a test of rational, teleologically attained, coherence to determine the superior status of a philosophical good and the basis for weighing goods.[10] However, the remit of such approaches cannot, nor is it intended to, embrace collectively held and transmitted beliefs, in which fudge, misunderstanding, and vagueness often suffuse and enable ranking, and in which 'choices' are assimilated into already given ideational frameworks and morphologies. Their epistemology cannot factor in the inconstancy and fluidity of goal setting. They would typically regard the practices of endorsing and of accepting as too weak forms of choice and rationality, and unquestionable faith as too strong a form, or no form at all. They may disregard the possibility of competing alternative rational standards of ordering principles, each of which has a claim to plausibility.

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[9] C. Puppe, 'Rational Choice Based on Vague Preferences', *Annals of Operations Research*, vol. 52 (1994), 67.

[10] J. Broome, *Weighing Goods: Equality, Uncertainty and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

Nor should we underestimate the factoring in of emotion and of rhetorical eloquence into the construction and delivery of sentences, as a parallel manner of distributing significance to utterances and as another immediate means of bestowing political features on language. That theme will be illustrated at the end of this chapter and will re-emerge in Chapter Eight.

I note briefly that various criteria are employed to determine the *substantive* contents of the distribution of significance. Quality, value, or superiority may be conferred on diverse grounds such as general utility, ethical desirability, global impact, the vouchsafing of group ends, or the protection of scarce vital resources. Correspondingly, terms such as well-being, good, universality, or (national) interest serve as significance distributors. Some may see those as optional ideological positions, others as existential features of thinking about politics. All are centrally prevalent in political discourse, but they are contained within the compass of thinking *about* politics, rather than thinking *politically*, as spelled out in Chapter One, and their merits are not therefore the focus of attention here.

As an act of decontestation, ranking offers a particular way of handling indeterminacy, and it does so in two distinctive ways. It may embody a rigid *direct* preference for a substantive value, such as liberty or due process; or it may employ terms that serve as *indirect* significance rankers—through increasing the discursive protection accorded to goods and values, or through raising their priority. In the first case, the high significance of liberty is not immanent in the concept itself; something else has to happen with the thought-practices in which it appears: an argument, a passion, a convention, a postulate about human nature, any of which causes the concept to be exalted in one form or another. Thus, within the family of liberal ideologies we will find liberty located in an ineliminable core without which liberalism abandons its ideational identity and disintegrates. However, as befits ideological morphology, concepts nearer the core (which may itself be regarded as a central arena of ranking) are less flexible than adjacent and peripheral concepts, whose position of significance will alter in relation to cultural constraints and contingent events.[11]

In the second case, one finds that political language possesses dedicated concepts or terms indirect in their shaping of valued substantive concepts and in their effect on the semantic content of the ranked concept or value. That said, they do operate directly on another dimension: they perform a ranking role that safeguards a non-negotiable or quasi non-negotiable position, by raising the desirable idea to the top of the ranking order of similar or competing ideas, occasionally even endeavouring to fix it there with no

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[11] See M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), ch. 2.

possibility of trade-offs. Instead of decontesting the components of a concept or value, they decontest its relationship with other, potentially rival, concepts or values by attempting to make the latter concede in the significance contest, using some of the most emphatic devices at their disposal. That ordering does not construct a structure of 'horizontal' morphological *adjacency*—which, as with ideologies, confers substantive meaning—but a structure of selective and 'vertical' *sequential* consideration.

In that second group of dedicated ranking concepts are the powerful prioritizing functions of 'rights' (a term mainly relating to the quality of life), 'legitimation' (a term mainly validating and endorsing systems and procedures), or 'securitization' (a term mainly invoking protection and urgency). Those indirect terms themselves do the ranking work, which is superimposed on a collection of substantive desiderata. In direct decontestation a concept's meaning is profoundly influenced by the idea-environment in which it is set: if, surrounding and attached to the concept of democracy, we find the notion of competitiveness rather than inclusiveness, democracy will tend to have a more elitist and confrontational flavour. When, to the contrary, inclusiveness is proximate to democracy, participation and deliberation may colour understandings of democracy. In indirect ranking, however, a competitive democracy may be set above or below an inclusive one, through enshrining certain forms of minority incorporation, or free market practices, as rights, or through legitimating either of them—in addition to the substantive reasons for lauding them. Here devices such as rights or legitimacy introduce the political element. Ranking is of course one of the many power-wielding devices that thinking politically exhibits, an aspect that will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

Political thinkers, to the extent that they are strongly committed to realizing or at least publicizing their preferences, would like to accord them the highest possible protection. Another way of looking at the strong decontestation described as non-negotiability is to talk about ring-fencing, which sets out public markers concerning the concepts or conceptual arrangements that require preserving. Such preservation is by no means a conservative attitude to ideas and language, since what is being preserved may just as well be a set of radical thought-practices, or a cultural insistence on being subversive. Sometimes political-thought processes are ring-fenced almost irrespective of their content. The procedural requirements for a modicum of consensus, openness, and the free exchange of ideas both enable and delimit the political arguments that can be made—recall the positive dogma of Rousseau's civil religion: no tolerance of intolerance[12]—as do the procedural arrangements that demand obedience to the pronouncements of a God-King. When such procedures

[12] J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 186.

are safeguarded by accolades such as 'legitimate' or 'just', their discursive outcomes are assigned higher significance. Hence ring-fencing of that kind provides a necessary feature of decision-making: how to decide on what to decide. And decision-making itself—as will further be seen in Chapter Seven—is not only an act, or a process, but a thought-practice that encompasses choosing, ranking, and excluding recommendations for thinking and action, and it is poised among all those meanings. Clearly, though, the arguments used for any concrete practice of ring-fencing—the justification of a particular procedure— are *parti-pris* and ideological, no matter how much some political philosophers and ideologists anchor them in appeals to universal human rationality.

Finally, another form of ranking is the deliberate or unintentional construction of a temporal sequence—not necessarily of urgency—in which a body of information is released in a pattern that attempts to maximize its impact. The front page of a newspaper is such an instance. It is designed as the initial and most salient presentation of events assumed to be of public interest (though for tabloids the aim is chiefly sales-maximizing). The mechanics of any printed text necessitates decisions about what comes before what, and much of that is linked to the questions of rhetoric that will be examined in following chapters. Websites, too, have home pages whose function is not merely introductory or site-map provision, but to rank and filter the release of information. Here the distance between ranking and the kind of power associated with manipulation narrows—though it is also undeniable that all information can only be accessed sequentially. Ranking systems may obviously be weak and unstable, though the rationale of politics will not tolerate such tentativeness for any length of time or social chaos may ensue.

2. RIGHTS: THE RANKING DEVICE *PAR EXCELLENCE*

The concept of rights is the archetypal *political* concept that discharges the role of ranking, even though it is just one such device and is therefore neither necessary nor sufficient for that purpose. Surprisingly, that political attribute of rights is not picked up by most current rights-theory—and, less surprisingly, not by ordinary rights language either. The overwhelming current tendency in political theory is to see rights either as ethical or as legal concepts, and those have indeed been the major frameworks in which much superlative scholarship has been produced, rotating around the differences between moral, natural, human, and legal rights; endorsing or challenging the universality of rights; linking rights to needs, autonomy, or recognition; and scrutinizing the practical delivery of rights in different political societies. Regrettably, the very success of those traditions and approaches has obscured the elemental political and discursive nature of rights. Accepting the view that rights are

'discursive resources',[13] we proceed to observe that the political role of rights is to lock rankings into a particular sequence that, first, strongly prioritizes some valued goods above others and, second, accords them special discursive defence against attack or amendment. The structure of rights language is telling: the right always appears as a protective capsule and shield for a distinct and separate good, whether the right to life, to liberty, to property, to happiness, to a minimum income, to demonstrate, and so on. The substantive weight in those phrases does not settle on the empty container 'right' but on the value, be it life, liberty, property, or protest.

Rights attempt to advance their protected value, or value-embodying practice, by positioning such values and practices at the head of a ladder of goods. In that manner the concept of 'rights' apparently supplies the magic key to the unassailability and finality that the political craves. For a right is a demand to prioritize whatever concept or good it protects over and above other demands, claims, and wants that are not couched in rights-language.[14] Some of that flavour is apparent in the words of a website dedicated to rights: 'Strong claims made by special interest groups sometimes overlook the reality that categories of human rights vary in their legal status.'[15] In other words, there is some distance to be travelled before a claim can be enshrined in rights-status—and, we may add, before such status is not only secured in legal discursive practice but in ideological or moral discourses as well. The move away from 'I want a pension', 'I demand a pension', even 'I need a pension' towards 'I claim a right to a pension' and ultimately 'I have a right to a pension' is that from a performative and agentic act of individual will or whim, to a thought-practice that is couched in terms that depersonalize and objectify a good.[16] The phrase 'I have a right' is intended to make people prick up their ears and accord that statement respect, prior to doing something about it. It seemingly removes the good from contention, establishing it as a social and existential fact or property while insisting on its recognition as a solemn pronouncement that commits others to specific kinds of regard and, subsequently, conduct. That insistence propels goods and values into the social domain by institutionalizing and de-privatizing them. The status of the rights asserter, whether individual or group, is politicized through the exercise of verbal power designed to elicit the support of a collectivity, inasmuch as the general role of rights safeguarder is transmitted to that collectivity as a sanctified public

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[13] S.A. Scheingold, *The Politics of Rights* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. xxiii. Scheingold emphasizes the mobilizing function of rights—of which more in Chapter Five—but I contend that rights are more immediately associated with ranking.

[14] I first advanced that view in M. Freeden, *Rights* (Milton Keynes and Minnesota: Open University Press, 1991).

[15] One World Guides, One World Group, http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/humanrights?gclid=CKvC_rfT1qICFSU_lAod-RzI8w (last accessed 6.7.2010).

[16] See also Scheingold, op. cit., p. 58.

responsibility. Of course, many claims are formulated as rights, giving them an initial power boost, even though it transpires that they inhabit the class of 'failed', unacknowledged, rights. The widespread phenomenon of failed rights demonstrates that the rhetorical dressing up of a demand or a want as a right is discursively costless. Indeed, it is a major weapon in ideological and political conflict. But within the domain of political language, failed rights are those that do not secure general, or at least enlightened, recognition—the latter involve tests of popularity or ethical robustness or, conversely, adoption by an authorised rights-creating agency (parliament, supreme court, a religious authority, etc.).[17]

Dworkin has coined the notion of rights as trumps, a phrase designed by him to secure rights against utility maximizing claims.[18] That idea of trumping can be extended to denote the manner in which attaching the word 'right' to any valued end, property, or practice simply provides it with overriding discursive power—or at least attempts to do so—and consequently down-grades what is being trumped to an inferior position in the pecking order of goods. To trump, after all, is to gain the upper hand in a conflict among claims, and trumps impose permanent and unchallengeable solutions on conflict or disagreement. While legal philosophers such as Dworkin may be focused on the *moral* merits of securing spaces that cannot be intruded upon by utilitarian argument, as an act of *political* thinking significance is discursively both intensified and rendered immutable by dint of attaching the word 'right' to a good or value and thus countermanding competing preferences. When we say that human beings have a right not to be tortured, or a right to free speech, we are saying that the absence of torture, or the presence of unrestricted oral and written expression, are non-negotiable and non-exchangeable goods of prime importance. To ring-fence successfully a highly valued good with a right is to end any conversation about the superior location of that good within a cluster of goods and to immunize its precedence as an entitlement. Through that discursive dimension, the concept of 'rights' provides the finality political thinking is constantly in search of, though over the course of time even a right may be demoted from that status as cultures and epistemologies mutate.

Obviously, even recognized rights may compete with each other over their relative ranking, Natural rights theories attach the word 'natural' to that of rights as an uncontestable compound elevator of a good to the head of any such ranking, and life, liberty, and property/estates once topped those lists. That corresponds with according certain values absolute status (permutation 3). Yet in less grandiloquent manner, without recourse to natural rights, a right

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[17] A more fundamental feature of failure in political thinking that also pertains to rights will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

[18] R. Dworkin, 'Rights as Trumps', in J. Waldron (ed.), *Theories of Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 153–67.

may be presented as superior to another right while also a serving as condition for attaining that further right (permutation 2). Thus the right to liberty may be accorded superiority over the right to equality, though the latter is dependent on the former. In his quest for prioritizing and weighting some principles above others, Rawls moved from the *general* requirement to determine such ranking (which is 'an essential and not a minor part of a conception of justice') by means of 'reasonable ethical criteria', based on a mixture of inter-intuitive agreements and considered judgements, to a *particular* sequencing that he termed a lexical order in which adherence to the top-ranked principle must be discharged before the second-ranked principle can be satisfied. At that stage of his thinking Rawls ruled out the balancing he was later to invoke, and to which I shall presently return. Rawls stated: 'A serial ordering avoids, then, having to balance principles at all; those earlier in the ordering have an absolute weight, so to speak, with respect to later ones, and hold without exception.'[19] In fact, Rawls's ordering is more complex than it seems. His equal right to liberty lexically *prioritizes* one conception of equality—equal wealth—over other conceptions of equality, while *co-ranking* equality and liberty when equality is decontested as distributing basic liberties to each and every person.[20]

In some ideological configurations, of course, the order of stacked values may be relatively inflexible. But at a higher level of generality, we can note that the different decontestations of the top value affect the meanings as well as rankings of the subsequent values, some of which can then overtake others in the scramble for higher ranking. What has always to be taken into consideration are the multiple conceptions a concept will harbour. Thus, some conceptions of the right to liberty (say free speech or the freedom of worship) may be ranked above some conceptions of the right to equality (say equality of resources), while others (say freedom of contract) are ranked below. Welfare may be raised above property ownership, or competition may surpass individual flourishing. Freedom of choice may outrank equality of outcome, in that the value of human differences will be privileged over levelling them out. But in other ideologies, conversely, equality as equality of need may outrank freedom of choice, particularly in welfare-sensitive argumentation. In more specific (perimeter) applications, the right to exercise free choice in selecting a marriage partner may, for liberals, outrank—though not necessarily abolish— the right to regard as equally valid all particular cultural patterns of partner selection (including those that eschew the free choice of the partners). Or the right for the equal need for health care may outrank the right to choose a particular hospital or doctor. All these, and similar, forms of internal ranking are typical sites of ideological dispute, when rights are used as the political finality tool through which to gain the high ground in the struggle over relative

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[19] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, op. cit., pp. 41–3.   [20] Ibid., p. 60.

standing. The plethora of such combinations is afforded by the variable nature of conceptual morphology: the micro-decontestations of major political concepts are sufficiently malleable as to construct numerous socially and culturally desirable series.

In another version, a number of values compete for top standing. Ranking decisions will then discard the overall integrity of the competing values, and a re-ordering of each value's relationship with others may reflect a preoccupation with solving a concrete problem. Thus on the subject of immigration policy the humane concern for the distress of others may compete with the protection of the livelihoods of an already existing population. That fleshes out a tension between the right to asylum and the right to work, but in order to avoid a zero-sum situation in which the one right negates the other, a ranking scheme specific to a given context is mooted. Putting a cap on such immigration is sometimes presented as a compromise, but its ranking aspect is not directly related to respect for others, a concern with accommodating a common good, or the recognition of mutual reasonableness. Rather, it is based on a re-assessment—in relation to other values—of the standing of values held to be intrinsically good (both asylum and work signify that intrinsic quality), or on the anticipated effects that the pursuit of a particular conception of a given value may be seen to have.

It is extremely rare to have a completely indeterminate or random ranking, as the normal practice of thinking politically cannot then take place, and a conceptual and interpretative vacuum prevails in the absence of significance indicators. Permutation (4), in which the notion of a single scale of values gives way to multiple, rearrangeable scales, does not quite accomplish that, but leaves the criteria of ranking open and indeterminate—typically in the case of rivalries between religious and secular *Weltanschauungen*. Importantly, almost all ranking *scales* abandon the lower sections of their lists to indeterminacy and indefiniteness, leaving them unranked, even as they jockey for position on the higher echelons. Rawls, unsurprisingly, opted for the opposite position: 'No political conception of justice could have weight with us unless it helped to put in order our considered convictions of justice at all levels of generality, from the most general to the most particular.'[21] But it is unclear how far down, if at all, Rawls's lexical ordering of a ranking of values (permutation 2) would continue to apply as a named list, even beyond the first two principles that relate specifically to justice. Such silences are understandably a possibly unconscious concession that the world of ideas and values is too complex to be completely patterned—the problem of inconclusiveness discussed in Chapter Two—or that the pursuit of significance should focus only on areas that have a major bearing on the living of lives. They enable

[21] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 45.

political thinking by concentrating on what can be ranked at a given point in time and space, while concurrently facilitating a wide range of thinking about politics to be reflected in different 'solutions' to such ranking.

But can a right itself be designated a value, rather than just what it protects and privileges? Only in an indirect sense, yet one that nonetheless connects to the subject of this book. It is usually held to be valuable that certain human properties and goods obtain special social and legal protection and precedence, both discursively and practically; that is to say, the eminently *political* role of rights is itself deemed a worthy one. What Scheingold has termed the myth or ideology of rights—'a faith in the political efficacy and ethical sufficiency of law as a principle of government'[22]—can be extended to signal a further invocation of the prioritizing and protective functions of rights discourse, elevated in the main through the persuasive appeal of liberal ideologies and as part of their ideational heritage, though occasionally understood as beneficial gifts by a wise social, or divine, order. Successful rights language is itself considered to be a discursive necessity in most modern societies, and its immediate impact is to confer unchallengeable unassailability on a ranking of socially appreciated goods. Arendt's evocative 'right to have rights'[23] thus locks the *practice* of ranking and prioritizing itself into the double bind of principled invulnerability and effective primacy. That was also the sense of Article 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.'[24]

The right to have rights is an instance of a framework ranking value (permutation 1)—in this case the special status of human beings—that validates and legitimates a further set of values, concepts, and practices. That also brings the concept of legitimacy back into play, demonstrating yet again that political concepts tend to engage with more than one feature of the political. On this dimension, rights perform a legitimating role by dint of their moral resonance. Legitimacy assists in the ranking practices indispensable to politics, but furthermore it flows into other central features of politics—the need to mobilize support and to generate justification for important political decisions, acts, processes, and institutions, as well as the need for stability—to be discussed in Chapters Five and Six. From a political perspective it is inopportune to talk about *moral* rights. Rights aren't moral; they are discursive contrivances that attempt powerfully and effectively to underpin the value-hierarchy of a moral (and ideological) order.

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[22] Scheingold, op. cit., p. 17.
[23] H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 296.
[24] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml (accessed 21.12.2012).

Cherished values, obviously, are not always formulated in the language of rights. J.S. Mill eschewed rights language as something' independent of utility', but emphatically endorsed the ranking of values. And when he referred to the 'free development of individuality' as 'one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a coordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things',[25] he clearly maintained that freedom, development, and individuality are conditions for the realization of further high-ranking values; that is to say, certain rankings of significance unlock the door to a trail of additional values (permutation 2). But Mill was also offering a further, inadvertent, insight. His trio of concepts is an example of top ranking values that have to share star billing with one another. Many such values come in mutually interdependent clusters that cannot effectively be prised apart, so that their internal arrangement vis-à-vis each other defeats relative ranking.[26]

3. THE CHIMERA OF INCOMMENSURABILITY?

The distribution of significance predictably runs into difficulties relating to different and competing ranking schemes. In any society ideological diversity as well as pluralism ensure that ranking orders can be hotly contested, and ideologies may be distinguished through the contending arrangements they proffer for the spatial relationships (central or peripheral, superior or inferior) among their central concepts. In that regard, two major related problems emerge with the ranking of rights. The one concerns rights whose relative ranking is competed over; that is, when two given rights cannot gain sufficient weight to outclass one another unequivocally. That form of inconclusiveness involves indeterminate positioning on a ranking series, a phenomenon that is akin to notions of incommensurability, inasmuch as incommensurability signifies the impossibility of comparative qualitative grading: say between the macro-concepts of liberty and equality (as distinct from some of the micro-conceptions of either that may be easier to grade). The other concerns the incompatibility of desirable or desired rights that excludes one or the other from inclusion in a ranking sequence in the first place. That is particularly striking with regard to values that exist in a zero-sum relationship—the bane of political consensus theories—as for instance animal rights versus a right to

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[25] Mill, *On Liberty*, in J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XVIII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 261.

[26] For a detailed discussion of that particular cluster, see Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Concepts*, op. cit., pp. 144–8.

religious or hunting practices that involve the slaughtering or killing of animals, when each side refuses categorically to recognize the existence, let alone the rankability, of the other side's crucial rights claim. That corresponds to permutation (3) as seen by either side, when the value to which significance is distributed is accorded absolute protected status. The consequence is an insoluble clash—because the special robustness of rights propels them in such cases towards intractable mutual collision—that may be temporarily settled by fiat, fear, or prejudice in favour of the one or the other, but remains impervious to establishing common ground or compromise.

On the surface, incommensurability seems to challenge the very feasibility of ranking. To claim that values are incommensurable is apparently to desist from engaging in ranking and simply to withdraw either or both values *hors de combat*—a rather obvious form of attempted depoliticization. But declaring two values as incommensurable and therefore unrankable is often the judgement of the external assessor—the scholar, commentator, or observer—rather than the value propagator or subscriber to an ideological set of beliefs, for whom the values in question may be eminently rankable, and not necessarily on a rational basis. It corresponds to permutation (4) when seen from the more distanced perspective of the kind of political thinking taking place in the society at large. That may lead not only to an enforced monistic structure of values but—in certain cases—to its opposite, pluralism. In that situation, parallel ranking systems are permitted to coexist in a society on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or culture, as well as within secular argumentation, with each base possessing its own internal ranking order. As an ideal type, pluralism accepts side-by-side ranking but rejects the comparative ranking of each of the ranking *systems*: say the framework of a cultural tradition with regard to marriage versus a framework of individual choice. It thus seems to indicate the fragmentation of the distribution of significance in typical relativist, 'separate spheres', fashion.[27] Such pluralism must assume that side-by-side rankings do not produce intractable, zero-sum conflict. The contestations it permits must be contained and not spill over into irresolvable confrontations among the different ranking systems. For otherwise, as Weber observed, 'the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other...one can only understand...what godhead is in the one or in the other order'.[28] It would appear that, in the face of intractability, incommensurability constitutes a refusal to engage in a major form of thinking politically—namely, the elemental requirement that choices pertaining to collectivities have to be made and that most choices involve ranking in terms of significance or urgency. Nevertheless, decisions will be made one

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[27] See e.g. M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

[28] M. Weber, 'Science as a Vocation' in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 147–8.

way or the other: zero-sum issues are either marginalized or disruptive, in which case they nevertheless migrate towards the centre of decision-making and force a reaction. Either way, thinking politically *will* prevail.

Weber's point was, however, exaggerated. To describe something as pluralist or intractable is itself to assign a significant value or property to political arrangements, rather than to challenge the possibility of ranking completely. That is manifested both in macro and micro form. On a macro-level, pluralism and incommensurability operate as subtle ranking devices, either by attesting to diversity itself as a value preferred to monistic singularity, in which observers and participants take pride; or acting as constraints that colour the significance of the available political thinking, by according the very equality of incommensurable values an ineliminable status and superiority over 'futile' exercises to rank them specifically. That disposition is notable in forms of toleration that bestow equal recognition on different groups.[29] So apart from the crucial zero-sum issue, a particular valued good is not denied by dint of its inability to occupy conceptual space in tandem with another highly valued good; rather, we may endorse both but be uncertain about their relative importance.

In his later writings, Rawls' position was famously different. 'The only comprehensive doctrines that run afoul of public reason are those that cannot support a reasonable balance [or ordering] of political values.'[30] The requirement here is to explain and reasonably justify one's views in a public arena of other citizens, but that Rawlsian desideratum does not coincide with common practices of political thinking. In particular, Rawls saw the failure to agree on a shared balance or ordering of political values as an exceptional defect of reasonability. He did so by postulating a very thin political domain that excluded crucial areas of political thinking he designated as comprehensive rather than political, and that did not conform to his requirements of public reason.

Yet, what may be logically or rationally impossible or ethically unacceptable is not therefore automatically banished from the province of politics. The need for decontestation as a preliminary to decision-making continuously results in flouting the 'impossibility' of ranking as well as in choosing among 'incommensurables'. That occurs not only when forced discursive solutions are applied. When push comes to shove, even the most reasonable and reflective kind of political thinking will have to engage in ranking, otherwise conceptual indeterminacy will undermine the very roles that the political domain exists to

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[29] See e.g. A.E. Galeotti, *Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[30] J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 169, and Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., pp. 243–4. Note that balance and ordering are now treated by Rawls as synonymous.

discharge. In the world of political thinking, conflict remains a strong possibility that is always discernible at one level or the other. Yet although moral and ideological dilemmas cannot be conclusively *solved*, they may need to be *resolved* in a particular space and at a particular time. By resolution we may refer here to its musical sense, of 'alter[ing] or transform[ing] (a discord, or relatively dissonant harmony) so as to form a concord, or relatively more consonant harmony.'[31]

If the distribution of significance role of thinking politically is not to disappear at catastrophic cost to social organization, then ethics, logic, and pluralism itself must offer concessions to the alternative political logic of making cultural and contextual sense out of what cannot profoundly be made sense of in some philosophical modes of argument. Crowder has similarly suggested that given the incompatibility of incommensurability and ranking, one can just go ahead with ranking anyhow. On one interpretation he sees that move as possible, but irrational. Yet arriving at a collective decision is not irrational in the least. It is simply that some of the procedures and some of the justifications for that decision fall foul of philosophical or ethical considerations and methods, though they are entirely within the ambit of thinking politically, constituting as they do common mixtures of rational and arational kinds of such thinking. Hence Crowder's second interpretation, that incommensurability 'is consistent with the reasoned ranking of values',[32] is more credible. Giving a reason, after all, doesn't mean being strictly rational in a purist sense.

On the micro-level of handling ranking under conditions of pluralism and incommensurability, one finds that both thinking politically and thinking about politics necessitate the overriding of constraints that would otherwise paralyse those ranking practices and thwart the detailed collective action that ensues from them. What is really at stake at that micro-level is that value pluralism is in part the product of conceptual morphology and the many conceptions a concept can hold. Whether pluralism or diversity are desirable goods to be pursued is not the issue here. They simply exist on or under the surface, when not repressed. Value pluralism is the default position of an essentially contested value-concept, or series of such values, reflecting their indeterminacy; and value monism is by contrast a product of a strong decontestation, superimposed on language and conceptual structure, that aspires to determinacy. Between the two, some form or prioritization is one practice that the political discharges. Under such circumstances, ranking is not just made possible because of a focus on the particular case, but because of the widespread—and politically typical[33]—linguistic and interpretative practices of

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[31] *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 15.7.2010).
[32] G. Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 52–3.
[33] Typical but not ubiquitous, as will be seen in Chapter Six in connection with the vagueness of negotiation.

narrowing down the meaning of each concept in an attempt to make it semantically comprehensible, unequivocal, and transmissible (though not permanently durable or unchallengeable). When that impression is created, as it so frequently is, a ranking order among concepts can be the outcome of decontesting them in such a way as to produce an ordinal sequence. That is accomplished, as observed above, by selecting those conceptions of each of the concepts in play that are amenable to an exercise in comparative ranking. To 'define' equality as equality of need will enable it to be ranked above freedom of exchange in welfare ideologies. To 'define' it as the equal freedom of opportunity will enable it to be ranked above equality of outcome (or income!) in market orientated ideologies.

Incommensurability or comparability are therefore not among the attributes of a given substantive value or concept. They are the product either of a relationship between conceptions of different concepts, or of a relationship between different conceptions of the same concept. Generally speaking, either incommensurability or comparability can be teased out of the same set of complex conceptual relationships: that is the beauty of semantic flexibility. For some the micro-resolution that leads to ranking may be arbitrary, but it can reflect predominant social understandings, or tactical considerations of advantage in mobilizing support, or a path of least resistance, or other calculations of benefit. It may even entail—through institutional silences— the abandoning of planned, centralized, policy preferences (the subject of Chapter Seven) and the ceding of ultimate control of collective finality (the subject of Chapter Three) to the vicissitudes of private social markets of value production.

The particular class of zero-sum clashes between rights, however, poses considerable difficulties for the political sphere. The more the political is expected to produce justifications for its decisions, the more is it severely challenged by those irreconcilable rights claims that do not overlap at any point. In the above-mentioned case of animal rights versus hunters, sacrificers or plain carnivores, each side would exclude the other from any ranking order in which their demands deserve to be enshrined as rights. Specifically, such differences can be re-coded as conceptual disagreements, in this case over which population is entitled to be designated a rights-bearing population: to include only human beings, in their capacity as displaying traits deemed to possess some kind of cultural or moral value, or also to include non-humans, categorized as rights-bearers on the particular basis of being capable of pain and suffering, or more generally as live inhabiters of our planet. The mutual exclusiveness of the claimed rights exacerbates the issue considerably. The zero-sum juxtaposition driving the conflict emanates from a rigid decontestation that reflects a principled, or stubborn, unwillingness to substitute other conceptions of the concepts in question that could reduce their incompatibility: for example, killing animals for food but not for pleasure or for ritualistic

purposes, or killing them painlessly, if that is possible, or hunting without killing (even then a potential source of suffering), or replacing animals with other sacrificial goods.

To the extent that political thought does aspire to finality, the impossibility in such cases of securing an uncontested, permanent ranking is a mark of an inbuilt, if usually modest, failure of political thinking that can only be overcome by linguistic and cultural fiat, rather than through extrapolating congenial conceptions of the relevant conflicting concepts or, alternatively, by postulating a shared rational vocabulary.[34] The inevitability of strong—principled or doctrinaire—contestation is endemic to political thinking, but it also clashes with two other endemic features of thinking politically: the need to make decisions on socially important issues, and the need to maintain stability. Postulating a shared rational vocabulary is one manner of offering the materials for catering to those two features, but it only achieves that through abstract insulation from the power invested in language, from semantic diversity, and from actual evidence of thinking politically.

4. ZERO-SUM INTRACTABILITY: THE CASE OF ABORTION

The principled or doctrinaire clashes of zero-sum extremes over which values are to be included in a ranking order are normal, if radical, forms of the dissent that characterizes the cultural diversity of political thinking. Those doctrines are frequently characterized by a mutual competition over alternative orderings which people not only regard as reasonable, but which they believe all people should regard as reasonable—a fundamentally political practice, as we have seen. That is in effect the Rawlsian project: one (rather impractical) proposal for ranking, not the solution to ranking. The example Rawls cites is that of abortion, and a possible solution for him is a majority vote in favour of abortion, bearing public reason in mind, while allowing anti-abortionists to desist from the practice[35]—hardly a solution for those who passionately resist abortion under all circumstances.[36] If 'reasonable' means 'moderate and overlapping', that anaesthetized zone of agreement is methodologically un-suited to catering for sincerely held zero-sum beliefs, thought to be reasonable

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[34] That impossible, and arguably undesirable, task is preached be some promoters of comparative political theory such as Fred Dallmayr (ed.), *Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[35] Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, op. cit., pp. 169–70.

[36] See also F.M. Frohock, 'The Boundaries of Public Reason', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91 (1997), 833–44.

by their advocates, who concurrently contend that their opponents are hopelessly and irrevocably unreasonable.

Abortion therefore merits further investigation as an illuminating case study of the intractable zero-sum collision of values. That collision, as argued above, arises from applying semantic restrictions and ideological decontestations that disable any conception of a given key concept in the relevant discursive field from establishing common ground with any conception of a rival key concept. The issue of abortion is a moral and a legal one, but it is also a political one in the two senses of thinking politically and thinking about politics. As an area that has seen extreme dissent over value priorities, the debates over abortion are highly illustrative both of the ranking problems of thinking politically and of the diverse consequences of stipulating the range of the political domain. In the first case, though there can be many shades of argumentation on abortion, public political thinking on the subject—especially when displayed by highly committed and emotion-ridden ideological pressure groups—ultimately gravitates towards a zero-sum form. In the second case, as with animal rights issues, abortion discourse is an area in which the extension or contraction of the conception of (valuable and unassailable) life is contentious, in this instance disputing the boundaries of who is a member of society. Substantively, too, in thinking *about* politics the discourse surrounding abortion involves central political issues such as individual liberty, the empowerment of women, and social justice. But here lies the problem: if an agreed ranking of fundamental principles is impossible, no public policy could emerge that would please both sides. In these ranking impasses, legislators and judiciaries may prefer silence. Alternatively, they may be induced to introduce some internal flexibility into their preferred distribution of value significance, but only inasmuch as they recognize that their own thinking should represent a wider ideational constituency (thus introducing a different set of values concerning inclusiveness or participation), or inasmuch as they subscribe to viewpoints that permit elasticity on concrete issues. As May states, 'Moral disagreement about abortion, however reasonable it may be, generates no principled reason to compromise on abortion policy.' Instead, 'political compromise occurs when a political agent invokes the fact of disagreement as a reason to accept an alternative that she perceives to be worse on its own merits than her initial position.'[37]

That reference to a *political* agent engaged in the process of ranking is revealing. When claimants press for a ruling, the political imperative to decide cannot be bypassed, because it is exacerbated by that other feature of thinking politically in making decisions: its frequent resort to the putative finality of an intractable and dogmatic decontestation. The logic of thinking *politically* is

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[37] S.C. May, 'Principled Compromise and the Abortion Controversy', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 33 (2005), 317–18.

distinct from the logic of morality or of reasonableness, even though it often borrows the latter's clothes, and even though thinking *about* politics may be both ethical and reasonable. If a zero-sum value relationship appears to disable decision-making, thinking politically must resort to the ostensibly arbitrary use of power or of authority if it is to discharge its responsibility to enable decisions for collectivities. It needs—and generally desires—to capture and harness those instruments of ranking (constitutions, religious beliefs and documents, appeals to the national interest, rights-utilizing epistemologies and ideologies, popular backing, elite wisdom and experience) that offer the best protection in such contests (often those that the decision-maker can just about get away with) and, of course, those may differ culturally, geographically, and temporally. It does so mainly through attaching a legitimized decontested intractability to one of two, or more, prior strong decontestations. Those rival decontestations may all survive the decision, but their ranking will now differ, and their significance decrease, on the additional legitimacy scale brought in to handle the zero-sum problem. No moral issue is *directly* involved in those instances of thinking politically. Such legitimacy is conferred by a procedure intended to do nothing but obviate the impossible requirement to choose substantively and ethically among values, however much it may resort to ideological justificatory discourses. In other words, the burden of choice is passed on to institutions and people whose function is simply to deliver a decision along agreed procedures—agreed not because they are necessarily good procedures but because they soak up the intractability issue. Even though it did not involve ranking, that crucial political role of amoral arbitration was a lesson already learned through Solomon's judgment.

Anglophone publics, who are well-acquainted with the US case of *Roe v Wade* (1973), of which more below, might benefit from a comparison with the 1975 ruling of the German Constitutional Court on abortion, which offers a number of insights into the complexities of ranking. In discussing both rulings it must be clear from the outset that courts are major sites of thinking politically, not only legally. Of the many political aspects of courts, a salient one concerns their role of distributing significance for a society while handing out legal judgments. The role of the German Constitutional Court is to assess any decision or proposal in light of a supreme ranking system already in existence: the Basic Law of 1949. Its main *political* function is to uphold that ranking by validating or striking down new and alternative proposals and practices for the redistribution of significance. That redistribution is, of course, legally constrained in a political system that is guided by a constitution of that kind, for the political system has already permitted the establishment of a prior ranking mechanism that reflects, endorses, and constrains the framework values and desirable procedures of a society. If the right to have rights was identified above as a framework value corresponding to permutation (1) of distributing high significance, here is another occupant of that category. In its

own words, 'according to the constant judicial utterances of the Federal Constitutional Court, the fundamental legal norms . . . embody . . . an objective ordering of values, which is valid as a constitutionally fundamental decision for all areas of the law and which provides direction and impetus for legislation, administration, and judicial opinions.'[38]

To that basic attribution of objective ordering are added a number of key ranking markers on the specific issue of abortion, derived from article 2, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law, which includes the sentence: 'Every person shall have the right to life and physical integrity'. The high ranking it entails is both substantive—because life and physical integrity are basic building blocks of human and social existence—and the consequence of its early positioning in the Basic Law, immediately after the inviolability of dignity and human rights, and the further inalienability of the latter. That such ranking is ordinal as well as cardinal is deducible from the following: 'The degree of seriousness with which the state must take its obligation to protect increases as the rank of the legal value in question increases in importance within the order of values of the Basic Law'. Indeed, as Williams has observed in another context, it is intuitively appealing to suppose that the likelihood of change is lowest for values ranked at the top or the bottom of an individual ranking hierarchy, and that should apply to social rankings as well.[39]

The conceptual move of the judgment is to break down the distinction between life and 'unborn life' in relation to article 2, which immediately results in the assertion that 'abortion is an act of killing' and hence constitutes a direct assault on the high ranking of life, with which it has a zero-sum relationship. Thus, resistance to abortion encompasses two moves. First, the background issue (what to do with regard to unwanted foetuses?) is attached to values to which high significance has been assigned by encapsulating them in a robustly protected right to either life or choice. Second, one of those two opposing rights claims is denied access to the ranking system altogether due to their perceived total incompatibility. The consequence is that attempts at successful ranking whose function is concurrently to eradicate the validity of an alternative value, require to be weighted in their most unchallengeable form. As usual in thinking about rights, appeals can be made to God, history, nature, economics, or science as unassailable, extra-human, rights-buttressing resources. Citing expert advice, the Court opted for what it saw as a powerful anchoring of its ranking, arguing that life 'exists according to definite biological-physiological knowledge, in any case, from the 14th day after conception. The process of

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[38] Quoted in the judgment of the German Constitutional Court, 25 February 1975 (English translation by Robert E. Jonas and John D. Gorby, *The John Marshall Journal of Practice and Procedure,* vol. 9 (1976), 605), http://groups.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/germandecision/german_abortion_decision2.html (accessed 21.12.2012). All following citations are from that document.

[39] Williams, op. cit., p. 149.

development which has begun at that point is a continuing process which exhibits no sharp demarcation and does not allow a precise division of the various steps of development of the human life.' Hence, contra advocates of limited abortion in the first trimester, no internal ranking is permissible: 'The legal value of unborn life is to be respected in principle equally with that of born life.' To nail down that argument, it was seen to reflect a 'completely over-whelming view in medical, anthropological, and theological science'. Science, social science, and religious morality offered triple indemnity; 'dominant opin-ion' offered the fourth dimension. All those were marshalled to ensure the kind of firmness of commitment to the superior ranking of a major value intended to lock a ranking order into position.[40]

The recognition of the conflicting claims of rights emerges in the judgment, but only at secondary level. It relates to the principle of balancing. Balancing might be seen, as with Rawls' later formulations, as an attempt to identify a position on a ranking scale that offers a fixed point for resolving conflict among competing values through—as Rawls proposed—entrusting that task to a supreme court as the exemplar and voice of public reason.[41] The German Constitutional Court, however, sees the role of balancing as a clear act of prioritizing, with the highest and immutably ranked value—human dignity—balanced only against the provision of counselling in the early months of pregnancy and reasonable penal sanctions. 'Respect for the unborn life and the right of the woman not to be compelled to sacrifice the values in her own life in excess of an exactable measure in the interest of respecting this legal value are in conflict with each other' is the adopted phrasing that elevates the right to foetal life above a woman's right to self-determination, while permitting unpunished infringement of the higher value in certain circumstances as a minor theme. The defining mutual exclusivity of zero-sum values is spelled out: 'A compromise which guarantees the protection of the life of the one about to be born and permits the pregnant woman the freedom of abortion is not possible since the interruption of pregnancy always means the destruction of the unborn life. In the required balancing, "both constitutional values are to be viewed in their relationship to human dignity, the centre of the value system of the constitution".'

The upshot of that is that any hindrances to the crucial discharging by the Court of the political act of ranking—in this case through the ordering of public morality—are removed by the judgment. Tellingly, a dissenting opinion described the majority judgment as difficult to reconcile even with a balancing 'of life against legal values of a lesser rank'—thus accepting the empirical legitimacy of a divergence between legal and human or social values and a consequent legitimate contest among different ranking orders. Only one other

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[40] See also ibid., p. 135.   [41] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., pp. 231–40.

form of ranking is taken on board, pertaining to danger to the life and health of the woman: 'The decisive viewpoint is that in all of these cases another interest equally worthy of protection, from the standpoint of the constitution, asserts its validity with such urgency that the state's legal order cannot require that the pregnant woman must, under all circumstances, concede precedence to the right of the unborn'. In that case the weighting of two competing values that may otherwise be annihilated—health and speed of response—is heightened. The second factor, the pressing time-frame of circumstances is, as we shall see, a resource whose scarcity constitutes a major theme of thinking politically and is a substantive contributor to the distribution of significance.

When it comes to incommensurability as well as zero-sum incompatibility, political decision-makers are understandably disinclined to toy with its disabling presence, but they may be prepared to acknowledge the complexity of competing values. This stance is evident in the very different landmark American Supreme Court decision in the case of *Roe v Wade*. The decision rejects any absolute or fixed view of value ranking, carving out instead a constrained ranking that permits some conceptually, ethically, and politically flexible rearrangements of priorities: permitting abortion in the first trimester and permitting its regulation or banning at later stages. In so doing, it partially removes the watertight protection that could be claimed through a right, precisely because when two absolute rights (i.e. claims for top weighted significance) cross each other's path, something has to give. By tapering the right over time, as the woman's well-being and the foetus's viability loom larger, the value of respecting a woman's personal decision is eroded by the emergence of competing values of health and life that take up increasing conceptual space. Generally speaking, the ranking function of a right is actually weakened if it is couched in the language of absolutes and cannot display some plasticity. Rigid protection is generally bound to render a disservice to the protected good, because it is set up to fail in a world in which credible contestation, at whatever level, is normal or at least epistemologically possible. Rigidity cracks more easily under pressure. A crucial political function of a supreme constitutional court is to adjust value and norm rankings so as to reflect changes in social and legal fashions, just as a crucial political function of a democratic legislature is to adjust preference rankings so as to reflect majoritarian and minority interests.[42] Although to allow the overriding of a right would undermine its *raison d'être* as a secure container of linguistic and conceptual meaning, there are nonetheless legitimate forms of amending its ranking power, that is to say, of softening the prioritizing and protective nature of a right in order that competing ranking orders do not

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[42] For the important distinction between values and preferences, see Williams, op. cit., p. 127.

become socially destructive. That balancing, too, is a key part of the political thinking germane to ranking.

Carl Friedrich maintained that, although the US constitution is full of contradictions in principle, 'there never will be any resolution in terms of an order of priority'.[43] Legally, he may have been correct in postulating the absence of a hierarchy of rights; but discursively that is incorrect. Rankings are unavoidable in each given case, if potentially ephemeral. To reiterate, *resolutions* in the sense of transforming and mitigating a discord are possible, even when *solutions* are not. Specifically, *Roe v Wade* focuses not on the right to choose but on a different right, the right to privacy, which is elevated—in a qualified manner—above the requirement to protect foetuses. Because that latter requirement is not itself formulated as a right to life, it is not in contention as a supremely secured value. That follows from two conceptual steps. First, the concept of a person is not taken to cover foetuses and 'the word "person", as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn'.[44] That appears to reflect liberal ideological and philosophical assumptions that identify rationality as that which makes a human being uniquely a person.[45] Second, the conceptual question of when life begins is understood as (currently!) unanswerable (rather than the arguably more plausible 'essentially contestable'). Therefore, 'When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.'[46] Indeterminacy invalidates the possibility of deciding whether the protection of a foetus can be accorded the significance that deserves shielding by a high-priority right to life. The indeterminate features of (political) language serve here as constraints on the political-thought practice of distributing significance.[47]

The general prominence of individual rights that obtains in the USA, including the right to be guided by one's conscience, is an indirect emphasis on a protective capsule (which, as has been seen, has its own value), not on a

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[43] C.J. Friedrich, 'The Dialectic of Political Order and Freedom', in P.G. Kuntz (ed.), *The Concept of Order* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 343.

[44] Touro Law Center, *Roe v Wade*. Decided 22 January 1973, http://www.tourolaw.edu/patch/roe/ (accessed 21.7.2010).

[45] See K. Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Moral Diversity in the Abortion Debate* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), pp. 18–19. This also reflects the distinction between the option theory of rights (based on choice and agency) and the needs theory of rights (based on the necessary features for human flourishing or functioning). See Freeden, *Rights*, op. cit., pp. 43–62.

[46] *Roe v Wade*, op. cit.

[47] The argument from indeterminacy can also be employed in the opposite direction, as in Archbishop Bernardin's view that it is precisely because the moment of infusion of the soul is unknown that one cannot risk the taking of a human life. Quoted in M.M. Ferree, W.A. Gamson, J. Gerhards, and D. Rucht (eds), *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 165.

direct substantive value, and may therefore result in a diffuse and multiple set of challenges to collective ranking orders, or in the impossibility of authoritatively constructing such orders. So in addition to the two constitutional courts illustrating the contrast between 'the German focus on the moral role of the state and the U.S. emphasis on individual rights'—the latter reflecting a lack of consensus in the USA 'about which [substantive] rights take priority'[48]—we can view the contrast as subtly representing two different approaches to the vital political task of ranking values possessed of a collective import: the exalting of national values as against the stylized constraining of public intervention. To do so, we also need to shift the perspective from the question concerning which rights take priority to another, more elemental question: 'in what distinct ways are rights accorded the differential power to prioritize?'

5. CHOICE VERSUS LIFE: AN AMERICAN STORY

The popular language of the abortion debate is revealing in its own evident manner of thinking politically. Thus in 2006 the mission statement of NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League), the pro-choice movement, talked of the right of a woman to choose to terminate pregnancy as fuelled by an 'unstoppable force'; the finality tendency of thinking politically was cast in terms of 'victory' and building a 'frontline'; and it referred to confronting challenges vigorously.[49] NARAL accepts the notion of balancing, but views some balances as acceptable and others as not, depending on their subservience to the principle of private choice while recognizing 'a state's increasing interest in potential life as pregnancy progressed'.[50] Various mission statements of the Catholic American Life League (ALL), to the contrary, protect the value of life both through rights-language and through the sacralization of God-given life, which then gives rise to rights. According life sacredness through 'moral absolutes' and 'objective truth'[51] underpinned by 'a scientific fact'[52] performs an unqualified and rigidly decontested ranking function equivalent to, if not surpassing, rights protection, insofar as the protection is

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[48] Ibid., p. 126.

[49] Nancy Keenan, 'Letter from the President', http://www.prochoiceamerica.org (accessed 11.1.2006).

[50] 'Liberty at Risk: The Vulnerability of Reproductive Rights under Alito', http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/assets/files/courts-scotus-alito-report.pdf (accessed 18.10.2012).

[51] American Bioethics Advisory Commission, 'Mission'. http://www.all.org/abac/mission.htm American Life League, 'Philosophy'. http://www.all.org/about/decintro.htm (accessed 11.1.2006).

[52] American Life League, 'Abortion'. http://www.all.org/issues/argue01.htm (accessed 11.1.2006).

based on an 'extra-human' pronouncement. One of its groupings, Stop Planned Parenthood, expresses 'the belief that we have the God-given right and obligation to raise our children from the beginning of their biological development'.[53]

ALL has declared that 'the acknowledgement of the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect, the defense and the promotion of the rights of the human person. It is a question of inherent, universal, and inviolable rights. No one, no individual, no group, no authority, no state, can change—let alone eliminate—them because such rights find their source in God himself.'[54] This is of course also an appeal to the originary temporal sovereignty examined in the previous chapter. More specifically, and harnessing legal constitutional language, ALL make a converse move to NARAL by interpreting personhood to include foetal life. The conceptual extension or contraction of personhood is the means through which the construction or denial of a right takes place, but its force is ostensibly placed beyond human control. An even further extension refers to 'preborn babies—that forgotten class of citizens',[55] thus conferring full social membership on foetuses. Alternatively, the language of progressive politics is invoked through hailing extended personhood as 'the final chapter of the civil rights movement'.[56] 'No apologies, no exceptions, no compromise', announced a write-up for ALL's 'Celebrate Life'.[57] Compromise-cum-balancing 'is cooperation with evil and is never a solution'.[58] ALL's assertion: 'you are either human or you are not'[59] calls up a dichotomy one of whose options is morally inconceivable and therefore unrankable, because 'abortion is murder, pure and simple'.[60] Elsewhere, the dismissal of abortion, euthanasia, human embryonic stem cell research and human cloning as assaults on 'intrinsic human rights' is described as 'non-negotiable'[61]—another version of zero-sum language.

That simplification of ranking systems—through eliminating a particular ranking option—strikes a chord close to the heart of decision-makers,

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[53] American Life League, http://www.all.org/nav/index/heading/MTE/cat/MTcy/ (accessed 18.10.2012).

[54] American Life League, 'Abortion'. http://www.all.org/issues/argue05.htm (accessed 11.1.2006).

[55] American Life League, 'Personhood'. http://www.all.org/nav/index/cat/ODM/heading/OQ/ (accessed 11.1.2006).

[56] American Life League, 'Personhood'. http://www.all.org/nav/index/heading/OQ/cat/ODM/ id/NTYyMA/ (accessed 19.10.2012).

[57] 'American Life League's Celebrate Life Magazine', http://www.clmagazine.org (accessed 11.1.2006).

[58] American Life League, 'Abortion'. http://www.all.org/about/dectruth.htm

[59] Ibid. http://www.all.org/issues/argue04.htm

[60] American Life League, 'About Us'. http://www.all.org/nav/index/heading/MTQ/ (accessed 18.10.2012).

[61] Judy Brown, 'Pro-Life Basics', *Celebrate Life*, September–October 2012, p. 16. http://www. clmagazine.org/prolifebasics/SO2012ProLifeBasics.pdf (accessed 19.10.2012).

inasmuch as complexity obfuscates the clarity needed when a decision is to be taken. Simplification is attractive to political thinking, for there is no more resilient distribution of significance than that secured in a field of meaning where strong decontestation is customary, as is the case with much religiously grounded discourse. Nonetheless, compromise may be an acceptable strategy even among pro-life advocates. Thus the Catholic policy of 'proportionalism' reduces a zero-sum rigidity by maintaining 'that evils must be weighed against each other and evaluated'. Following May's observation, the lesser evil is ranked above the greater one and permitted, rather than prohibiting both.[62]

The strong, zero-sum version of the right to choose versus the right to life exemplifies how a particular value is indisputably established at the top of a pecking order, and other values are always made to defer to its rigid decontested intension. Reasonableness in the Rawlsian understanding has no logical place here, because, on the subjective interpretations of their respective advocates, each of the two absolute and top-ranking values is reasonable, while the other is not and is therefore excluded from ranking. It is impossible to formulate a position that every reasonable individual could endorse and accept. As a feature of political language rather than as a moral or ideological stance, 'reasonable' becomes in this instance an unoccupiable category, unless one can acknowledge—from an external viewpoint—the possibility of two or more reasonable views that cannot coexist. That, however, is likely to frustrate the political feature of collective decision-making. If 'reasonable', as in the German case, can mean adhering to a generally accepted morality, or avoiding any hint of Nazi thinking and policy, the process of attaining it does not involve an exercise through which individuals commit themselves to an overlapping reasonable consensus. Yet many Germans found the Constitutional Court's decision unreasonable.

Constitutional amendments play a special role in American political culture as the foremost channel for enshrining particular social principles, through adding them to a protected and legally ultimate document. It is no surprise that ALL sees as its central aim the amendment of the American Constitution with the Paramount Human Life Amendment: 'The paramount right to life is vested in each human being from the moment of fertilization without regard to age, health or condition of dependency.'[63] In thinking politically it focuses on reorganizing the stated priorities of the prime national ranking document. The word 'paramount' is, after all, a patent distributor of significance, connoting highest in rank, or pre-eminent and to aspire to include it in the constitution is a telling instance of thinking politically. Indeed, the ranking power of the term 'rights' has been recognized in broader abortion discourse. In a South Dakota debate on pro-choice strategies, one observer noted that

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[62] Rudy, op. cit., pp. 31–3.
[63] American Life League, http://www.all.org/article/index/id/MjQwNQ (accessed 19.10.2012).

'South Dakota people don't see it as a choice . . . they view it as a right they should have . . . using the term "right"—as in inalienable rights—is a frame that works much better.' And the author concludes: ' . . . it's worth listening to what kind of language works when talking to people in South Dakota about abortion because it probably will work everywhere else.'[64]

The distribution of significance on abortion will frequently take on substantive forms not associated with devices such as rights. The putative link between abortion and abusive eugenic policies can be employed to lower the former's standing as a legitimate preference. Furthermore, there may be a contest over the relative ranking of the claimants, or those entitled to a voice, in a dispute over an abortion. The pregnant woman, the foetus (through its representative on earth, whether prospective parent or other), the potential father, and society are four distinct voices that may have to be heard, but the proportional weight allocated to each (and the exclusion of some) reflects different ideological fields, diverse ways of thinking about politics.

6. THE DANISH CARTOONS

Ostensible zero-sum relationships between consequently unrankable values are of course common. The 2006 furore over the Danish cartoons that depicted the prophet Muhammad as a terrorist offers another typical instance of the significance aspect of thinking politically and the complexity involved in putting absolute ranking claims to the test of public political thinking. Muslims were seen to be the victims of specific ranking principles and their ensuing practices in liberal societies, 'abused by secular values, oppressed by Western liberty.'[65] A writer in the *Guardian* wrote about 'two competing conceptions of the sacred'—the holy status of a religion's founder confronting free speech—while attempting to find a balancing point.[66] The recent scholarly tendency to associate sacralization with the secular has its limits, though. Importantly, non-negotiability, unlike sacredness, is not merely a feature of belief-systems that are anchored in extra-human sanctioning—the latter, consequently, seen to be removed beyond the control of human beings. It is equally a feature of more rationalist, malleable and self-reflective epistemologies and ideologies and, as this example demonstrates, liberalism is no exception.

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[64] Rachel Joy Larris, 'Rights v. Choice: Abortion Slogans', 26 June 2006. http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/06/26/rights_v_choice_abortion_slogans.php (accessed 19.10.2012).

[65] A. Anthony, 'The End of Freedom?', *Observer*, 12 February 2006.

[66] Karen Armstrong, 'We can Defuse the Tension between Competing Conceptions of the Sacred', *Guardian*, 11 March 2006.

Non-negotiability implies a departure from an accepted norm of flexibility or balance. The commitment to basic human rights evinced by liberalism—now that natural rights, with their religious or pure rational-logical underpinnings, have largely gone out of fashion—is anthropocentric, a product either of human choice or human need. Its non-negotiability does not lie in its status as a stipulation to be obeyed without questioning, but in its being an historical product of that very questioning itself, spelling out either the requirements of human rationality, tolerance, and solidarity, or the recognition of the conditions without which the humanist goal of flourishing cannot be achieved. It expresses a value about where to draw red lines in a belief system that normally eschews red lines, a process quite different from some forms of religious fundamentalism. Evidently, the non-negotiable status of a right such as free speech is founded—as a ranking device—on the sub-text of the universality that buttresses these rational, ethical, and existential understandings within liberalism and related systems, and it is the high value accorded to those understandings in certain epistemologies and ideologies that secures that ranking.

As Ronald Dworkin has insisted, returning to his idea of the trumping power of a value in an ordinal series of values, and invoking permutation (2), 'Free speech is a condition of legitimate government',[67] and in so doing he creates a specific zero-sum relationship between the unacceptability of religious insult to a Muslim and the right to insult, disabling in effect the fundamental consensual ranking a polity requires. If, nevertheless, advocates of free speech have been called to moderate that right—again, not an uncommon call with respect to discourses that tread some of the fine but permeable, rather than red, lines between criticism, condemnation, and hate speech—it is largely because marginal moderations of non-negotiable principles follow exactly the same logic as a move away from absolute rights. The protection of principles, and attempts at a relatively durable distribution of significance, may better be served by concessions at the point when core and adjacent concepts adjust to the periphery of concrete pressures on *some* of the particular conceptions to which the valued concept plays host. If those pressures are intense, the more resilient concepts may have to undergo the kind of temporary modification that their durability can absorb. That morphological flexibility (or defusing of the tension, mooted by the *Guardian* article, caused by conceptual and value rigidity) is ultimately a property of non-absolutist idea-systems and a key characteristic of how the ranking function of thinking politically is cashed out in those idea-systems. As public (as well as philosophical) discourse has it: 'Free expression is never total'[68]—non-negotiability is not identical to absolutism.

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[67] R. Dworkin, 'The Right to Ridicule', *New York Review of Books*, 23 March 2006.
[68] Anthony, 'The End of Freedom?', op. cit.

However, the possibility of flexibility in the cartoon case arises mainly from the asymmetry of ideological rigidity. In the abortion issue, there is great ideological rigidity among both pro-life and pro-choice camps. But those who believe in free speech are often those who will reflectively consider alternatives to their non-negotiable position. Sensibilities regarding individual expression can, to some extent, be carried over into an understanding of the sensibilities of the opponents of that expression. One commentator, referring to freedom of speech as attracting an intransigence equivalent to that underpinning faith, wrote: 'these values are as dear to Europeans as religious truths. To see them watered down to pacify a value system that is thought to be . . . less tolerant is anathema to us'. That said, he continued: 'I am for restraint on both sides and my immovable position has moved . . . a little.'[69] As a leader in the *Guardian* expressed it: 'The Guardian believes uncompromisingly in freedom of expression, but not in any duty to gratuitously offend. . . . John Stuart Mill is a better guide to this issue than Voltaire.' And yet, the *Guardian* was nevertheless moved to restate the liberal position against its challengers: 'Freedom of expression as it has developed in the democratic west is a value to be cherished, but not abused. And it is above all a universal value. Insults, in cartoons or elsewhere, are best ignored, not punished.'[70]

7. A NOTE ON URGENCY

The above cases are all hard-core, if not completely intractable, instances of thinking politically. But there is another such area with regard to ranking: the question of urgency (permutation 5) has already been alluded to as following from severe temporal constraints. Urgency may overrule a prevailing ranking order based on substantive values; it may become a value in itself; or it may cloak itself in a value such as the national interest, or more plainly national survival (or subsets of those), which can be used efficiently to create a sense of immediacy. In international relations theory the concept of 'securitization'—a response aimed at blocking an existential threat—performs that triple function. Effectively it displaces existing ranking sequences of values with a single supra- and pre-ranking objective—temporarily eradicating all attempts at ranking other than the pressing nature of the issue—which assumes the highest significance, deriving its substantive force from a discursive association with continued national or group existence, particularly but not exclusively in the international arena. Whereas the distribution of significance usually engages in a spatial ranking of a field of goods and values, higher

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[69] H. Porter, 'A Few Bad Cartoons are no Reason to Fall Out', *Observer*, 5 February 2006.
[70] 'Muslims and Cartoons: Insults and Injuries', *Guardian*, 4 February 2006.

and lower, urgency eliminates that space in favour of a single temporal point. As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde have noted, securitization is a rhetorical structure, 'a self-referential practice' that 'should take absolute priority' and that 'overflows the normal political logic of weighing issues against each other.'[71] That statement may, however, be qualified by the argument of this chapter that 'normal political logic' also includes attempts to establish a trump value without the constant need to address the question of balancing, because normal political thinking—inasmuch as normal implies typical rather than norm-establishing—does not only embrace open, democratic thinking. That latter kind of thinking is a feature of reflective political thought that may in other contexts be deemed to be too expensive, inefficient or—in some cultural cases—normatively and epistemologically unacceptable. However, even liberal societies invoke urgency in addition to their usual stances on non-negotiability, the suspension of democratic practices such as elections during periods of emergency being well-known instances.[72] Urgency operates here, too, as a substitute for, not an addition to, the normal ranking order. Importantly, too, urgency can be employed as an ideological imperative attempting to create a new normative order, as voiced by an Egyptian politician: 'activists from different ideologies and the society are united on the urgency of democratic change'.[73]

Of course, there are other kinds of urgency, such as those brought about by natural disasters (some of which may involve physical safety). Scanlon invokes health as a reason for raising a benefit further up a hierarchy of urgent needs.[74] But as a moral philosopher he focuses on the specific criteria for urgency as grounds for ranking goods, whereas the argument here is to explore the antecedent discursive practice of calling upon urgency in the distribution of significance. From that perspective securitization strikes a particular chord of emotional immediacy: it not only shifts any issue classified under its existential banner to a trumping status that eliminates ranking; it also—as will be noted in Chapter Eight—employs the fear of threats in order to 'force' an issue psychologically to a position of the highest provisional prominence. That immediacy is of course ephemeral, even if the national interest in survival is not. Tellingly, the vested supra-ranking order of securitization is further enhanced because it is also claimed as a fundamental right of a state to protect its members and hence reiterated as an element of rights discourse, not just as an emergency. Wæver has convincingly argued that the uttering of 'security'

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[71] B. Buzan, O. Wæver, and J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 24.

[72] In the British cases, the cancellation of the 1915 and the 1940 general elections due to the two world wars is such an instance.

[73] Usama al-Ghazali Harb in 2006 (quoted in M.L. Browers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 130.

[74] T.M. Scanlon, 'Preference and Urgency', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 72 (1975), 655–69.

itself becomes the crucial speech-act in such instances.[75] Hence its role as a capsule concept is similar to that of rights—it elevates and shields whatever is inserted into that discursive sign.

8. EMOTIONS AND RANKING

Ranking, let it be emphasized, is not solely a purely rational act, nor just one of ponderous moral evaluation. The political role of emotion as a ranking device needs therefore to be included in any serious textual analysis. As noted in Chapter Two, the expression, say, of anger, fear, excitement, pleasure, or communal pride adds considerable weight to the concepts, ideas, or arguments to which they are attached. Strong emotions such as fear may operate directly as prioritizing devices that bestow urgency on an argument. As noted in Chapter Two, the famous Kitchener recruitment slogan 'Your country needs you!' was couched in stirring terms of urgency. Emotions lower the threshold of urgency, making it more immediate, and they advance and reinforce the standing of the goods and rights which they accompany. As Prokhovnik has observed, emotions assign salience in that they 'identify which observations, perceptions and reflections are significant, that is valuable, noteworthy, apt, appropriate or fitting'.[76] Generally, 'emotion is part and parcel of the emergent orderings of the relational field' that individuals experience in their encounters with other people.[77]

Western rights discourse tends to employ emotional language and visual aids when the case for the prioritizing role of rights is based on the prevention of pain and suffering, rather than on the safeguarding of rational purposive agency. Thus Amnesty International constructed a website of 'online art for human rights' in which artists graphically and viscerally evoke the restraint and torture undergone by individuals deprived of their rights,[78] and has launched an illustrated website named 'Children's drawings depict the horror of Syrian conflict'.[79] The conceptual reorientation of rights from a rational/ethical base to a physical/psychological one relating to fundamental needs makes it easier for a ranking exercise to harness emotion in support of rational

[75] O. Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in R.O. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 54.

[76] R. Prokhovnik, *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 78.

[77] I. Burkitt, 'Complex Emotions: Relations, Feelings and Images in Emotional Experience', in J. Barbalet (ed.), *Emotions and Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 157.

[78] Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org.uk/ (accessed 16.3.2007).

[79] Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/blog-children-s-drawings-depict-horror-syrian-conflict-2012-09-11 (accessed 19.10.2012).

argument. For emotion can be employed far more easily when rights discourse is no longer anchored in the field of analytic philosophy. Though that facilitates higher ranking in public political languages attuned to emotional communication, emotional weighting may not satisfy the equivalent ranking role required in some of the professional languages of political theory.

Emotion is highly pertinent to ranking exercises on the issue of abortion, though the salience of emotional language is more notable in the main pro-life movements. ALL's American Bioethics Advisory Commission talked of 'the rush toward bioethical tyranny'.[80] References to the bumper sticker 'abortion stops a beating heart', asserting that 'every preborn baby is a potential murder victim', describing pro-abortionists as advocating 'the killing of innocent children', or '"Freedom of Choice" means the "Freedom to Kill"' are all designed to shock and tap a reservoir of outraged feeling.[81] NARAL, from the other side, in more muted form, appeals to the 'passion and power' behind pro-choice rights-protection.[82] It draws attention to violence against abortion clinics that threaten the lives of those dedicated to ensuring a woman's right to choose.[83]

Ranking is a feature of politics and political thinking in their distributional capacity. But, as has been intimated above, it intersects with all the other features of thinking politically, often reinforcing them, and occasionally undermining them as well. The arrogance of politics feeds on the ultimate superior rank of politics itself as establishing initial control over the language that concerns collectivities. The mobilization and withholding of support for social activities and events pits preference against preference, value against value. In relation to order, ranking creates patterns that may enhance predictability. In the construction of political visions, ranking is vital in signalling desirable social ends, in underpinning imaginative ambition and in soliciting a reforming impetus. And, of course, ranking is a thought-practice packed with power in the form of attempts to change perceptions and understandings. Every redistribution of significance involves the ideational reconstructions, deliberate or otherwise, that are redolent of power. All this is just a reminder that the analytical categories of thinking politically are conceptually distinct, yet effectively intermeshed.

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[80] American Bioethics Advisory Commission, 'Mission'. http://www.all.org/abac/mission.htm op. cit.
[81] American Life League, 'Abortion'. http://www.all.org/issues/abort.htm http://www.all.org/issues/argue02.htm http://www.all.org/issues/argue05.htm http://www.all.org/issues/argue10.htm (last accessed 11.1.2006).
[82] Nancy Keenan, 'Letter from the President' (accessed 11.1.2006).
[83] NARAL, Pro-Choice America Foundation, http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/assets/files/Abortion-Access-to-Abortion-Violence.pdf (accessed 31.7.2010).

5

The Scramble for Acceptance: Mobilizing
and Withholding Support

*'It is a remarkable institutional fact that there is no simple, universal way
for persons or nations to assume commitment.'*[1]

1. CONCEPTUALIZING SUPPORT

Thinking politically is inextricably expressed through the various forms of
building up support for, and giving voice to, ideas concerning policies, groups,
and institutions at the heart of making decisions for a collective. That support
may concurrently be solicited from, or denied to, one collective while refused
or granted to another: discursive internal resistance to a state, its forms of
governance, or its policies may be combined with backing for the aims and
values of the contesting group; state support may be accompanied by a strong
contestation of the ideas of certain groups in its midst; the endeavours of
ruling elites to manufacture or seek support may be highly selective in their
targets and their manner; and within what is commonly referred to as civil
society, group may vie with group over support through non-state channels.
Mobilizing support is manifest in the variations of enabling or disabling
discourses that seek epistemologically and ideologically optimal forms of
underpinning or resisting ruling elites, leaders, and collective policies and
values at all levels of expression. Discursive support is a vital fuel without
which political systems atrophy and it is no less important than the physical
forms of support that oil and fire the social machine.

Without the mobilization of oral and written support, politics cannot take
place, and its articulation undeniably becomes a vital aspect of that domain,
absolutely central to, and commonplace in, the everyday discourses and

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[1] T.C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960),
p. 39.

ideological manoeuvring at the heart of the public arena broadly understood. The diversity of languages of support ranges from the professional to the humdrum and the relatively inchoate. Its absence would be inconceivable and would indicate either extreme oppression or the unimaginable dissolution of the political in the face of terminal apathy. Expressing support navigates across a wide spectrum of alternative mixtures of argument and emotion, while its rationalized modes rely on an extensive conceptual vocabulary that both overlaps and diverges, creating a complex field from which to energize collective institutions and arrangements and secure their sustenance. Conversely, denying such support through discursive hostility is a major source of political attrition. Approval, bonding, and background dispositions are what constitute a support discourse and the student of political thought needs to be acquainted with their internal nuances. Policies for collectivities do not have to be formulated by a large collective; indeed, they rarely are. But they do appear to be anchored in the linguistic articulation of general support or the semblance of such support. Indeed, the ambiguity and polysemy of political language that enables it to be consumed differently may be vital to increasing the potential scope of governments and groups for eliciting support from a targeted population. At any rate, the practices of mobilizing, engineering, appealing for, or declaring verbal and written support for a group or an individual are prime manifestations of thinking politically and, arguably, more frequent and fundamental to normal political processes than the fomentation of resistance. Those practices are ubiquitous in societies, but not all of them have been the subject of much theorizing in the mainstream traditions of political thought. Political theory needs to draw them towards the centre of its concerns.

Political science has of course developed a large body of theory on political mobilization, a topic that attracted much attention in the 1960s and 1970s.[2] Since then the emphasis has shifted somewhat to the mobilization strategies of social movements and protest groups, located in a sphere that is occasionally referred to as contentious politics. As a political sociologist commented, 'valuable insights are scattered over different fields of interest'.[3] One approach may link political mobilization to the endeavour to influence distributions of power; another could emphasize the structural nature of mobilization as support and commitment: a third might focus on eliciting changes in individual participation; a fourth would add the extra-institutional types of destabilizing mobilization activities; and a fifth argues that political support is becoming a scarce resource—though on closer inspection that erosion applies

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[2] See e.g. J.P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization: A Sociological Analysis of Methods and Concepts* (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

[3] B. Nedelmann, 'Individuals and Parties—Changes in Processes of Political Mobilization', *European Sociological Review*, vol. 3 (1987), 182.

to the democratic deficit perceived in advanced industrial societies.[4] Unquestionably, the mobilization of support can be redescribed as a power act, and the language used to express the intent and purpose of mobilization is also an instance of thinking *about* power. Attracting or denying support is at least an attempt to exercise power, and the intensity of beliefs about the objects of support[5] is conveyed in expressive power language such as pledges and promises. But, as we have already observed, power criss-crosses the entire range of political thinking. The thought-practices involved in mobilizing support cannot therefore be reduced to expressions of power. They merit separate consideration as a feature of thinking politically. However, there has clearly been a decline of interest in mobilization as a mainstream topic in political science. Part of that may have to do with the more fragmented view of politics emanating from theories of governance and networks that have replaced the clear channels of mobilization once thought to exist between governments and states on the one hand, and their members on the other.

Nonetheless, the question of support is still a key feature of the political, and political theory requires a rearticulation of its vocabulary in order to enter that particular thicket. Above all, support is not rendered or withheld merely in material terms or in time and physical effort. It is also, and crucially, handled in symbolic and expressive manifestations, such manifestations being themselves in many cases a complex speech-act, such as a rousing speech to an assembly of people. Conceptualizing support crucially involves not only the question of whom or what to support but in which register to voice it. Various aspects of the written and verbal practices of mobilizing and rendering support can be distinguished. First, types of support are identified and expressed in language often classified by political theorists and political scientists under the heading of concepts such as obligation, allegiance, loyalty, commitment, and trust, and further underpinned by the function those concepts are held to discharge, primarily that of legitimation. As Nedelmann has observed, 'the very discussion about the legitimacy or illegitimacy, legality or illegality, conventionality or unconventionality of various means used is itself a technique of mobilization'.[6] Mostly, in O'Connor's words, 'the idea of political legitimacy is tied to the capacity of the state bureaucracy to reproduce legitimating ideologies'.[7] Second, the discourse of support may, as implied above, revolve around its articulated pursuit both by ruling groups and by other political entities, or it may revolve around the expressions of support or

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[4] On this last point, see R.J. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] See J.D. McCarthy and M.N. Zald, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 82 (1977), 1218.

[6] Nedelmann, op. cit., 190.

[7] J. O'Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 111.

its refusal that emanate from other groups *towards* those entities. Third, the objects of support or resistance may conventionally be a state or a government, and somewhat less conventionally a body of citizens, a nation, or a cosmopolitan construct. Fourth, the pressing or permissive nature of support may be indicated through certain conceptual combinations linking, for example, consent to obligation or coercion to acquiescence or resistance. Fifth, support is articulated in languages that range from the professional to the humdrum and the relatively inchoate. Sixth, the mode of expressing or denying support may be couched in rational language, in emotional language, and in non-verbal signs, or—most likely—a combination of those, and in each instance it may vary from weak to strong. Indeed, of all the features of the political the granting or withholding of support is the most imbued with emotion, replete with positive or negative feelings about group identity, group membership, or group rejection. As Jasper notes, 'emotions give ideas, ideologies, identities, and even interests their power to motivate'.[8] Epistemological and ideological packages then constitute the containers that combine the modes of support with their specific conceptual configuration.[9] Those packages are significant grammatical vehicles through which various discursive practices host the languages of support and bestow on them variability and specific intelligibility.

No less significantly, languages of support and its withholding are expressed in vernacular, often circuitous terms that require translation into the professional language employed by political theorists. Far more than with the other features of thinking politically—with the exception of exercising discursive power—those who participate in them can directly experience them as an especially salient, concrete, and observable part of the fabric of socio-political life. The languages of support and dissent are replete with a rich conceptual structure through which alternative discursive paths may be traced. Moreover, their vernacular forms in particular are not exhausted by articulated debate and reasoning. Verbal protest may be replaced by non-verbal vocalizations, or by silence, the latter, too, sending messages of support, apathy, or dissent. Visual indicators—a military parade, a vigil, a riot—possess a physicality that may also inform us, as much as speech-acts and writing-acts do, about political thinking. The challenge to political theorists is to include those usually vernacular and common forms of thinking politically within their subject matter and to offer a decoding that can enhance the accumulated corpus of professional political thought from which we draw. Oakeshott made a similar point: 'the study of "politics" at a university may afford an undergraduate the opportunity of acquainting himself with two different

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[8] J.M. Jasper, 'The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements,' *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13 (1998), 420.

[9] See also the behavioural model offered in J.F. Marquette, 'A Logistic Diffusion Model of Political Mobilization', *Political Behavior*, vol. 3 (1981), 8, 15.

manners of understanding, two modes of thought, two explanatory "languages", namely, the "languages" of history and of philosophy. What falls outside these is, I think, one or other of these manners of thinking disguised in some not very elegant fancy dress'.[10] Given the focus of professional political theory on abstract and normative theories of support, that broader purview is urgent.

In the course of this chapter I will offer two case studies that illustrate the range political theorists ought to consider as a matter of course. The one, which will be interspersed in the text, revolves around the group known as the Greenham Common movement, engaging thousands of women who camped, over a period of almost twenty years from 1981, outside the perimeter fence of an RAF base in the south of England housing US Cruise nuclear weapons. The other, whose formulaic character merits a separate and multi-layered analysis, examines the 'repatriation' ritual in the small English town of Wootton Bassett, through which the bodies of British soldiers killed in the war in Afghanistan were regularly driven until 2012 on their way to autopsy in Oxford. The one—radically anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons—denied support to the political entity of which they were formal members; the other was proudly supportive of the army and of many of the values that go with a deep-felt and emotive patriotism. Yet each of the two instances concurrently exhibited commitment and resistance towards different political entities and values, a mixture that should be regarded as typical.

The distinctions among concepts such as obligation, allegiance, loyalty, and commitment are far from crisp, and even less acute in the substitutes and circumlocutions to be found in everyday discourse. Trust, a more recent entrant in the field of *political* concepts, will be considered below. In that sense, we are always looking at a field of intersecting, complementary, and *ersatz* concepts, possessing vague boundaries with regards to this feature of thinking politically as with others, concepts whose very existence and internal composition are more interdependent than may appear to be the case for those bent on investigating them in their singularity. Nonetheless, some marked and some subtle differences exist among the concepts, and the very choice of which concept to employ or to highlight is itself indicative of a methodological or ideological position.[11] In popular discourse, however, one can only reconstruct such nuances from the context of broader or less accurate terminology and—as always with ordinary language—some interpretative licence has been applied to the concrete examples dispersed throughout the chapter. Within the same language group—in this case English—it befalls upon us to translate from one linguistic pattern to another.

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[10] M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (London: Methuen & Co, 1967), p. 328.
[11] For one attempt by a political theorist to draw such distinctions, see J. Shklar, 'Obligation, Loyalty, Exile', *Political Theory*, vol. 21 (1993), 181–97.

2. THE SEMANTIC LIMITATIONS OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

Political obligation is the most entrenched of the support concepts in political philosophy and the study of its history, and it has formed the focus of professional attention as a principal mode of providing political support. Although recent trends in political theory adumbrate ethical, often pre-political and non-forensic forms of obligation, its predominant particular take on support has been in placing it at a formal level, buttressed by both moral and legal pledges, centred on the practices of promising and contract-formation. Those practices are epistemologically dependent on a view of human agency as deliberate, rational, anticipatory, and responsible; and on a view of human interaction as offering advance guarantees of predictable and mutually accommodating behaviour within certain parameters. In some of its versions, political obligation is unconditional once the obligation has been entered into, which makes it a particularly powerful way of eliciting or, indeed, enforcing consent (less of a paradox than it seems), and Hobbes can serve as an example. But in most cases political obligation is conditional upon its reciprocity; that is, upon the receipt of specified goods, both in return for the obligation and as an incentive to maintain it in future—for example, the protection of life, liberty, and property; or the delivery of well-being. Such goods translate political obligation into a contractual relationship between individuals, their societies, and their governments. The mainstay of the literature has examined the conditions of its breach (illustrated by Locke's right of revolution): under what circumstances does contractual obligation terminate, and whether non-contractual forms of obligation continue to persist and may even justify the abrogation of the ostensibly more sacrosanct and demanding legal, philosophical, and religious underpinnings of contract. However, in parallel with the complementary concept of rights and its role as protector of values, political obligation creates an entrenched demand for support and is couched in terms of its precedence over other associative relationships between rulers and ruled—though its unconditional form is clearly more peremptory. Political obligation therefore also requires evaluation as a ranking device when eliciting verbal and practical resources for the functioning of the political, and it may encapsulate the priority of a duty to political entities over other duty claims.

Initially, the introduction of political obligation as a replacement for loyalty and allegiance seemed to offer an ethical breakthrough. It produced an originary egalitarianism instead of the ascriptive hierarchies associated with feudalism, and established agent-centred acts of deliberation instead of the diffuse sentiments—such as awe, fear, servility, complicity—that rulers and governments had traditionally called upon. Consequently, it shifted messy, arbitrary, and violence-ridden notions to a plane of argument dedicated mainly to rational and moral dimensions, in which the acts of consent and

promising became central, generating conditional obedience and placing individuals alongside states and governments in a mutual exchange of concrete and symbolic services. As a result, dominant genres of political philosophy have utilized the concept of political obligation for almost four hundred years when analysing the bases of commitment, to the point where that perspective has become part of a prevailing, almost unassailable, philosophical tradition.

The well-known problem with the theory of political obligation is that much of it depends on two different mythologies. The one is historical and conjures up an initial agreement—exemplified in the social contract literature—which, even if hypothetical, is seen to be logically entailed, deriving consent from theories of human nature, co-operative or warring. This intersects with the arrogation theme discussed in Chapter Three. The second is an ethical thought-exercise in which rational and equal individuals freely take upon themselves certain duties and responsibilities in the present, possibly on a renewable basis, in order to ensure a just and stable society. The first tends to gravitate towards the deterministic end of the spectrum, the second to the voluntaristic end, but both assume fundamental framework agreements and the prevalence of consensus as the only acceptable basis of a political society.

The optimism about the shaping of a moral social order engendered by such mythologies of political obligation now seems—regrettably for the erstwhile aspirations of liberals and consent theorists—both premature and misguided. For political obligation has principally figured in the realms of the conscious, the intentional and the virtuous, as the ethical precondition to justified obedience and compliance. It straddles two very different political functions: the delivery of support to a governmental system and the signalling of the latter's legitimacy; yet in its most salient forms it cannot decisively deliver either of those goods. Political obligation has been optimally expressed through formal acts of public speech and writing; perhaps inescapably so, in view of standard rituals of public commitment. Consequently, when deduced tacitly, as in the Lockean model, it loses its clear status as obligation and becomes famously awkward, precisely because it crosses over into the realm of the unconscious and verbally unarticulated. In that existential mode, political obligation is extrapolated from the very discharge of certain political arrangements, such as the provision and acceptance of services, the maintenance of order, and—more recently though less inevitably—participation in political activities such as voting. When assumed as an ethical existential or logical requirement[12] political obligation similarly falls short of expressing social understandings about political responsibility.

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[12] See T. McPherson, *Political Obligation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 64, who refers to political obligation as a synthetic statement concerning social membership that cannot therefore be questioned.

Three additional issues compound the problems of conventional applications of obligation to the political sphere. On one level, the importance of emotions in eliciting support, acceptance—and obligation itself—is a constitutive facet of political thinking that cannot be ignored,[13] though it habitually is. At another level, the language of political obligation is also constitutionally and procedurally unsuited to the recent professional discourses of comparative politics. That language was crafted historically with the state and a central government in full epistemological view, but network and multi-governance standpoints will have to elicit new notions of political obligation or ditch the concept altogether in favour of more malleable ideas of support that relate to different institutional clusters. At a third level, the marrying of consent—whether express or tacit—to the ethics of political obligation attempts to offer an unambiguous empirical test (the act of willing at whatever point in time, past or present) as a precondition for identifying and then justifying obedience to, or acceptance of, a political entity. That test, however, ignores the indeterminate semantic status of consent. Whether or not we *ought* to be obligated we either do, or do not, actually feel obligated when ostensibly indicating consent, so that 'political obligation' straddles the empirical and the normative.

The language of political obligation is a characteristic deflection of the vital issue of mobilizing political support from the methodological field of the political to the methodological field of the philosophical, because 'it is standard to formulate the philosophical problem of political obligation as a problem about moral obligation'.[14] It may well be that all human beings, upon rising to the status of full moral agents, 'begin their moral lives with a substantial body of moral rights and duties',[15] but they do not automatically begin their *political* lives with a substantial body of *political* rights and duties, nor do they necessarily rise to the status of full *political* agents. There are few constraints in attaining the status of full moral agent (usually interpreted as being rational, autonomous, and purposive), unless a stunting of that process occurs, just as there are few constraints in being considered equal in the eyes of God—a perspective over which human beings presumably have no control. But to attain the status of full political agent is something that is bereft of clear indicators, mainly because politics happens not in a world of abstract universals but in a world of concrete particulars, in which status is bestowed through human convention. While being denied the means of expressing one's

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[13] R.G. Suny, 'Why We Hate You: The Passions of National Identity and Ethnic Violence', Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, University of California (2004) (http://repositories.cdlib.org/iseees/bps/2004_01-suny (accessed 17.4.2013), pp. 29–30.

[14] A critical observation by M. Gilbert, 'Agreements, Coercion and Obligation', *Ethics*, vol. 103 (1993), 704.

[15] A.J. Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on Rights and Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. vii.

morality does not infringe on one's independently ascertainable moral status, being denied the means of expressing one's political attributes notably undermines one's political status, as that is expressed not just in 'being' but in 'doing', whether willed or constructed and, moreover, is attained through access to groups that produce collective thoughts and acts.

Hence one may well ask whether the promising and contractual arrangements conjured up by standard versions of political obligation are typical of political thinking and political processes, for if they were so they would be remarkably powerful ways of expressing support. Tellingly, even the more critical among recent obligation theorists, such as Klosko, who record the failure of existing general theories to obligate all or most members on a single principle, have not given up their own search for a satisfactory theory.[16] But we should press further and ponder the boundary between obligation and political obligation. When is a promise a *political* promise, and is such a distinction valid? What makes an obligation political cannot be satisfactorily answered simply by stating that a political obligation is determined by its content, namely, an obligation directed at particular political institutions or laws[17]—though of course it is that too. We err in assuming that a general notion such as political obligation should mean the same thing, or cover the same ground, when used by philosophers and by political theorists. In effect, only some features of the philosophical concept of obligation are brought into play in the political sphere; only certain structural attributes are engaged; only particular substantive issues are foregrounded, while others are marginalized.[18] Its ethical imaginary identifies that sphere as a locus of good conduct or wise regulatory principles. But respect for others, an altruistic sense of community, or a non-calculating approach to obligation—desirable as they may be—are not requisites for *political* obligation.

Some philosophical work on obligation goes even further in emphasizing interpersonal obligations and duties across a society, while de-emphasizing both 'vertical' and communal obligations, and in that sense is not densely political. Much current liberal political philosophy recognizes the social nature of human relationships[19] but—unlike its liberal predecessors a century ago—does not proceed to accept the collective nature of politics and the consequent

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[16] See e.g. G. Klosko, *The Principle of Fairness and Political Obligation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), pp. 1–6 and *passim*.

[17] Gilbert, op. cit.

[18] Despite its promising title, a recent example of the idealized miscomprehension of the political nature of obligation that confirms the regrettable gap between political theorists and political philosophers on that issue is D. Mokrosińska, 'What is political about political obligation? A neglected lesson from consent theory', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 16 (2013), 88–108.

[19] P. Smith, *Liberalism and Affirmative Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 20, 22, 52–3.

requirement to explore the relationship between individual and collective, and between collective and collective. It might help to accentuate the conceptual pairing in two different ways, distinguishing between political *obligation* and *political* obligation. Political *obligation* is the most formally demanding notion in the cluster of collective support concepts that contains also loyalty, allegiance, bonding, commitment, and trust. As such it can lay claim to being the most remote from, and the rarest of, the normal thought-practices in that cluster, asserting the uniqueness of that practice in isolation from others. *Political* obligation relocates that practice in the broader communality of the witting and unwitting support-mobilization practices that constitute a fundamental feature of the political, not the philosophical. It positions it in a family of concepts that specialize in handling discursively the mutually sustaining or disruptive relationships between individual identity and group identity and, in so doing, establish the points of permeability in the boundaries between the two identities, through which mutual support is transmitted or denied.

What constitutes an act of obligation and who is obligated remain highly contested issues in the political sphere. Very few citizens undergo a public act of political obligation that contract theory hypothesizes; that is usually restricted to immigrants acquiring nationality. The institutional practices indicating political obligation are unclear, in particular whether voting in a general election is such a practice. The question whether political obligation is a one-off constitutive practice, whether it needs to be reaffirmed periodically—reflecting the frequency of systemic political changes—or whether it is merely to be withheld through civil/political disobedience is left open. The ultimate location of public responsibility—in the members of a polity or in their agent, the government—is blurred by the very notion of a mutuality of rights and duties involved in political obligation and by the consequent vagueness in parcelling out their respective domains.

3. GENERALITY, ASYMMETRY, SUPREMACY

One important difference between promising in interpersonal relations, as contrasted with political promising, pertains to the frequent private specificity of the former versus its political generality. A short-term, specific promise to meet my friend for coffee at 4 p.m. has no long-term political consequences (though my failure to turn up might have private costs!). Normally, it is determinate and time- and space-bound and it may be discharged by a single, non-repeatable, act. The promising involved in political relations is of a broad nature and can be temporally indeterminate, as long as certain conditions are not contravened. The duration of political obligation in its strongest form spans more than an individual life in the sense that it is

open-ended with respect to the continued existence of a political society. It is also typically concomitant with a social membership that for most people is not a chosen one.

A second characteristic of political obligation is to be found in its curious asymmetry. The one side of the agreement binds individuals; the other side, groups such as governments or abstract entities such as states. The asymmetry runs one way numerically, tilting in favour of the people, and another way with regard to the distribution of power, usually tilting in favour of the state and its governments, though occasionally swinging back in situations of revolution or strong resistance. A witty comment on that asymmetry is to be found in the work of the satirist Ephraim Kishon, who 'imagined a confrontation between the public and a government minister, in which "the public submits its resignation on the eighth day"'.[20] That is not the only kind of asymmetry. An imbalance also exists between the specificity or 'exactness' of decision-making and the diffuseness of much support. Locke allowed for a justifiable uprising against a political authority not upon any small breach of contract on the part of the rulers but only following an indeterminate: 'long train of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices, all tending the same way'.[21] The asymmetry is further exacerbated by the common gap between decisions and their time-lagged monitoring. If, for example, political obligation needs to be mediated through the type of reflectiveness that ensures the careful testing of a public commitment to a governmental decision, the withdrawal of obligation may come too late to make a difference: it took a while for the legitimacy claims of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to be seriously, perhaps decisively, questioned. And if support through political obligation is considered to be a crucial resource, its relative vagueness supplies sufficient indeterminate energy to governments for the latter to claim legitimacy.

A third property of political obligation connects with the question of supremacy, adding a dimension to the theme of Chapter Three. Both political obligation and allegiance may be seen as the product of the self-assumed superiority of the political through the myths that surround it as the ultimate locus of, and authority for, communal decision-making. When Creon insisted on trumping Antigone's alternative religious commitment to her gods and her ethical and emotional commitment to her slain brother, a new narrative was born. Insistence on the primacy of the political began to transform loyalties and allegiances into retrospectively conscious public obligations. No less famously, Locke argued that people are 'obliged to obedience' to the laws of a government through enjoying 'any part of the Dominion of any

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[20] Obituary of Ephraim Kishon, *Guardian*, 1 February 2005.
[21] J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, Second Treatise*, #225 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 463–4.

Government', such as taking lodgings or travelling freely on the highway.[22] Whether the purpose of such travel is to enjoy the open fields, visit a sick friend, or go shopping—whether it indicates obligations to other pursuits and goals, or to oneself—is of no consequence to the default philosophical view of political obligation. Involvement in other spheres of social activity is generally seen to succumb to arrogation by the political. From the perspective of our epistemologies, of course, that casts doubt on whether silence is consent. Hobbes already noted that 'Silence is sometimes an argument of Consent',[23] but the 'sometimes' is significant in allowing for silence to signify the lack of consent as well. It also questions the converse, whether the indicated consent is really tacit. It suggests rather that activities other than speech and writing are claimed as recognizable forms of conveying political messages. Verbal silence does not signal total silence.

That takes us beyond the usual domains of moral philosophy because it abandons the staple diet of articulated intentionality on the part of the members of a society on which philosophers feed. Moreover, when employing tacit consent arguments, the interpretative advantage is accorded to the political thinking that seeks to extend the realm of political obligation in favour of states and governments. That significantly implies that givers and recipients of support may have quite distinct interpretative frameworks and diverse understandings of the consent leading to political obligation, summoning up both the indeterminacy occasioned by essential contestability and the existence of further background claims to obedience that may under-pin the foregrounding of political obligation. As one participant in the Greenham Common protest movement wrote: '[The state] may use force on us, but it can no longer make us accept its account of itself, or of us.'[24] The conclusion must be that a single explanatory concept, be it political obligation or another term, is simply insufficient to account for thinking politically on the topic of support. A cocktail of concepts and ideas may be omnipresent in that domain, in which the moral dimension may not play a preponderant part in actual political thinking. As with all political concepts, they cannot be treated in isolation when concrete discourse and thinking is concerned. We have to quit the slightly neater and more contained world of philosophical conceptual analysis for a messier empirical reality. Conceptual interdependence and intersection create complex and unstable fields of meaning that require navigation with different methodological equipment.

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[22] Ibid., #119, p. 392.
[23] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 313.
[24] A. Seller, 'Greenham: A Concrete Reality', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 8 (1985), 30.

4. LEVELS AND DEFENCES OF (DIS)OBLIGATION

One complexity concerns the entity to which an individual is presumed to be politically obligated. There are three entities, in ascending tiers, to which individuals display forms of political commitment: a government, a political system or regime (including a constitution that underpins the system), and a nation or political community and—as we shall see below—the kinds of political obligation and commitment to each level may differ considerably.[25] Each of these elicits a particular mode of support that is central to political thinking: support for decontested decisions; support for the semantic framework in which those decisions are carried; and the emotional underpinning of group bonding and identity that is a culturally and psychologically ubiquitous feature of societies. Some argue for a fourth tier, a cosmopolitan political entity, but that is typically symbolic or abstract, even though some supranational institutions, such as the UN or the EU, have been accorded weak indeterminate obligation as well. Ethical duties rather than political obligations are more likely to be invoked when responsibilities towards members of the world community are discussed.[26] The standard right to disobey—that is, to suspend individual obligation—occurs when a government is understood to contravene the rules of the political system, to which it is as bound as are its citizens (and those resident in its territory). Hence, obligation to level 1 (a government) is tested by the standards set up for obligation to level 2 (the regime). Tellingly, political obligation is usually tested in the breach, usually as the defiance of level 1 in the name of level 2. The civil or political disobedient claims to accord the laws and the political framework greater respect than do their direct agents, the government. Disobedience hence has the educational role of reaffirming the correct reasons for tendering support. Yet the issue of commitment to a nation, level 3—a highly salient feature of societal thinking across the globe, particularly in vernacular forms and, obviously, under the aegis of nationalism—is precisely where conventional theories of political obligation break down.

There is no formal way of expressing dissent to a nation from among its members—other than refusing to speak its language, disregarding its national holidays, ceremoniously 'disrespecting' its flag, and the like; or, in the case of an ethnic or national minority or an irredentist group, manifestly rejecting the majority culture en bloc. That is even further complicated in the case of commitment to a transnational system of beliefs and practices, such as a religion with its imagined community where religious duties are frequently

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[25] These three tiers correspond roughly to Easton's distinction among support for three objects. See D. Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 116.

[26] See e.g. D. Heater, *World Citizenship* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 74–6.

translated into political obligations; or to an international organization, which offers very few tangible targets for resistance, except when state members vote.[27] Thinking politically must obviously include thinking about one's ties to one's nation or ethnic group. But there is a serious gap here. Anglo-American theories of political obligation based on voluntarism and contract are incapable of accounting for political support, or political dissent, at the level of a nation, let alone a religious community with stringent and immutable rules—though it will be noted below that recent political theory has attempted to articulate ideal types of cosmopolitan support. In contrast, we may glean from the vocabulary of national sustenance the notion of 'pledging allegiance to the nation',[28] which suggests a position suspended between obligation and commitment, between rational consent and emotional bonding, between verbalized cognition and unformulated inclinations. That looser, less forensic concept of allegiance, as shall presently be suggested, may offer an important key to comprehending the thought and language of political support more generally.

Most of the theoretical niceties attributed to different concepts pass individuals by; they cannot be thought to weigh heavily in their decisions to obey, support, or oppose. Nonetheless, we should not completely dismiss the concept of political obligation. It still appears in political rhetoric as a device that justifies obedience or dissent. Moreover, it still reflects an actually existing aspect of thinking politically, but not necessarily in the form of binding mass consent for, and endorsement of, a system of government. Volunteers and philanthropists may actually think in terms of political obligation to certain groups. But bonding rather than binding may be a more apposite account of what is in play, for political obligation does not occupy as much conceptual space as is granted to it by liberal philosophers. One tendency in recent years has been to disperse it among a population, or a citizenry, at large, as a horizontal rather than vertical relationship, in which people, or citizens, are obligated to each other, while concurrently insisting on the ineluctable moral duties that social membership entails, for example as a joint commitment.[29] While commendable as a broadening of the arena of politics, it remains an ideal-type rendering of social relationships that obscures and decentres the vaguer and more complex ways in which support for a group and its representations is thought about, and consequently bestowed or withheld.

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[27] International courts may be another exception here, but as a medium through which individuals can only indicate their lack of support for their polity or an aspect of it.

[28] T. Janoski, *Citizenship and Civil Society: A Framework of Rights and Obligations in Liberal, Traditional and Social Democratic Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 72.

[29] Gilbert, op. cit., 704; C. Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), pp. 172–8.

Another current in political obligation theory is the 'benefit received' version that grounds obligation in the recognition that individuals have obtained goods and services for which they should be grateful to the donor. Apart from the problem that it is virtually impossible not to benefit in some way from residence in a state—for example walking on a paved road, using a water supply—even in the worst regime (although the case for specific gratitudes may be outweighed by concurrent harms supplied by the regime), there is the underlying suspicion that on that understanding obligation can be purchased as a market transaction. Yet this version resonates with some well-known forms of demanding commitment, such as the common plaint of parent versus teenager in a family: 'after all I've done for you, the least you can do is tidy your room', met with the stroppy (contractarian!) response 'I didn't ask to be born!' Two interesting features of the 'benefit received' position stand out. First, obligation is initiated by an authority who then insists on a return, thus abandoning the mutual and symmetrical immediacy that is typical of 'ethical' varieties of obligation. Second, gratitude is more of a sentiment than a reflective stance and—to the extent that the family is a useful parallel—underscores the emotional ties that infuse political obligation of that kind. Undoubtedly mobilization rhetoric frequently employs gratitude as a device to ensure governmental or mayoral re-election.

5. ALTERNATIVE TERMINOLOGIES OF SUPPORT

In liberal ideology, obligations are generally thought to be self-assumed: that is the position underlying contract, consent, and promise. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, obligation is 'the action of constraining oneself by oath, promise, or contract to a particular course of action'.[30] However, the concept of duty as distinct from obligation—as conduct owing to another—does not imply solely self-assumption or some form of consent; it may be passively accepted or, frequently, imposed.[31] An edifying instance of that occurred in a speech by Tony Blair on multiculturalism and integration, in the context of growing indications of political extremism and support for terror among a small minority of British Muslims. For Blair, integration is 'about values', 'shared, common unifying British values'. The mobilization he saw was around 'belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage'. And the right to live in a multicultural society was significantly accompanied by 'a duty to integrate', a

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[30] *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 21.12.2012).
[31] Many philosophers, on the other hand, simply assume that we *have* duties qua individuals vis-à-vis other individuals, rather than regarding them as a cultural understanding or norm.

duty that has to be 'asserted'. Prior consent is not sought for that duty; it is apparently signalled by belonging to, or joining, British society. Commitment to those values and mobilization for their support are unconditional: 'we expect all our citizens to conform to [our common values]'. Finally comes the stipulative insistence directed at immigrants, those who make a conscious choice to become members of a society: 'conform to [tolerance]; or don't come here'. In this version of political obligation-cum-duty support for the values of political society is presumed to be a result of a spatial relocation rather than a public act of political support, similar to Locke's tacit spatial criteria, except that crossing a border deliberately signals an act of consent. It is further expressed and confirmed invariably and explicitly, rather than tacitly, through adopting and voicing a series of practices relating to the national tier, such as learning English, and to the constitutional tier, such as learning the rights of citizenship.[32] And it includes an implicit threat, a topic to be revisited in Chapter Eight.

In those vernacular instances the separate concepts constituting the family of support terminology are often carelessly run together, yet their decontestations are not without significance, shifting the emphasis as they do—perhaps unknowingly—away from philosophical understandings of obligation. It demonstrates yet again the relative irrelevance of the language of obligation in encapsulating thinking about support-mobilization. This can be seen in allusions to allegiance with respect to the rule of law—showing the mutation of meaning of a concept conventionally delineating personal commitment and obedience to a superior, and inextricably linked to the historical relationship between a liegeman to a liege lord, but now reattached to a principle and a set of practices. That is implied in Bernard Crick's rendering of Britishness: 'an overarching political and legal concept: it signifies allegiance to the laws, government and broad moral and political concepts—like toleration and freedom of expression—that hold the United Kingdom together'.[33]

Generally speaking, allegiance—and loyalty—imply a flow of support from individual to political object, attracted *by* a core public realm that articulates and shapes them from the perspective of whatever is deemed to populate it: formal state-entities, constitutions, rulers, policy-makers, fundamental social values. Increasingly, though, democratic assumptions have readjusted the direction of flow to one emanating *from* members of a polity *towards* the public domain, relying on notions of discretionary participation in the form of trust; or commitment—an intense and welcoming dedication to a policy, value, or ideology. By contrast, political obligation presents a third, more balanced, option of that flow, demanded by a centre and gifted by

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[32] Tony Blair, 'Our Nation's Future—Multiculturalism and Integration', 8 December 2006, http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10563.asp (accessed 10.6.2007).
[33] B. Crick, 'All this Talk of Britain is so . . . English', *Guardian*, 12 April 2004.

the periphery. The personalized dimension of allegiance does not imply mutuality;[34] and it indicates a hierarchy of inferiority and superiority between individual subject and political entity.

Duties, of course, are not only insisted on by the state or government, but proclaimed by individual members, often in opposition to governmental demands. The Greenham Common movement was such a case. It was a largely non-violent protest by women against the arms race, and against the presence of unaccountable American forces on British soil. Individual responsibility is often invoked in popular discourses of contentious politics and the web of mutual commitments it weaves becomes part of the fabric of thinking politically. In the Greenham Common movement it was tellingly directed at sub- or supra-state entities, unlike standard forms of civil disobedience that refer to upholding constitutional and national values against governments who violate them. 'The taking of responsibility by ordinary people . . . for how we behave towards each other' was both a sub- and a supra-state strand, particularly in the following context: 'We are *all* responsible for the preservation of life . . . this is a difficult idea to accept, for we are not used to defining responsibility so broadly';[35] while 'our right, indeed our responsibility, to take action to prevent genocide . . . we have a responsibility to the people of the Pacific region, to Aboriginal Australian people and to Native American people'[36] was a specific supra-state obligation. In both instances, the formal institutional loci of political decision-making are sidestepped, but not the mobilization of support for vaguer universal or spatially remote groupings. On another level, they constitute the transference to another object of the more immediate support for the protest movement itself. Of course, governments respond in kind when their understanding of obligation is employed to trump that of their opponents, as when the then Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Heseltine, avowed that 'the defence of the freedom of the free world was one of any government's most important moral obligations'.[37]

One problem with philosophical theories of obligation is that as a rule they are wedded to an overarching theory that applies equally to all. The unity of such theory arises predominantly from the emphasis on justification.

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[34] For that reason, Kersbergen's formal definition of allegiance as 'the willingness of a national public to approve of and to support the decisions made by a government, in return for a more or less immediate and straightforward reward or benefit to which the public feels entitled on the basis of its having rendered approval and support' does not distinguish between allegiance and obligation and shows no evidence of the emotional underpinning of allegiance or the lack of symmetry argued here. See K. van Kersbergen, 'Welfare State Reform and Political Allegiance', *The European Legacy*, vol. 8 (2003), 566.

[35] A. Cook and G. Kirk, *Greenham Women Everywhere: Dreams, Ideas and Actions from the Women's Peace Movement* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), pp. 28–9.

[36] B. Junor, *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp: A History of Non-Violent Resistance 1984–1995* (London: Working Press, 1995), pp. 227, 229.

[37] M. Heseltine, *Hansard*, 1 November 1983, 724.

Justification cannot be distributed both unequally and fairly. The indeterminacy and inconsistency of actual political thinking allow for no such general theory. Agency, intuition, emotion, belonging, community, solidarity all vie for position in a 'general' theory and none achieves hegemonic status. Some or none of those may account, in the self-understandings of political actors, for the imparting of support; and some or none of those may serve theorists to analyse modes of thinking about group support. Dagger, for example, helpfully distinguishes between obligation and identification.[38] The fuel required for a political system to operate successfully may, albeit, be more efficiently extracted from identification, and be more widespread, than from obligation. Take for instance the self-identification of women as radical protesters at Greenham Common, where the slogan 'embrace the base'—referring to a mass encirclement of the base in 1982 by some 30,000 women holding hands—'could only have come from women's experience' and was described as 'creating a supportive structure of and from ourselves within which our feelings could be expressed'.[39] Containment through boundary formation, solidarity, and support all have their place in this symbolic unspoken practice in which bodies, not mouths, speak, and in its subsequent written restatement.

Of course, even within the family of consent terminology there are subtle and less subtle variations. Consent is simply a very strong intentional form of indicating verbal support. So is agreement, inasmuch as it signifies a thought-practice of accepting a position or view, or inasmuch as it signifies an accord between more than one party, though it can more loosely indicate concurrence as a less demonstrative convergence with the views of another than that required by consent theorists. Acquiescence is lower down that scale of intensity, referring to 'passive assent to, or compliance with, proposals or measures,'[40] yet it is a prevalent form of non-objection to the activities of a government or the rules of a state and may arguably be the main form of 'consent'—both verbal and silent—in a polity. But then again, there are countless occasions when silence masks a tacit dissent, sullen or fatalistic.

All this leads to the categorization of political support in relation to the rational or the emotional. Even with respect to political obligation, considered in most of the literature to be a characteristic of rational agency, the systemic insistence on ranking such obligation as one of the highest requirements of a citizen's political life may itself be attended by clear emotional undercurrents in its expression. That itself is a major shift away from exclusively ethical perspectives, as individuals may *feel* under a political obligation without meeting philosophical criteria for *being* obligated. In other words, absent

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[38] R. Dagger, 'Membership, Fair Play, and Political Obligation', *Political Studies*, vol. 48 (2000), 109.

[39] A. Nicolson, 'Greenham Common', *Performance Magazine*, 22 (1982), 36.

[40] *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 21.12.2012).

consent, promising, contract and self-assumed duties, individuals may still feel committed to a political entity. An awareness of such a feeling is part of the processes of thinking politically, perhaps a vital constituent of group membership, and its philosophical justification is immaterial in an analysis of the actual thought-patterns and discourses of mobilization.

6. COMMITMENT AND LOYALTY

The term 'commitment', already alluded to above, warrants further consideration. If we return to the question of obligation versus commitment to a nation, people evidently may—and do—feel commitment to the success and flourishing of their nation or community, but that attitude—and emotion— does not relate to consent theory. Sentiments do not generate obligation directly; they generate loyalty, allegiance, and bonding which may then be a fertile ground for subsequent obligation on the basis of benefits received or anticipated.[41] More generally, the notion of political commitment denotes an intense and persistent adherence to supportive thought and action based on rational, moral, or emotional grounds.[42] As one of the Greenham Common women expressed it, 'because of this commitment, I find myself struggling to replace those capacities for reason and judgment that I was trained to rely upon solely'.[43] Such statements are problematic for those political theorists used to a conventional toolkit of conceptual analysis. Indeed, the political role of commitment is largely contained in that emotional intensity that persistently flies below the radar of analytic political philosophy. It contains variable combinations of passion and of intellectual self-persuasion and political vision that create the relative consistency and immovability vital both to political support and to political stability—as will be seen in Chapter Six—while the outward forms of that intensity are manifestations of power—as will be seen in Chapter Eight. In a state of commitment, belief in alternative ends, visions, or goals is suspended, even though they could be rational, ethically sound, or emotionally satisfying as well. That form of decontestation, through ignoring other meanings and interpretations, is a (usually unconscious) attempt to

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[41] In the case of many religions that obligation is either extra-human—to a deity—or to the main functionaries of that religion.

[42] See e.g. Howard S. Becker, 'Notes on the Concept of Commitment', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 66 (1960), 33; D. Easton, 'A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5 (1975), 451–2; C. Hall, '"Passions and Constraint": The Marginalization of Passion in Liberal Political Theory', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 28 (2002), 736.

[43] Seller, op. cit., 31.

forestall deadlock when more than one goal might be reasonable, justifiable, or attractive.

Loyalty is a specific form of commitment. Loyalty becomes political when the particular object to which it is directed is a collective group and its symbols, and is central to the identity or the functioning of that group and its institutions. The fact that such political loyalty has a non-universal focus is distinct from its general status as a ubiquitous form of thinking and feeling about politics common to all cultures. As Jollimore asserts, 'the loyal person cannot be loyal to everyone. That is incoherent.'[44] Shklar offered a distinction between commitment and loyalty, relating the former to voluntarism and intent and defining the latter as 'deeply affective and not primarily rational'.[45] That view on commitment does not necessarily follow either scholarly argumentation or reflect actual political discourse. Commitment has strong emotional underpinning and in vernacular discourse usually operates as a corrective to a more abstract rationalism. Loyalty, however, as Shklar appreciated, may be the result of a choice, but in that case one cannot assume it to be deeply affective alone—it will possess a rational intent, and be the object of powerful persuasion. In the USA Loyalty Day is an official rival to Labour Day on 1 May. On Loyalty Day 2007, for example, President Bush proclaimed that 'all citizens can express their loyalty to the United States by flying the flag, participating in our democracy, and learning more about our country's grand story of courage and simple dream of dignity'.[46] In the UK, the phrase 'Her Majesty's loyal opposition' is presumed to express responsibility within constitutional constraints and fidelity to the crown—that is, to the rules of the political game and the dignity of its institutions—even amidst dissent. Loyalty can be felt but it can also be taken up and asserted consciously.

The exploration of the terms of citizenship elicited by the challenge of integrating immigrants in the UK merits more detailed discussion as a case study of mobilizing political support. The inculcation of citizenship with a positive mobilizing content has become an important aspect of recent political thinking and in this case the combination of allegiance and loyalty is instructive. Under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, a citizenship pledge was added to the UK oath of allegiance. The initial 'I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second'—still couched in traditional terms of a narrow tie to a personal sovereign *and* plainly intentional and 'rational'—was supplemented by: 'I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its

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[44] T. Jollimore, *On Loyalty* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. xiv.
[45] Shklar, op. cit., 184.
[46] G.W. Bush, Loyalty Day, 2007: A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070430-3.html (accessed 16.4.2009).

democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen'.[47] The Act was followed by a detailed report entitled *The New and the Old: The Report of the 'Life in the United Kingdom' Advisory Group,* chaired by Bernard Crick. It focused on 'creating a greater sense of mutual respect, support and belonging', which it interpreted as a 'civic duty'.[48] The notion of a more active participation in society was not directly channelled to dedicated political institutions, but centred rather on some aspects of a common heritage and the symbolic affirmation of pride in the nation. As the report stated, '"United Kingdom" in the context of "democratic values" must mean not only a corporate symbol, still less just a geographical entity, but above all else the collective will, interests, and values of all its individual citizens'.[49] Hence the objects of loyalty have become far broader than the related, older, use of allegiance. In particular, a double decontestation of citizenship was enlisted, 'as nationality as defined by law, and as participation in public life', so that 'new citizens should be equipped to be active citizens'. That chimed in with the ongoing transformation of citizenship from merely a legal status to a social role with expectations of a specified behavioural contribution that is summed up as a 'civic obligation'—an extension of political obligation—but it lacked the corresponding enlargement of rights that was the story of welfare thinking throughout the twentieth century.

This discourse may be further appreciated against the backdrop of the 'no rights without responsibilities' doctrine ushered in by New Labour, among others under the influence of Amitai Etzioni.[50] In that version, while rights must be respected, they have an unfortunate confrontational and egoistic aspect that can undermine communitarian values, and must therefore be 'purchased' through socially responsible conduct. Rights are thus conditional upon individual provision of support for communal values,[51] and their unique status as ranking devices par excellence, discussed in the previous chapter, is eroded. Instead, the requirements of national citizenship become a partial substitute for rights in this contrived redistribution of significance. For the authors of the report, the particular skills that citizens were to acquire were supportive both in terms of mobilizing for integration—beefing up a sense of community—and as a series of obligations to act as citizens: that is to say, to learn English and to 'fair play' (an obligation to tier three, the nation and its

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[47] Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, 2002, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/41/schedule/1 (accessed 17.4.2013).

[48] *The New and the Old: The Report of the 'Life in the United Kingdom' Advisory Group* (London: Home Office Communication Directorate, 2003), pp. 3, 4.

[49] Ibid., p. 30.

[50] See A. Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (London: HarperCollins, 1995).

[51] For a further discussion, see M. Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 190–203.

customs), and to adopt values such as tolerance, respect for free speech and human rights (an obligation to tier two, the constitutional system).[52] Significantly, what comprises being British remains consciously a broad and indeterminate category: 'We neither need to define "Britishness" too precisely, nor to redefine',[53] acknowledging the tactical advantages of conceptual imprecision.

The report also appears to recognize the difference between vertical and horizontal support. Allegiance is cast yet again as asymmetric, as downward mobilization, creating a mutual but hierarchical relationship of supplication for paternalistic services: 'We give our allegiance to the state (as commonly symbolised by the Crown) in return for its protection.'[54] But mechanisms for supporting new immigrants voluntarily within the confines of civil society are also mooted. Moreover, the report quotes from a document on 'Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market' of the Cabinet Office referring to citizenship as 'a process of inclusion in, and the acceptance of, the key institutions of modern society such as the welfare state and the political system'.[55] Explicit consent, tellingly, is evaded and thought unnecessary. Indeed, the almost total silence on the allegiance and loyalty of native non-immigrants[56] is itself a strong indication of the tacit assumption of the existence of sufficient bonding or acquiescence to render superfluous the mobilization of the great majority of the population to the nation or the political regime. There is every reason to suppose that these forms of thinking politically about support are far more common than those employed by consent and obligation theorists. Finally, debate often ranges against a backdrop of competing national loyalties,[57] epitomized by the notorious 1990 'cricket test' mooted by the former UK Conservative government minister, Norman Tebbit: 'A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? . . . Are you still harking back to where you come from or where you are?'.[58] From a wider perspective of comparative political thought, the corresponding endeavours to bridge commitments to particular cultures through forging some supra-parochial commonalities are bound to flounder in a new (liberal-democratic) particularism and pluralism, however ethically attractive that may seem.

The manufacturing of loyalty through Acts of Parliament and declarations is more problematic than that of allegiance. Loyalty is converted into something that needs to be obtained, proclaimed, ritually rendered, not just tendered. Can loyalty be imposed through a compulsory ceremony? Are governments deluding themselves in seeking to transform personal feeling

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[52] *The New and the Old*, op. cit., pp. 9–10.
[53] Ibid., p. 11.   [54] Ibid.   [55] Ibid., p. 25.
[56] The exception is one sentence in ibid., p. 71.   [57] Ibid., p. 53.
[58] Quoted in D. Howe, 'Tebbit's Loyalty Test is Dead', *New Statesman*, 3 July 2006.

into political commitment, when loyalties are more usually interpersonal than institutional, close than distant? When governments and states work so hard to extract loyalty from their members, the concept of loyalty undergoes transformation. Groups, nonetheless, can elicit loyalty, and nations have been one of the prime objects of that kind of affection, even more than of allegiance, just as they completely fail the tests of political obligation. The problem, therefore, is that in a world of competing loyalties *within* a society, one claimant to loyalty rises up and attempts to trump the others. The state has the ammunition for that, but it lacks the immediacy and authenticity at the heart of loyalty. It is easier to evoke loyalty for a nation than for a state, and governments know that, though it can also be far more dangerous. But when loyalties compete, intractable zero-sum ranking problems are in the offing. The manifold types of support may be withheld from one political entity just as they are granted to another: political actors and their discourses will be located in more than one political grouping simultaneously, each of which is demanding support.

What may be more typical of loyalty than its mere affectiveness are its association with unwavering commitment, based on reasons rooted in past time but transcending and obscuring time limits, and the absence of terms under which it may be justifiably breached. For that reason, the language of the UK pledge and the American celebration of Loyalty Day is addressed not only to a state but to an implicitly non-negotiable political culture, the property of a society or a nation. Barbalet sees loyalty as 'the emotion of confidence in organization'.[59] For analysts of political thinking that is only part of the story. The notion of organization requires a looser and more fluid interpretation when entities such as a nation are invoked, often simply through naming the country ('Deutschland über alles' in the German national anthem is a plea for parochial loyalty and pride, not necessarily of superiority), and when the deliberate eliciting of loyalty is part of the verbal mobilization of political support. Unlike allegiance, loyalty emerges from empathy; like allegiance but unlike political obligation, loyalty carries no intimation of symmetry in the status of the parties to the obligation 'contract': the polity and its members. And unlike the assertive implications of confidence, loyalty hints at subservience or at least inequality. On the part of power wielders such drawing out of supportive emotion, whether through allegiance or through loyalty, is a rational act, even though they too may concurrently be under the sway of emotion.

The rational evocation of sentiment—this time that of the demos, not the rulers—is captured in the Habermasian idea of 'constitutional patriotism', a notion intended to deflect emotional commitment from ethnic or national

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[59] J.M. Barbalet, 'Social Emotions: Confidence, Trust and Loyalty', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 16 (1996), 80.

groupings—that primarily appeal to potentially unstable and passionate compounds of belonging and loyalty—towards abstract democratic procedures and values, thus producing systemic political allegiance based on the rational construction of an alternative and ostensibly durable emotional identity.[60] That was tellingly voiced in President Obama's Loyalty Day address in 2011 when, in contrast to President Bush, he referred to the core constitutional values 'of liberty, equality, and justice for all' as principles that elicited 'loyalty and fidelity', adding to Bush's exhortation to display the flag also the request to pledge 'allegiance to the Republic for which it stands'.[61] Similarly, Mouffe observes that 'to recover citizenship as a strong form of political identification presupposes our allegiance to the political principles of modern democracy and the commitment to defend its key institutions.'[62] That said, patriotism is more generally the effective concept redescribing loyalty in the normal political language of nationalism, and it is usually presented as a virtue of individual conduct, as well as a necessity of the proper functioning of a 'people' or 'country'—terms that constitute further imprecise (but rhetorically powerful) renderings of the body politic. From that perspective of durability, when loyalties are switched, no matter for what reason, an act of betrayal has taken place.

The language of citizenship undoubtedly serves as a vehicle through which support discourse may be moulded. But for some thinkers this opens out to an idea of cosmopolitanism to which commitment should obtain—expanding on Kant's vision of world citizenship. As Beck puts it: 'What loses any legitimacy is the fundamentally dubious assumption that such [moral] responsibilities are absolute within a border, while their absence is equally absolute outside this border.' While the language of support remains here a major feature of the political, the absence of boundaries in which to locate that moral commitment suggests that another feature of the political—the insistence on an overriding sovereign collective identity, discussed in Chapter Three—appears in a new and atypical form, while a third feature—the construction of political visions—is designed to fashion a 'methodological cosmopolitanism [that] is about the present implications of a globally shared future'.[63] As an ideology, Beck astutely observes, globalism 'does not motivate and mobilize the masses'; instead he calls for a blend of promoting cosmopolitan transnational interests while harnessing the energies of national politics.[64] Scholars have become

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[60] J. Habermas, 'Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe', *Praxis International*, vol. 12 (1992), 1–19.

[61] Obama, B., Presidential Proclamation, Loyalty Day, 2011, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/29/presidential-proclamation=loyalty-day (accessed 20.12.2012).

[62] C. Mouffe (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 11.

[63] U. Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, 1–2 (2002), 20, 27.

[64] Ibid., 40–2.

acutely aware of 'the limitations of the language of national citizenship as a framework for global politics'. For Turner this means that 'if we are to have global rights and global citizenship, we need to evolve a language of obligation and virtue', and he refers to Richard Rorty in advocating the mixing of the tolerance of others with uncertainty about the ultimate authority of one's own culture.[65] All this refreshes the idea of horizontal obligation, though an orientation towards others grounded on obligation alone may once again be insufficient to do the trick, and the identification of humanity as a political community is usually broken down into particular groups of (oppressed or victimized) strangers for whom one wishes to register support.

7. SUPPORT AS TRUST

In a seminal article on political support, David Easton examined the attitudes behind overt manifestations of support. He distinguished between specific and diffuse support. The former is directed towards the political authorities and assumes that members have political awareness and that they hold the authorities responsible for their actions and performance. The latter refers to 'an evaluation of what an object is or represents'. That opens the way to considering support in terms of 'bonds of attachment'—as a sentiment containing both rational and non-rational components. But it also raises the significant question of the diverse sentiments attached to different forms of that diffuse support. Thus Easton suggested that when diffuse support is directed at political authorities it assumes the form of trust or confidence, whereas when it is directed at the political community it relates to 'a sense of we-feeling, common consciousness or group identification.'[66] And of course trust reflects a rational evaluation of actions in the light of certain standards that have been met in the past, but it also reflects feelings of comfort in the surrender of self to others, in 'an affective or emotional acceptance of dependence on others'.[67] In the political sphere, trust cannot be entirely run together with confidence, much as the two overlap. It differs from the latter in that it entails the truster's gift of (conditional) self-retreat from the public arena, leaving political activity to the object of trust, and not merely the certitude that someone in a position of power will do well by one. Here then is yet another twist to the finality theme of the political: the assumption that the need for participation is at some level eliminated, being replaced with the reliability of

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[65] B.S. Turner, 'Cosmopolitan Virtue, Globalization and Patriotism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, 1–2 (2002), 50, 57.

[66] Easton, 'A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support', op. cit., 444–5, 447.

[67] Barbalet, op. cit., 78.

another, indeed of strangers. The locus of decision-making, rather than the contents of decisions—mimicking the notion of the superior sovereign—is removed from contest.

Hardin identifies two main aspects of trust: expectations about the competence of the trust recipient, and an assumption that the trust recipient has the right motivation to perform in the interests of the truster.[68] Philosophical treatments of trust often emphasize its cognitive aspect, as does Hardin, namely, that it follows on a prudential assessment of trustworthiness and constitutes knowledge based on evidence. Hence Hardin is reluctant to investigate the emotional side of trust.[69] That approach raises a number of questions. The exemplar of individual trust directed at other individuals is often modelled on love and friendship and typified by its unconditionality, or at least long-term duration. It is also predicated on some version of direct, possibly even deliberative, democracy based on 'public testability'.[70] When transferred to the sphere of trusting distant individuals or institutions, some modifications are necessary, especially in relation to unconditionality. For like political obligation, but unlike allegiance and loyalty, trust appears to be chiefly conditional in collective relationships. The unconditional friendship dimension of trust, however, need not be abandoned entirely when the emotional aspect of trust is taken seriously, and when certain ideological representations of leadership, with their implicit paternalism, are factored in. Hardin criticizes contemporary discussions of declining trust in government for frequently suggesting 'that all of the moral censure that we might apply to failures of trust and trustworthiness between close friends come to bear on the relations between citizens and their government'.[71] Their expectations of government are consequently too high. But that is not entirely borne out by the actual language of trust wielders and withholders.

Trusting is a state of mind, and political trusting, or distrusting, are regularly to be found in speech and writing. Assessing trust in a collective setting is not just a question of knowledge, but may be based on a mixture of knowledge and beliefs, channelled through loyalty to, or immersion in, ideological containers that shape expectations in different ways. Liberal ideology may insist on institutional distrust in the form of transparency and accountability, but it may equally be inspired by notions of human harmony and decency that can be projected onto a political leader who makes the right noises and displays reassuring body language, as well as by fundamental trust in the benefits of a constitutional regime. Socialists may be torn between a

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[68] R. Hardin, *Trust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 36.
[69] Ibid., pp. 25, 27, 38.
[70] See J. Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 169.
[71] Ibid., p. 41.

deep distrust of capitalism and its political arrangements that infects their perception of current political institutions, and between an idealized view of human nature that—shorn of its alienating and dehumanizing environments—will eventually emerge as entirely trustworthy. Other ideologies, such as varieties of conservatism, will place distrust at the centre of their constructs, arising from theories of flawed human existence, or human imperfection. Trust will also be partially fuelled by emotional impulsiveness, evident specifically in the discourses that emerge when trust is breached. The breach of trust is met with a feeling of moral let-down and disappointment, a let-down that differs little from the ones experienced in interpersonal relationships. It indicates, moreover, that trust itself also involves the bestowing of extensive emotional and moral 'capital' onto the trusted object; indeed, that any cognitive risk potentially involved in the bestowing of trust is annihilated by an emotional leap of faith based on beliefs, even myths. Trust in the US and UK government positions with regard to the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in 2003 was not based on any knowledge held by the respective electorates but on the belief (not shared by all, obviously) that governments would not lie on such a crucial matter, and on a parallel belief that expertise, proper channels of assessment, and accountability were part and parcel of a democratic constitutional set-up.

The vernacular language of trust was particularly evident during the premiership of Tony Blair. Blair set out to 'win the trust of the British people' by 'chang[ing] the tide of ideas'.[72] By 2004 he was declaring that such trust had been earned: 'When people talk of trust, I say this: I know manifestos rarely make best sellers. But any party activist who wants an answer to the question about trust—go and read what we said we would do in 1997 and 2001.'[73] At the same time, the concept of trust was proving counterproductive, leading Blair on another occasion to deny that the divisions over Iraq were 'over issues of trust or integrity . . . the real issue . . . is not a matter of trust but of judgement'.[74] In the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq the issue of trust loomed large in the public eye. Opponents of New Labour were particularly scathing: 'The fact that voters trust politicians less than they did in 1997—something unthinkable 10 years ago—is indicative of New Labour's fall from grace as it became undermined by a succession of sleaze scandals, the corrosive effect of Mr Blair's power struggle with Gordon Brown and, most profoundly, the Iraq crisis.' The effect of that loss of trust was leaving Blair's successor 'facing a daunting task to restore not just the Labour Party's credibility, but the

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[72] T. Blair, *New Labour: My Vision of a Young Country* (London, Fourth Estate, 1996), p. 3.
[73] T. Blair, 28.9.2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/ (accessed 16.4.2009).
[74] T. Blair, speech in Sedgefield, 5.3.2004. Guardian Unlimited, http://politics.guardian.co.uk/iraq/story/0,12956,1162991,00.html (accessed 16.4.2009).

credibility of the entire political establishment'.[75] Notably, in his leadership acceptance speech a few days later Gordon Brown pledged to strive to 'earn your trust not just in foreign policy but earn your trust in our schools and our hospitals and our public services, and to respond to your concerns'.[76]

The above language is revealing. Trust, or distrust, is distributed among different political entities: the personalized leader, the party or parties in power (i.e. the particular government) and, strikingly, the world of government in general. And concepts such as integrity and credibility serve as additional criteria for eliciting political support, while reference to judgement shifts support to expectations of rational assessment of policies by the public's leaders. As a concept straddling rational cognition and emotion, trust is peculiarly related to the other support concepts. It is always appealed to as a resource that decision-makers and power wielders would like to possess. It is also strongly located in an ethical dimension of assessment: a breach of trust is one of the most ignoble things that one side can do to another, conceptually distinct through its unspoken emotional contractarianism from the non-contractual betrayal associated with loyalty. Distrust, on the other hand, may be a sanction for the failure to meet certain expectations, but it is also a manifestly desirable feature in a polity that requires the constant monitoring of its agents.[77] It is easy to see how distrust could be conceptualized as a public virtue: the importance of scrutinizing public authorities is an indicator of civic responsibility. Hence democracies operate in peculiar fashion on a mixture of trust and distrust, a rhythm that entails the abandonment by the public of participation in central decision-making—because of the supposed trust-worthiness of the rulers—and its sporadic reclaiming when rulers default. In the terms of recent liberal philosophy, trust appears to be a relinquishment of the sacred cow of autonomy in favour of an assumedly beneficial heteronomy in which others are permitted to act on one's behalf; but that bestowing of political trust is nonetheless always accompanied by distrust and the periodic exercise of control over the trust recipients, through which the trust-givers continue to exercise truncated autonomy. As Hardin rightly notes, liberal theory originated with a theory of distrust of government.[78] Concurrently, a positive sense of trust looms large in Locke's politico-legal vocabulary.[79] In terms of mobilizing support, trust is a background attitude and sentiment in which consent is non-specific. Significantly, trust precedes its honouring; it is an investment in the discharge of practices expected from those in power, with

[75] 'Tony Blair's Betrayal of the People's Trust', *Yorkshire Post*, 10 May 2007.

[76] G. Brown, 17 May 2007 http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/may/17/labourleader-ship.labour2 (accessed 21.12.2012).

[77] See e.g. P. Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[78] Hardin, op. cit., p. 15.

[79] Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, Second Treatise*, op. cit., #156, p. 417.

risks attached and with its own kind of time-lag that is cashed out first and foremost in moral and psychological disapproval rather than in civil resistance.

8. THE MORPHOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY OF SUPPORT: PROFESSIONAL AND VERNACULAR PERSPECTIVES

The inability to disentangle the rational and emotional components of the family of support concepts with any measure of precision demonstrates the methodological difficulties in assigning those concepts solely either to analytic philosophy or to psychological or cultural studies. Because they are above all political concepts, political theory requires a more holistic methodology that reaffirms the vagueness of conceptual boundaries as well as locating the rational and emotional not as contrasts, not even as parallel phenomena, but as intersecting and continuously mutually informing. Not all these distinctions become more intelligible by applying 'reason' or 'emotion' as a means to their categorization. Ultimately, the linguistic flow of support comes in varied forms, each of which sustains different aspects of a political entity. One can find loyalty without unconditional consent, political obligation without allegiance, commitment without loyalty, trust without political obligation. Equally, one can find civil disobedience without disloyalty, contestation without disobligation, resistance with commitment to smaller political entities. The latter could centre around claims of the marginalized through contentious politics and its social movements, emphasizing the support required by, and respect due from, states for the justifiable dissidence of their members, not only *from* those members *for* their states. Thus Martin Luther King, alluding to the mutuality of political obligations: 'Ultimately, a great nation is a compassionate nation. America has not met its obligations and its responsibilities to the poor.'[80]

Within that holistic framework, the relative positioning of the key terms of support may make a difference. The conceptual morphology of mobilizing, offering, or withholding support proffers interesting insights on possible combinations and relates them in turn to the preconditions for conferring the accolade of 'legitimate' on a political institution or its activities. Simmons's peculiar assertion that 'all actual states are illegitimate', emerges from the constricted vantage point of a purist philosopher's view of political obligation,[81] and it merits comparison with a starkly different, and misconceivedly

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[80] Quoted in M. King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King: The Power of Non-Violent Action* (Unesco Publishing: Paris, 1999), p. 523.
[81] Simmons, op. cit., p. x.

truncated, assertion by Easton: 'Legitimacy is a kind of supportive senti-ment.'[82] The field is far more intricate than either of these views implies. Weber's famous analysis made a move in another direction by drawing out the distinction between person and office.[83] Thus a conceptual pattern that accords democratic participation a major role may attach *allegiance* to an office, and political *obligation* to the constitutional set-up in which that office is valid and acceptable, even desirable. Pushing this further, it may also involve *loyalty* to a leader, and *commitment* to an ideology. We may wish to explore whether loyalty in such a case is more peripheral to the conceptual architec-ture than the other concepts, and further, whether systemic obligation and ideological commitment are the top ranking support goods such a conceptual pattern will seek to invoke. Hence disobligation and civil disobedience, as well as the fragility or mutability of ideological support for a given set of values, may generate the two main forms of conceptual rearrangement when support is queried, withheld, or recommitted. That process may mushroom into delegitimization or relegitimization.

The general term 'support' is far more common in everyday discourse than some of its conceptual sub-terms discussed in this chapter. In accounts of the Greenham common protest movement, 'support' figures strongly in narratives of the participants, ranging from the narrow ('my role was in supporting other women'[84]) to a more inclusive emotional cohesiveness, even an 'emotional inspiration'[85] ('We are bouncing up and down on the same spot . . . everyone flushed and laughing . . . giving us a sense of solidarity'[86]) to the description of a general ideological commitment ('This is where the women's peace move-ment is at, and you've all got to rush and support us'[87]). It is not surprising that the term 'allegiance' is lacking in a discourse that challenges hierarchy and male dominance and often overlaps with anarchist positions. Allegiance, as noted above, maps out a one-way relationship with a political authority or superior entity and is understandably absent from the conceptual morphology of a loosely organized, egalitarian, and quasi-spontaneous protest movement. Loyalty, too, is not a commonly used word and is supplanted by frequent allusions to commitment directed either at abstract ideas such as non-violence or to concrete group goals: 'Not taking stands in order to appear non-judgemental is not non-violent, it is a clear dereliction of responsibility, as is rhetoric

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[82] Easton, 'A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support', op. cit., 451.

[83] M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds), vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 957.

[84] Quoted in S. Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham* (London: Casswell, 2000), p. 127.

[85] Jasper, op. cit., 416.

[86] L. Day, 'The Greenham Common Contest: A Participant Observer's Account', *Rain*, No. 62 (1984), 4.

[87] J. Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham* (Virago Press: London, 1989), p. 235.

without practical commitment . . . we work non-violently in faith because we know it works . . . non-violence is a spiritual energy . . . it is a precious resource and has an infinite life'.[88] Or: 'During the March action we made a public commitment to non-violence'.[89] And specifically: '[action involving resistance is] actually a daily commitment and it reflects one way of seeing the world which is not negotiable'.[90] The latter comment links the topic of this chapter with the themes of ranking and of power, as the intensity (a power feature) of commitment to the granting of support serves concurrently as a ranking device for the non-tradable values to which that commitment is attached.

There is one final and highly significant aspect of the Greenham Common movement, relating to the supplementation of speech and text through alternative languages. Sometimes the issue is that of finding a new vocabulary, in itself a significant characteristic of thinking politically. During 2012, Russian protest movements had, in the words of one commentator, to find 'a political language that wasn't already occupied by the Kremlin. The language of 1989 wouldn't do: "democracy", "open society" and even "human rights" are all damaged goods in Russia.'[91] But the Greenham Common women went a step further. At one point, some of the camp members became exasperated by the lack of response to, or comprehension of, their points of view when they attempted to explain their principles and actions to the guards inside the perimeter fence. They decided instead to keen. As two of them wrote: 'Keening is something done traditionally by women and is now confined to mourning. It's a means of expression without words, without having to get tied up in various arguments, facts and figures, whys and wherefores. You can just show how you feel . . . had we just gone there and stood outside with a banner we could easily have been ignored, but by using sound we could actually penetrate the building. We didn't want to just shout slogans. Politicians are hardened to this sort of thing.'[92] Verbalization was replaced by vocalization. It highlighted the impossibility of communication in standard political argument, invoked feeling rather than reason, symbolized the tragedy of mass destruction armaments, inflicted raucous cacophony on its targets, and deliberately alighted on a practice no longer undertaken in British funeral rites. Whereas Rancière refers to the excess of words, many of which are useless or meaningless in their

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[88] Junor, op. cit., p. 72, quoting Sarah Hipperson.

[89] B. Harford and S. Hopkins (eds), *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: Women's Press, 1984), p. 36.

[90] Quoted in N. Couldry, 'Disrupting the Media Frame at Greenham Common: A New Chapter in the History of Mediations?', *Media, Culture & Society,* vol. 21 (1999), p. 350.

[91] P. Pomerantsev, '2012: The Year the Kremlin Lost Control of the Script', *Open Democracy*, http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/peter-pomerantsev/2012-year-kremlin-lost-control-of-script (accessed 29.12.2012).

[92] Cook and Kirk, op. cit., p. 65.

failure to enunciate what is just,[93] this is rather a case of a surplus *beyond* words.

9. CEREMONIAL PERFORMATIVITY AS A LANGUAGE OF SUPPORT

The Wootton Bassett phenomenon, despite the tragic circumstances in which it took place, was a challenging and complex set of political practices that concealed far more than it revealed. This small market town stands on the only route between RAF Lyneham and the Oxford hospital 50 miles away where all the autopsies on the soldiers who die in Afghanistan are carried out. Between 2007 and 2012 thousands of townspeople and visitors turned out to line the streets each time the cortege passed through town. This is a story about ritual and about reacting to a particular category of the dead—the war dead. But it is about many other things as well, among others the denial of politics and ideology despite the fact that they suffuse the occasions. It also serves as a further example of silent political thinking side-by-side with its verbal expression, both of which contain important political and ideological messages. As the cortege approaches, 'a ripple of silence flows up the High Street . . . People stand still . . . the . . . profound silence is eerie.'[94] The contrast between the horizontal flow of the moving dead—moving slowly up the street and moving the hearts of the onlookers—and the vertical immobility of the living is a powerful political statement pertaining to many social imaginaries: pride in the calling of those who have tragically discharged a public duty; empathy for those who suffer when a state has to betray the obligation to protect all its members in the name of protecting the rest; allegiance to the perceived fundamentals of British society, including the co-option of royalty to enhance the status of the repatriations ('It is an honour to have the royals in town' after a visit by the Prince of Wales); and dignity as an expression of what seems to be best about the British public spirit, through the deliberate public management and channelling of both individual and group emotion.

At one level this was a grassroots expression of support for the families of the dead and for the military in general. But it raises important questions about the nature of the political. In the eyes of the local population, the

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[93] J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* and the analysis by D. Panagia, 'Ceci n'est pas un argument: An Introduction to the Ten Theses', *Theory and Event* vol. 5, 3 (2001).

[94] S. Bucknell, 'Speech by Mayor of Wootton Bassett', This is Gloucestershire, http://www.Thisisgloucestershire.co.uk/gloucestershierheadlines/Speech-Mayor-Wootton-Bassett/article-1404019-detail/article.html (accessed 31.1.2010).

send-off of the dead soldiers was a spontaneous act, a local practice that 'started purely by chance'. But it quickly became 'the newest of British traditions', carefully planned and choreographed from the moment the transport plane flew over the town, each time at 11a.m. 'It's not a ceremony, don't call it that' claimed the treasurer of the Royal British Legion, the main orchestrating charity behind the scenes.[95] Yes that is exactly what it had become. In the process the boundaries of the practice expanded and contracted in parallel. On the one hand, many townspeople preferred to see this as a local affair and resented the media intrusion: 'It's the people of the town, no more or less than that'. Yet in its privatized, monopolized, and localized rituals, Wootton Bassett removed national mourning from the public sphere by substituting itself for the public domain: 'We are proud that in a way we stand proxy for the grief of a nation'.[96] The political periphery challenged the dominance, and perceived incompetence, of the national centre of government.

All that is remarkable, given the conception of the political that pervades local discourse. 'Our repatriation ceremonies . . . are absolutely apolitical', asserted James Gray, the local MP, in a letter to the *Guardian*.[97] That flew against all the evidence, and it provokes yet again the underlying question this book addresses: 'what makes practices and thought-practices political?' Two things were considered political by the participants: the muscling in by the national political establishment and its political parties on the local and sacralized space of the repatriation; and the additional silence that disabled any local public utterance with regards to the rights and wrongs of the war in Afghanistan. Yet in response to the declared intention of an ultra-radical Islamic group to hold a counter-procession in Wootton Bassett with 500 empty coffins symbolizing the Muslim dead in the war (cancelled after widespread *national* dismay), Gray announced that local people 'would not be drawn into conflict with the group' at the very moment the contrary was happening. Thus one reaction to the proposed Muslim march spelt out the national identity contained in the Wootton Bassett ceremonies as follows: 'We are a Christian country . . . who honour very much our Queen and country. We obey the law and pay respects to our servicemen who protect our freedom'.[98] The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who until then had kept a low

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[95] Anne Bevis, quoted in 'Silent Lament for Fallen Soldiers', 4 March 2009, http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/wdp/news/Silent-lament-fallen-heroes/article-744189-detail/article.html (accessed 31.1.2010).

[96] Steve Bucknell (the Mayor), James Gray (Local MP for North Wiltshire), and Maurice Baker (president of the local branch of the Royal British Legion). Letter to the Editor, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jul/18/wootton-bassett-journalists-afghanistan (accessed 4.2.2010).

[97] *Guardian*, 4.1.2010.

[98] S. Morris and R. Butt, 'Brown Condemns "Abhorrent" Islamicist Wootton Bassett Protest Plan', *Guardian*, 4.1.2010.

profile when confronted with the establishment-hostile populism of Wootton Bassett and its admirers, was driven to condemn that march as 'abhorrent and offensive'. The imagery of politics is also revealing: 'the town is finding it increasingly difficult to keep politics at bay'[99] referred to a visit by the leader of the extreme right British National Party; and 'politics, inevitably, does creep in'[100] contrasted the dignity of the march with a slithering snakelike metaphor of the insidious political sphere.

In sum, the complex languages of politics need unpacking through concrete multi-layered events such as the above, which are only partly verbal and which illuminate thought-practices concerning the political in general and its separate features in particular. The vernacular, in this case, is replete with instances of thinking politically. For the purposes of this chapter what stand out are the mobilizing of local and extra-local support for core public institutions and events, and the affirmation of the importance of public performances of loyalty. But, casting a wider net, the Wootton Bassett ceremonies were also an example of collective organizing, decision-making and planning; of the ranking of public significance through the prioritization of the war dead and of 'sacrifice'; of the desire for a form of national stabilizing through the spatial containment of national sorrow and through the integration of individual grief into communal solidarity; of the self-assertion of the community and by inference the nation as a dignified entity, which underpins some of the most fundamental conceptualizations of what it is to be British; and of the attempts to exercise power both in the elementary sense of marshalling a public occasion and in the macro-sense of navigating between the local and the national through a qualified—and rather ambivalent—resistance to external intervention in, or the 'hijacking' of, the ceremony.[101]

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[99] Ibid.

[100] James Gray, M.P. for North Wiltshire, quoted in 'The Town that Weeps', *Guardian*, G2, 25 February 2010,

[101] For a more detailed analysis, see M. Freeden, 'Editorial: The Politics of Ceremony: The Wootton Bassett Phenomenon', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 16 (2011), 1–10.

6

Stability, Order, and Disruption: Discourses of Balance and Contention

'We give approval to Law and Order, but we do not like them, or their methods, or their instruments.'[1]

1. DIGGING UNDER STABILITY

Among the core features of political thinking, the one referring to the organization of the spatial and temporal relationships and dynamics within political communities looms large. Whether relating to stability or promoting instability and disruption (often so as to attain an alternative stability or a continuous state of challenge and renewal—itself a discernible pattern), thinking politically entails the articulation of, and reflection on, conceptual and argumentative discourse concerning cooperative, dissenting, or conflictual arrangements for groups. It is a way of thinking about the nature and ends of collective activity, or activity directed at collectivities: what about those is normal, what is desirable, what is effective, what is subversive? Interest in the interaction taking place within collectivities, buttressed by empirical evidence of their ubiquity, presumes their inevitability and—at least while they are a focus of interest—their durability, no matter what parallel resistance may exist to their functioning and aims. Exploring how that reflects in political language is one of the challenges facing political theorists. The gradual weaving of a discourse that either undergirds or shakes up conceptualizations of political interrelationships may have little to do with the actual conditions to which it relates. The schism between political theorists and empirically-oriented political scientists on the topic of this chapter threatens to yawn widely. But as noted in previous chapters, though the conventional foci of ethicists and ideologists are at best policy proposals or interpretations of political processes, those

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[1] J.A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 8.

thought-practices, too, actually exist and their analysis is a theoretical comment on the many ways in which they are expressed.

There exists a long-standing tradition of macro-arguments throughout the history of political thought on peace, order, stability, and harmony, from the ancient Greeks to Rawls. Acknowledging their importance and historic centrality to the main issues of political thought, these discourses will be addressed briefly before continuing to investigate the micro-discourses that revolve around issues of maintaining, improving, or undermining political stability and preserving or denying political order. While the previous chapter examined various flows of ideational support that political entities seek to mobilize, or are offered or denied, this chapter investigates some patterns of thinking that concern the co-ordinating, maintaining, fragmenting, or unsettling of the life of a community. Sometimes these components are presented as a matter of stark alternatives or opposites; but the rhythms of political thinking also frequently contain them in fluid mixtures. The separate focus of the two chapters investigates the difference, on the one hand, between the symbolic goods needed for a political collectivity to operate and, on the other hand, the continuities or changes that collectivity is thought to require in the light of what are considered to be its paradigmatic constituent relations. And whereas, as has been shown in Chapter Three, *boundaries* of time and space and the regulation of competences are another basic theme of political thought, here we explore questions of *internal* social balance and imbalance that preoccupy such thinking.

In recent years, the consideration of disorder and rupture in political theory has been privileged over that of order and stability, sometimes to the point where stability is regarded as an 'artificial' imposition on the 'naturalness' of disruption. But in the political science literature a generation ago, stability was undoubtedly a matter of central interest. Discussions of social and political stability revolved around three axes: time (or longevity), space (or harmony and integration), and communal culture (the absence of violence and highly disruptive protest, or the presence of public reasonableness)—which itself intersects with the first two. The longevity approach to stability has been associated with Lipset and his notion of 'uninterrupted continuation',[2] and a similar approach is to be found in Dahl's work, in which the stability of the institutions of polyarchal democracy equals their age.[3] Other theorists, however, have dissociated themselves from that definition. Thus Ake—rebelling against the association of stability merely with those characteristics—defined it as 'the regularity of the flow of political exchanges'. We could presumably

[2] S.M. Lipset, *Political Man* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 48.
[3] R.A. Dahl, 'Thinking about Democratic Constitutions: Conclusions from Democratic Experience' in I. Shapiro and R. Hardin (eds), *Political Order* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 177.

include thought-practices in that regularity, although he does not do so. For Ake the test of stability was purely the incidence of conformity or violation in relation to a given pattern of political exchanges—whether irregularities were in a smaller proportion than regularities over time[4]—thus distancing himself from approaching stability merely as a question of temporality. Similarly, Sanders criticized the emphasis on continuity as lacking in subtlety and theoretical sophistication for not allowing for similar events to be read as relative variations over time that differ from instance to instance. He persuasively put the case for the comparative spatial and temporal contexts in which stability and instability occur, as variable deviations from what is considered normality in each political system.[5] As for the spatial dimension of fundamental human interactions, one student of comparative politics claimed that 'an overriding concern of political systems is with order and disorder . . . because all other important topics such as political equality, poverty, and racial justice depend on the quality of government and the kind of harmony fostered by it.'[6] The pedigree of such harmony reaches back to the Greek philosophers and to the universal order of Augustine's City of God.[7] It evokes, as we shall see, not merely order and coordination but implies good order. We encounter a parallel conception in the Indian notion of *dharma* as proper ethical conduct 'sanctioned by the divinely sustained ontological order of things'.[8] With implicit normativity, political sociologists such as Talcott Parsons hailed integration as imperative to the maintenance of a social system. In that integration, 'the sharing of value-orientations is especially crucial, although consensus with respect to systems of ideas and expressive symbols are also very important determinants of stability in the social system.'[9] Finally, the emphasis on non-violence assumes evolutionary forms of development as well as the preponderance of virtuous conduct in collectivities or the ability to settle conflict in an orderly fashion. In addition, non-violence implies the superior power of political discourse over the power of more salient forms of physical political action.

The properties of stability cannot indeed be reduced to the abstract repetitiveness and durability of substantive themes of thinking about politics, or instability to the lack of those, whatever their specific content may be—though

[4] C. Ake, 'A Definition of Political Stability', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 7 (1975), 273, 277–8.

[5] D. Sanders, *Patterns of Political Instability* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 56–7, 66.

[6] R.B. Jackson and M.B. Stein (eds), 'Introduction' in *Issues in Comparative Politics. A Text with Readings* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 17.

[7] See e.g. D.F. Donnelly, *Patterns of Order and Utopia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 17–30.

[8] S. Kaviraj, 'On the Historicity of "the Political": Rajaniti and Politics in Modern Indian Thought', in M. Freeden and A. Vincent (eds), *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013), p. 29.

[9] T. Parsons and E.A. Shils (eds), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 24.

many political theorists explicitly or implicitly still have recourse to durability of a chronological or, alternatively, ahistorical nature. Nor is stability just a matter of compliance with demands made by others over time.[10] The questions posed here are rather about the properties of discourse and language that pertain to group stability, sanctioning or challenging it; about the ideological and epistemological contexts in which stability statements and assessments take place; about how political thinking can conjure up ideas concerning change that are conducive to systemic stability (e.g. the enabling of constitutional amendments); and about what kind of thinking qualifies as thinking relevant to the stability/instability of groups, addressing that issue directly or indirectly as one of the core features of thinking politically. The actual existence or absence of political stability is not the central issue here, nor is it the issue whether political language actually contributes to, or undermines, the stability of a political system—important as that question is. The issue is rather the salience of the variants of thinking about collective stability and instability, as well as about order and disorder, as a central political thought-practice. Not how we effectively make stability, but how we talk and write about it, is a matter of prime concern to analysts of thinking politically. As will be seen, that thinking does not have to adopt the contours of a conservative over-concern with safety and restraint.

Hence political stability is not only the subject of substantive arguments. It also has structural indicators, manifested in discursive stability and the regularity of patterns of political discourse. Conversely, in discursive instability we encounter two dimensions: the specific substantive arguments used to criticize or undermine ideas of order, harmony, and consensus, and the structural irregularity, fragmentation, and disruption of discursive patterns about the political. In approaching the structure of discourse as itself a stabilizing feature through which patterns of thinking emerge, we might, for instance, identify certain morphological constraints that operate on given instances of political argument: discourses of constitutionality are not amenable to the disruptive languages of *coups d'état* or revolutions. The suppleness or rigidity of political argument may also serve as such a factor: imposed inflexibility will provide a stability of sorts, but when its brittleness is superimposed on dissenting underlying currents it will be quicker to collapse—as the fall of the Soviet Union demonstrates, even with regard to its dominant discourses. Given that certainty—not uncertainty—is the contingent feature of the political concepts that comprise the units of political thinking, when it offers short-term oases of continuity and predictability, stability must be assessed against that property of human argument. Hence thinking in a way that promotes stability must do one of two things. It could include a fragile 'certainty' assumption that

[10] U. Rosenthal, *Political Order: Rewards, Punishments and Political Stability* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978), p. 48.

decontestation can both be successful and durable, even permanent, irrespective of the validity of that assumption. Alternatively—to avoid the fragility of certainty that is the product of rigid decontestations—it may entertain a premise that the epistemological and structural expression of, and belief in, the mutability of argumentation will produce more cogent patterns if the latter embraces a loose rather than a steady-state, or fixed, set of conceptual relationships and arrangements. Here, though, the slack cannot be given completely free rein; it has to be contained.

The epistemologies entertained by specific ideologies may be more, or less, adaptable and thus capable of assimilating change into stability: liberalism is equipped to cope with a degree of ideological change that emanates from a self-critical posture and from the encouragement of creative experimentation, not only from open-ended conceptions of time.[11] On the other hand, interwar twentieth-century liberalism was accused of encouraging the heightened relativism that enabled extreme ideologies to find political space and of destabilizing the social order through its 'degeneracy'.[12] Particular cultural beliefs—monarchical traditionalism or forms of religious fundamentalism—may indeed favour some sort of continuity, but their stabilizing attributes depend on the absence of strong resistance to such beliefs, or on sufficient 'safe' outlets for dissent.

Much of that reflects the kind of discursive expectations that pervade a society, or its articulate sectors. Those expectations need not be substantively conservative—they may anticipate anarchic disorder or rapid change—but they will be structurally conservative if in so doing they presume the continuity of broad patterns of already existing thought-practices. Liberalism certainly falls into that category. Substantive discursive instability may be created by ideological and epistemological shifts that modify the criteria determining the formulation of cooperative, dissenting, or conflictual conceptual arrangements for groups. Also worth investigating is whether there are parts of a discourse or an argument that are more flexible than others: which conceptual combinations rotate more easily among meanings and which remain relatively constant and immune to ideational and contextual change; whether parallel discourses of stability and instability are mutually constraining, and whether they permit us to assess their relative significance. I raise these as pointers; in the course of one chapter there is no space to develop all those themes.

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[11] As Ake rightly observes ('A Definition of Political Stability', 280), it is wrong to confuse political instability with political change.

[12] J. Hallowell, *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1946), p. 19 and *passim*.

2. ORDER AND DISORDER

Order and stability are not one and the same, although up to this point they have seemingly been run together. Not least, conventional language as well as much professional usage cannot disentangle the two neatly. But it might be useful to adumbrate a general distinction. Order is an ontological fundamental in the minds of its endorsers; stability relates more specifically to the workings of a system or society.[13] Disorder, in turn, is not utter randomness or undifferentiated chaos.[14] After surveying various scientific definitions of disorder, Arnheim plausibly observed that disorder 'is not the absence of all order but rather the clash of uncoordinated orders'. Those disorders either operate with the framework of some loose overarching order—say a disease of the body—or eventually replace it with another order. Even 'a revolution must aim at the destruction of the given order and will succeed only by asserting an order of its own'.[15] As with its antonym, order, in its most emphatic form disorder addresses a fundamental state of affairs or perception of the world, but one that is ontologically unpatterned, a view held for example by Lacanian post-structuralists,[16] while instability is more specifically connected to irregularity and upheaval. Here again, matters are complicated by the fact that in normal discourse the ontological meaning of disorder is run together with terms such as disarray, disturbance, and confusion, all containable within the notion of instability. But the difference between those two sets of meaning is nonetheless one of kind, not of degree.

The quest for order is either one of the default positions of political thinking or an ultimate aim of almost all streams of such thinking. It either exists already and has to be protected and occasionally reasserted; or it is a teleological beacon at the end of a long road. The languages of perpetual revolution and the more unstructured forms of anarchism also display borderline manifestations of order. Indeed, intense focusing on disorder in current discourse, especially that revolving around radical democratic visions, often obscures the latent tendencies of the contenders to repair or replace perceived political malfunctions rather than just to demolish them. Both absolute order and absolute disorder are unoccupiable positions—empty categories—in political

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[13] Rosenthal distinguishes narrowly between political stability as an unaltered political phenomenon throughout a period of time and political order as stable compliance interactions at the societal level (*Political Order*, op. cit., p. 48). Neither of those definitions does the conceptual and ideational work explored in this chapter.

[14] See P.G. Kuntz, 'Introduction', in P.G. Kuntz (ed.), *The Concept of Order* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. xxxvi.

[15] R. Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 3, 13.

[16] See e.g. S. Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

thought, but illusions about, and generalizations of, order prevail. More discrete and dispersed challenges to authority and organization—as distinct from questioning the existential possibility of order—are fairly abundant in 'disorderly' political discourse. Hence political disorder may either indicate a number of contesting or diverging arrangements for a given polity ('many orders together'[17]), or a deliberate attempt to destroy or damage a specific political order deemed to be lacking, if only to construct another. In the language of politics as presented in these pages, the interplay between order and disorder is another manifestation of the crucial tension created by the normal rhythm of the pendulum swinging between determinacy and decontestation on the one hand and indeterminacy and contestation on the other.

3. POLITICAL ORDER AND COHERENCE

The search for political order has been at the heart of political thinking ever since it developed as a distinct mode of thinking. But the tendency in much of that thinking is to have discovered order rather than created it, discerned in intrinsic balances and harmonies that typify both human nature and social life. Hobbes is the great—though not the sole—exception here in imposing an artificial order on unruly persons, whose natural psychological frailty and insecurity leads to a fundamental tendency to conflict and disorder that has to be repressed. The despotism of his solution flies in the face of most ethicists because of their postulation of the innateness of human virtue and social cooperation, with the resultant espousal of order as normal as well as desirable. Stability, on the other hand, does not build on revealing inherent order but on seeking a constructed (not necessarily imposed) regularity and immunity to upheaval. The Chinese Communist Party's recent policies of promoting a Harmonious Society, for example, involving a modified Confucian conception of harmony, have been described as a 'rhetorical response to maintain social stability'.[18] Of course, thought and speech have their own ordering properties. Even Hobbes does not dismiss the inevitability and naturalness of some order in human thought and conduct. Prior to his consideration of political order, Hobbes examines the ordering role of speech in numbering: 'he that can tell ten, if he recite them out of order, will lose himselfe' and continues more generally to assert that 'truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations.'[19] In political thought the search for that right order is no

[17] Kuntz, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi.

[18] D. Joshi, 'Does China's Recent "Harmonious Society" Discourse Reflect a Shift Towards Human Development?', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 17 (2012), 167–87.

[19] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 104–5.

other than the practice of ideological decontestation and the morphological configurations that emerge from that practice, with their ensuing competing conceptions of order. Hobbes's underpinning of the definition of names by 'naturall sense and imagination' is a ordering device, appealing either to an extra-human base, scientific and mathematical, or to what 'may be feigned by the mind of man', imposing an artificial order through establishing rules.[20]

Coherence, coordination, and classification are the overlapping routes to the creation of order in thinking politically. Created order is unavoidable because there always is an abundance of contending and alternative methods for each one of those routes, and the political sphere is centrally concerned with attempts to form ideational, discursive, and conceptual order of those kinds, as applied to collectivities. Even those who disclaim or denounce that political objective, as do some recent poststructuralists as well as anarchists, end up with a notion of right balance and patterned conduct. The superimposition of coherence on a system of argument—and we are talking mainly, though not solely, about macro-systems of political thinking—is a central property of ideologies, whose selective and competing arrangements aim at discursive stability, predictability and—to a large extent—comprehensiveness, applied to alternative systems of social order. That drive for coherence is also a crucial identifier of normative designs of order that limit possible political orders through ethical selection and, as constructed by moral philosophers, tend to aim for a high degree of cohesion. In effect, coherence involves the twin processes of inclusion and exclusion, removing factors that clash with or contradict the fundamental organizing premises. In parallel the conceptual structure is decontested so that compatibilities among concepts are coordinated through choosing particular conceptions of each concept, with their resultant patterns of configuration. And the problem of inconclusiveness— where interminable, potentially diverging paths of argument disappear over the mental horizon—is shaded out by remaining within the relatively abstract framework of regulatory principles. Any proclaimed comprehensiveness is thus necessarily thin or deceptive. As J. A. Hobson observed, 'pride and a sort of aesthetic craving incessantly impels thinkers to piece together their bits of intellectual order into a completeness and an objectivity they do not possess'.[21] Binary classifications are another significant form of conceptual order. In that case, heavy oversimplification holds at bay the sources of potential disorder.[22] Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction is just such an

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[20] Ibid., pp. 106–8.

[21] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, op. cit., p. 12.

[22] This partly parallels the tendency of states to 'measure, codify and simplify' that Scott has found in governmental practices with regard to land tenure or identity cards, but it equally applies to the patterning of political thought. See J.C. Scott, 'State Simplifications: Nature, Space, and People', in I. Shapiro and R. Hardin (eds), *Political Order* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 42–85.

instance, generating ideational stability through the kind of exclusionary boundary formation discussed in Chapter Three. The possibility of criss-crossing networks of such 'friends' and 'enemies' is not mooted.

Another instance of classification entrusted with a political task is the commonplace distinction between public and private, here functioning as an ordering device through its boundary building, ostensibly removing unregulated and disorganized thinking and action from the realm of the political. In aspiring to construct an impermeable divide, the very notion of the public domain establishes a sphere in which orderly control over social transactions is apparently exercised. What happens in the private domain is by definition—though quite wrongly—asserted to be non-political; indeed, in liberal ideologies the creativity and spontaneity emerging from the private sphere is the font of inventiveness and entrepreneurship that propels many forms of political progress. Hobson again: 'It is "law and order" itself that the natural man is "up against".... May it not be necessary to make a compromise on a lower level with the forces of disorder?... The human mind and the human body need areas of disorder, or risk, caprice, or undirected activity.' Through that 'free margin of disorder around the order of our lives' disorder was rendered both beneficial and safe. Pressing the point home, Hobson suggested that a modicum of 'lawlessness, disorder, risk taking, falsehood, and illogic' was necessary for politics and morals so as to offset a potentially deadly conservatism.[23]

As part of the struggle of the political domain for control over the affairs of human beings, millenarian, chiliastic, and future societies designed by human beings—however subversive they may be of current corrupt or misguided stabilities—entertain visions of order located in that future. Even ordinary forms of progressive political thought subscribe to ideas of harmony and balance that privilege order over disorder. To put this in even sharper relief, there are also theories of conflict that invoke a structural constancy of their view of strife or contestation, a constancy evident in many varieties of anarchism. Whereas such constancy may not produce social stability, as a type of political thinking it produces discursive stability and a predictability of sorts.

Mill's strictures on the distinction between order and progress, or permanence and progression—a distinction he termed 'unscientific and incorrect'—are instructive. Noting two interpretations of order as 'obedience' and as 'the preservation of peace by the cessation of private violence', Mill went on to make a different distinction, that between 'Order as the preservation of all kinds and amounts of good which already exist, and Progress as consisting in the increase of them.' That, however, could not correspond to an institutional division, as the same agencies and same social arrangements were required for both, and the same qualities of individuals—'industry, integrity, justice, and

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[23] Hobson, op. cit., pp. 9–10, 15, 21.

prudence'—were necessary for both, only more of the same in the case of progress. Consequently, 'when Order and Permanence are taken in their widest sense, for the stability of existing advantages, the requisites of Progress are but the requisites of Order in a greater degree'. Progress thus included order, but not vice versa. Political stability, in this version, was more likely to be secured by valuable change than by stagnation; it was the result of a 'natural balance' between the old and the young that had to be protected against 'artificial regulation'.[24] Underpinning that analysis was an assumption about the interaction between rational human agency and the release of dynamic processes integral to social life, and necessary for a well-ordered polity.

That perspective became even more prominent with the incorporation of cooperative social evolutionary theories into liberal thought at the turn of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries.[25] The new liberals such as L. T. Hobhouse adopted an organic conception of national unity that reflected the temporal evolution of human rationality, with its concomitant of cooperation and coordination. In parallel, the mellifluous connotations of harmony formed the spatial mesh of organicism: '. . . the fundamental postulate of the organic view of society . . . implies that . . . a . . . full development of personality is practically possible not for one man only but for all members of a society. There must be a line of development open along which each can move in harmony with others. Harmony in the full sense would involve not merely absence of conflict but actual support.' The relationship of natural development to human agency was crucial for, although the evolutionary process simply was the site of such development, it was directed by its own specific creation—a rational human being who, exceptionally in the course of evolution, could channel the evolutionary process itself. Thus harmony both grew and was made, and to that extent was a selective process: not all human practices and ideas were in mutual harmony. Notwithstanding, Hobhouse's conclusion was not the plausible one that parallel harmonies could be fashioned out of different ideational choices—a possibility that must remain salient in any analysis of ideational stabilities—but rather that a singular harmony had to compete with a range of social disharmonies and types of conflict. Conceiving collective harmony as constructed—and to some extent necessarily so—was a feature of political thinking that relied on social and ethical interdependence as both given and desirable, but it hardly held within it the seeds of a pluralist political order. Rather, it corresponded with the then dominant liberal view of a unitary state and society harbouring, in the long run, insignificant internal

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[24] J.S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XIX (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 384–9.

[25] For a discussion of the freeing of vital human energy in British liberal thought, see M. Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 22ff.

schisms. True, Hobhouse recognized the impossibility of full harmony, but he insisted that 'the endeavour to establish coherent system in the world of thought is the characteristic of the rational impulse which lies at the root of science and philosophy', while 'the impulse to establish harmony in the world of feeling and action' was of the essence of the rational impulse in the world of practice'.[26] Social stability was both a goal and an outcome of the evolutionary process.

From a very different perspective, Hayek's concern with 'made' and 'grown' orders as the central concepts of his book, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, emphasized order as a reasonable expectation of extrapolating the qualities of the whole from its parts. As is well-known, Hayek referred to a spontaneous order, the significance of which for our purposes is largely to group it within the category of an immanent attribute, akin to older conceptions of a natural order. That is why from an ideological perspective, and despite his own disavowals, Hayek is closer to conservatism than to the agentic-interventionist approaches of new liberals and socialists.[27] Thinking politically about stability was, therefore, a question of removing the disruptions to that spontaneous order, the value of which is the cooperation with others without which need satisfaction is unattainable. Hayek summed up: 'It would be no exaggeration that social theory begins with—and has an object only because of—the discovery that there exist orderly structures which are the product of the actions of many men but are not the result of human design.'[28] Whether or not that is true of social theory we may postulate that, in the field of non-professional thinking, order is not a 'discovery' of something external to it but an inherent attribute of thinking politically, irrespective of regarding order as made or grown.

In sharp contradistinction to theories of natural order and harmony, voices such as Foucault's proffer a very different take on order. Foucault ascribes to policing and disciplinary practices 'a world of indefinite regulation, of permanent, continually renewed, and increasingly detailed regulation, but always regulation'. For Foucault, order is state rationality—*raison d'état*—in an extended equilibrium, which 'will make it possible to fix exactly what should be the rational principles and forms of calculation specific to an art of government'. Significantly, order is anchored to 'a non-naturalness, an absolute artificiality' in the political domain itself.[29] It is only in the economic realm of civil society that a new 'naturalness' emerges, causing power

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[26] L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, ed. J. Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 61–2.

[27] See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 298–311.

[28] F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 35–7.

[29] M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, ed. M. Senellart (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 340, 348–9.

(government) and knowledge (science) to develop a second, parallel sphere of order. Repression and incentive regulation will ensure 'growth within order'.[30] Foucault's thinking about order is in one sense subversive, yet it is not disruptive. Order may be unpleasant and undesirable, to say the least, but it is inevitable and it produces results.

4. STABILITY AND INSTABILITY

Beyond the fundamental assertion that thinking and speaking both express and shape stability, whether static or dynamic—the detecting and construction of grammars concern just such a mechanism—we need to engage in the kind of micro-analysis that can shed more light on patterns of stabilizing and destabilizing speech. Even as we acknowledge that political discourse displays some stability in its macro-patterns—as do other types of discourse—it can be fundamentally unstable in the micro-configurations it adopts. That substantive instability, of course, may well be a source of the innovation and creativity that undergirds pluralist and individualist societies, though it can also be a cause of destructiveness. While Ake establishes political stability as passive 'insofar as political actors proceed as usual'[31]—and they could do so mechanically—at least a part of political stability discourse incurs active speech and writing about stability. That said, not all thought-practices pertaining to political stability will be regarded by their agents as such and it is up to the analyst to argue that they are. Plotting, planning, and playing with the ideas that construct and map political terrains are of prime interest here. And those political terrains—the temporal and spatial life of a collectivity—serve as the focus of that feature of thinking politically to which this chapter is dedicated.

Other approaches to stability emphasize the absence of, or reduction in, conflict.[32] When translated into political thinking this becomes somewhat problematic. In pluralist societies, for instance, a degree of peaceful dissent is viewed as both normal and desirable.[33] The boundary separating that from conflict is vague. Verbal violence, specifically, is associated with hate-speech as

[30] Ibid., p. 354.
[31] C. Ake, 'Modernization and Political Instability: A Theoretical Exploration', *World Politics*, vol. 26 (1974), 586.
[32] L. Hurwitz, 'Contemporary Approaches to Political Stability', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 3 (1973), 449–52.
[33] However, what actually counts as a normal form of discourse on political stability is not the focus of this chapter, and if it were, it would have to resort to a method incorporating Wittgensteinian family resemblances rather than an impossible quantitative survey that would also have to face a contestable ranking of the sources of, or populations expressing, such discourse in terms of their representative significance. Normality in this approach is also structural and morphological, not just a matter of temporal regularities.

harm-causing—but that too is to look at discourse from the perspective of its contribution to socio-political (in)stability, and it overlooks other forms of verbal aggression that have been acquiesced in by plural democracies in recent years, such as virulent criticisms emanating from within Parliamentary debates. What needs to be borne in mind, therefore, are the general devices employed in political thinking through which substantive languages of instability are handled and substantive languages of stability are constructed, as distinct from the concrete and specific messages of conflict or cooperation they impart. Such substantive forms are multifold: Schemes of securing or challenging law and order (the very running together of the two concepts is telling), revolutionary plans and goals, beliefs in fraternity or community, ideologies of patriotism and nationalism, expressions of radical democracy or populism, and the languages of crisis and crisis management all revolve around stability, whatever else they concurrently perform.

Underlying many of the concerns associated with political stability are understandings of politics with respect to what the ends of a community or collective are. Order, peace, and uniformity may vie with controlled change or teleological evolution or with the condemnation of stasis, with insistence on the inevitability and naturalness of conflict, and with condemning any political intervention in plural and unpredictable paths of individual inventiveness and initiative. And of course different ideologies will choose to label certain forms of speech and writing as destabilizing—often by employing the term '(il)legitimate' or one of its equivalents—an appellation that may well become not just an ethical judgement but a self-fulfilling prophecy within specific cultural contexts.

Comparative political scientists such as Sanders attempt to identify a range of behaviours that constitute destabilizing political action. Those include *coups d'état*, guerrilla warfare, riots, demonstrations, strikes, and acts of violence, as well as 'changes in type of normative structure'.[34] But what are the forms of thought-behaviour that relate to destabilizing activities, or to their converse stabilizers such as national holidays or public ceremonies? As has just been contended, theories of political order, whether natural or constructed, are one kind that can itself contribute to stability, including theories that attempt to control the future and to set it on a predictable course. Thinking about norm protection and norm change is another, including for example discourses on law and legality. Epistemologies and ideologies that ideationally contextualize riots, strikes, violence, disorder, rupture, and crises are a third. A fourth, on a somewhat different level, would be thought-practices that pave the way for accessing and shaping issues of political stability, or that are indirectly intended to disseminate stabilizing views on a particular issue. Two such

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[34] Sanders, op. cit., pp. 197–8.

thought-practices (with parallels in conduct and action) are negotiation and the ostensible construction of consensus. Both demonstrate in different ways how some of the linguistic and morphological features examined in the opening chapters come into their own and are employed to shape stabilizing vocabularies. Ultimately, political theorists need to investigate dual levels of discourse: language directly intended by the participants to refer to stability or instability issues, and language that is indirectly assessed by the analyst to concern the stabilizing or destabilizing of a political entity. In the first, contextually dependent, category we will find, for instance, revolutionary rhetoric, radical and ostensible 'anti-political' critique of institutional practices, or conservative opposition to sweeping redistributive welfare schemes. In the second category, more dependent on external interpretation, we may find prevalent beliefs, for example, about the relationship between religion and politics, or issues pertaining to legal reform.

As observed above, both those levels are distinguishable from the non-substantive, structural irregularities signalling the instability of discursive patterns about the political. Some of those structural instabilities may obtain, for example, as a consequence of ranking problems. One such instance is the impossibility of mediating among zero-sum values discussed in Chapter Four, even if the participants in the debate themselves overtly fail to refer to or to recognize that instability. Such discursive instability may also emanate from poor illocutionary performances by élites and ruling groups when appropriate language to anchor stability is lacking, if it is wedded to inflexible ideologies or to the personal ambitions of leaders.[35] And just to clarify, discursive disorder, unlike discursive instability, is impossible if language is to make sense.

An additional challenge is that of categorizing discourses on legitimacy, one of the many concepts that inhabit the realm of more than one of the political features under discussion in this book. The articulation of legitimacy is obviously also a discursive expression of support, but legitimacy is mainly a justification—or an excuse—for support, designed to attract and elicit it, rather than a direct form of support, and 'legitimate' is generally an accolade granted to a regime or government that conducts itself in a particular approved way, or that has come into being through accepted norms. Nonetheless, debates over the legitimate status of a political entity do not directly pertain to stability either, though assertions of legitimacy or illegitimacy may themselves be a stabilizing or destabilizing factor. More pertinently, as seen in Chapter Three, discourses on legitimacy are closely related to the superiority claims of the political—when ensuing from those who affirm their own legitimacy.

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[35] See J.J. Linz and A. Stepan (eds), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 50–3.

On the topic of legitimacy and stability we may avail ourselves of some insights provided by political scientists as a springboard to further contemplation by political theorists. Linz and Stepan, to take one example, maintain that there is little political stability where there is no large majority granting legitimacy to political institutions and the socioeconomic system, or when the social order is perceived as unjust.[36] We may suggest that contentment or discontent with the norms that establish legitimacy, and not only explicit argument about the legitimacy status of a political entity, is one typical direct form of thinking about stability. The respect accorded to constitutionalism, for example, legitimizes a way of devising order.

5. STABILITY IN AMERICA

In the framing of the constitution of the USA, considerations of stability were salient and overt, combining thinking politically with thinking about politics. In focusing on the split between the intentions behind democratic practices and their consequences, Madison in particular emphasized the costs to stability. His references to stability are of two kinds. First, there is a link between the unintended consequences of faction and democratic 'spectacles of turbulence and contention'[37]—mal-representation causes unrest and conflict. Second, institutional innovations are themselves unsettling. Madison or Hamilton pointed to 'the mutability in the public councils arising from a rapid succession of new members' as necessitating 'some stable institution in the government . . . a continual change even of good measures is inconsistent with every rule of prudence and every prospect of success', forfeiting the respect of other nations, endangering individual liberty through incessant revision of the law, and privileging 'the sagacious, the enterprising, and the moneyed few over the industrious and uninformed mass of the people.'[38] Ultimately, stability attracted 'attachment and reverence'; its lack diminished the status of politics. But instability, argued Madison, also affected the quality and virtue of citizens: 'Stability in government is essential to national character . . . as well as to that repose and confidence in the minds of the people which are among the chief blessings of civil society.'[39] The presence of stability established the political as the arena in which the human and civic need for predictability was secured.

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[36] Linz and Stepan, ibid., p. 12.
[37] A. Hamilton, J. Madison, and J. Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 81 (Federalist 10). For one view, see D.E. Ingersoll, 'Machiavelli and Madison: Perspectives on Political Stability', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 85 (1970), 259–80.
[38] Ibid., pp. 380–1 (Federalist 62).
[39] Ibid., p. 226 (Federalist 37).

Once again, the illusive quest for a measure of certainty was at the heart of political thinking, attempting to override the ubiquity of uncertainty.

Tocqueville too associated some of the defects of democracy with instability. Madison's point was rephrased: Tocqueville claimed that electoral turnover increased legislative instability predominantly because the American constitution could be, and had been, amended frequently. Tellingly, associating institutional with cultural attributes, Tocqueville stated: 'Not that American democracy is by nature more unstable than any other, but it has been given the means to carry the natural instability of its inclinations into the making of laws.'[40] Whereas many, from ancient times onwards, professed to regard mixed government as a source of political balance that stabilized a system by permitting multiple trends and forces to participate, Tocqueville denied the value of mixed government—'one equally shared between contrary principles'— for then 'either a revolution breaks out or that society breaks up'. He therefore saw stability as the result of establishing a superior social power, but that was potentially in direct conflict with freedom. Crucially, he insisted, 'one must not confuse stability with strength'. Rather, the 'omnipotence of the majority' encouraged instability by 'driving the minorities to desperation' through their unjust abuse and consequent resistance. The loss of freedom through majority tyranny would resurface in the form of anarchy.[41]

Tocqueville conceptualized stability as linked to the non-oppression of subgroups in a society, and instability to the inability of governmental mechanisms to reflect the diversity—perhaps what we might now call fragmentation— of modern societies. Stability, however, was not a question of identifying a dominant principle of political order, but of cultivating modest, sub-virtuous, social habits that added up to 'self-interest properly understood', shaping 'a lot of orderly, temperate, moderate, careful, and self-controlled citizens'.[42] This offered a micro-approach to social coordination by appealing to custom and to conciliatory restraints on the social practices of individuals constituting civil society. Significantly, if unsurprisingly, Tocqueville believed that professional lawyers embodied one of those parameter-defining constrictions, offering 'the strongest barriers against the faults of democracy'. He summed this up as follows: 'Men who have made a special study of the law and have derived therefrom habits of order, something of a taste for formalities, and an instinctive love for a regular concatenation of ideas are naturally strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and to the ill-considered passions of democracy.'[43]

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[40] A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 249. See also J. Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 107.

[41] Ibid., pp. 251–2, 259–60. See also S.S. Wolin, *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 251–2.

[42] Tocqueville, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 526–7.

[43] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 263–4.

Moreover, 'the judge is a lawyer who . . . is given a liking for stability by the permanence of his own tenure of office'.[44]

Tocqueville's reading of stability connects it to the failure of institutional arrangements to allow for social diversity, a failure he regarded as irreversible. As a consequence, destabilization emanates from frustration with blocked participatory options, underlying which is a general sense of the unfairness and injustice experienced by the relevant minorities. There are also other institutional failings, most notably those of bureaucracies unable to preserve historical records and hence weakening the temporal continuity of the terrain of stability because 'nobody bothers about what was done before his time'. The blinkeredness of democracy—existing entirely in the present—'pressed to its ultimate limits, harms the progress of the art of government', because novices, which is what democratically elected officials may often be, lack experience in public affairs.[45] Here the discontinuity which recent theorists of instability have rejected as a useful analytical criterion is nevertheless taken seriously, but its causes are traced by Tocqueville to the absence of institutional skills of government. As for the partial remedies for stability shortcomings that Tocqueville recommends, they are significantly to be found in two domains: in the ideational structures preferred by legal professional elites, and in tested socio-cultural practices, such as civility and self-discipline. Form—the provision of an established and expert discursive pattern in law and an area dedicated to the strong regulation, legalization, and routinization through precedent, of verbal and physical conduct—and a content that eschews extremes, are mutually supportive.

6. FOUR NORMATIVE GENRES

The eventual linking of stability with justice is a common theme among current political philosophers. Most of them appeal not to the sociological and cultural insights from which Tocqueville believed he was drawing, but to ethical imperatives or to normative preferences. Of course, Tocqueville's value-preferences run through his writings as well, but his arguments are located in a series of empirical observations, however much those observations are sifted through the sieve of ideology. Among the recent debates exercising political philosophers that relate to cohesive organization and stability, four genres may be singled out: the first two more concrete, the last two more abstract. The first practises political thinking through constitutional and legal

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[44] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 269.		[45] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 207–8.

theory. The second is the school of thought termed 'deliberative democracy', a school that has developed its own momentum over the past twenty years. The third is the Rawlsian approach to reasonable stability. The fourth comprises ethical arguments for order, but nonetheless with a political undertone. All four genres are examples of professionals thinking politically in a manner that assumes, validates or challenges the ends of collective stability and order. They are also concurrently instances of thinking about politics when the engagement with stability is raised to a conscious level of discursive ideological intervention in the political scene, though those intentional references are more limited and occasional.

a. Constitutions

Rather obviously, most participants in political discourse have a strong preference for good government, whether from egoistic or altruistic motivation. Here good government is understood as distinct from the rejection of government in the name of alternative modes of collective life and is associated with respect for rules of social engagement and for rules of governmental conduct. Those rules do not have to be democratic; after all, a theocracy may insist that the rules derived from its religious understandings perform exactly the same role of establishing good government. Within mainstream Western political thinking, however, the rules of social engagement and governmental conduct are saliently, though far from exclusively, those that make up constitutions, and constitutions are paramount stabilizing devices. Sunstein puts it emphatically: 'In my view, the central goal of a constitution is to create the preconditions for a well-functioning democratic order'.[46] There is no space in this chapter to explore in any detail the stabilizing discourses of legal constitutionalism; indeed, as Dahl has unsurprisingly emphasized, there is no optimal stabilizing constitutional design even for democracies.[47] Some pointers will have to suffice. We see stability and order, for instance, delicately alluded to in Bagehot's famous *The English Constitution*, a volume that commences with an observation about political language: 'Language is the tradition of nations; each generation describes what it sees, but it uses words transmitted from the past.' The British constitution, asserted Bagehot, combined outward sameness with hidden inner change. Its dignified parts—its 'theatrical elements'—attracted its motive power, while its efficient parts employed that power, and wrought the greatest alterations. The implied cooperative polity ensued

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[46] C.R. Sunstein, *Designing Democracy. What Constitutions Do* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 6.
[47] Dahl, 'Thinking about Democratic Constitutions', op. cit., pp. 193–7.

because one must expect 'what is venerable to acquire influence because of its inherent dignity'.[48] Lord Balfour, introducing the book, proposed that the components ordered through the constitution 'form part of a co-operative system, they are an element in an interdependent whole', and went on to talk of a patriotism attached to the machinery of government 'involving conceptions of unity and continuity'.[49] A.V. Dicey, for his part, insisted that the role of the constitutional conventions that existed alongside the enforceable laws was 'to produce harmony between the legal and the political sovereign power'.[50] These all resonated with the organic theories of society that sustained so much political thought, both conservative and progressive, a century and more ago. In particular, stability was guaranteed by the two dimensions of the social organism: evolving steadily over time, and interlinked through social space.

Hence stability was assigned to two forms of 'naturalness': the one modelled on the notions of growth and maturation; the other on the notions of social interdependence, harmony, and division of labour. Both forms were perceived by their promoters as default positions from which deviations may occur, but to which social and political thought and action should direct themselves.[51] But constitutional lawyers also placed much value on sanctions and the political power that underpins order. Order had to be manufactured and devised; harmony and unity were in need of constant reinforcement. In that they differed from liberal social reformers who believed in the evolving power of individual reason and social development to create material prosperity and spiritual flourishing. Rather, the conservative undertones of constitutionalism appear to be endowed with stabilizing properties deriving from 'deeply rooted customary and traditional norms' and to embrace 'the shared and strongly felt values and beliefs of the community',[52] and even the liberal ideology on which much constitutionalism is based was thought to be confirmed by that very constitutionalism, 'thereby helping to slow the pace of ideological change.'[53] Indeed, in 'periods of great stability' stasis threatens to take over the legal landscape.[54] Substantive ideologies forge a discursive practice with its own structural stabilizing properties.

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[48] W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 1, 7–8.

[49] Ibid., pp. xi, xx.

[50] A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 10th edn (London: Macmillan and Co., 1950), p. 438.

[51] See the discussion in M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 94–116, and Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 203–6.

[52] T.C. Grey, 'Constitutionalism: An Analytic Framework', in J.R. Pennock and J.W. Chapman (eds), *Constitutionalism*, Nomos XX (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 204.

[53] G.J. Schochet, 'Introduction: Constitutionalism, Liberalism, and the Study of Politics', in ibid., p. 10.

[54] J.R. Pennock, 'Epilogue', in ibid., p. 378.

b. Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy has indicated both a process and a value framework. The process involves a series of public participatory conversations among members of a group, in which persuasion—in the specific form of justifying decisions in a manner designed to be accepted by others or at least to be regarded as reasonable, perhaps even compelling[55]—could result in the formation of a common and defensible view. In some cases the conversations are public and inclusive; in others, internal to the group. The value framework encompasses a number of suppositions, among them that a common justificatory standpoint is possible, that it could elicit the authentic preferences of the group members, and that the heart of democracy lies in its nature as a transparent discursive procedure, rather than one that establishes accountable leadership.[56] In particular, it has been characterized by the absence of any coercive, oppressive or manipulative form of power and—given the regularity of such forms—some proponents of deliberative democracy wish to proscribe them ab initio. Whatever deliberative democracy is morally, politically it is a debate about stability and about the forms of language and argumentation that sustain it.

That is why deliberative democracy, with respect to the theme of this chapter, represents for the most part an instance of thinking politically rather than thinking about politics. Instead of pontificating about stability, it incorporates mechanisms of, and epistemologies and outlooks about, human interaction that are generically stability-promoting. Thus, although Benhabib's discussion of deliberative democracy dissociates itself from the 'realization of a stable sense of collective identity', she advocates the construction of 'coherent preferences', 'conditions of social cooperation mutually acceptable to all' and binding procedures, in a return to constitutional theory with a participatory twist: 'Proceduralism is a rational answer to persisting value conflicts at the substantive level.'[57] In that sense, the discursive unpredictability that ensues from deliberative democracy is not tantamount to disorder, as it is regarded by its advocates as the best method of containing such contingency. In effect, deliberative democracy endeavours to prevent the build-up of unsettling moral and political frustration, as well as channelling dissent into acceptable modes of expression and communication, while concurrently appealing to a model of public virtue. Indeed, when political theorists talk

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[55] See J. Cohen, 'Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy', in S. Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 100. Such cases of persuasive power will be considered in Chapter Eight.

[56] For a helpful account, see J. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[57] S. Benhabib, 'Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy', in Benhabib (ed.) op. cit., pp. 68, 71–3.

about the politics of *difference*—as they did in particular in the 1990s—that phrase serves as a ethical retranslation of *dissent*, making the latter acceptable.

In general, when normative references to stability are made, they go beyond the artificial construction of stability as a desirable state of affairs. Instead, they offer conjectures about the potential normality of balance, moderation, consent, giving voice, impartiality, and other stability-inducing values. Those can be extracted by the second-order analyst of deliberative democratic discourse, focusing on the assumptions of first-order deliberative theorists. For however much the latter refer to ideal theory, they simultaneously presuppose a core of ethical human interaction that is in principle empirically valid, functioning somewhat like an ethical default position that defines one's humanity. Consent here is not a precondition of approval, as it is in conventional political obligation theory, but the outcome of a process in which excessive pluralism gently gives way to the exercise of reflective reasoning, of which all human beings are thought to be existentially capable. Connolly has pertinently contended that such processes gravitate 'toward an ontology of concord', achieving internal harmony alongside harmony with the other elements of social life.[58]

That kind of discourse relating to 'ethical stability', though generally available in sections of open societies, is more commonly to be found among political philosophers and visionary ideologists or utopians.[59] Revealingly, the frequent use of the adjective 'robust' in philosophical discourse indicates the search for firm principles or arguments. The bulk of that debate is informed by an implicit desire to minimize disruption and conflict, and is inspired by the assumption that individuals are reasonable, cooperative, and, up to a point, considerate of others' interests. Those articles of faith have been part and parcel of the ethical liberal tradition, now simply redirected to extract the rationale behind democratic practice—a world away from the sociological assumptions about the rise of new classes that require political incorporation, or the extending relationship between political centre and periphery, or the endemic combativeness that many claim is typical of social life. The liberal tradition subscribes to the importance of diversity and pluralism, but concurrently maintains that it can be channelled and rearticulated to construct a stable core. It is positioned poles apart from subversive theories of radical democracy whose stated aim is to create the equivalent of a permanent revolution in the shape of continuous discursive assaults on the complacency and oppression of the 'democratic' practices of the establishment. Liberal pluralism may not infrequently run up against its own limits when zero-sum values within a pluralist community collide or when what Rawls referred to as

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[58] W.E. Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 10.

[59] A discussion of utopianism will be deferred to Chapter Seven, dealing with political visions.

deep conflict occurs. Usually, though, it proceeds by teasing out liberalism's predilection for rational convergence and consensus, through encouraging the self-selection of certain values and forms of conduct or, more commonly, often assisting those practices artificially through conspicuous constraints on verbal and written expression. Political correctness is one such instance of pre-emptive linguistic devices against instability (though it may be far from successful), as is the banning of hate speech, despite their being presented more usually as ethical desiderata. In that latter form, they often entail the reflective consideration of differences with a view ultimately to finding common ground.

When common ground appears elusive, stability is often sought through temporal deferral. Thus Bohman, in presenting democracy as a continuous process of cooperation and compromise in public deliberation, intended to 'increase the temporal horizons of deliberation', risks projecting the solution of deep conflicts on an indefinite future, or on a future that, like the tortoise, may always be just ahead of the hare, avoiding a finishing line.[60] For whereas the process of deliberation may be continuous, polities are incessantly called upon to deliver decisions, and decisions impose a provisional closure on continuous debate. Deferral can only work if the issue at hand becomes, for whatever reason, non-salient or non-urgent. Although Bohman curiously opposes the terms stability and change, his conception of change is designed to ensure a longer-term stability through permitting changing understandings to be reflected and incorporated through deliberation. Here again the possibility and desirability of agreement shore up the theory epistemologically: 'To the extent that critical theory is defined by an ideal of consensus, its proponents search for greater democracy'. Therefore, 'deliberative democracy needs not only to be stable but also to provide periodic renewal of its institutions when public reason begins to fail to produce agreements'.[61]

Legitimacy is accordingly severed from mere popular approval and fused instead with reasonable ideational interaction, with a particular mode of thinking politically: a way of handling argument, rather than of attaining a substantive good, that emphasizes the collective as the addressee of considered and other-regarding individual expression. Or put differently, the method of handling argument is itself a substantive good because it validates decisions and thus, from the viewpoint of this chapter, steadies any disruptive tendencies in a political entity. And significantly, at least for deliberative democrats, the handling of argument is not through negotiation but through disclosure and transparency.

Generally speaking, consensus as a form of stabilizing has been proffered both by philosophers and ideologists as a unifying macro-agreement around

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[60] J. Bohman, *Public Deliberation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 89, 245.
[61] Ibid., pp. 198–201, 242.

values, policies, or goals, but it has come in two very different guises. Philosophical inquiry into consensus has assumed it to be an outward sign of reason or of virtue; while the ideological crafting of consensus is presented as a practical coalition of different political forces around a set of concrete measures. In the first case, as we have already noted, consensus is the product of an ethical vision that, while occasionally idealized, is accorded the status of a regulative principle. In the second, however, consensus is a pronouncement on what are claimed to be historically verifiable processes of political convergence—something close to what Rawls disapprovingly termed the averaging out of doctrines.[62] For as a rule consensus is assembled loosely around shifting objectives with strong liminal constraints at their edges rather than the uniform, abstract ideal that some philosophers make it out to be.

c. Reasonable stability

Because so many theorists correlate dominant liberal-democratic practices with self-interest and a consequent social fragmentation,[63] deliberative democracy discourse has become an arena for exploring alternative means of forging a shared public reason. Although he did not follow such a strong participatory route, Rawls's interest in stability is a major instance of that refocusing. It is unusual in that Rawls places stability at the centre of his concerns, particularly because among contemporary political philosophers stability is rarely proffered as a stated value. However, not all forms of stability attract Rawls's approval and certainly not all that are identified by comparative political scientists; only stability for the right reasons—namely, the stability that includes considerations of justice as fairness endorsed by all—is commended by him. Stability for Rawls is not an incidental by-product of justice; it is a good in itself involving a publicly shared reasonable pluralism that entails an overlapping consensus on 'fundamental political questions' and that involves fair terms of social cooperation and equal sharing in political power.[64] Rawls notes that, although 'the problem of stability has played very little role in the history of moral philosophy', it is 'fundamental to political philosophy'. Hence the central question he poses in *Political Liberalism* concerns not only the justice but the stability of societies divided by reasonable but incompatible doctrines. Stability is a consciously-sought political value, closely linked to Rawls's alternative phrase, a 'well-ordered society' (also referred to as a

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[62] Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 1993), p. 39.
[63] Bohman, op. cit., p. 1.
[64] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., pp. xix–xxi, xlii–xliv.

'well-ordered democratic society'), namely, one that shares a public conception of justice that substantively commands general acceptance. Reasonable pluralism needs to be constructed in such a way as to attain it. The consensus Rawls pursues, however, is not an empirical Venn diagram of existing viewpoints—what he would term a modus vivendi—but relies on a free-standing thought exercise that envisages a fair society on which general agreement can be based.[65] The assumption of that conceptual unity ontologically precedes that of the actual formation of ideational overlapping consensus, which in turn precedes the establishing of orderly constitutional arrangements that implement that conceptual unity-cum-stability. Disorder is consequently marginalized as unreasonable, irrational, or mad. By contrast, reasonable pluralism is not disorderly, because it is constrained in powerful moral, political (and ideologically liberal) containers. All that is not that far removed from the order predicated in constitutional theory, expect for two elements: a hypothetical resort to a reasonable vox populi, ingenuously dressed up as actual consensus, or 'current public views in a well-ordered society' on which citizens 'roughly agree' that arrives at a potentially timeless, not an historical, unity; and the evocation of a sovereignty that is not a legal but a moral fiction, and certainly not a thought-process that engages with the political world. Indeed, Rawls candidly admits that 'I . . . assume, on the basis of a number of plausible considerations, that the case for the stability of justice as fairness, or some similar conception, goes through.'[66]

What is most significant for the purposes of this chapter is Rawls's conviction that stability is a conceptual issue, a way of thinking through profound political issues before it is a way of acting or of institutionalizing. Stability is anchored in part to the soundness or reasonableness of the 'liberal' and 'political' conception of justice. A stable conception is a reasonable and rational one, and that bestows on it the moral underpinning that alone can sustain stability in Rawls's view. Stability does not signal any durable or firm kind of order, certainly not one imposed by state power, as is the case in Foucault's version. That is why Rawls rules out persuasion, let alone compromise, and definitely not discipline, as a means of attaining the required consensus of all—the latter has to emanate from inside the reasoning thought processes of individuals seeking fairness. As a result, when Rawls thought about stability he was indeed thinking politically, but not in a sense that accorded with his own, thin, engagement with the term 'political'.[67] Moreover, even as an instance of thinking politically—on the understandings employed in this book—his was unquestionably a very truncated notion of the political, because it was a constricted conception of both stability and order.

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[65] Ibid., pp. xliii, 35–40. See the further discussion in Chapter Seven below.
[66] Ibid., pp. 66–7.
[67] See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 228–36.

Nonetheless, the suggestion that Rawls eliminates politics from his well-ordered society[68] holds only if we assume that political thinking is only about contestation and dissent rather than also about the crafting of agreement. Rawls himself commits the opposite infelicity, by holding that politics as a shared enterprise is only about the crafting of agreement and not also fundamentally about contestation and dissent.

Not least, stability also connects with the political feature of mobilization discussed in Chapter Four. It is attained by creating the right kind of motivation for 'a reasoned allegiance to . . . [just basic] institutions sufficient to render them stable'.[69] Rawls drafts in that further feature of the political to support his argumentation, but without acknowledging it. In unpacking Rawls's conception of stability, compliance and consensus dominate—a vision far removed from the understandings of those who value dissent and place it at the core of the political. But it also puts a high moral premium on agency and will as the determinants of stability, as distinct, say, from cultural worldviews, or structural features of the political, or epistemologies of order and system, or the 'emotional stability' garnered from involvement in local politics,[70] let alone force. That said, agentic will does not entail full choice in this regard. The compulsion of what is ethically right leaves few options to individuals except to make the 'right choice'. Real choice, however, is just as likely to accompany potential disorder, though it may also be the case that agents gravitate towards *parallel* forms of vague order, rather than towards the singularity of unity.

d. The ethics of order

The ethics of order is the next genre to which we turn. That theme is, once again, often sustained by a vision of a good society and, although some of it is preoccupied with the inevitability of disorder, the latter is rarely regarded as desirable. To the contrary, as Goodin puts it, 'the problem of evil is the problem to which political order is a solution'.[71] Expectedly, the ethics of order is closely linked in modern Western thought to democracy on the one hand and to (mainly interstate) peace on the other. Both subscribe to an epistemology in which order in thinking is paralleled by order in behavioural practices. The ethics of order is prominent in peace studies when terms such as 'conflict resolution' prevail. The emphasis on conflict resolution looks to a future of finality rather than to the more tentative prognosis of 'conflict

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[68]   C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 29.
[69]   Ibid., pp. 141–3.
[70]   On that point see F. Tannenbaum, 'On Political Stability', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 75 (1960), p. 176.
[71]   R.E. Goodin, 'Structures of Political Order: The Relational Feminist Alternative', in Shapiro and Hardin (eds), *Political Order*, op. cit., p. 499.

management'. Thus the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Bradford declares as one of its aims 'to work in post conflict situations in order to sustain cultures of peace'[72]—when sustaining suggests stabilizing. The notion of sustainability is, of course, also at the epicentre of environmental political thought, one of whose main aims is preservation—another form of (re)establishing a durable naturalistic order.

The frequent assumption in comparative politics that stability is associated with democracy[73] has been subversively refined by Schmitter's delicious suggestion that 'democracy is a uniquely contingent form of domination . . . [that] rests neither on harmony of interest in its survival, nor on a consensus of values inculcated in mass publics.'[74] Those stark empirical insights live uneasily with normative thinking about democracy that habitually associates order with the pursuit of specific values. Sometimes that appears in the guise of solidarity, a commonality of well-being, or a solid collective identity rather than the centralized institutional integration that comparative political scientists and theorists of modernization once sought. Though those are concepts with important components other than order, they are predicated on, and contain, some ordering or cohesion of ethical and symbolic relations. At other times the fragmentation engendered by democracy is accompanied by the expectation that diversity will produce its own forms of legitimacy by creating what Mansbridge has termed 'protected spaces' for discourse and action. 'Protected' must be assumed to mean partially immune to external disruption, a condition achieved among others by the 'stable coercion' of those who would oppress the disadvantaged.[75] Those 'counter-publics' require their own organized arenas in which they engage in 'forging bonds of solidarity' and 'preserving the memories of past injustices'[76]—that is to say, generating stability across space and over time. Their micro-stability is held to generate macro-stability. Power, too, despite serious reservations, is here rightly recognized as a stabilizer even in a democratic context and accorded ethical justification as a harbinger of order.

But disorder is increasingly regarded by political scientists as normal. It is of course quite possible to have stable patterns of political thought that encourage institutional instability, though its social costs may be high, and that could be one perspective in exploring more recent 'contentious politics' studies. Alternatively, stabilizing mechanisms emerge that are now geared to managing dissonances. One kind of order meets another, and 'the intercurrence of

[72] http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/confres/ (accessed 7.1.2013).

[73] See Jackson and Stein, op. cit., p. 198.

[74] P.C. Schmitter, review of J.J. Linz and A. Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 74 (1980), 849–52.

[75] J. Mansbridge, 'Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity', in Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference*, op. cit., pp. 47, 56.

[76] Ibid., p. 58.

different ordering arrangements becomes the medium of change through time.'[77] Path dependency is another way of ensuring order over time, by affirming that future developments occur within the constraints of past events and arrangements. Curiously, that message is not greatly different from that of Burkeian conservatives. Thus Hugh Cecil held that 'institutions to which a country is accustomed derive great strength merely from their familiarity' and went on to quote the famous passage from Burke, in which ideology masquer-aded as empirically-based epistemology: 'it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity. . . . The institutions of policy, the goods of fortune, the gifts of Providence, are handed down, to us and from us, in the same course and order. Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world . . . wherein . . . the whole . . . in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression.'[78]

Finally, one should not forget that order and stability are also signalled by visual symbols, rather than by vocal or written means, some of which indicate the mutual reinforcement of stability and commitment. Foremost among them are rituals such as the opening of Parliament, or the piece of patterned cloth that serves as a national flag, both of which indicate the abiding presence of organization and collective identity (and, correspondingly, flag-burning is a prime expression of an assault on a collective order).

7. THE ORDER OF DISORDER

Prescriptive thinking is an important experimental site for servicing the order and stability aspects of thinking politically, though it is not always experienced as such by its advocates. If at all, as in the instance of deliberative democracy, it is criticized for that tendency by more sceptical appraisers.[79] Particularly among advocates of direct action and practitioners of contentious politics, the aim of pursing an argument vigorously and relentlessly is seldom to attain reasonable agreement or even compromise. It is usually to raise the stakes— through action accompanying rigid principles as well as through disruptive speech—so that subsequent negotiation designed to accommodate radical

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[77] K. Orren and S. Skowronek, 'Institutions and Intercurrence: Theory Building in the Fullness of Time', in Shapiro and Hardin, op. cit., p. 113.

[78] H. Cecil, *Conservatism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), pp. 17, 58–9; E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1969), pp. 120–1. Italics in original.

[79] E.g. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy*, op. cit.

demands takes place in order to avert an impending, or threatened, crisis.[80] Crises, indeed, have been defined as 'turning points' that may embody both social struggle and the opportunity for social integration.[81] In the words of Martin Luther King, 'you are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action'. For King, such contention was 'constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth'.[82] Gandhi's advocacy of non-violence is an apposite example of such resistance generating its own order. Whereas 'civil disobedience . . . becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless' it was 'never followed by anarchy'; rather, 'a body of civil resisters is . . . like an army subject to all the discipline of a soldier'.[83]

Challenges to existing practices cannot reasonably be content with the discursive practices of deliberative democrats because it is only through destabilizing tactics that irreversible decisions—those that would exclude the future attainment of radical objectives—can be prevented.[84] But are activists thinking or are they doing? The distinction cannot always hold, as a demonstration, for instance, involves placards, loudhailers, chants, and verbal threats as well as possible skirmishes. Those practices contain thinking about politics— for example, critiques of the capitalist arrangements of the G8—but also thinking politically in a manner that calls into question procedures of orderly political thought itself. We are here in the domain of ontological challenges to existing values about order.

As an example consider the protest language leading up to the 1968 National Democratic Convention riots in Chicago. One of the protest leaders, Jerry Rubin of the Youth International Party (Yippies), said: 'I support everything which puts people into motion, which creates disruption and controversy, which creates chaos and rebirth.' Yet the young protesters of the American New Left illustrate how the features of thinking that involve support withdrawal and support mobilization intersect in this as in so many instances with those involving order and stability. Already in 1961, the Students for a Democratic Society activist group, who also protested in Chicago in 1968, spoke the language of order and unity in their verbal assault on establishment consensus, in a manifesto authored largely by Tom Hayden that called for a greater sense of solidarity and participation: 'America rests in national stalemate, its goals ambiguous and tradition-bound instead of

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[80] M. Humphrey, *Ecological Politics and Democratic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 108.

[81] J. O'Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 145–6.

[82] M.L. King, 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' [16.4.1963], http://almaz.com/nobel/peace/MLK-jail.html (accessed 21.12.2012).

[83] M. Gandhi, quoted in M. King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Paris: UNESCO Publications, 1999), pp. 286–8.

[84] Humphrey, op. cit., p. 107.

informed and clear, its democratic system apathetic and manipulated rather than "of, by and for the people"... America is without community.' The manifesto insisted 'that politics be seen positively, as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations; that politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community'.[85]

The North American experience of 1968 pales by comparison with events in Paris and Nanterre that year and the demonstrations that brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets in an uneasy alliance between workers and students. Jean-Paul Sartre conducted an illuminating interview with the student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit in which Sartre observed that 'what many people can't understand is the fact that you have not tried to work out a program or to give your movement a structure. They attack you for trying to "smash everything" without knowing—or at any rate saying—what you would like to put in place of what you demolish'. Cohn-Bendit's response was edifying: 'we [the students] must avoid building an organization immediately, or defining a program; that would inevitably paralyze us. The movement's only chance is the disorder that lets men speak freely, and which can result in a form of self-organization... what matters is not working out a reform of capitalist society, but launching an experiment that completely breaks with that society, an experiment that will not last, but which allows a glimpse of a possibility; something which is revealed for a moment and then vanishes. But that is enough to prove that something could exist.'[86] We have here an intriguing blend of protest with a sense of its transience, a protest to be replaced either by 'self-organization' or one whose ambitions in the name of disorder need to be reined in severely in the face of the weight of social order.

The recent internet activity of anarchists testifies to the inchoate and partially amorphous nature of such thinking that itself becomes a valued feature of 'anti-political' thinking or, put differently, democratic thinking as disorganized on principle: proudly indeterminate, fragmented, and inconclusive.[87] Contemporary anarchist movements search for a consensus, develop their own 'collective structures', 'constructing a different set of social relations', and engage in prefigurative visions that prepare new modes of social organization, cooperative, and solidaric.[88] Agonistic politics, which decries the possibility of consensus and advocates a version of mutually recognized pluralism as the norm, is itself propelled on another path of stability constituted by the balance among opposites: agonism is a desirable form of order and equilibrium, of continually contingent articulations of multiple voices,

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[85] D. Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 20, 76–7.

[86] *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20.5.1968. Reproduced in http://personal.ashland.edu/~jmoser1/cohnbendit.htm (accessed 4.1.2013).

[87] For an analysis of those modes of thinking and communicating, see U. Gordon, 'Anarchism Reloaded', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12 (2007), 29–48.

[88] U. Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 35, 38–40.

through a legitimated pattern of disruption and acknowledgement of the other.[89] And Laclau has frequently seen dislocation of the identity of the subject as the hallmark of modern societies and propounded the notion that myth is required to reconstitute social order.[90] Even the relentless dislocative resistance emanating from 'le politique' that is prevalent in French critical thought brings with it a set of alternative radical egalitarian norms with which it contends 'la politique'.

8. NEGOTIATING TOWARDS STABILITY

In Chapter Four we looked at the role of non-negotiability in securing strong distributions of significance through ranking. However, stability and the organization of the spatial relationships within and among communities are prominently promoted through negotiation and the subsequent agreement on matters of collective concern it is intended to secure. Non-negotiability can only contribute to the stabilizing of spatial relationships if a discursive and value-laden position is effectively enforced; or if there is actual nigh-concurrence with the non-negotiable concept or value, due to deep cultural preferences. Otherwise, the thought-practices enabling and even necessitating negotiation relate both to epistemological elements and to the morphological features of language. It may be too facile to suggest a simple correlation between stability of the outcomes of negotiation and high consensus or unanimity.[91] Epistemologically, negotiation can be employed because of the postulation of polysemy and a pluralism of positions as normal or inevitable, whether or not desirable. It can also be employed because—as a consequence—disagreement, contention, and conflict are permanently latent and occasionally manifest; because either reason, or emotion and rhetoric, or a package containing them all, are accorded central roles in human communication; and, ultimately, because decisions and policy-making are indispensable if a political community is to survive, let alone prosper. The very acceptance of non-coercive negotiation is itself an epistemic acknowledgement of the value and nature of agreement, and of a particular participatory understanding of decision-making in which the practice of negotiation is not exceptional but a permanent process of ordering ideational disconnect, fragmentation, and discontinuity—an acceptance of

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[89] See e.g. B. Honig and M. Stears, 'The New Realism: From Modus Vivendi to Justice', in J. Floyd and M. Stears (eds), *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 177–205.

[90] See e.g. E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London: Verso Books, 1990).

[91] F. Pfetsch, *Negotiating Political Conflicts* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 164.

negotiation as a method of thinking politically. In societies where monopolies of meaning have been created, there will be a greater tendency to delegitimate other conceptual variants *ab initio*—though, to reiterate, pluralist idea systems also have their fundamental, if possibly sparser, red lines. And when political language is infused with certain emotions, such as anger or hatred, those may have to be diffused in order to overcome the conceptual inflexibility and disambiguation they foster.[92] It is indeed the volatility of some emotions that enables negotiation.

What makes the thought-processes and conversations attempting agreement what they are depends not only on elective epistemological attributes but on inescapable morphological ones. Morphologically, the fluidity and contestability of conceptual configurations enable the kind of semantic overlap that is frequently central to the forging of common understandings, however tenuous and fragile their ostensibly shared meanings are. That structural property is compounded by the interpretative leeway that consumers of text and speech possess. Negotiation may engage in the quest for finality even when such a resolution turns out to be unattainable, no more than a temporary resting point that can be dressed up as conclusive or long-term. Discursive and contextual fluctuations and ambiguities require continuous reworking of political vocabularies, and enable conceptual negotiations that are temporarily stable. One way of accomplishing that is to shift conflict or dissent onto an indeterminate future, or to break it up into parts, some of which are manageable. And rather than sidestepping the brooding presence of disagreement through thought-experiments that magic up ethical unanimity, negotiation assumes that the real world requires particular skills and communication procedures in order to navigate amongst the unsettling fault lines of dissent.

Thus the real test of negotiation is not so much the mutual acceptability in toto of a position but that of finding the first point at the periphery of one's semantic zone of comfort where one can stop and still defend the core value system at stake, while attempting to penetrate the interpretative domain of one's interlocutors. Flexible concepts will still retain some central meanings that are epistemologically and ideologically rigid and that is a source of power in negotiation, quite distinct from the power residing in language itself, a theme to be explored in Chapter Eight. Even liberalism—an ideology for which structural elasticity is characteristic of most of its conceptual arrangements and that consequently has a built-in propensity to compromise—intentionally cultivates zones of morphological inflexibility. Liberalism may comprise a wide range of positions on the necessity of many specific human rights, but regards the notion of a right as epistemologically non-negotiable,

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[92] See also Neta C. Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships', *International Security*, 24/4 (Spring 2000), 116–56.

and even the contents of some rights—to life, dignity, and reasonable freedom—are ideologically invariable, although their edges will be blurred.

The normal inconclusiveness of political discourse may also be warded off by moving down a clear argumentative path up to a certain point in a conceptual chain. That is another way of looking at what Schelling has termed 'a focal point of agreement'.[93] The non-negotiable component may not be a precise value but a field of acceptable meanings (a number of conceptions of the concept) beyond which the value cannot shift—in the eyes of its promoters—without losing its ineliminable features. Thus democracy is not democracy if it is 'guided' democracy; socialism loses its core meaning once it becomes 'national socialism' in the Fascist sense. However, both democracy and socialism can still move conceptually within quite generous boundaries and trajectories. Those features undermine the presumption, proffered by some scholars, of a fixed minimal set of conditions for democracy to obtain, conditions usually presented as inflexible. Preserving that minimalism can only be a result of linguistic fiat running against the grain of meaning and conceptual morphology, or setting the bar so low that both practical and conceptual complexities are ignored.

Even a political culture that epistemologically eschewed negotiation could not avoid the processes of semantic engagement and clarification, quite apart from tactical and strategic considerations that may dictate the convergence on a point of view—convergence always being a route towards approximation rather than towards identity. The aim of a successful negotiation must be to protect as many as possible of a side's core values and concepts in whatever conceptual configuration is crafted at the close of the process. The inevitable rotation of concepts around axes of meanings mitigates the danger of their total erosion. Apart from the obvious complete elimination of a valued concept, that erosion—potentially fatal to negotiation—could take two forms. First, it could remove from the wider semantic field of a concept those meanings associated with it by one negotiating partner. The ambiguous concept of federalism is identified as supra-national in British discourses with EU members, while German or French positions locate it in a sub-national domain.[94] Second, a concept may hold its meaning in a context in which that meaning can no longer do the work for which it was intended; that is to say, the conceptual and cultural contexts that bestowed discursive stability on that meaning no longer exist. Thus the expansive notion of welfare as human flourishing developed by new liberals and moderate socialists has lost ground due to its flooding by the minimalist conception of welfare—entertained particularly in the USA and more recently by neo-liberal positions—that

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[93] T.C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 111.

[94] Pfetsch, op. cit., pp. 63–4.

sees it as comprising handouts to the marginalized. In both those instances, an apparently unbridgeable gap opens up. Hence the need, if a successful negotiation is desired, to utilize the 'trump cards' of concepts—their indeterminacy, ambiguity, and vagueness—through which the trappings of flexibility can be introduced into the negotiating situation and the erosion process can be reversed, or inhibited.

In considering the manner in which negotiation is enabled by the leeway that obtains in the meanings carried by political concepts, the following features are among those to be taken into account: (1) the logical constraints that dictate permissible conceptual combinations; (2) the cultural constraints that account for the emergence of diverse discourses of negotiation;[95] (3) the emotional costs, or curbs, imposed on the flexibility of the concept in moving among its conceptions; (4) the ranking of values relating to the negotiation in order of salience; (5) the ideological framework within which partiality or antagonism exists, and within which certain areas of negotiation are preferred and others debarred; (6) the practical limits imposed on conceptual negotiation by the contingencies of a given situation. Although in the context of this chapter negotiation is aired as a stabilizing device, it clearly brings into play also other political features such as the distribution of significance or contestation over political boundaries.

We have already subscribed to the view that all communication is a question of translation, even within the domain of the same language. The semantic decoding of a discourse as reception-dependent is central to investigating the language of negotiation. In parallel, reception theory allows us to factor in the readings, glossings-over, and misunderstandings of the negotiating position consequent upon the polysemic character of political language,[96] as well as to be aware of the role of rhetoric and metaphor in alluding to negotiating aims and expectations,[97] such as 'blue sky thinking' or 'wrapping things up'. In particular, the discursive identification of the imprecision of language is put to politically beneficial use when the vagueness of textual formulations allows for a degree of obfuscation that may smooth the path of negotiation, while the precision aspired to by some political scientists and theorists, let alone many political philosophers, proves here yet again to be counterproductive.

In general terms, this goes to show that there is considerable ground left to cover if political scientists and political theorists are to converse meaningfully. Thus Sanders is concerned with definitions that are 'of a more precise

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[95] J.K. Sebenius, 'Caveats for Cross-Border Negotiators', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 18 (2002), pp. 121–33.

[96] M. Del Collins, 'Transcending Dualistic Thinking in Conflict Resolution', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 21 (2005), pp. 263–80.

[97] T.H. Smith, 'Metaphors for Navigating Negotiations', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 21 (2005), 343–64.

and rigorous nature' and is consequently sceptical about the impressionistic flexibility of a 'journalistic' definition of instability as uncertainty.[98] Yet uncertainty, to reiterate, is a normal aspect of political language and not necessarily a sign of instability. It may be the case that 'journalistic impressions' are just what need to be included in an examination of major forms of actual political discourse and, further, that the tendentiousness in discourses on stability or instability, which Sanders links to 'ethnocentrism' or 'culture bias', may yet be studied systematically and profitably using interpretative research methods other than those of formal or statistical analysis.

One particular feature of a negotiating discourse is the deployment of parallel languages by each side: a language used for internal consumption, either public or semi-concealed; and an external language used for transmitting ideas to the other side. Thus, negotiating party Arcania will use languages Arcane 1 (internal) and Arcane 2 (external); while negotiating party Obscuria will use languages Obscurian 1 (internal) and Obscurian 2 (external). In addition, there is a difference between the production and the consumption of those external languages. Arcania consumes language Obscurian 2 as Obscurian 20, and Obscuria consumes language Arcane 2 as Arcane 20. The result—schematically speaking—is the existence of four discourses of production and two discourses of consumption. In the course of that process the reception of Obscurian 20 by Arcania may modify Arcane 2 and even—more fundamentally—Arcane 1, though that is not necessarily the case.

If we now employ the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblances, an effective negotiation process is one in which, from Arcania's perspective, sufficient resemblances will obtain between Arcane 1, Arcane 2, and Arcane 20 for the semantic fields to protect the crucial core meanings of the concepts and ideas that Arcania regards to be in contention. First, Arcane 2 needs to overlap sufficiently with Arcane 1 to satisfy the values held by Arcania, especially in a relatively open and transparent society. Even if Arcane 2 is initially non-public and possibly in considerable divergence from Arcane 1, such opacity cannot be protected without risk. And of course, to complicate matters further, each side is most likely to be listening in to the internal language of the other. Second, if the negotiation is to have a satisfactory outcome, the reception of Arcane 2 by Obscuria, in the form of Arcane 20, cannot drift beyond the point where Obscuria's ultimate stated understandings (its Obscurian 1, modified or not) will have to be acknowledged publicly as incompatible with Arcane 1. At the very least, an alignment needs to be perceived by Arcanians between Arcane 1 and whatever revised Obscurian 2 emanates from Obscuria, an alignment to be performed by the conceptual and cultural filters controlled by Arcania's negotiators. The converse obviously

[98] Sanders, op. cit., p. 55.

holds for the other negotiating party. Arcane 1 and Obscurian 1 need to be kept apart, otherwise the game will be up.

Negotiation can be seen both as a value and as a technique serving values. Each side of that distinction is itself nested in more than one theoretical framework.[99] Consequently, the choice of navigating through the challenges thrown up by negotiation interfaces with a number of epistemologies and methodologies. As a value, negotiation is rooted in the reading of compromise as a virtue, as a feature of altruism, fairness, or decency. Concurrently it is anchored in an ethics of reasoning based on respect for the other side,[100] and in that particular area within liberal ideologies that concerns reasonableness and toleration. In both cases it is predicated—as a normative ideal-type—on the desire 'to create shared meanings and understandings where contradictory readings existed before', and it aims at putting forward 'an offer roughly equidistant between the previous positions of the negotiating parties'.[101] The analysis of negotiation in either case may initially differ. As a feature of normative ethics, negotiation can be elevated to a universal rule of conduct based on rational argumentation, or it can be interpreted as a variant of deliberative democracy theories. As a feature of a particular ideological family, it can be posited as a self-evident viewpoint, morally superior to other competing ideological stances that result in harmful conflict, and legitimately buttressed by emotional commitment as well as rational argument.[102] There is every reason to assume that both features operate simultaneously, thus offering complementary readings to the negotiating discourse. In actual discursive practice the distance to travel towards agreement is far more likely to be asymmetrical inasmuch as—irrespective of concrete and physical threats—the conceptual and augmentative intransigence of one side is more powerful.

As a technique, negotiation is rooted within a strategy of bargaining and rational choice, in which the maximum advantage possible over the other negotiating parties consistent with arriving at an agreement is sought—the 'intersection of the maximin strategies of all players'.[103] It consequently entertains no notion of either mutual recognition or equidistance. Those strategies may be nested in Realpolitik ideological positions—types of non-liberal nationalism come to mind—that legitimate the pursuit of group self-interest,

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[99] J.R. Cohen, 'Reasoning Along Different Lines: Some Varied Roles of Rationality in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution', *Harvard Negotiation Law Review*, vol. 3 (1998), pp. 111–21.

[100] H. Richardson, 'Moral Reasoning', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003), http://plato.stanford.edu/

[101] R. Cohen, *International Negotiation: A Semantic Analysis* (London: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1999), pp. 3, 5.

[102] See T.S. Jones and A. Bodtker, 'Mediating with Heart in Mind: Addressing Emotion in Mediation Practice', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 17 (2001), 217–44.

[103] F.W. Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 119.

often at whatever possible cost can be inflicted on the other parties. Adopting that viewpoint involves important reconceptualizations of negotiation away from notions of fairness, but not from notions of stability.

Theorists of negotiation tactics recognize some of the above issues in their own terms. Schelling, for instance, points to the 'logic of indeterminate situations', whose essence is 'some voluntary but irreversible sacrifice of freedom of choice' due to 'the paradox that the power to constrain an adversary may depend on the power to bind oneself; that, in bargaining, weakness is often strength, freedom may be freedom to capitulate, and to burn bridges behind one may suffice to undo an opponent'.[104] In the language of this study, decontestation is always a restriction on semantic freedom, though not always a conscious one, whereas most analysts of negotiation focus on intentionality. Decontestation, as implicitly portrayed by Schelling, may also transport interlocutors back to safer semantic territory, or it may open up a semantic divide that is not in the interest of the other parties. Some of those power aspects of negotiation will be referred to again in Chapter Eight, but first we turn to the ways in which thinking politically always includes anticipating the future.

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[104] Schelling, op. cit., p. 22.

7

Visions and Prescriptions: Temptations and Failures of Political Thinking

'We should be a poor kind of people if we did not have some vision of the future.'[1]

PART ONE: LIVING IN THE FUTURE

1. UNTRODDEN TRAJECTORIES

No account of political thought can overlook that aspect dedicated to projecting futures and constructing plans for, and in, a society. It is part of what societies are required to deliver to their members and what those members expect from organized social life. But it is also an obvious fact of human life that we as individuals think, and dream, about our personal and joint future(s) in anticipation, hope or trepidation. Some of those ideas and discourses are couched in terms of dystopias reflecting existential anxieties, social despair, Cassandra-like warnings, and gloomy prognoses. Such futures are not planned but threatened, though they may also be linked up with schemes for countering or meeting them headlong.[2] Others, probably the majority, are visions, grander or more modest, of a better society. They are presented in prescriptive or normative language, though nineteenth-century thinkers frequently encased those desiderata in scientific cladding, as if imposing their determination on a recalcitrant world. That difference between prescription and normative stipulation, the former often just spelling out value-preferences for a society,

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[1] Lord Woolton, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 132 (House of Lords), 5 July 1944.
[2] For one among countless examples, see Al Gore, Nobel Lecture 2007, http://www.nobelprize. org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2007/gore-lecture_en.html (accessed 22.12.2012). On threats, see Chapter Eight.

has been noted in Chapter One.[3] Some visions are more matter-of-fact commitments or predictions of beneficial action to be taken in defined areas, indirectly appealing to broad social ideals but frequently accompanied by technical micro-language. All visions are evidently future-oriented, even those conservative and traditionalist visions that conjure up the future as a continuation of what is precious about a selectively fashioned and recalled past. Thatcherism, for instance, was famously articulate about the changes required to reverse some of the policies and achievements of the welfare state and to stem the extension of participatory privileges in national policy-making to trade union representatives, all in order to retrieve the solid values of the British character and way of life as that ideology saw it.[4]

Philosophers, publicists, and intellectuals—and in the more distant path, soothsayers and mystics—have been driven by cultural fashion and psychological proclivities to voice their own images and prescriptions for their societies. In democracies in particular, though not only in them, one of the most obvious roles of governments as well as of parties, pressure groups, and think-tanks is to generate policy proposals at various social levels, with a view to their being put into effect or at least to competing over adoption by crucial decision-makers. The decision-making involved in social visions and planning can therefore be closely associated with the requirements of leadership. There is, however, a difference between visions and planning. Visions tend to be articulated at a more comprehensive and general level, while containing a forceful set of imaginative aspirations; planning is more concrete and mundane, even to the point of being seemingly detached from a framework vision that nonetheless will sustain such planning in an unstated and vaguely conceived manner. As an editorial in *The Times* observed, referring to the post World War II landscape, 'Only by such a [national] plan can we . . . open the way to a full community life for the largest proportion of the people.'[5] Planning may also involve notions of quicker—in the sense of more immediate—temporal change than visions, which are as a rule set in a remoter future and often idealized without spelling out a clear sequence of time-lines. Yet the two are entwined. The hackneyed contrast of the terms 'pragmatic' and 'ideological' is an indicator of the unawareness of that oft-invisible link between planning and vision. Planning is intended to reinforce support for decision-making entities and, concurrently, can serve as a focused endeavour to realize some of the values held dear by significant groups.

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[3] I follow here Jürgen Habermas's distinction in *The Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 55.

[4] See e.g. S. Letwin, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992); M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 385–93.

[5] Editorial, *The Times*, 18 November 1940.

The future itself resounds with the silence of the non-existent. We know that it will happen but we cannot hear its voice, only our multiple voices seemingly projected onto it yet actually revealing of present political thinking. The future is an imaginary and unpredictable, yet inexorably looming, and redeeming, place—and it can only be conceived hypothetically or at best tentatively, whether as remote or near, open-ended or teleological, agent-driven or determined by extra-human forces, an inaccessible utopia or a realizable one, static or progressive and flexible, flawed or perfectible. One can talk of what Koselleck called a horizon of expectation—'the future made present'.[6] Yet, even as expectations may constrain future developments—inasmuch as ideational interventions to realize or to prevent them take place—any society is riven by contesting expectations of the future, leading to an inevitable indeterminacy of expectations when those expectations are assessed collectively. The problem of vision- and plan-oriented political discourse is to project the future through responding to the social and psychological need for relative determinacy, a need to crowd out the unexpectable in the name of the plausible (what Churchill once referred to as 'informed forethought'[7]). It can of course fall prey to the bombastic or confront the terrifying, and the implausible may well materialize. On another level, a distinguishing feature of different political visions will be the prevalence of a conceptual basket containing preponderant but varying balances of group identity. Visions carry additional baggage with them, engaging with questions such as 'who are we?', while attempting to fashion a future that secures whatever response such questions may elicit and perhaps provisionally satisfy. The projection of such identity can typically be seen in statements such as: 'concerning planning, the greatest asset we . . . had ever had, was the character and ability of our own people'.[8]

In constructing political visions, societies attempt to 'nationalize' time, to identify it as a public good and to compete over its ideational ownership. This chapter will not deal with the different ideological appropriations of the idea of time (linear, circular, aggregative, disruptive, and so forth) in the hands of diverse political belief-systems, nor will it consider the uses to which time has been put in existing, rather than future-oriented, instances, for example the scientific management schools of the early twentieth century.[9] Instead, it focuses on the fundamental need of societies to conjure up futures in the first place. This section will explore some characteristics of thinking about

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[6] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 272.

[7] Quoted in 'Planning for Peace', *The Times*, 2 October 1942.

[8] 'Reconstruction by Stages', *The Times*, 2 December 1942.

[9] For one such treatment, see C.S. Maier, 'The Politics of Time: Changing paradigms of Collective Time and Private Time in the Modern Era', in C.S. Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political*: *Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 151–75.

vision and planning. Among myriad possible instances I have selected, some-what arbitrarily, some British and American examples. In the USA, they come from State of the Union Addresses. In the UK they draw on one notable example of forward thinking—focusing on post World War II reconstruction, an unusually fertile hunting ground for visions and plans—but other instances are incorporated into the discussion as well. The second section will focus on a specific version of thinking politically as a case study with important ramifi-cations: the propensity to fail, embedded in prescriptive political theory dedicated to constructing visions.

Societies are almost always the site of competitions among social visions. Those who construct such visions are eager to present them both as superior to their rivals, and as superior to the absence of any vision. So the production of political visions must attack inertia and suggest that change will usher in improvement, including the kind of change that aims at dismantling previous, pernicious change. Political forecasts often include inventive (re)constructions of the future, and the use of stirring rhetoric is consequently common in their composition, even though it is inevitably eroded when visions are reduced to the world of planning with its technical, legal, or bureaucratic language. But as people by and large invest heavily in their personal futures and in the futures of those to whom they feel attached, they will possess both a rational and an emotional interest in any collective thinking that may affect those futures. And political visions, furthermore, are particularly fragile constructs, as will be seen in the second section of this chapter, subject to fundamental weaknesses of political thinking.

Two salient themes emerge in grand social visions: faith and imagination. Faith is the extra-rational link between a perceived present and a possible or desired future, but it is also the motive force that elicits perseverance and forward movement in the face of contrary indications or the overarching grandeur of the vision. Hailing the Beveridge report, the Liberal peer Lord Nathan observed: 'the mere term "Beveridge" connotes a symbol of hope in the future, a source of faith in the power of ordered planning'.[10] That forward movement harnesses the intensity of which thinking politically is capable, and it is often indispensable for acts of imaginative projection that are so import-ant a property of collective thinking. Equally, of course, there may be resist-ance to that kind of thinking. Thus the Conservative peer Lord Monkswell: 'People who have been so ill-mannered as to inquire have been informed that the thing is going to be done by faith. That is not very comforting.'[11] Long-term visions may hold out their improbabilities, if not their terrors.

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[10] Lord Nathan, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 126 (House of Lords), 24 February 1943.
[11] Lord Monkswell, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 134 (House of Lords), 15 February 1945.

Imagination itself is central to political thinking and, indeed, theorizing, notwithstanding some desiccated instances of argumentation. As Sheldon Wolin observed, 'most political thinkers have believed imagination to be a necessary element in theorizing because they have recognized that, in order to render political phenomena intellectually manageable, they must be presented in what we can call "a corrected fullness" . . . imagination . . . has been the means by which the political theorist has sought to transcend history.'[12] That imagination is by no means reduced to the refined minds of the great political philosophers; it is located in each and every person who thinks politically. The debates on post-war reconstruction are replete with references to 'imaginative courage', to 'a bold and imaginative conception' and to catching 'the imagination of the people of this country'. Or as William Morris wrote in delineating his detailed view of the future: 'I want to give you my personal view of the Promised Land of Socialism . . . those of us with a grain of imagination in them cannot help speculating as to how we shall live then.'[13] Social imagination is a mark of the inventive curiosity that communities always produce, as well as a necessary ingredient in the inevitable leap from any number of presents to any number of futures.

Both visions and planning are about attempted control, about 'the conquest of the future',[14] and the drawing up of proposals and projects for a good or flourishing or 'successful' society is yet another manifestation of the endeavour to exercise power over a society's thought-patterns and processes—power which, of course, can be discursively persuasive as well as coercive. As the leading early twentieth-century British politician Ramsay MacDonald asserted, 'no Party will dispute the fact that varying degrees and methods of control for social and human ends are required by reason of the growing power of production . . . and the proved inability of an anarchist competition to remove the moral as well as the economic blot upon civilization'.[15] The projection of any future is far from costless—it may, for instance, destabilize or agitate the present in which it is articulated, as well as demand immediate financial outlays—but it enables the elaboration of political ideas that, unless instantly abhorrent or nonsensical, have yet to pass the practical tests of feasibility, and are therefore screened from them. Suspended somewhere between option-proposing and option-determining, the putative discursive intervention in a time-line that is yet to unfold (and hence a potentially failed 'intervention', as will be argued in the second section) is a major characteristic

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[12] S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2004), p. 19.

[13] William Morris, 'How Shall We Live Then?' http://www.iisg.nl/archives/morris/live01.php [1889], p. 1 (accessed 1.12.2012).

[14] 'Reconstruction by Stages', *The Times*, 2 December 1942.

[15] J.R. MacDonald, 'Preface', in G. Elton et al., *Towards a National Policy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), p. xiv.

of thinking politically, and a major focus for the hopes, frustrations, and conflicts that are so central to communal life.

2. PLANNING AS PROMISE AND INSPIRATION

Visions are a currency in which the extremes of the political spectrum have always traded with particular zest. When Barbara Wootton commented on the misrepresentation of socialists, she observed that they are 'charged with expecting the imagination of their audience, no less vivid than their own, to fill in most of the details of the picture'.[16] True, at the time she wrote the horrifying spectre of the thousand years' Reich had in effect begun to fill in such details, though that vision was quenched in what its anticipators, though certainly not its victims, would have considered to be its infancy. But in the case of most political visions, their level of generality is important. For those visions to be constructed, existing vocabulary needs to be flexible enough to change; and in some cases concepts may have to be completely discarded and replaced. Put differently, political vision requires that concepts detach themselves easily from time and space constraints—which is why utopias fall so obviously into that category. That does not necessarily mean that political visions become universal, but that they are those exercises of the social imagination that are potentially re-attachable to other time/space contexts. 'The immensity of the task', wrote *The Times*, anticipating the post-war world as early as 1941, 'should not be a deterrent but an inspiration. The end of the war will be a call, not to return to idleness and complacency, but to undertake great things.'[17] Evidently, the making of political visions may entail a struggle over conceptual replacement, over ideational attractiveness, and over what the presumed power to deliver looks like. Equally clearly, these conceptual macro-transplantations cannot be bogged down in the minutiae of technical or administrative detail: 'Planning is not an end in itself. It is the indispensable means of promoting the health and happiness of the people and the amenity of their lives.'[18] The specific vision of the post-war world was crafted to sustain long-term hope over short-term despair.

When we break down the practice of visualizing and detailing a social future, the interlaced literary, aesthetic, and emotional complexity that rhetoric often bestows on that practice opens up to reveal a number of related components. Sometimes it is in the form of a story about a collectivity— perhaps a New Jerusalem or a journey of national awakening being

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[16] B. Wootton, *Plan or No Plan* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), p. 7.
[17] Editorial, *The Times*, 28 January 1941.
[18] Editorial, *The Times*, 17 April 1942.

undertaken. Such a narrative revolves around collective identity far more than around policy prescription. Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland*, an early vision of Zionism—an ideology that involved a real as well as a metaphorical journey—is an apposite example.[19] Sometimes it is about the emphatic realization of a religious creed, as Sayyid Qutb understood the mission of the Qur'ān through Muhammad: to 'bring forth a community, found a state, organize a society . . . tying them to one source, to one authority, to one directing force—and that is religion'.[20] Other visions are less group-oriented and offer a collective ambience where individual development or liberty can grow. In the more corporeal world of everyday politics, a collective future may initially entail a decision that launches that vision, in the form of a promise or pledge, a public statement of at least moderate transparency and salience, directed at a social group whose durability is assumed. That is a different kind of promising from the one examined in Chapter Five: not the hypothetical promising of contract theory; nor the ethical assumption of obligations that seem simply to arise *from* social membership; but the concrete promises that concern policy-making *for* a given population and that emanate from those who compete among themselves for their visions to be accepted *by* the people at large. The choice of the word 'pledge' intensifies the speech-act to a promise, in terms of formality and solemnity. The pledges discussed in Chapter Five related to ritualized individual commitments to supporting a central political entity. Here the direction of flow is reversed—a political administration affirms a specific commitment to its members. Most democratic election manifestos include such pledges.

Visions are obviously authored both by formal power-wielders and by multitudes of power-contenders. With regard to the former, one of the roles of leadership being that of producing social visions, such visions tend to be couched in the centralizing terms one would except to emanate from an authoritative decision-making agency. As an editorial in *The Times* expressed it, looking ahead to what would ultimately become the desperately distant 1945 triumph, 'We possess all the elements of victory and all the driving power. To coordinate all these resources we want such leadership as can only come from a central authority.'[21] And a debate in the House of Commons referred to post-war reconstruction as giving Britain 'the moral leadership in the universal struggle for social security'.[22] The power-contenders are, unsurprisingly, less constrained in the kinds of vision they can, and do, produce and in many cases their flights of imagination are bolder and frequently more

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[19] T. Herzl, *Old-New Land* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1941) [first published in German as *Altneuland* (Berlin und Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902].

[20] S. Qutb, quoted in R. L. Nettler, 'Guidelines for the Islamic Community: Sayyid Qutb's Political Interpretation of the Qur'ān', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 1 (1996), 187.

[21] Editorial, *The Times*, 17 October 1940.

[22] Arthur Greenwood, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 186, 16 February 1943.

removed from feasibility or from an attainable timeline: ecological and future-generations oriented thinking benefits from such freedoms. The issue, however, is not merely between contending rafts of promises; the practice of promising or pledging may well be resisted or doubted by those towards whom it is levelled, when the trusting of institutionalized promise-makers becomes eroded in relation to specific policies rather than to grand visions. The reaction to Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's broken 2010 manifesto pledge not to raise university tuition fees undermined trust in the Liberal Democrat Party, despite Clegg's apology: 'There is no easy way to say this: we made a pledge. We didn't stick to it—and for that I am sorry. . . . I will never again make a pledge unless as a party we are absolutely clear about how we can keep it.'[23]

Alternatively, the promises of one political grouping will be rubbished by another in competition over their respective credibility. Ramsay MacDonald's admonition to the British public could be echoed from generation to generation, when he castigated the opposition policies for their 'propaganda of reckless promise': 'programmes and promises of this nature are deadly allurements to masses of men and women'.[24] Yet the world of political visions is also one of false reassurances (because they cannot be guaranteed). Churchill, beset by his 'black dog', acknowledged in moments of gloom that 'A dangerous optimism is growing about the conditions it will be possible to establish here after the war. . . . It is because I do not wish to deceive the people by false hopes and airy visions of Utopia and Eldorado that I have refrained so far from making promises about the future. We must all do our best and we shall do it much better if we are not hampered by a cloud of pledges and promises which arise out of the hopeful and genial side of man's nature and are not brought into relation with the hard facts of life.'[25] Sir Percy James Grigg, Secretary of State for War, commenting on 'homes for heroes' for Army personnel, put it pithily: 'The making, or anything which looks like the making, of promises on insufficient ground is one of the most fatal things I can imagine.'[26]

At any rate, promising is far from being an adequate part of vision fashioning. Visions need to be formulated in particularly attractive terms that appeal to commonalities of destiny and, often but not always, to the widest possible scope of social interests. Side by side with planning particulars, visions exude an uplifting holism, a macro-panorama of impending social life with a considerable payoff, ensuring 'the . . . generous distribution of the things that make up the good life'.[27] In the era of nation-states, some visions draw

[23] Andrew Grice, *Independent*, 20 September 2012. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nick-clegg-eats-humble-pie-over-broken-promises-8157482.html (accessed 1.12.2012).

[24] MacDonald, 'Preface', op. cit., p. viii.

[25] W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 4 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), pp. 958–9 [note: 'Promises about Post-War Conditions', 1 January 1943].

[26] Sir Percy James Grigg, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 386, 2 February 1943.

[27] Editorial, *The Times*, 17 April 1942.

both strength and attractiveness from associating themselves with the destiny of the nation, for many the highest effective and loyalty-commanding political grouping. When ecologists shift their visions either to a regional or a global order, they are following the same route in appealing to what they conceive as natural social entities. E.F. Schumacher wrote: 'We need the freedom of lots and lots of small, autonomous units, and, at the same time, the orderliness of large-scale, possibly global, unity and co-ordination . . . when it comes to the world of ideas, to principles or to ethics, . . . we need to recognize the unity of mankind and base our actions upon this recognition.'[28]

Many visions project end-states, adding the macro-finality of the good life to the micro-finality of decontestation. Alternatively, they identify momentous resting-points, in a society's apparently unlimited life span, furnishing the comforting prospect of a replenished stability and its accompanying security that are among the various features of thinking politically. As William Beveridge proclaimed in the introduction to his famous 1942 report with its unrevealing title, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*: ' . . . any proposals for the future, while they should use to the full the experience gathered in the past, should not be restricted by consideration of sectional interests established in the obtaining of that experience. Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.'[29] In moments of social drama, political visions resort to expectations of replacement and renewal: 'we are engaged in no less a task than that of moulding the future of the young generation'.[30] 'We are turning our back, finally, on past doctrines and past conceptions and looking forward with hope to a new era', announced Ernest Bevin. State action meant 'blazing a new trail', 'introducing, as against automatic control, conscious direction'—the future can be managed and channelled.[31]

The consumers of visions also need, however, to be assured that visions will happen quite normally, not just at moments of social upheaval, and that societies are located on improvement trajectories so that the regular march of time at their disposal puts the visions of authoritative or powerful groups within reach. That relates to some public expectations that politicians produce visions—they satisfy, in loco parentis, a craving for guidance. Tellingly, in the run-up to the 2010 General Election in the UK, Ed Miliband—the author of the Labour election manifesto—was berated for a programme of micro-measures. The TV interviewer, Kirsty Wark, asked: 'How do you address the problem that there is no real big vision in this?' Miliband responded: 'I don't

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[28] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1975), p. 69.
[29] W. Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, Cmd. 6404 (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 6.
[30] R.A.B. Butler, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 391, 29 July 1943.
[31] Ernest Bevin, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 401, 21 June 1944.

agree that there is no vision . . . the vision is very clearly of an economy reshaped and market institutions reshaped by government in the right way to build a strong economy of the future. A fairer society as we go forward and also a big opening up of our politics. And I think that's a vision.'[32] Wark's implicit reference was to the Conservatives' 'Big Society' as enunciated by Prime Minister David Cameron: 'for this vision to succeed we need mass engagement'; namely, giving society more, and government less, say in people's affairs. 'We can pave the way . . . if there is a will to follow that path.'[33] Leadership and followers are united through a topography of forward movement. Not least, taking charge of a vision of societal practices intersects with other forms of thinking politically. It brings yet again into play the arrogating role of politics as boundary setter and determiner of social competences. But it also a source of sustenance for communities. As an expert on think-tanks—those professional generators of plans and visions from which leaders are invited to draw—has noted: 'The rhetorical or discursive strategies of think-tanks enhance the political potency of ideas and mobilize support.'[34]

Outside the momentous impact of a world war, visions are often related to crises—or putative crises—and attempts to overcome them. Three such examples, in reverse chronological order, may be gleaned from USA State of the Union addresses. These social vision and planning statements proffer instructive case studies of the role of political visions in vernacular political language, directed to set out the self-image of a nation. In his 2012 address, President Obama affirmed that 'in this moment of trial, there is no challenge too great; no mission too hard. As long as we're joined in common purpose, as long as we maintain our common resolve, our journey moves forward, our future is hopeful, and the state of our Union will always be strong.'[35] And in 2010, Obama located his address in an historical succession ('we must answer history's call'), in which progress is not inevitable but has to be constructed through courage and national strength, by means of which 'we can deliver on that promise'. In a two-party system, in particular, the rhetoric of future-orientation is that change must come, and that work invested today is aimed at improving tomorrow. The future, curiously, can be arrested, as if it were out there in the minds of political visionaries but could be obstructed by the

[32] Newsnight, 12 April 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00s1sb1/Newsnight_12_04_2010/

[33] David Cameron, 'This is a Radical Revolt Against the Statist Approach of Big Government', *Observer*, 18 April 2010, p. 32.

[34] D. Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 218.

[35] Barack Obama, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/25/state-of-the-union-address-full-text (accessed 8.1.2013).

political system: 'How long should we wait? How long should we put our future on hold?' Detailed plans are an important facet of those visions, but all plans flourish under the umbrella of 'carry[ing] the dream forward.'[36]

President George W. Bush's reactions to the 'war on terror' provide an example of a vision that in some of its particulars is accompanied by a *mission*, with its dual religious and military connotations. Although the appeal and subject-matter of the address are broad, there is considerable emphasis on attaining one specified goal. As Bush declared in 2003, with the political language of finality firmly projected on to the future: 'In all these efforts . . . America's purpose is more than to follow a process. It is to achieve a result: the end of terrible threats to the civilized world'. The rhetoric strongly accentuated the ritual of promise and the channelling of future time: 'In the ruins of two towers, at the western wall of the Pentagon, on a field in Pennsylvania, this nation made a pledge, and we renew that pledge tonight: Whatever the duration of this struggle and whatever the difficulties, we will not permit the triumph of violence in the affairs of men; free people will set the course of history.'[37] In 2004 the wording, in relation to the Iraqi war, was even more explicit: 'America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. . . . Our aim is a democratic peace . . . this great republic will lead the cause of freedom.'[38] Bush, too, offered assurances about the control of future time, speaking in 2005 about 'our . . . responsibility to future generations . . . we will pass along to our children all the freedoms we enjoy'. It is also a vision whose embrace extends across social space, reaffirming 'our confidence in freedom's power to change the world. We are all part of a great venture . . . to spread the peace that freedom brings.'[39]

As ever, political visions transcend the written word. One of their most famous pictorial representations was Diego Rivera's 'Political Vision of the Mexican People'. In that extensive series of murals at the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, Rivera 'set out to supply a hitherto non-existent national revolutionary iconography',[40] contrasting Mexico's Indian heritage with the current economic plight of urban and rural workers. The murals mainly display various harmonies of pastoral serenity, physical toil, and religious

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[36] Barack Obama, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/28/us/politics/28obama.text.html?pagewanted=1 (accessed 5.4.2010).

[37] George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/on politics/transcripts/bushtext_012803.html (accessed 6.4.2010).

[38] George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/ politics/transcripts/bushtext_012004.html (accessed 6.4.2010).

[39] George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/ politics/transcripts/bushtext_020205.html (accessed 7.4.2010).

[40] A. Kettenmann, *Diego Rivera 1886–1957: A Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 1997), pp. 27–32.

festivals, all infused with an atmosphere of stability, grace, and cooperation. Rather than projected as one holistic catch-all, the future is rolled out in a series of complementary tableaus, both transformative and evocative. The co-option of artists by the political establishment is far from new, particularly in non-democratic regimes, but that project is an interesting instance of such an establishment bestowing its blessing on an artistic radicalism that hopes to inspire and direct social change, rather than on an artistic pseudo-radicalism aimed at consolidating the power and achievements of ultimately conservative ruling elites.

In quite a few expressions of political thinking, and in some of the prominent ideological families, resistance to a particular vision, as well as resistance to the very practice of planning, may be emphatically stated. But in such cases the resistance is generally qualified and the 'anti-planners' are not themselves bereft of visions of the future. Rather, they decry attempts to create and channel that future and adopt instead a discourse that relocates the mechanisms of attaining it to ostensibly extra-human forces, or to harmonious, 'natural' and decentralized rhythms in human interaction. Hayek notably warned against 'the illusion that we can deliberately "create the future of mankind"'.[41] But he too harboured a vision of the future, in this case a vision sheltered from governmental economic management. It was of a 'Great Society' (a notion borrowed from Adam Smith) in which a spontaneous order, extensive individual freedom, and a moral code that treated all alike—though in a limited sense—would prevail;[42] or a 'Good Society', one which, in view of the randomness of individual life-chances, did not offer 'delectable plums' to a few but 'offered better prospects to the great majority'.[43] Sometimes that vision was termed an 'Open Society' (an appellation borrowed from Popper, and note the capitalization of all three phrases), one whose members would possess 'common opinions, rules and values' rather than a unified and purposive common will. As for planning, it was 'central direction of all economic activity according to a single plan' to which Hayek objected. What he wrote on planning in general is therefore highly instructive: ' . . . everybody who is not a complete fatalist is a planner, every political act is (or ought to be) an act of planning, and there can be differences only between good and bad, between wise and foresighted and foolish and shortsighted planning'.[44]

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[41] F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 152.

[42] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 2; vol. 2, pp. 109–11, 144–6.

[43] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 132.

[44] F.A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 88, 234.

3. SCIENCE AND UTOPIA

The idea of political parties as, among others, the vehicles for the production and dissemination of programmes for a society developed at the end of the nineteenth century, when the preference for 'one issue at a time' was replaced with a plethora of programmes coming mainly from the progressive domain. Although both world wars provoked large-scale thinking about post-war reconstruction, planning became part of the idiom of political discourse at all times. For Wootton, planning had to eschew both generalities and obsessive detail. The centralization that accompanied planning was also an administrative prerequisite that elicited the necessary expertise and supervision without which plans could not be realized,[45] and it entailed the assumption of responsibility by a formal social agency. She defined planning as 'the conscious and deliberate choice of economic priorities by some public authority'.[46] If we sidestep her restriction of planning to the domain of economic activity—a viewpoint rather typical of practical socialists in the mid-twentieth century— what is further striking is its linkage to another feature of the political, the distribution and ranking of significance. As Lord Woolton put it in a House of Lords debate on reconstruction plans: 'The task that faced us . . . was . . . dealing with the fundamental requirements of the people in the proper order of their importance,'[47] while the *Manchester Guardian* anticipated 'a new order of national priorities'.[48] And another feature of thinking politically, the subject of Chapter Six, was periodically invoked. Problems such as a higher standard of living and steady employment in the post-war future 'must be solved if there is to be any kind of stable equilibrium in the world after the war'.[49]

During the 1920s and 1930s the interest in planning under the rubric of rationalization married control of the future with the application of 'scientific' methods for its attainment. Those two decades of debate about the merits of planning were by no means restricted to socialists. In 1930 John Maynard Keynes had enjoined his readers 'to substitute for the operation of natural forces a scheme of collective planning'.[50] Indeed, planning was no technical or economic issue alone, as Hobson observed: 'in that [conscious social] planning the most critical issue will be that of the proper moral relation between the individual and society'.[51] Yet, voicing the distinction discussed in Chapter Three between monitoring boundaries and intervention in the

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[45] B. Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), pp. 305, 307–10.

[46] Ibid., p. 6.

[47] 'Lord Woolton on Plans for Reconstruction', *The Times*, 9 December 1943.

[48] Editorial, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1944.

[49] Lord Westwood, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th Ser., vol. 132 (House of Lords), 5 July 1944.

[50] J.M. Keynes, 'Sir Oswald Mosley's Manifesto', *Nation*, 13 December 1930.

[51] J.A. Hobson, 'The State as an Organ of Rationalisation', *Political Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1931), p. 44.

creative domain of other social spheres, Hobson demanded 'the personal freedom of production outside the compass of collective planning'.[52] The language of World War II and its aftermath was replete with the centrality of a national plan. In its election manifesto of 1945, 'The Labour Party offer[ed] the nation a plan which will win the Peace for the People'. For, as it continued, 'If peace is to be protected we must plan and act. Peace must not be regarded as a thing of passive inactivity: it must be a thing of life and action and work'.[53]

Utopian thinking is a special case of future visions, not all of them overtly political. Few social visions have invoked, as do utopias, the imaginative flights of fancy of which human beings are capable. Although many utopias come with detailed blueprints, others are fantastical workings of an alternative future, whether as methodological criticism of the present or as quasi-artistic and aesthetic constructions of the good life in considerable abstraction from any conceivable future reality. Then again, utopian thought can play loose with time, shifting between pasts and futures, denying unidirectional unilinearity.[54] 'Utopia is the imaginary society in which humankind's deepest yearnings, noblest dreams, and highest aspirations come to fulfilment', writes one scholar.[55] Another describes one of the roles of utopias as '"social dreaming" that may help promote "alternative" values and ideas', often of the dispossessed.[56] Those visions may challenge social arrangements and be imaginatively disruptive rather than seek to build on and continue social and cultural trajectories. As Karl Mannheim saw it, 'only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time'.[57] Given, however, that most utopias do not pass over into conduct, it may be more helpful to regard that fundamental disruptiveness as already attained in utopian thought-practices themselves. Even when utopian thinking is attempted to be put into practice, as one commentator wrote of Robert Owen, 'his utopian vision blinded him from realizing how inadequately his New Lanark experience had prepared him for administering

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[52] J.A. Hobson, 'A British Socialism. II', *New Statesman*, 1 February 1936. For further details, see M. Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 351–6.

[53] 'Let us Face the Future', Labour Party Election Manifesto 1945, http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1945/1945-labour-manifesto.shtml (accessed 9.1.2010).

[54] R. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hemel Hempstead: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 173.

[55] R.M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopia in Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 1.

[56] M. Kenny, 'Introduction: Exploring "the Utopian" in Political Ideologies', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12 (2007), 212–13.

[57] K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., n.d. [1936]), p. 192.

the first model community for his social movement'.[58] Importantly for the discussion in this chapter, there is nothing in utopian thinking that necessarily connects it to national or state projects. Many utopias are conceived of as small scale 'intentional communities'[59] but that does not diminish them as instances of thinking politically with respect to possible futures.

In contrast, the idea of utopia can be attached to highly abstract notions of time, such as the Chiliastic ecstasy in which a sudden inward transformation of the outer world bursts forth in recollection or longing,[60] or one in which fulfilled, eternal—rather than perfected time—is summoned up.[61] In doing that, as Leopold observes, one should not 'ignore the role that more demanding and less-immediate ultimate targets can play in helping us choose between equally accessible possibilities now'.[62] When this happens, the political is retained as an expression of desire or dissatisfaction. Although utopian thinking involves a degree of disengagement from the world of 'real' politics, it is not removed from the political itself, if only as one form of dissent that has bearing on the order of disorder noted in Chapter Six. Yet even then, as Mannheim appreciated, 'the impossible gives birth to the possible'.[63] Indeed, as Sargent has observed, 'very few actual utopias make any pretence to perfection'; as a rule they combine hope and failure.[64]

PART TWO: ENDEMIC FAILURES OF POLITICAL THINKING

1. THREE CRITERIA OF FAILURE

The indeterminacy and vagueness of visions of the future lend themselves particularly well to an examination of failures in political thinking. Every one of the six features of the political may fail, but within the theme of this chapter we have an especially instructive instance. The kind of failure this section

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[58] D.E. Pitzer (ed.), *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 106.

[59] See D. Leopold, 'Socialism and (the Rejection of) Utopia', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12 (2007), 221–2.

[60] Mannheim, op. cit., p. 215.

[61] Levitas, op. cit., pp. 70–3, offers a helpful analysis of the views of Karl Mannheim, Ernest Bloch, and Paul Tillich on these questions.

[62] D. Leopold, 'A Cautious Embrace: Reflections on (Left) Liberalism and Utopia', in B. Jackson and M. Stears (eds), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 31.

[63] Mannheim, op. cit., p. 213.

[64] L.T. Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). pp. 104, 126–7.

explores may occur at many levels of articulation—at the level of the vernacular or that of competitive institutional political discourse—but it can notably be found also at the level of highly reflective professional political theorizing. True, many vernacular visions of the future are detailed, but they are not infrequently unconstrainedly and even wildly imaginative. And governmental and party-political rhetoric about the future is, as has been shown above, more likely to be either vague or micro-oriented. Professional political theorists, however, invest much more heavily in constructing visions of the future in terms of academic care and sophistication and they therefore warrant being taken more to task for not delivering on what their relatively complex theories of the future commit to deliver.[65]

In recent years there has been a spate of works on political failure by political scientists and economists, relating chiefly to institutions and policies, as well as Scott's excellent study.[66] Many of those investigations concern failed states and their inability to maintain political order. International relations theory, while bemoaning the inadequacy of studies of failure, has also mainly examined the failure of states to deliver political goods such as security, wealth, a legal order, or infrastructural requirements that characterize what is loosely referred to as a Weberian state.[67] A second type of literature concerns the unwillingness of states and their officers to honour standards of political and ethical probity.[68] A third genre has identified discourse failure in common deviations from the truth requirements of 'reliable' social science that can nonetheless be explained in terms of rational choice. Such failures of explanation are regarded as forms of understandable, and occasionally correctable, error.[69] In addition to the above, there is another link between thinking politically and failure, namely, the discursive construction of crises. Hay has suggested that crises and breakdowns can be 'constituted in and through narrative' when an occurrence is interpreted as something that recruits 'the contradictions and failures of the system' to trigger off certain responses.[70]

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[65] An earlier version of this section was published as M. Freeden, 'Failures of Political Thinking', *Political Studies*, vol. 57 (2009), 141–64.

[66] J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[67] See e.g. R.I. Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-State Failure', *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2002), 25/3, 85–96; J. Milliken and K. Krause, 'State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies', *Development and Change*, vol. 33/5 (2002), 753–74.

[68] E.g. N. Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

[69] See G. Pincione and F.R. Tesón, *Rational Choice and Democratic Deliberation: A Theory of Discourse Failure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[70] C. Hay, 'Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the "Winter of Discontent"', *Sociology*, vol. 30 (1996), 253–77.

That involves a discursive transformation in which thinking *about* failure is harnessed to policy ends.

There has, however, been no equivalent literature on failures *in* political thinking and theorizing. Yet it is indisputable that (1) political thought displays its own forms of failure; (2) some forms of failure in political thinking are endemic, unlike the institutional and policy cases of failure which are mostly portrayed as contingent and reparable; and (3) understanding the reasons for those failures is yet another way of illuminating both the possibilities and the permanent constraints that operate on the construction of political argument. The analysis in this section is restricted to the direct failures endemic in the construction of prescriptive visions of society that aspire to normative status. But in so doing, it draws attention to the more fundamental failure of the discipline of political theory to conceptualize and analyse systematically the problem of such direct, immediate, and case-by-case failures, and offers some corrective steps in that direction.

Failure should be distinguished from fallibility. The latter, as elucidated by Popper, relates to the possibility of error in scientific assertions of knowledge. Prescriptive and normative political thought are not falsifiable in Popper's sense, yet they can fail. Nor does this section consider cases where uncertainty is *consciously* factored into theories. Even that conscious recognition does not eliminate failure, as some theorists who subscribe to contingency, for example post-Marxists, are nevertheless tempted to offset that contingency in their substantive thinking by offering prescriptions that consequently fail to provide a durable formula.

Three specific criteria of failure in political thinking, and in theories such thinking produces, may be posited. First, the failure to deliver ideationally what the political theory or argument in question has itself undertaken— through its creator(s)—to deliver. Second, the failure to take on board the constraints imposed on the initial construction of a theory or argument by the features and structure of political concepts. Third, the failure of the specific epistemologies and ideologies that underlie political theorizing to confer sufficient conclusiveness on the theories that emerge from them. The under-lying causes of those three criteria invoke, respectively, three problems with political language and discourse: first, the impossibility of keeping meaning constant over time; second, the indeterminacy—repeatedly encountered in previous chapters—that surrounds the eliciting and defining of the concepts and values a theory is designed to promote; and third, the inevitable limits to offering sufficient comprehensive detail in prescribing paths of political change or reform.

The three criteria are examined here specifically in relation to the construc-tion of grand, or macro, political visions and/or single and overarching regulative principles—common, though far from ubiquitous, enterprises among political theorists and philosophers. In the normal course of their

activities, political theorists consciously and conscientiously grapple with potential defects of coherence, consistency or clarity in their own theories, and they are centrally concerned with improving and finessing approaches to micro-problems. All that is not being questioned—their theories may pass those tests with flying colours and still fail the three criteria. Those criteria concern substrata issues that are often ignored by, or seen as beyond the professional responsibility of, those offering political visions. In ignoring the criteria, as will be shown, macro-theorists may nonetheless announce their awareness of the possible defects and limitations of their theories, but not necessarily in the areas of concern to this study; that is to say, despite expressed tentativeness theorists may still overlook major structural and epistemological barriers that their theories confront. In limiting the scope of their responsibility, it is significant that the expectations hanging on the delivery of political visions, expectations that macro-theorists themselves encourage, are not primarily those of their professional colleagues, trained to anticipate well-constructed arguments. Rather, they emanate from various publics—professional and lay—anticipating the emergence of a new or improved society, or a fundamentally reformed political system, through the received and consumed text.

Nor are the three criteria a blanket condemnation of political visions and regulative principles. Evoking them does not involve denying that such visions and principles nonetheless have looser impacts: in terms of their inspirational effects, their capacity to mobilize for a cause, their creativity, or the way they occasionally influence future encounters with political practice and policy-making in general terms—but those all fall short of delivering what was intended. There are undoubtedly further philosophical or aesthetic standards by which a theory will not be considered to have failed. But, in line with a central theme of this book, the emphasis in probing failure is on analysing political theory itself as a thought-artefact with empirically determinable features. Some of those features exhibit built-in weaknesses that lead to ideational culs-de-sac in the political practice of thinking about politics.

The case made here is not simply the vague and common assertion that there is a gap between theory and practice. Nor—to borrow a distinction from comparative government literature[71]—does the focus on the particular political thought-practices discussed in this section emphasize the *outcomes* or consequences of political thinking in terms of the concrete practices it enables, disables or fails to shape; rather, it emphasizes the *outputs* of political thinking in terms of the efficacy of their formulation as argumentative positions. And a further step is taken: this section reintroduces the analysis of ideologies I have pursued in other work and that has largely remained outside the aegis of this

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[71] See J.J. Linz and A. Stepan (eds), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 18.

study. Failures of political thinking will gain additional purchase when linked, for instance, to crucial differences between archetypal conservative and liberal approaches (though obviously not every member of each ideological family will share all its core morphological and epistemological attributes).[72] And against those who assume that theories of failure inexorably emanate from a conservative *Weltanschauung*, I will argue that postulating such failure does not inevitably lead to endorsing theories of human imperfection. It is no less illuminating to assess the intricate relationship between progressive ideologies and failures of political thinking.

Why should we be interested in failures of political thinking? One compelling response is that in politics success, or creating the illusion of success, is the only currency in circulation, residually making failure either a taboo or the worst form of political censure. Yet because political failure is ubiquitous and salient, one would expect its conceptualization to be developed and complex. That expectation is confounded by the paucity of systematic reflection on the possible interstices between political thinking and failure. Failures of political thinking often remain hidden from view in ordinary political language, unless used to berate someone else's inadequacies, and their analysis is even rarer as a tool at the disposal of political theorists. As political theorists we under-conceptualize failure partly because we have internalized an ideological framework in which 'failure is not an option', in politics as well as in war and business; partly because conventional professional standards require us to formulate weighty and convincing arguments that we wish to succeed *as arguments*; and partly because normative political theory in particular would cut off the branch on which it was sitting were it to be deliberately wedded to epistemologies and methodologies that anticipate failure. Those who offer substantive political theories are not noted for adding 'this argument may either succeed or fail', for that would rebound on their professional reputations by undercutting the intellectual persuasiveness of their case. Sorensen reflects that standpoint with the typical certitude of trained academics: 'You cannot represent your own belief as arbitrary'.[73] Persuasive effectiveness is a precondition for making a case when prescribing preferences—though no guarantee against failure, of course. Moreover—as sincere political ethicists or ideologists—propounders of substantive political theories will normally believe in the rightness, truth, or authenticity of their arguments, thus removing *ab initio* the possibility that they are dealing with a failed theory or argument. The belief in such truth or rightness is a precondition for making a case for universalizing norms. On the other hand, participants in a political discourse they wish to influence—agenda pushers and certain ideologues— may think to themselves 'this argument may either succeed or fail but if

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[72] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 89–91.
[73] R. Sorensen, *Vagueness and Contradiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 28.

I present it as a sure-fire success I may be able to manipulate it to a controlling position among rival arguments'. Some of those techniques are grouped under the term 'spin'. Even then, one might suggest, political theorists should be curious about which rhetorical argumentative devices resorted to by such discourses work and what might be considered failure on their part.

2. THE ASYMMETRY OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Failure is the default position of prescriptive political theorizing—political thinking intended to make a difference to the ways political processes and arrangements are conducted. Importantly, not all of the failures in question are catastrophic; hence this is not a counsel of despair about the futility of political thinking, but simply a comment on one of the features of the politically normal—the normality of failure. Indeed, the ability to distinguish between minor and major forms of failure in political theory may protect theorists from certain pitfalls and reconcile us to reasonable, rather than inflated, expectations from the practice of political theory. Such inflation comes not with a particular ideology but more generally with the drive of the political towards establishing finalities for group conduct and organization examined in previous chapters. That is demonstrably, but not only, salient in those many prescriptive or ideal-type theories that postulate purist, teleo-logical, and/or revolutionary end-states. The normal political logic of political actors and theorists is therefore all too frequently at loggerheads with the constraining features that operate on the practices of political thinking. Some of those practices, though ubiquitous, are avoidable in principle. Others, as we have seen, clash irreconcilably with the features of linguistic indeterminacy as well as with the ideational terrain within which political thought operates. The specific claim that the features of political concepts and arguments are unsuited to the political language of finality pertains as much to the construction of future visions as to some other aspects of thinking politically. It is, however, to three specific forms of failure in political thinking that this section turns: flaws of temporal durability, of the definiteness and robustness of decision-making (the ending of contestation), and of control over the political space which a political theory penetrates (universalization and the thorough embracing of particular cases).

Although the claim that 'failure is the default position of prescriptive political theory' may shock some, others may rightly see that as a tautology. For to default means to fail. Here, rather, 'default' is employed in a computer-speak sense—the pre-set position from which one proceeds and to which one reverts. A 'default' position is not always maintained, but lurks as a back-ground magnet, and politics, including political thinking, is regularly a

continual set of attempts to move away from that position. As noted in the previous section, political will and political imagination are two routes through which those endeavours at alternative futures are established, either as objectives or as consoling and reassuring visions. Outside the vernacular—frequently at the hub of professional analytic and prescriptive political thought—admirable and praiseworthy exercises of considerable argumentative and imaginative ingenuity are undertaken, but they are flawed nevertheless. Failures in political thinking may involve only partial slippage, not necessarily a return to square one. We are not focusing on reactionary ultramontanism, or on a conservatism that proclaims the futility of change and human agency.

One clue to the analysis of failure is found in the different conventional usages of its ostensible opposite, success. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines success as 'the prosperous achievement of something attempted; the attainment of an object according to one's desire'. But in the past, success has not always been the opposite of failure. Success once meant 'that which happens in the sequel, the termination... issue, upshot, result' and it could either be good or ill success.[74] Crucially, it operates on a future time dimension. Hence, in order to explore the first criterion of failure—the failure to deliver what a theory undertakes to deliver—it is instructive to proceed from the initial observation that, if success is future-oriented and purposive, failure is the unattainability or blocking of future-orientation and purposiveness. That would link success importantly to intentions and to agency, to a willed and realizable plan,[75] and failure to the impossibility or the unavoidable obstruction of agency, or to misguided future-orientation and intent: the inability to effect 'what happens next'. That said, a distinction between two kinds of failure to deliver must be made. The one relates to contingent failures of expectation both on the part of the producers and the consumers of the political text or utterance. Expectations in political thinking, and of political theorizing, may be based on promises, calculations, or manipulative power, any of which can fail. Promises and, more specifically contracts—which involve a formal commitment to future action—may be breached. The formal scenario will then not happen, because of the reactivated, and now negatively-inclined, will of the agents. That contingency may also account for the foundering of calculations that certain values will be realized, because of the mis-estimation of risk or probability, including intervening factors such as the absence of human support. Manipulative discursive power aiming to secure the triumph of particular thought-patterns may encounter resistance,

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[74] *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (accessed 2.12.2012).

[75] There exist situations in which success is deemed to have been achieved irrespective of human agency. In some such cases—e.g. prayers to intercede against a tyrannical ruler who then fortuitously dies—human agency may be believed to cause divine intervention.

or display persuasive weaknesses.[76] Although all such failures are common, and many are difficult to avoid, there is nothing inevitable about them.

The other form of failure relating to the first criterion is that accompanying political visions. In general political theorizing, as crafted by professional theorists, visions are often attached to single or overriding regulative principles. These are in a different class of relationship between intent and goal. Whereas promises, calculations, or manipulative power are techniques of delivering expectations, political visions are broad, often comprehensive, views of a well-functioning, or a good, society (though occasionally dystopias as well). We have already established that not all visions and future-orientated principles are utopian in the primitive sense of being other-worldly; nevertheless, they may be elusive and improbable in their endeavour to proffer long-term or permanent solutions to everyday issues. But the abstract philosophical construction of visions and regulative principles is particularly prone to failure in the terms discussed here.

To avoid failure in what such visions claim to deliver ideationally, there has to be an astonishing—indeed impossible—degree of control over possible future trajectories of an argument or discourse. The more complex, or the more imaginatively distanced, the political theory or ideology carrying that vision tends to be, the more will certain aspects of it be disabled, due to 'the radical contingency of the future.'[77] Put differently, contingent control over time leads to non-contingent failure in political thinking. We are not referring to thinking about short-term policy-objectives that preoccupy planners but about the typical macro-visions of political theory. For example, short-term concrete intentions to recognize and mitigate the personal distress of the unwell, to endorse the pooling of risks, and to underline mutual social responsibility through specific policies attached to a national health service—as long as those goals are defined in modest terms—are not the same as the visionary macro-intent to create social arrangements that are neutral among different conceptions of the good. As has been contended in previous chapters, such neutrality is both practically unattainable and conceptually impossible, on the overriding strength of the argument that there is no 'view from nowhere', despite some philosophers' views to the contrary.[78] Or at another level, the intent to improve the quality of life by reducing the consumption of fossil fuels through taxation is not the same as the visionary intent to eradicate poverty by eliminating not only absolute but relative scarcity. As the latter scarcity is a product of constantly competing perceptions and malleable expectations, the psychological and cultural control over such factors in an imagined future is inconceivable.

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[76] See Chapter Eight for a further discussion.
[77] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, op. cit., p. 343.
[78] See e.g. T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

3. UNCONTROLLABLE AND ABSENT
TEMPORAL TRAJECTORIES

The frequent and certain failure of political thinking to deliver what it has undertaken occurs when a given type or level of expectation superimposed on an initial discursive position cannot be met because of the nature of the argument—its atemporality, its perfectionism, or the postulation of a hypothetical and unrealizable model. This instance relates partially to agency and intent, but mainly to real-world inapplicability. It is an output that ensures the total absence of an outcome, a feature less prevalent in policy recommendations than in 'grand' theorizing. How do we actually recognize Marx's species-being? Can we really imagine a non-competitive society?

In many utopian and Idealist theories—Robert Berki referred to the 'idealism of imagination'[79]—future trajectories are often spelt out with a great lucidity whose remoteness, however, secures them from being put to the double test of realization (outcome) and of realizability (initial plausibility of conceptualization). Idealist future may unfold in ostensible historical time; utopian future may leap into discontinuous time. As Pizzorno puts it, 'long-term ends provoke consequences that are unknown, uncertain, unpredictable. This uncertainty can be overcome by some form of transcendental knowledge.'[80] And Arendt observed: 'there is hardly a better way to avoid discussion than by releasing an argument from the control of the present and by saying that only the future can reveal its merits'.[81] In the inception and present status of those theories, success can only be anticipated through removing subsequent choice and agency from their projections and trajectories, or through controlling that agency.[82] In the latter case, the anticipated normative transformations of a society assume, and are dependent on, the harnessing of a malleable and unified future human will as the means for their realization. The author of the political theory attempts to exercise ultimate control over the will and agency of the individuals whose social and political arrangements are envisaged, by effectively replacing their will with his or hers. An agentically produced normativity based on channelling the agency of others, however, is either self-contradictory or, at least, precarious.

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[79] R. Berki, *On Political Realism* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1981), p. 232.

[80] A. Pizzorno, 'Politics Unbound', in C. Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 35.

[81] H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 346.

[82] This refers not to actual success in constructing those utopias but to the preconditions for persuasively theorizing about their success chances. Some utopias permit active agency and subsequent choice, in which case they relinquish control over the future or merely pay lip service to the possibility of agency, without allowing it to change the direction of utopia itself.

Thus, Fourier's 'the destinies are the past, present and future results of God's mathematical laws of universal movement',[83] eliminates human agency. Alternatively, the controlling agent was the utopia's entrepreneur. Robert Owen's own assessment of his paternalist influence on a pre-determined utopia was driven by his custodianship of the Great Truth: 'It is of all the truths the most important, that the character of man is formed FOR—not BY himself'.[84] Hegel's 'the State consists in the march of God in the world'[85] is far more complex. It operates not through bypassing human agency but through co-opting human ethical will into a larger design and rhythm, in which—the cunning of reason notwithstanding—the idea of the modern state sets the standards of self-consciousness, recognition, and freedom that expose all existing states as imperfect. Hegel's employment of speculative reason underpins those moves. His exploration of the limits of subjectivism and empirical intuition leads to his promotion of the philosophy 'of reason, totality, the whole'. As he maintained, 'speculation is the activity of the one universal reason directed upon itself.'[86] But that ambitious, non-sceptical overreach of the power of thought, when worked out in the actuality of the historical arena, produces a heavily constraining retrospective movement. While with Fourier and Owen, human agency is pre-constrained by a given future or a knowledgeable individual that serves as the context in which agency can be exercised, in Hegel's case—since he refuses to set up a 'world beyond'[87]—an alternative present is located at the culmination of a selective and sanitized trajectory that contains the immanent, true, one and unified reason. The subjectivity of agency is caught up in a momentous, singular, historical flow and is *erhoben* to an objective plane. That present is a chimerical regulative ideal not least because Hegel detaches that which he identifies as rational in history from the rest: 'The present has cast off its barbarism and unjust arbitrariness, and truth has cast off its otherworldliness and contingent force, so that the true reconciliation, which reveals the *state* as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective.'[88]

In William Morris's reflections on his own imaginative creations, utopia was a 'speculation' (though not in Hegel's sense) about 'a promised land' and a matter of temperament. He saw it partly as an 'intellectual conviction deduced

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[83] C. Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.

[84] Quoted in Donald E. Pitzer, 'The New Moral World of Robert Owen and New Harmony', in Pitzer (ed.), *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 100.

[85] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), #258, p. 279.

[86] R.B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 68–9, 79.

[87] Hegel, op. cit., p. 20.

[88] Ibid., #360, p. 380.

from the study of philosophy or from that of politics and economics in the abstract'. Revealingly, Morris wrote: 'the logical sequence of events is sometimes interrupted and turned aside by the historical; and my hope is, that now we know . . . we shall consciously resist the reversal of the process, which to some seems inevitable.'[89] That refers to the characteristic socialist utopian argument that human agency is activated in order to ensure a necessary process, underplaying the tensions between inevitability, historical contingency, and consciousness. Tellingly, and unlike many forms of cooperative social Darwinism at the time, Morris did not resolve those contradictions by locating the emergence of human agency in the inevitability of the historical process itself. Rather, he saw a danger that utopias would be accepted by their readership with all their 'necessary errors and fallacies . . . as conclusive statements of facts and rules of action'.[90] Similar criticisms have been applied to anarchist theories, which are vulnerable to what Stuart White, following Molnar, has termed an 'impossibility theorem'. Inasmuch as the vision of anarchy requires universal consent, and repudiates force in the attempt to gain and maintain it, an anarchist society is an impossibility.[91]

In sum, single-minded certainty, or purity of conviction, in managing temporal trajectories relies on initially detecting laws, rhythms, and logical inevitabilities—the well-known problem of exercises in teleology—or on wishing away all possible impediments to the free play of the human imagination and will, and of recommended human practices. Instead of path-dependency—a term political scientists employ concerning the hold that past occurrences have on present decisions—we encounter future-path determination. As Dewey perceptively wrote, conjuring up yet again the drive to finality: ' . . . the philosophies of flux also indicate the intensity of craving for the sure and fixed. They have deified change by making it universal, regular, sure.'[92] The impossible prognosis of an as yet non-existing future is the only (silent) guarantee against the immediate perception of failure of the projection; hence in the short term it may be exhilarating and motivating. Paradoxically, utopian and anarchist discourses are frequently inspired by what *they* see as current political failures, and their thought-patterns are conscious or unconscious diversionary strategies to transcend the awfulness of those experienced failures while presenting themselves as genuine desires for (lasting) human and social improvement. Much, though not all, utopian thinking addresses what Hood terms the continual dethroning of orthodoxy[93]

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[89] W. Morris, 'How Shall we Live Then?', op. cit.

[90] W. Morris, 'Bellamy's Looking Backward', in M. Morris (ed.), *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, vol. II (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p. 502.

[91] S. White, 'Making Anarchism Respectable? The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12 (2007), 14.

[92] J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929), p. 50.

[93] C. Hood, *The Art of the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 190.

by side-stepping human fragility and thus ostensibly disconnecting the vision from the factors that will erode it. But in insisting on full success, such theories set themselves up for inevitable failure. They re-embed failure in the very utopian vision of a world of unattainable perfection that some utopias crave, or at least a world permanently removed from the more oppressive one of existing social ills.[94] Such future-path determination could only be achieved by removing or guiding future reflective and critical agency, by blocking off all routes but one when arriving at a conceptual, logical, or ideological intersection. Of course, the intentions of utopian and anarchist thinkers may also be located in the realm of political tactics—futuristic visions designed to mobilize immediate support for contentious politics—in which case they may be contingently successful. The success here, however, is not that of a visionary political theory but of short-term rhetorical manipulation. Utopians and anarchists may also engineer the 'success' of increasing awareness of current social defects, but that relates to the identification of a problem, not to its ideational solution.

The scientific garb in which Marx and Engels dressed their historical laws, in contrast to the arbitrary imagination of individual thinkers, replicated the problem of failure while charging the utopians with that very shortcoming. But even as they accused utopians of excessive detail in their visions of perfection, their own alternative macro-visions floundered on the conviction that determinate capitalist development would in future produce socialist solutions—hence the resultant refusal to offer their own detailed blueprint.[95] Marx and Engels also labelled progressive socialist theories as unrealizable in their entirety, because their language and thought were disengaged from the actual world.[96] Consequently, they held that people are made to live either with a sense of illusory and misleading hope or with a sense of frustration at their truncated inability to attain the ends that they have been manipulated into believing. Unlike that critique, the focus of this section is not on the resulting alienation—as Marx saw it, a failure, alongside others, of correct thinking effected by the inadequate material conditions for thinking—but on the conceptual features of political language. Because those features are endemic to such language and cannot be damned as alienated, as argued in Chapter Two, no hope can be held out for nullifying alienation through their negation. Nor is the focus here on a Lacanian or Žižekian view, according to which 'reality is never directly "itself", it presents itself only via its

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[94] Compare also R. Levitas, 'Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12 (2007), 304, on the 'necessary failure' of utopia.

[95] Leopold, 'Socialism and (the Rejection) of Utopia', op. cit., 230ff.

[96] K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 118.

incomplete-failed symbolization',[97] for that relates to the metaphysical problem of how to capture reality and engage in ideology-critique. To the contrary, the symbolic nature of political language and concepts is itself a sheer reality political theorists need to analyse.

The mode of universalist and ahistorical abstraction beloved by some ethicists is parallel to, yet different from, utopianism. The decontextualization it presents insulates a given political argument from cultural, temporal, and spatial constraints (though not entirely from logical ones). Here the *absence* or *transcending* of a future (and of a present and past as well, i.e. timelessness) is designed to block off failure, through the stipulation-cum-manipulation of ethical imperatives. But that device, too, ensures failure rather than eschewing it. For ethics is selective in the free choice it lauds. It labels some choices—and *ipso facto* some futures—bad or erroneous. That was starkly put by Rawls (although bizarrely offered by him as an argument *against* the coercive nature of political philosophy): 'If we feel coerced, it may be because, when we reflect on the matter at hand, values, principles, and standards are so formulated and arranged that they are freely recognized as ones we do, or *should*, accept.'[98] In that unified world, ethical formulations are miraculously and singularly compelling; and, as Rawls puts it, 'the principles of political justice do impose certain essential constraints'.[99] At the very least, the coercive application of ethics, even of reason itself (masked as self-persuasion), in a book entitled *Political Liberalism* can be seen as a failure from many *liberal* perspectives.

On the surface, Rawls appears to introduce qualifications in *Political Liberalism* that mitigate the unassailability of his vision of a well-ordered society. In his 1996 introduction he refers to the limits of reconciliation by public reason and acknowledges the existence of reasoning that 'may be fallacious or mistaken'.[100] But on three counts his declared tentativeness is disingenuous. First, he does not seriously consider what might happen were his version of reconciliation to prove impossible. With respect to comprehensive doctrines he holds up his hands unless they incorporate a 'reasonably just constitutional regime'; that is, unless they subscribe to a constitutional consensus. Rawls is not prepared to accept a consensus based on compromises among comprehensive doctrines 'actually existing in society' because that is 'the wrong kind of consensus', grounded not on his ideal of a 'reasonable overlapping consensus' but on 'existing interests'.[101] That ideal is extra-political, but not in Rawls'

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[97] S. Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', in S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 21.

[98] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 45. Italics added. See also Chapter Eight.

[99] J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 158–9.

[100] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., pp. lx, lvi.

[101] Ibid., pp. lx, xlvii, 389. See also Rawls' related comments on balance and ordering discussed in Chapter Four.

highly restricted sense of 'political'. It is extra-political because it 'is worked out first as a freestanding view that can be justified *pro tanto* without looking to, or trying to fit, or even knowing what are, the existing comprehensive doctrines'.[102] The famous veil of ignorance—now applied to comprehensive doctrines—honours us with a return visit. That is hardly compatible with Rawls' claim to reflect 'the political culture of a democratic society'[103]—a concrete and specific culture that has been worked out through continuous (non-Rawlsian) political contestation and struggle over time.

Second, Rawls runs up against the serious problem that non-liberal political belief systems may not be prepared to endorse the boundary distinction between Rawls' domains of the 'political' and the 'comprehensive' because of their very different understandings of the political. Rawls makes no concessions to what a comparative political theory might reveal, or to the reception of his later phrase 'realistic utopias' outside liberal democracy—indeed, those utopias only provide justice for 'liberal and decent Peoples in a Society of Peoples'.[104] That closed-circle 'utopianism' projects a sobering light on the purported achievability of *Political Liberalism*, vacillating as it does between willed probability and moral necessity. Even *within* liberalism, as I have argued elsewhere, there can be no clear boundary between the 'political' and the 'comprehensive'.[105] Liberalism's internal pluralism cannot be corralled into comprehensive spheres alone, nor be satisfied with a cursory acknowledgement that there are 'different and incompatible liberal political conceptions'[106]—an observation that Rawls then relates only to the distribution of goods—but must be able to challenge both existing and prospective constitutional consensus.[107]

Third, the rhythm of argument proceeds rigorously from a constitutional consensus to an overlapping consensus that beckons to the future, 'over time'.[108] Rawls, however, does not think that a challenge to the former would be likely, because he assumes that constitutional essentials are 'always, or nearly always reasonably decidable' and because he assumes that what forms the domain of the political is not up for dispute: 'Public reason . . . specifies the public reasons in terms of which such questions are to be politically decided.'[109] Such public reasons are not nearly as flexible as Rawls suggests when allowing for constitutional amendments, because a constitutional consensus based on the liberal principles of justice advocated by him needs to meet the 'urgent political requirement to fix, once and for all, the content

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[102] Ibid., p. 389.   [103] Ibid., p. 3.
[104] Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, op. cit., p. 6.
[105] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, op. cit., pp. 226–77.
[106] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., p. xlix.
[107] For a critique along such lines, see M. Humphrey and M. Stears, 'Public Reason and Political Action: Justifying Citizen Behavior in Actually Existing Democracies', *Review of Politics*, vol. 74 (2012), 285–306.
[108] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., p. 168.   [109] Ibid., p. liii.

of certain political basic rights and liberties, and to assign them special priority.'[110] If, according to Rawls, public *reasoning* may be fallacious, public *reason* is by definition always reasonable,[111] and acquires top ranking in the distribution of significant social values (that, as we have seen in Chapter Four, *is* a form of political thinking, but not one recognized as such by Rawls). The possibility that a future generation—or another culture—might entertain a very different view of rights, both adding and subtracting rights as has been the case throughout the history of rights, is not mentioned. Moreover, when Rawls then moves to an overlapping consensus, it encompasses some essential needs as well as basic rights, thus broadening the unity he postulates. That broader unity relies on a 'conjecture' that liberal differences can be narrowed and that they can be 'correctly based on fundamental political ideas in a democratic public culture'.[112] Rawls' faith in the outcome does not falter. As he concludes, 'We must start with the assumption that a reasonable just political society is possible, and for it to be possible, human beings must have a moral nature, not of course a perfect such nature, yet one that can understand, act on, and be sufficiently moved by a reasonable political conception of right and justice to support a society guided by its ideals and principles.'[113] The first 'must' is indeed possible, but not necessarily on Rawls' terms; the second 'must' is contestable. Rawls' mixing of imperatives with permissives is unsettling. But then, creating the illusion that the blocking off of alternatives has *not* occurred, or asserting that the internal consistency, the ethical force, or the rhetorical passion of a theory are sufficient reason for its acceptance and implementation, are among the most distinctive characteristics of political ideologies, characteristics that in Rawls' case, as in all other similar instances, invariably nestle within a political philosophy.

4. THE LIMITS OF DETERMINACY

The second criterion of failure identifies it in terms of lacunae already evident in conceptualization or in argumentational epistemology—many of which relate to the issue of indeterminacy as it applies to the initial theory or argument. That ensures a priori contestation of what might constitute success. Here the policy-formation stage, and the preliminary postulation of values, include too many imponderables for specific goals to be attached to them. It is the problem of failing to determine unquestionably what we want to

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[110] Ibid., p. 161.   [111] Ibid., p. lvi.
[112] Ibid., p 167. For a more differentiated view, see M. Freeden, 'European liberalisms: An essay in comparative political thought', *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 7 (2008), 9–30.
[113] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, op. cit., pp. lxi–lxii.

happen—a different problem from not being able to ascertain what actually will happen. There are in fact multiple things we assume can, may, or should happen—the pliable presuppositions have manifold successions but no clear route to success. 'What is democracy?' boils down to 'what internal weighting within the complex concept of democracy should be accorded to equality, to self-determination, to participation, and to representation?' 'What is community?' requires a decision not only on its size but on 'is community about co-operation, identity, or control?' The expressed intent to bring freedom and democracy to Iraq that was heralded in 2003 is meaningless unless accompanied by a conceptual decision on what is meant by freedom and democracy— that is, the unavoidability of having to choose among the competing conceptions of a concept that has been raised in earlier chapters, in order to arrive at a 'successful'—though invariably temporary—decontestation of the two terms that also ensures their compatibility, which is by no means a given. While the macro-structure of the theory may be clear in the eyes of its formulators, the micro-connections within that (holistic) structure are too legion to count, let alone predict. In that case the complexity of the search for success overlooks the infinite mutations of its conceptual components.[114] The chances of the 'right'—that is to say consensual and uncontested—conceptual permutation coming along and ensuring the clear-cut realization of a theory that many political thinkers pursue are miniscule.

The impression of success can only be ensured, and failure apparently avoided, by the dual yet fallible processes of strict conceptual decontestation and the deliberate or unintentional disregard for the developmental elusiveness of morphological complexity. That would involve discounting the indeterminate properties of concepts discussed in Chapter Two, and superimposing a map of so large and general a magnification that entire areas of conceptual meaning would remain uncharted, covering up the failure of the theory to give polysemy its due and making it impossible to appreciate the complex field of meaning that is blurred by such enlargement. That is not to argue that no principles general enough to be comprehensible exist. The right to life, even with slight modifications (the deliberate termination of pregnancy as explored in Chapter Four, can be one grey area), is one such principle. But the thicker, more intricate, and more comprehensive the theory, the slighter the possibility of bringing it out in sufficiently sharp focus to permit an uncontested lucid formulation. And a theory that remains seriously and substantively contested cannot be seen as a success of political thinking, except as a call to engage carefully with the issues it raises.

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[114] This parallels Scott's observation with regard to the state implementation of visionary, high-modernist, schemes that 'simplified rules can never generate a functioning community, city, or economy' (Scott, op. cit., p. 310), and that formal order is parasitic on informal processes.

Typical failures to appreciate the rich but invariably contestable conceptual structure in any political argument are evident in competing ideologies. That failure is not ordinarily identified by those who hold the decontested positions themselves—to the contrary, they seem assured of their own success—but by those sitting on the sidelines. Take the dispute between Burke and Paine over the status of rights, in which each fails to offer a conceptually compelling rebuttal of their opponent or to state their own case irrefutably. As is well-known, in distinguishing between real and false rights, Burke decontests rights as located in civil society and its conventions, as distinct from natural rights that are extra-social and perfect in metaphysical abstraction. On the latter he writes, 'The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false.'[115] In particular, he includes restraints and liberties among the rights of men; they concern virtue and prudence in a communal and governmental context, and they represent a contract-cum-partnership linking the dead, the living, and those to be born. Paine, to the contrary, locates rights in the unbound reason of individuals, not in a temporally indefinite contract but in the temporal present of those exercising the right—liberating future rights-exercisers from the restraints of past rights-exercisers. Rights are not culture and space-specific but universal and equal. While Burke finds rights in the cumulative wisdom of a society, Paine associates them with the wisdom of a creator,[116] but a wisdom that is literally ever-present, so that rights can be *re*-created. Both stances are 'metaphysical' or non-empirical assertions located in assumed pasts—social or theological—on which the subsequent decontestation of rights rests. Despite those two scholarly interventions, a theory of rights remains as open as before. The definition of a right is suspended between indeterminate questions such as: are rights invented, discovered, or do they evolve? Are they universal and/or particular? What is the basis of the validity that transforms a claim or entitlement into a right: reason, human nature, the capacity to suffer, the capacity to choose, a vital need, revered practice? The multiple determinate, decontested answers to those always ignore, or fail to override decisively, other plausible responses and therefore fall short of offering durable conceptual solutions.

To return to the Iraq example, what exactly would have to happen in Iraq for us to say unequivocally: 'freedom and democracy have finally arrived!'? Success here depends on the clear articulation of goals, but that feature is not the natural property of concepts and language, as it is

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[115] E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 153.

[116] T. Paine, *Rights of Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 87–8.

impossible to hold decontestation down against the fluidity of conceptual meaning that all political concepts display. To reiterate, those kinds of failure are not catastrophic but normal. Because decontestation is inevitable if meaning is to be conveyed, the failure of political conceptualization is built into the permanent fragility of decontestation itself. Acknowledging that is the privilege of political theory; denying it is the prerogative of ideologies. Political theorists and philosophers, perhaps inevitably, regularly assume the mantle of ideologists.

Once we accept the essential contestability of concepts, we are in a position to understand why a dual failure is built into decontested choice. First, the decontested choice of conception among those contained in a given concept will be regarded as a failure by other decontesters who are pushing different conceptions of the same concept, and may be seen as an impoverished choice even for the choosing agent. The exercise of choice in a pluralist world necessitates the curtailing of *many reasonable* conceptions of a concept, and hence will always disappoint some points of view, failing to do them justice. Agentic control over meaning turns out to be too limited to deliver robust philosophical underpinning. Second, the failure relates to the goal of 'precising' already noted in Chapter Two—a common goal of political scientists with regard to the notion of 'democracy',[117] but also an aspiration of political philosophers bent on conceptual clarity, as well as a central aspect of the act of decontestation itself. In Chapter Two it was suggested that the conceptual precision of abstract prescriptive politico-philosophical debate may signal the kiss of death for actual political processes. In parallel, the imaginative precision of much utopian discourse may also signal the kiss of death for obtainable futures. The same conclusion applies to theorizing about such discourse. The vitality of language ensures that decontestation will fail to hold meanings constant, due to continuous shifts in word usage and in the meanings a word signifies. Central to the argument of this book is the power of decontestation to obscure a world of synchronic multiple options that further mutate over time and across cultures. Some political scientists lament the ambiguity of concepts as 'a serious handicap', obstructing theory formation.[118] But if ambiguity and indeterminacy are normal that lament is a misunderstanding, for then the failure to produce an unchallengeable conceptualization—of Humpty Dumpty's insistence on making a word mean 'just what I choose it to mean'—is structurally ineliminable.

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[117] See the critical discussion in D. Collier and S. Levitsky, 'Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research', *World Politics*, vol. 49 (1997), 430–51.

[118] U. Rosenthal, *Political Order: Rewards, Punishments and Political Stability* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978), pp. 217, 224.

5. THE ELUSIVENESS OF INCLUSIVENESS

The third criterion of failure concerns the cases when features of political thought, and the manifold peripheral components of political concepts, do not enable us to *specify* adequately what actually should happen. The failure relates to comprehensiveness, to tying up the innumerable loose ends a complex argument produces; in short, it is a failure of argumentational conclusiveness—returning to a theme from Chapter Two.[119] This category relates to the difficulty of *assessing* the success of certain exercises in agency, intentionality, and purposiveness—however common they may be. It is not about the existential absence of the outcome, nor about the terminological confusion that essential contestability ordains in setting out a robust conceptual content for what the output might be, but about the elusive embrace of the output once it is thought through. Do our 'best' theories of justice really create a fair society? Is liberalism the winning ideology? It may well be possible—say by referring to testable economic or scientific evidence-based theories—to predict certain *segments* of the future with reasonable probability. What is important in such cases is the realization that such micro-predictions are more likely to succeed than macro-ones.

The central issue at stake with the third criterion is this. The formulation of designs for desired political arrangements creates the illusion of argumentative and deliberative success by means of chains that link premise to conclusion, and other chains that link one moral argument harmoniously with another, through a process of withdrawal from the real world of political thinking with its diverse constraints. In the case of ideal-type visions, the first, 'vertical' set of chains offers a spurious logical sequence, while the second, 'horizontal' set of chains offers a spurious compatibility. The spurious compatibility is mainly a question of finding the right decontested conceptions of various concepts that can co-exist adjacent to each other. The spurious logical sequence is the main problem here. Its force supposedly does not diminish as it proceeds from premise to conclusion—yet it is superimposed on a set of arguments that tapers off, that loses force, specificity, and clarity as it proceeds.

Put differently, future-path determination masks the inevitable inconclusiveness of paths of political argument. The more intricate the political theory—the more, say, it wishes to take into account factors of merit, need, and luck in allocating scarce resources—the more intractable are potential solutions when attempting to do justice to the millions of individual cases in a society. Hence visions of a good society necessarily have a cut-off point,

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[119] For a related argument as to why the human sciences cannot adopt models of completeness, see H.L. Dreyfus, 'Why Studies of Human Capacities Modeled on Ideal Natural Science Can Never Achieve their Goal', in J. Margolis, M. Krausz and R.M. Burian (eds), *Rationality, Relativism and the Human Sciences* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), pp. 3–22.

imposed by the growing uniqueness and specificity of detail when they begin to diverge from abstract generalities. For example, the allocation of distributive justice to individuals simply cannot identify a concrete occupant of a broad category such as the 'least advantaged'. Hence arbitrary cut-off points are necessary in order to contain and process meaning, but arbitrary they are (the poorest, the sickest, the ugliest, or the stupidest: to find one occupant at the bottom of all those categories would indeed be an inconceivable tragicomedy of monumental proportions!).

The alternative is to invoke the phrase 'regulative principle', which all too frequently embraces the meaning of a regulative ideal. It is a view of knowledge of which political philosophers have been enamoured at least since Kant propounded principles of reason in the form of rules, directing understanding towards a certain goal and postulating what we ought to do, unifying our items of knowledge and approaching universality. As Kant explained: 'If it then appears that all particular instances which can be cited follow from the rule, we argue to its universality, and from this again to all particular instances, even to those which are not themselves given. This I shall entitle the hypothetical employment of reason.'[120] In a contemporary register, Dworkin asserts that 'we want to treat ourselves . . . as a community governed by a single and coherent vision of justice and fairness', given that 'justice . . . is a matter of the right outcome of the political system'. That evokes a 'purified interpretation', offering the best justification of law as seen 'from the perspective of no institution in particular and thus abstracting from all the constraints of fairness and process that inclusive integrity requires'. Tellingly, he then concedes, 'the argument must now move towards arguments of utopian theory'.[121] Some philosophers, in other words, focus on right action rather than on the inexhaustibly messy details that unsurprisingly pull 'right' action in diverse directions.[122]

But the notion of a regulatory ideal conceals the inconclusiveness and vagueness of political concepts that, in turn, dictate the unavoidable imprecision of distributive measures. From the viewpoint of the individuals who comprise a society, systems of justice are incapable of taking into account the fine print of personal circumstances. A system of justice must fail in principle when even one member is the victim of injustice consequent upon the failure of the theory to cater for intractable complexity. That failure is no marginal hiccup but something acutely perceived by all individuals at the receiving end. The broad constraints of a regulative ideal cannot offer the

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[120] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A two-part appendix to the transcendental dialectic. Appendix B674–5. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/kc25.pdf (accessed 22.12.2012).

[121] R. Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (London: Fontana, 1986), pp. 404, 407–8.

[122] Granted the greater subtlety of Kant's argument, the use of regulative principles in recent political theory has overshot in its ambition.

detailed decontestation that is necessary when micro-components of that ideal are in zero-sum value-relationships, which consequently elude the harmony among concepts that many ethicists anticipate, and whose imposed solution will unavoidably frustrate one of the parties. Regulative ideals also fail, as with political obligation, when their claimed generality cannot satisfy all reasonable approaches.[123] Or as Tully, guided by Wittgenstein, has pointed out, 'understanding political concepts and problems cannot be the theoretical activity of discovering a general and comprehensive rule and then applying it to particular cases, for such a rule is not to be found and understanding does not consist in applying such a rule even if it could be found'.[124] Regulative ideals introduce the simplicity that undercuts philosophical conventions of complexity and discursive experiences of conceptual pluralism, but that simplicity is redolent of ideological discourse, through which failures are often disguised to seem less obvious. When instead we reasonably pursue complexity we end up with inconclusiveness.

Failures, gentle or harsh, cannot be avoided in visions of distributive justice, nor when constructing theories of human rights. There the move from major to minor to minute rights raises boundary problems of vagueness concerning the cashing out of the general categories of liberty, well-being, and even life, as in the contested area of abortion. Alternatively, it applies to the political satisfaction of human needs, caught between 'objective' and 'subjective' understandings, between physical and emotional categories, and between 'basic' and insatiable 'optional' needs, that permeate thinking about the welfare state. Merely unpacking the notion of 'equality of opportunity' reveals an overwhelming list of barriers to be removed (physical, economic, legal, cultural, emotional, gender, ethnic, age), and the struggle over spelling out their prioritization for each individual would end in stalemate, once the most salient inequalities were identified. As Anderson points out, in a discussion that was already only limited to liberal conceptions of distributive justice: 'The pragmatic liberal approach to welfare policy cannot readily be reduced to a tight, formal theory. To base welfare on the universalization of essential services entails a constantly open estimate of the engagements and opportunities that are crucial to the good life. Thus, the problem of welfare is never settled. It is open to continuing debate. . . . Liberalism has failed to secure the more fundamental just distributions. . . .'[125] In our terminology, it is faced with the inconclusiveness of relevant information—a problem shared with all other ideologies.

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[123] G. Klosko, *The Principle of Fairness and Political Obligation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 204), p. 3.

[124] J. Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Vol. 1: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 27.

[125] C.W. Anderson, *Pragmatic Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 140–1.

The difficulty with general political visions that require the recognition of individual claims is that their logical paths branch out into innumerable and interminable byways as a direct result of two factors: conceptual polysemy and the move from the general to the particular. The polysemy of political concepts—always carrying more meanings than any given instance of the concept can capture—requires choice and agency in order to negotiate among the plurality of meanings and the infinite range of paths that such meanings open up. Without such negotiation the decisions central to politics are corrupted. Semantic absolutism silences all agency but that of the philosopher or ideologue, which gives short shrift to the pluralistic (if you wish, democratic) opening up of meaning-formation to a multitude of idea-choosers. Ultimately, however, the real-world constraints of political thinking catch up with the absolutists and the universalizers, reimposing failure on their inevitably flawed ontologies and epistemologies, let alone on their good intentions. Even the self-appointed political philosophers or theorists who act as the sole agents that choose meaning cannot control the logical paths of their own theories as they stretch beyond the horizon of capture. Tellingly, Burke makes a comment on simplified constitutional and governmental proposals that mirrors the problem of inconclusiveness: ' . . . it is better that the whole should be imperfectly and anomalously answered, than that, while some parts are provided for with great exactness, others might be totally neglected. . . .'[126]

As the possible meanings of concepts multiply, and conceptual intersection creates a tangle of intermeshing as well as contradictory possibilities, the efficacy of argumentation grinds to a halt, abandoning details as insoluble and leaving the vision without a possible endpoint. Particulars are too numerous to be contained in any one scheme, not the least because any political theory requires some streamlining in order to be intelligible and communicable. In a hypothetical world where each political concept had only one meaning, a meaning also compatible with those carried by other political concepts, where vagueness did not reign, such failures would be avoidable. That, however, does not constitute any known world of human thought and language. In sum, regulative principles trade on universality and generality; specific schemes walk doggedly with protective blinkers on a semi-private path through a large field of possibilities; while by contrast the analyst of thinking politically notes, at either end of this spectrum, the vying competitive attempts to impose order on disorder that are ineluctably doomed to failure. The order of comprehensiveness is foiled by the disorder of inconclusiveness; while the order of determinacy is foiled by the disorder of exclusivity.

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[126] Burke, op. cit., p. 153.

6. NORMALIZING FAILURE: FROM CONSERVATIVE FATALISM TO LIBERAL EPISTEMOLOGY

How should one react to the common charge that to endorse failure as normal is a profoundly conservative viewpoint? To begin with, the identification of failure as a default position needs contextualizing. It is an observation, rather than the desideratum it almost seems to be in some conservative doctrines that espouse theories of innate human imperfection. Nor does it reject the significance of human agency and the continuous presence of agency-induced change. Many planned changes may still have achieved something without arriving at their pre-announced destination. In fact, the appreciation of human vulnerability alongside a modicum of human agency, requiring both socially planned cooperation and individual initiative, is a composite that marks out left-wing welfare thinking. Moreover, theories of semantic indeterminacy are linked to the impossibility of strong control and robust order. Thus the theory of failure enunciated here dilutes the conservative faith in the possibility and desirability of prioritizing and enforcing social order. Even subscribing to the idea of imperfectability, or to the normality of failure, does not in itself indicate a conservative *Weltanschauung*. One belief doth not an ideology make; the normalization of failure is on its own insufficient to make conservatism what it is, nor would its inclusion in other ideologies render them conservative. Ideational overlap is a distinctive feature of ideological morphology.

As participants in the political world, we observe incessant failures and flaws in political thinking. But can we, as political theorists, live with the permanence of such failure? More specifically, are there any recognizable political thought frameworks that embrace the normality of failure as presented in these pages? Could liberals be the most promising candidates for that niche? To begin with, liberals have always been undecided about the inevitability of progress and about the role of human agency in that process. That uncertainty is particularly pronounced and convoluted in the writings of L.T. Hobhouse. The evolution towards internal harmony and consistency was at the heart of Hobhouse's understanding of liberalism. 'The ideal [liberal] society is conceived as a whole which lives and flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts'. However, 'true harmony is an ideal which it is perhaps beyond the power of man to realize, but which serves to indicate the line of advance.'[127] That is a typical liberal universalist approach, but the 'perhaps' indicates that the ideal may just about be attainable—an article of faith some liberals were loathe to abandon. Note also that the regulative ideal of harmony determines, again in teleological fashion, the route of progress. And note that harmony offers the assurance that internal contradictions can be ironed out.

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[127] L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, ed. J. Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

The device of a remote and possibly unreachable ideal, while nevertheless implying a route to that nowhere, is one of the most typical in the arsenal of progressive thinkers and could also be assimilated into a common utopian genre of thinking. Nevertheless, Hobhouse's was not an exercise in liberal utopianism. He allowed for different lines of change to emerge, thus acknowledging liberal pluralism and anticipating possible failure: 'There are many possibilities, and the course that will in the end make for social harmony is only one among them, while the possibilities of disharmony and conflict are many.' The vacillation continues, however. The progress of society depended on choice, as 'the expression of deep-seated forces of human nature which come to their own only by an infinitely slow and cumbersome process of mutual adjustment.'[128] In this stumbling dance, will and grand design were locked in a mutually faltering embrace. Trial and error, success and failure themselves, were incorporated into a movement—inspired by the evolutionary doctrines of the period—that would ultimately lead to harmony. When later, riddled with pessimism, Hobhouse confronted the enormity of the First World War, he rhetorically asked: 'are we to agree . . . that struggle is really the law of life . . . ? Or did humanitarianism represent a living movement which, though thwarted and arrested by new forces that it has failed to control, has in it the undying spirit which will in the longer run prevail?' His response was to offer 'the conception of a common humanity, not as the dream of a philosopher, but as a popular emotion which has tested and proved itself in the hardest of schools'.[129]

That ultimate closure of liberal theory may seem surprising to many of its adherents, though on closer inspection it is integral to its belief in the civilizing of humanity. That closure occurs not just by postulating the rational progression of individual and society, or through the weaker method of spelling out the formal possibility of a good end-state (albeit in a dynamic equilibrium) while refusing to anticipate its detailed content. Rather, the very act of an agent's choice superimposes decontestation on the indeterminate structure of any political concept. Choice, we assume, is a liberal virtue, but strictly speaking the virtue referred to is the *exercise* of choice rather than the *actual* choices resulting from that exercise. The choice, once made, is decontested and restrictive. After all, even a democratic political process transforms a multitude of voices and interests into one decision at the cost of failing to represent many of them, however legitimate and respectable; and it is no different when ideas and concepts are in play. Moreover, like any other members of an ideological or philosophical family, liberals claim to know how to distinguish a right choice from a wrong one, and they do so in two ways. First, in the fundamental sense that a right choice—so they insist—is

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[128] Ibid.
[129] L.T. Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), pp. 19, 104.

always made in a particular reflective mode. Second, the liberal trajectory is substantively harnessed to self-development and progress—the latter being the guarantor of success in both its senses.

There is of course nothing unscholarly about asserting right choices. Those political philosophers and ethicists who talk of right or true ideas may well have a case within their own domain. Undoubtedly, many particular choices are bad or wrong from most sensible points of view and I have already dismissed the possibility of unconstrained relativism. But two problems surface here. First, the more ambitious, inclusive, and sweeping the framework of correctness claimed by a given theory or theorist, the less likely it is to command general agreement or to satisfy reflective critics, because—even internal to the theory—more than one choice may have persuasive or moral force. Too many abstract and universal liberal theories become totalizing: they embrace the scope and the polished constructed harmony, although clearly not the invasiveness and the violence, of a totalitarian theory.

Second, the internal intricacy of political concepts cannot carry the burden of 'right' and 'true'. While those terms serve as ontological statements about a unified universe of morals, they also operate as emotional appeals and as political directives and interpretations. Political concepts run aground, or break up, when subjected to the understandably fervent monolithic intensity of central ethical precepts. That is not an argument against strongly-held ethical views, which play crucial roles in controlling and prescribing conduct, but a comment on the inadequate fit between universal ethics and conceptual morphology, particularly as ethics has in recent decades become more or less coterminous with liberal political philosophy. Consequently, in order to find a relationship between liberalism and failure we need to pursue another path. That path emerges when decontestation itself becomes transparent, at least to the analyst, if not to the ideologist, of liberalism. To reemphasize, decontestation *succeeds* in privileging certain meanings and argumentative paths, but it concurrently *fails* inescapably to give full expression to the multiple meanings contained in conceptual morphology, both synchronically and diachronically. As political theorists we must celebrate the conceptual complexity of political language, but we cannot protect it from being obscured by its unavoidable discursive simplification—in this instance, when simplification is employed to manufacture and assert ideational 'success'.

What to a politician, and to some philosophers, may be a weakness appeals to the kind of liberal for whom pluralism asserts its weight against universalism. Indeed, we arrive at the possibly surprising conclusion that acknowledging gentle failure (failure that is not seriously harmful to the prescriber or to others) can join the exercise of choice as another liberal virtue. Increasingly, liberal epistemology has come to reject semantic singularity and constancy and must therefore accept the failure of resolute and durable argumentative exactitude. That is why some claimants for central liberal status—natural law

as well as its modern substitutes such as an overlapping consensus—themselves fail to satisfy the complexity of liberal requirements. While addressing rationality they eschew the temporal drive of progress; while advocating the liberation of the mind from illogical and oppressive forces, they undermine the cultural diversity of individuality. All those are elements of a liberal *Weltanschauung*, and the art of liberalism is to hold them in a balance where no element loses out critically to the others.

The conceptual analysis of failure is therefore permeated with a liberal epistemology. Liberals recognize that one's own reflective choice is less than perfect because liberals claim the right to be less than perfect. That was strikingly articulated by Herbert Asquith, the Liberal prime minister, in an indirect dig at T.H. Green's famous interpretation of positive liberty, when he said: 'I believe in the right of every man face to face with the State to make the best of himself and subject to the limitation that he does not become a nuisance or a danger to the community to make less than the best of himself.'[130] In addition, liberals should also respect other reasonable conceptions of the concepts promoted by the family of liberalisms. Those are strong reasons why 'liberal perfectionism' is such an inadequate phrase. Unlike some conservative political theories of permanent and disheartening imperfection, or socialist political theories of perfectibility and end-states, liberal future-orientation displays open-ended improvability. Liberal success is modest and ambiguous: it moves forward on an identified trajectory (say, the civilizing of societies) without knowing in advance by what the next stage, once achieved, will be succeeded. If we are prepared to accept that many of the (current) successes of others and many of our own (current) failures are no calamity, that numerous other conceptions and arguments, additional to those we adopt, may have persuasive force and ethical and intellectual attractiveness, liberal epistemology can cater for that. The liberal standpoint that enables this requires not only the recognition that we are different from others but also concedes the slightly harder admission that they are different from us. Failure—as the right to make (non-catastrophic) mistakes and the right to fall short of one's potential—is an object of liberal tolerance, a tolerance reflected in parallel in the semantic flexibility displayed by the conceptual arrangements to which liberals subscribe. If in the last pages of this section I have pinned my ideological colours to the mast, I have done so not least because on my own understanding of political thinking its features are always displayed in a specific ideological garb which we may as well acknowledge, and because no methodology can rise above its ideological proclivities.[131]

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[130] H.H. Asquith, *Hansard*, 4th Series, 18 April 1907, 1189.

[131] See also M. Freeden, 'The Professional Responsibilities of the Political Theorist', in B. Jackson and M. Stears (eds), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 259–77.

Scott perceptively locates failure in the combination of the universalist pretensions of epistemic knowledge and authoritarian social engineering.[132] Alongside that blend, however, there exist also genuine aspirations to establish social codes of conduct, propelled by visions more holistic than authoritarian. It may well be that the development of critical schemes, plans or visions, as well as their injection with passion and commitment, are crucial educations in reflective citizenship, though that is not the theme of this chapter. The viewpoint proffered here is of a different kind: such aspirations are politically ineluctable, but epistemologically and conceptually, if not ethically, flawed. Ethicists and prescriptive political theorists engage in a ubiquitous and defining practice of political thinking, and for that very reason they need to take stock of the limits of their language, or tone down their expectations. What they can achieve are not approximations on the path towards realized visions but tests and critiques of the civilized nature of current arrangements: to escape bad practice rather than to achieve best practice, to *encourage* pluralist human flourishing rather than to *determine* the nature of such flourishing. Social visions offer inspiration because they propose a route away from the unacceptable, not because they secure the desirable. In pursuing the latter, the route will fail; in pursuing the former, temporary successes may be obtained. Modest failure and temporary success may not be that distinct from one another; anything more spectacular in either direction should cause political theorists to ponder.

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[132] Scott, op. cit., p. 340.

8

Power Patterns and Power Surges: Organizing and Intensifying Speech Acts

'We find that the strongest and most constantly employed faculty at all stages of life is thought—even in every act of perceiving and apparent passivity! Evidently, it thus becomes most powerful and demanding'.[1]

1. THE IMMANENT POWER OF LANGUAGE

Power is the least controversial contender for membership of the set of concepts through which we identify the domain of the political, yet it has been conspicuous by its absence in much recent political theory and philosophy. That is intriguing, for no reasonable definition of politics can avoid allocating some central position to the wielding, or attempted wielding, of power, or to its constraining and directing role in social life. The major debates on power in the second half of the twentieth century opened up new vistas on its nature as a relationship among agents, on its observable and unobservable manifestations, on its specificity and containment within institutional politics and governance or its pervasiveness and ubiquity as a property of social interaction, on the structural versus agency features of power, on the nature of its possible oppressiveness through domination and patriarchy, on its hegemonic tendencies, on its disciplinary and truth fixing roles, on its interest-related nature, on its class anchorage, and on its prominence as a concept whose observable indicators are essentially contested. All those debates were focused on power as an empirical outcome in the realm of behaviour, institutional arrangements, and the marshalling of human resources.

Although those empirical debates on power are still alive and well, in political theory power is far from being a respected concept and it rarely attracts the energies of political theorists. It is now almost 40 years since Steven

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[1] F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 329.

Lukes's significant book[2] on the subject and, tellingly, its recent reissue in expanded form[3] and the ensuing debate have not as yet resulted in any notable innovation on the political theory side.[4] The Foucauldian turn certainly has done something to enhance our understanding of power as normal, though not generally as an agreeable phenomenon, but its plausible location in a vast range of human practices, discourses, institutions, and knowledges has provided cultural and sociological insights without having been accompanied by a new assessment of its empirically detectable role in political thought. Nor have its conceptual features been subject to new scrutiny.

Power is implied in society rather than seen in the making, and it is relatively rarely observed in its exercise, with the exception of its physical and psychological manifestations. Feminist theory has sought to expand power to gender relations, suggesting that power is just as crucially located in the private as in the public sphere, but the extension of power to the non-public realm had already in the 1950s and 1960s been suggested by behaviouralists such as Robert Dahl, and its generality assumed by sociologists such as Talcott Parsons. Perhaps the chief theoretical innovation in feminist theory on power has been the popularization of the notion of empowering. Side-by-side with their conventional emphasis on power as oppression, feminists have given a positive connotation to the equalizing and enabling features of power insofar as women are concerned, linking power with autonomy, while concurrently reinforcing its association with dehumanizing effects. In the hands of ethicists in particular, normative political theory has shied away from a serious confrontation with power, sharing with liberal theory an embarrassment about its existence, ignoring it, wishing it away, condemning it, or shackling it to its tamed justifiable forms, sandwiched between authority and legitimacy. For much contemporary political philosophy, power is not so much the elephant in the room as the evil genie that needs to be bottled for as long as it takes.

Only in discourse analysis has a detailed examination of the relationship between power and language emerged in recent years. However, in critical discourse analysis—itself an offshoot of the ideology critique of the mid-twentieth century—the emphasis, in Fairclough's words, on 'the critical analysis of discourse . . . [as] a resource against the struggle for domination' is retained. It is, in other words, the inscribing of an ethical position against power as a tool of dominance, power that is seen to be transmitted through ideologies that are in turn narrowly interpreted as 'sustaining unequal power

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[2] S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

[3] S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd edn (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[4] Recently, K. Dowding (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Power* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011), has refocused on the multiple aspects of understanding power, though not only from the perspective of political theory and language.

relationships'. Fairclough thus describes his investigation as 'a somewhat depressing picture of language being increasingly caught up in domination and oppression'.[5] Commendably, this approach looks at the actual deployment of speech and language, while not ignoring the 'hidden' aspects of power that structure and permeate speech and writing—recognizing both the conscious and unconscious manifestations of power in language. Nonetheless, the emphasis is on the construction of subjectivity and social relations, always through the prism of hindrances to human emancipation. Power remains an undesirable—a status that no analyst of politics can unequivocally uphold.

The focus of this chapter is entirely different. It looks at power as a specific and fundamental feature of the political and starts from the assumption that it is conceptually and practically impossible to forgo power relationships in a society. Power relations and the actual wielding of power are endemic to all human relationships. To do away with power is tantamount to eradicating social structure and interaction and ipso facto to abolishing politics altogether. Unlike, say, legitimacy or obligation, which may have no empirical equivalent in a given case, power is empirically ubiquitous and theoretically ineliminable. In so doing, this chapter neither ignores nor underestimates the perspective of critical discourse analysis; indeed, it accepts that if politics crucially includes power, so must political thinking. But it does query the totalizing methodology of many of the critical discourse practitioners, as if that were all that could be said about power and language.[6] Accordingly, it dissociates itself from praise or condemnation of the social and individual consequences of power.

A first, general, guideline is that language is always both a structure or a grammar and the product of agency in its particular manifestations, intermingling cultural conventions and intentional practices. But the second, specific, guideline is that, irrespective of whether power is transmitted through language or whether power is identified by its impacts, language is always itself a repository of power. One does not need to encounter sentences in which an order or command is given to ascertain that language contains power. The very existence of language in voice or text reveals it to be a shaper of decontestations and a determiner of options, even when those remain vague. As Reid and Ng claim, 'language, far from being a simple reflection of power, underpins the creation of power, its maintenance and change'.[7] Power is not something imposed on language, but immanent in its moulding and channelling properties.

[5] N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 216, 89, 3.

[6] For a more subtle approach, see R. Wodack, *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[7] S.A. Reid and S.H. Ng, 'Language, Power, and Intergroup Relations', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 55 (1999), 123.

It should therefore be unexceptional that one of the tasks lying ahead of the political theorist of political thinking is to map and analyse the power aspects of those patterns of thinking that concern collectivities. That has three aspects: First, we can think and converse *about* power: how to use it or resist it, where it lies, is it legitimate or pernicious. Second, we can trace types of power, whose source is analytically external to discourse, working *through* discourse and conveyed by it: does the speaker have authoritative status, is the discourse reflective of oppressive or submissive ideologies and sub-cultures? Third, and the main subject of this chapter, power resides *in* discourse and language and to that extent language is endowed with political features. Speech and texts are one kind of intervention in the world through which meaning is immediately imprinted on the discourse itself, and mediately superimposed on the consumers of the discourse.

We may well wish to appraise the uses of power, and we may be eager to explore the effects of power on the conduct and identity of human and social institutions. But prior to that we need to understand which forms are adopted by the production and wielding of power in utterance and writing. Understanding, first of all, with all its biases and limitations, must precede evaluation—a rule that equally applies to the analysis of ideologies—even if, at a secondary level, we need to tread the hermeneutical circle of pre-evaluating what is worth understanding. Second, we may focus on the units of political thinking—political concepts—and the clusters of political concepts that emerge as arguments and ideologies. In so doing we continue to recognize that political concepts also appear in different and looser terminologies, both professional and vernacular. Power, force, coercion, or violence may be the objects of attempts by theorists to allocate to them crisp meanings, but they too are subject to the vagueness of their shared and overlapping boundaries.

Third, this chapter endeavours to identify the means through which those clusters of political concepts function as sites in which power is exercised; that is to say, which devices enable them to be co-opted into the direct exercise of power, or the attempt to exercise it. At the heart of this exploration is the contention that thinking politically involves certain kinds of power practices that are inherent in its expression and communication. Those power practices are evident at three levels. First, the mere production, that is to say, the existence, of any instance of speech or text itself makes a difference to a discursive environment, and hence it already possesses a power component in a very loose sense—it occupies discursive space that displaces other discursive acts. Second, speech and texts have a grammar, an organizational pattern, which is a way of ordering communication. Those practices of channelling, filtering, weighting, selecting, and sequencing human expressiveness involve processes that are palpably political. Third, power is specifically manifested through conceptual and argumentative intensifiers that are either designed to

augment, or are capable of augmenting irrespective of particular intent, the impact of the speech or text.

The first two features are more or less familiar, and the organizational and sequencing attributes of thinking politically have already surfaced in previous chapters. The third, however, is seldom discussed in political theory. As will presently be seen, part of understanding the intensification capacity of language relates to J.L. Austin's notion of language as performative. That performance—from the perspective of political theory—involves the production and transmission of power, and those processes must consequently be seen as central political properties of utterances and texts. There exist, of course, social understandings and conventions, both deliberate and unintentional, which become assimilated into expressions of intensity—the concept of rights, as will be contended below, is one of them. But the thrust of my argument is more specific: the performative aspect of power lies in its *variable* intensity, intensity here signifying not a property of political language but a prominent *political property* of all language, no matter which substantive messages are conveyed in a discourse. That does not entail any corresponding assumptions about the overriding role of individual agency or manipulation in the transmission of discursive power, as was the practice of positive political science a generation or so ago. Important as they are, that is not the issue at hand.

The performative aspect of power should be distinguished from its structural manifestation. The former is irregular and its instances, although very frequent indeed, are transient, whereas the latter is a permanent cementing or organizing property of a polity. The difference may be likened to that between a power surge versus a background hum of social, cultural, psychological and linguistic constraints (including grammar) that operate on individuals and society. The performative power surges of intensity occur on a continuum between reflective and unreflective agency, between deliberate and targeted attempts at making a difference to the way people think and act and—at the other end of the spectrum—the unreflective consequences of an untargeted expression of thinking, say, one that ranks preferences when it was not the main purpose of the agent to do so. In both cases power relates to a practice of an individual—as distinct from an agent—rather than a depersonalized structural feature of society. Moreover, once we move away from the unintentionality pole, we are talking of *degrees* of intentionality, from casual to focused. Finally, picking up the theme of Chapter Seven, power failures—that is to say intensifications of speech and writing that have no effect, or an unintended one—are quite common.

There are various ways of identifying and categorizing the appearance of power in political thought, speech, and text. We could apply it to each and every one of the features of the political investigated in previous chapters. For as suggested in Chapter One, arrogating, ranking, supporting, ordering, and future-direction (and their permutations) intersect with thought-practices of

power. We could insist that ideas about the origins of sovereignty impose boundaries that constrain, enforcing inclusion and exclusion and empowering those in control with the right to veto any other social allegiances and claims. We could show that ideas about ranking are, at least indirectly, empowering and disempowering ideational structures; after all, ranking, as a hierarchical measure, creates preferred sequences of time by means of urgency, or ladders of significance by means of trumps or preferences. We could argue that ideas concerning support and acquiescence or resistance are familiar forms of conceptualizing social power relations, mobilizing power for or against a regime or a group. We could demonstrate that constructing stability or promoting instability involves arguments and ideologies that strengthen or weaken existing political arrangements and have bearing on the cementing and centripetal forces operating in a society. And we might proceed to identify those political visions pertaining to the unfolding of collective destinies that occupy people's thoughts as empowering and rallying, or as applying control through planning. Even the partial and inconsistent promise of Saint-Simon and of Marx and Engels to negate power has been, intellectually and emotionally, a powerfully seductive, if chimerical, vision. All the above can trace the patterns in people's minds that relate to the wielding, or the distribution, or the constraining, or the eliminating, of power. Finally, significant silences—as distinct from intentional silencing—may also be decoded as forms of linguistic control, though much of those would fall within the rubric of arrogation: the discursive control exercised by the political sphere over other social spheres. Those are all rich resources from which our understanding of thinking about power must draw.

But our task as political theorists of political thinking will remain incomplete unless we also recognize that the very verbal and written expressions of thinking about politics are themselves an exercise, or attempted exercise, of power. Hence, power and language appear in two forms. On one level, the attempt to make a difference through the use of language, as well as the unintended consequences of language that cause a difference to occur, always are a political feature of any manifestation of language. The power normally possessed by discourse is the most direct *political* component of all speech and texts. But what is on offer in this chapter is by no means a total or inclusive theory of power. Its main theme is confined to an endeavour to identify the generic features and indicators of expressing power in political language, oral and written—as well as nodding in the direction of non-verbal visually diffused communication—that can directly influence the collectivities that are the objects of that thinking.

The second, substantive level needs at least to be intermittently noted, even though it is not the focus of this book. It concerns the way thinking *about* politics affects thinking politically. Power is also expressed as competition over the control, and occasional monopolization, of the specific vocabulary of

language—the main characteristic of ideologies. For ideologies—those clusters of political concepts in a particular morphological configuration—are sites in which discursive and ideational power is invested in the shape of decontestation and appropriation of meaning, as well as through the subsequent protection of those clusters from semantic onslaught by other ideological families. The decontestative power to fix meaning, however, always runs up against the variability and unpredictability of its reception. Political theorists are predominantly concerned with those concepts that are close to the core area of the political, examples of which are liberty, equality, democracy, legitimacy, rights—and the negation of all of those. Consequently, exploring the direct exercise of power in language must be accompanied by an appreciation of the epistemological and ideological frameworks within which particular constellations of political concepts are ordered and presented; for that, too, is necessary to understanding the often very different devices through which various texts augment the power of their written and spoken utterances and conceptual arrangements. Those arrangements affect the prominence of certain concepts and thus exercise morphological power over a field of argument or interpretation. That morphology is separate from the inevitable grammar of a speech and text: it is a varying arrangement of the *ideological meanings* they can carry that is superimposed on whichever grammar applies. All the central political concepts that figure in normative political theory possess power by dint of the value attached to their meanings: their declared desirability or intellectual attractiveness act as a magnet that controls the ordering of political thinking and of social practices within which they play their elevated roles; and their positioning at the core of a given ideology increases their impact. Indeed, the sense of mission, of calling, that many students of politics feel duty-bound to answer—their reform-mindedness, their prescriptiveness, their search for universal or culturally contextual norms—is itself an attempt to change people's minds as a preliminary to changing political facts on the ground.

2. PERFORMATIVE SPEECH ACTS

The notion of performative utterances was famously introduced by J.L. Austin. For Austin it referred to the force of the utterance in intending to perform an act. That force could be conveyed through tone of voice, cadence, emphasis, gestures, and non-verbal actions (sometimes referred to as coverbal[8]), though Austin was concerned about their 'vagueness of meaning and uncertainty of

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[8] R. Krauss and C.-Y. Chiu, 'Language and Social Behavior', in D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske, and G. Lindzey (eds), *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol. 2, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 41–88.

sure reception'.[9] He regarded those mainly unavoidable properties as a 'typical fault'.[10] An illocutionary utterance was that whose performance 'has a certain *force* in saying something'.[11] As elaborated by Searle, illocutionary force could include at least 'word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb and the so-called performative verbs'.[12] Bourdieu located that illocutionary power in the body as well as its utterances: 'the modalities of practices, the ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking ("reproachful looks" or "tone", "disapproving glances" and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist'.[13] Austin went on to pave the way in classifying the illocutionary forces of an utterance. He divided them into verdictive (appraisive), exercitive (favouring or opposing a course of action), commissive (commitments to action), behabitives (reactions and attitudes to the conduct of others), and expositives (expounding and clarify-ing).[14] But these divisions are left as undeveloped thoughts, and they are certainly not considered by him as political features of discourse.

A perlocutionary utterance was for Austin one that, in addition to its illocutionary properties, could also produce certain effects on its audience as a consequence of saying it, but we are left with only an embryonic analysis of the latter, and a concession that the difference between the two locutions is slippery.[15] Both, it must be emphasized (something Austin does not do with sufficient clarity) relate to the wielding of power, successful or not. Illocu-tionary force coats the locution with a constraining or enabling patina, while perlocutionary force relates to its successful impact. By impact we refer to the thoughts and emotions triggered off by the illocutionary force as a preliminary to a physical response, if any.

So far, so good; but for the student of political theory other issues remain urgently on the agenda. The first issue—to be expanded below—is that the reconstruction of the agency-related and intentionality aspects of a speech act is not the only area of interest to the political theorist: unintended conse-quences, failed intentions, and misinterpretations of the message are equally valuable insights into political language. Perlocutionary consequences may be unexpected. In the study of power within the domain of politics, impact is at least as important as intention, and Austin has indeed drawn our attention to the fact that words are also acts.[16] More importantly for our purposes, words are expressed in thought-practices, that is to say, recurring or discern-ible conventions and patterns. Those acts of articulation are by their very

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[9] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 76.
[10] Ibid., p. 98.   [11] Ibid., p. 121.
[12] J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 30. See also Austin, op. cit., pp. 4ff.
[13] P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 51.
[14] Austin, op.cit., pp. 148–64.   [15] Ibid., p. 131.
[16] Ibid., p. 13.

existence power acts. The second issue, which is outside the remit of this chapter, is that the very use of force in language is a social practice that should attract the interest of the social scientist: what kinds of illocutionary or perlocutionary acts work well within which cultural environments?

Quentin Skinner, expanding on Austin, has helpfully distinguished between two forms of interpretation: what is the *meaning* of a text, and what is being *done* in and by a text.[17] In parallel, political theorists—when they do discuss power—have on the whole concentrated on what power is and what it means, while political scientists focus on what power does. That may be an unnecessary division of labour, for power is an exercise concept and to appreciate that adds an extra dimension to our understanding of political thinking. The laying-forth of a prescription, a programme, or a norm is never a neutral act in 'take-it or leave-it' mode, using bland language. The structure and presentation of an argument cannot, even at the simplest level of analysis, escape a particular ordering and prioritizing that will be consumed by its readers and listeners. It is a commonplace, following Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian debate, that structure—of any kind—is power.

But to say that about text and speech is insufficient. What we now need to know are the means through which power is expressed. A very useful start has been made in the work of Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde on securitization. Although their emphasis is on those actors who have the power to define the terms of a discourse, rather than on the discourse itself, they illuminatingly refer to the power politics of a concept in the context of its rhetorical and semiotic structure. Drafting in both Austin and Bourdieu, they draw attention to the potential of a performative force to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already within the context. Rightly, they stress that the application of such force may either succeed or fail: speech acts have the potential for both.[18]

This line of argument needs to be taken further. For, as already suggested, in text and speech, power is specifically exercised not only in the ordering of thinking but in the shape of intensity. Intensity and intensification are a case of the actual act of exercising power—they are a power practice, not a thought-practice about power. Above all, they endow an aspect of discourse with weight in relation to its other aspects—thus doing something to and with a text—and, by design or not, they produce an intellectual, aesthetic, or emotional *impact* on the consumer of the discourse. As Edelman comments, 'the

[17] Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 7–8.

[18] B. Buzan, O. Wæver, and J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. 25–8, 32, 46; O. Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in R.O. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 61. For Bourdieu, however, the power of discourse lies above all in the social position of the speaker (Bourdieu, op. cit.), pp. 109, 111 and *passim*.

intensity with which a problematic definition of an issue engages some people usually signals the level of intensity with which a conflicting definition engages others'.[19] Intensification is the most prominently directive dimension through which political language intervenes in the real world, complementing sharply the other broader ideological and epistemological interventions that, through mapping and silences, shape the political. For language not only communicates ideas; nor does it only describe and evaluate. It also contains two kinds of intensifiers. The one employs modulators that are tagged on to thought, description, and evaluation, sieving and weighting them by means of emphasis-varying contrivances designed to activate and hone the consumption of certain messages.[20] Here adjectival or adverbial qualifiers are often engaged to do the trick: words such as 'very', 'indeed', 'surely', 'categorically', 'unquestionably', 'emphatically', 'absolutely', are themselves modulating intensifiers of any speech act, serving to introduce an aura of certainty into the indeterminacy of expression.[21] And certainty emits power.

The second kind of intensifier assumes certain modes, or styles, of discourse. Four major modes of power as intensity are evident in the empirical intervention of discourse: the rational persuasive force of its argument, the rhetorical attractiveness of its vision, the appeal of its emotions, or the menace of its tone. Reason, rhetoric, emotion, and menace appear in different measures in a speech act and not all may be present in a given instance. Hence they are not necessarily indigenous to the elementary power properties of all speech acts at their basic level of organizing communication; nonetheless, they are located somewhere between the widespread and the ubiquitous. Articulateness, cogency, emotiveness, and imagination may be viewed as resources through which intensity is transmitted. Even though on another dimension we might trace them back to the individual ability that supplies those resources, they become part and parcel of the power of a text and should be treated as some of its attributes. They become embedded in text and speech, rather than being causes of its properties. Reasoning, rhetoric, emotion, and menace are of course also consumed in ways that depend on the interpretative and epistemological filters through which they are comprehended.

The four categories may seem to overlap and intersect in many ways, and indeed they do. Some scholars would include them all under the heading of rhetoric, possibly the most fundamental of the four that pertains to speech

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[19] M. Edelman, *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), p. 11.

[20] The way people speak, using hedges, interrupters or tags refers to the relationship between the delivery of language and power, as for example relating to gender differences—a specific form of power *through*, not *in*, language that is outside the focus of this chapter.

[21] See also S.H. Ng and J.J. Bradac, *Power and Language: Verbal Communication and Social Influence* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993).

acts in the raw.[22] But the classification is intended to bring out different styles of discourse. Thus central political notions can be heightened by attaching intensifiers to them, some of which may be metaphors: 'the authority and legitimacy of the regime are at stake'; or repetition ('justice for the individual, justice for the state, justice for humanity'); or aesthetic and emotional verbal attachments (the 'purity' or 'beauty' of a vision, the 'terror' or 'fear' invoked by certain plans); or action-cum-conflict indicators ('struggle for', 'battle over'); or leadership indicators ('the mother or father of the nation'); or words directly indicating force ('seize the initiative', 'eliminate').

3. REASON AND REASONING

In investigating the rationality of an argument we are looking at the substantive discussion itself, and assessing its persuasiveness (or indeed dissuasiveness). It involves an appeal to another's judgement or good sense in order to elicit a change in thinking or acting, or to prevent such a change. Persuasion can engage with either of two dimensions. The first summons up cogency, coherence, validity, proof, and intellectual forcefulness. The second invokes ethical or cultural arguments located in ideologies and epistemologies in which certain values are held to be invested with irresistible mobilizing force. That dimension may specify universal normative standards of conduct, or it may deploy heavy cultural armoury to drive points home, such as appeals to God and religion, or to science, or to common sense that ratchet up the stakes involved and are intended to increase the pressure emanating from an argument. Although such arguments are directed at the intellect, they often and simultaneously are knowing applications of the *power* of argument. At the very least, they attempt to convince and win over their consumers by employing the most efficient, compelling and professionally influential language required to attain impact—the rationality of means rather than of ends. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca have astutely observed, arguments are 'possessed of a certain force, which may moreover vary with the audience.'[23] Thus the reaction of some specialist audiences may be more complex and unpredictable than anticipated, particularly in comparison to a general audience. For example, a reasoned argument may be couched in terms that would have persuaded the historians whom a scholar is accustomed to address but

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[22] By rhetoric I refer not to a body of rules or to the study of rhetoric but to the rhythms present in discourse, and the devices and embellishments introduced into it, that make it imaginatively, culturally, or aesthetically attractive to its consumers.

[23] C. Pereleman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), p. 9.

not the philosophers who are currently reading his work; or the party faithful but not the floating voters.

The relative weighting of any particular form of discursive power depends heavily on the social and cultural context in which it takes place, for different contexts require diverse kinds of linguistic intensity if they are to have contextual impact. Threatening or getting angry isn't likely to cut too much ice in an intellectual debate. Rational argument against democracy in the midst of a pro-democracy demonstration is likely to get very short shrift. However, when political actors make a case for a policy or a decision, they wish to mobilize support for their view through the power of their view or vision; indeed, political language often tends to be cast in superlatives when persuasion leans on rhetoric. The communicator has a target audience or readership in mind and tailors the text, successfully or not, to the anticipated frames of reference and to their assumed optimal receptiveness. That also entails switching between specialized professional or lay languages as the occasion requires. When Cicero wrote 'wisdom in itself is silent and powerless to speak'[24] that is only partly the case, for wisdom is always cast in a language, and when that language is in tune with a particular professional, or deep-rooted vernacular, vocabulary it is both recognizable by its users and potentially influential. For audiences unschooled in that vocabulary, however, eloquent rhetoric may have to be brought in to play a larger, substitute role.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* attaches performatives such as induce, convince, entice, or urge in defining 'persuade'. But significantly, the noun 'persuasion' is, among others, defined as presenting 'compelling arguments'. That is precisely where the variable intensity of persuasion is heightened. Numerous examples of compelling argument abound in the history of political thought, many in the form of what Aquinas termed the 'dictate of reason',[25] a veritable kind of compulsion! For Hegel, reason 'is infinite power'[26] and the maxim 'what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational' is underpinned by Plato's 'greatness of spirit' (an appeal to an authority) and is 'a conviction shared by every ingenuous consciousness as well as by philosophy' (an appeal to the naturalness of common sense)[27]—language intended both to persuade and to pre-empt dissent. The association of free choice with necessity—a theme preeminent in Hegel's writings—renders an appeal to human agency compatible with the irresistible power of the argument at stake, an argument well-suited to conform to the epistemological expectations of contemporary

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[24] Quoted in Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, op. cit., p. 83.
[25] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, first part of the second part, Qu. 92, article 1 http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2092.htm (accessed 8.12.2012).
[26] G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History* (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. 11.
[27] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 20.

philosophical liberals and geared specifically towards them. The phrase 'We hold these truths to be self-evident', found in the American Declaration of Independence,[28] is an very forceful expression of persuasion, implying that it is rationally pointless to question them. As noted in Chapter Seven, the considered reasoning of ethicists has a coercive edge. Rawls accounted for that as follows: 'Our feeling coerced is perhaps our being surprised at the consequences of those principles and standards, at the implications of our free recognition.'[29] It sits uneasily with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's comment that 'only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary can give meaning to human freedom.'[30] According to Rawlsian-type rules of professional discourse, there is no case for saying 'if you aren't for us, you're against us'. Rather, 'if you aren't for us, you're an unreasonable ethicist and a bad political theorist', which constitutes professional elimination, not just coercion. Rational persuasion is itself mandatory within the profession, and by extension for the population at large, and particularly so when considering issues of public reason, which fall within the domain of the political. In that sense, ethics dispenses with erroneous choice, thus once again departing from the real world of thinking politically. For philosophers that may of course be a legitimate move, but it reduces their relevance in the sphere of political thought, a status to which many of them nonetheless aspire as potential power wielders.

A telling test of the intensity facet of persuasive reasoning may be applied to liberal theorists. For liberalism frequently shies away from power, and John Stuart Mill was a typical liberal in that sense. In rejecting the form of power known as compulsion as a means of doing good to another, and in lumping together remonstrating, reasoning, persuading, and entreating, he was unable to recognize that all those, including reasoned persuasion, are also forms of power with their own considerable compelling force.[31] Dahl, in turn, pushed power into a small box, merely as a special case of influence involving 'severe losses for noncompliance'—hence most forms of influence were not forms of power.[32] Yet political theorists, after all, are the main constructors and purveyors of high quality political thinking, and their uses of political language must be taken very seriously. When they talk to each other, they generally wish their analyses and prescriptions to outweigh and override those of others.

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[28] *The Declaration of Independence*, 4. July 1776, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html (accessed 9.1.2013).

[29] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 45.

[30] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, op. cit., p. 514.

[31] Mill, *On Liberty*, in J.M. Robson (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XVIII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 224.

[32] R. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 2nd edn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 32.

Their discourses, too, constitute power relationships, and the most effective power tool at their disposal is persuasion through rational argument. Indeed, Mill himself recognized in *Considerations on Representative Government* what he had obfuscated in *On Liberty*: 'Those who can succeed in creating a general persuasion that a certain form of government, or social fact of any kind, deserves to be preferred, have made nearly the most important step which can possibly be taken to ranging the powers of society on its side.'[33]

4. RHETORIC

More than rational persuasion, rhetoric is a form of dressing that offers signposts to the consumer of the verbal or written text. In the case of the rhetorical attractiveness of a text or utterance, we are looking at the effectiveness of the clothing of the argument, aesthetically, technically, and structurally. It has its persuasive element, but usually approaches persuasion indirectly, not through addressing the intellect. Like rational persuasion, rhetoric may search for the most apposite formulations that could be expected to work on the consumer, anticipating a (possibly more popular) vocabulary to which they might be susceptible.[34] In morphological terms, rhetoric can be a means of accentuating certain components of a concept, or a concept in relation to others, as in the phrase 'give me liberty or give me death',[35] and therefore is part of the category of *internal* decontesting devices without which the meaning of a concept is too amorphous to be intelligible. However, rhetoric is best approached through larger argumentative segments than concepts and their qualifiers alone.[36] Both rational persuasion and rhetoric are types of power *in* discourse. But both may also invoke the authority of the source of the argument or conceptual decontestation as a means to boost the force of their messages, which may be explicit or evident in the mode of speaking and writing. They then become types of power *through* discourse as well.[37]

Rhetoric is often perceived as bogus or inauthentic. As Ricoeur observed of rhetoric, insofar as it replaces truth with eloquence: 'The technique founded

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[33] J.S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, *Works*, vol. XIX (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 381.

[34] See Quentin Skinner's illuminating discussion of the maxims of classical rhetoric as applied to renaissance England in *Reason and Rhetoric*, op.cit.

[35] Patrick Henry, 'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death', speech on 23 March 1775, http://www.law.ou.edu/ushistory/henry.shtml (accessed 16.12.2012).

[36] See A. Finlayson, 'Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies', *Political Studies*, vol. 60 (2012), 751–67.

[37] For an historical discussion, see R.B. Hall, 'Moral Authority as a Power Resource', *International Organization*, vol. 51 (1997), 591–622.

on the knowledge of the factors that help to effect persuasion puts formidable power in the hands of anyone who masters it perfectly—the power to manipulate words apart from things, and to manipulate men by manipulating words.'[38] That 'inauthenticity' of power resonates well with its pejorative connotations among ethicists and critical discourse theorists. But of course, even for Ricoeur that has little bearing on the analysis of discursive power, as the (perlocutionary) effectiveness of power lies in the reaction of its object, not in the sincerity of the power-wielder. On occasion, rhetoric may not even be intended; in such cases it cannot be subsumed under persuasion. Besides, much rhetoric is genuine and arises out of a passion, or an inspired rather than mischievous, eloquence, displayed by the producer. Rational persuasion works when it invisibly uses the cultural languages that have the greatest impact within its particular mode, as in languages of logic, induction, or reflection. Rhetoric may also reflect the cadences of certain vernacular languages, the historical memories of a society, or the employment of clichés and conventional metaphors, that are not deliberately selected but work well in a particular setting. Not least, given that ideologies are competitions over the control of political language, rhetoric is another contrivance in that inevitable yet doomed struggle for finality. Rhetoric may replace substantive arguments for authority and legitimacy, although even those arguments usually benefit from a fair layer of rhetorical coating and from occasional linguistic pyrotechnics.

Because decontestation is a form of power, imaginative efforts to enhance rational decontestative argument may themselves be forceful tools, employing metaphor and metonymy alongside other central rhetorical devices. As a particularly significant form of rhetoric, metaphor transfers a name to something that belongs to something else.[39] Its method of re-description is thus a disruptive intervention in a semantic field. The impact produced by that unfamiliarity is a form of exercising discursive power, expressed in the acts of naming and renaming: they 'facilitate the generation of new thoughts of a particular kind'.[40] The 'startling' quality of a trope is an imaginative leap that lends considerable power to the idea conveyed through it. Even in commonplace mode, replacing 'welfare beneficiary' with 'scrounger', or 'refugee' with 'illegal immigrant', has immediate rhetorical impact as a speech act of social reclassification, though it can concurrently intensify the emotional temperature surrounding the person and the practice. Ultimately, in Garsten's formulation, 'rhetoric is a form of rule'.[41]

At the micro-level, the analysis of political thinking needs to delve into metaphor and its associates in order to extract the detailed information from

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[38] P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 10.
[39] Ibid., p. 13.   [40] Ng and Bradac, op. cit., p. 138.
[41] B. Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 6.

political texts that literary critics bring to light in theirs. Do some metaphors work particularly well in the political sphere, metaphors such as the 'ship of state', 'a level playing ground', or 'the rules of the game'? Or have they become clichés that need to make way for short-term innovative turns of phrase in order to maintain an impact, such as the 'stakeholder society' (emphasizing collective investment in a common enterprise—a device intensifying corporate belonging) or the 'third way' (emphasizing steering an astute route between two extreme positions—a device intensifying novelty and a vision of the future), themselves quickly relegated in turn to hackneyed phrases? Or, perhaps, do metaphors need to be adapted to the cultural and contingent milieus of the languages that convey them, so that the implications of equality of opportunity embedded in a 'level playing ground' require an ideology receptive to that kind of barrier removal, as well as a public school sporting tradition in which such playing grounds originally had a resonance? It is also worth noting that, while the art of oratory was widely developed and practised in ancient societies such as Rome, the spread of the written word requires a refocusing on written texts, only very few of which exhibit, or need to exhibit, the kind of professional rhetorical skill that was the objective of classical and early modern thinkers and public persona. The consumption of a text lacks the ambience created through the group reception of a speech directed at an assembly of listening and interlinked people. Moreover, the ancient belief in rhetoric as an avenue to truth has been largely replaced by pluralist presumptions that necessitate the adaptation of rhetoric to power struggles among competing and often precarious political languages.

Examples of rhetorical attractiveness are typically to be found in political visions, framed in pleasing, even seductive, language. Thus Fourier on whether he has really discovered the theory of the four movements and its utopian promise: '…if the answer is affirmative, all economic, moral and political theories will need to be thrown away, and preparations made for the most astounding, and happiest, event possible on this or any other globe, the transition from social chaos to universal harmony.'[42] The sweeping, bombastic and dramatic character of the prose is designed as a framework statement that functions to elevate the spirits of its consumers and to concentrate their focus on the key nature of the text; in other words, its intended impact is to establish the text as sole contender for the readers' interest and sole guide for their actions.

The combination of rhetorical intensity with the intensity of rational persuasion[43] is common. Take a speech by former British Prime Minister

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[42] C. Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.

[43] J. Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 146, terms that combination 'conviction rhetoric'.

Tony Blair on justifying the use of all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's ostensible weapons of mass destruction. In a statement to, and the following debate in, the House of Commons, Blair said: 'At the outset I say: it is right that this House debate the issue and pass judgment. That is the democracy that is our right but that others struggle for in vain. And again I say: I do not disrespect the views of those in opposition to mine. This is a tough choice. But it is also a stark one: to stand British troops down and turn back; or to hold firm to the course we have set. I believe we must hold firm.' He continued:

> Looking back over 12 years, we have been victims of our own desire to placate the implacable, to persuade towards reason the utterly unreasonable, to hope that there was some genuine intent to do good in a regime whose mind is in fact evil. . . . That is why this indulgence has to stop. Because it is dangerous. It is dangerous if such regimes disbelieve us. Dangerous if they think they can use our weakness, our hesitation, even the natural urges of our democracy towards peace, against us. Dangerous because one day they will mistake our innate revulsion against war for permanent incapacity, when in fact, pushed to the limit, we will act. But then when we act, after years of pretence, the action will have to be harder, bigger, more total in its impact. Iraq is not the only regime with WMD. But back away from this confrontation and future conflict will be infinitely worse and more devastating. . . . Tell our allies that at the very moment of action, at the very moment when they need our determination that Britain faltered. I will not be a party to such a course. This is not the time to falter. This is the time for this House, not just this government or indeed this Prime Minister, but for this House to give a lead, to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk, to show at the moment of decision that we have the courage to do the right thing.[44]

The rhetorical intensity of the speech resides in the austere dichotomization that operates on an ethical level. This is addressed through the general category of good versus evil and through the specific category of courage and steadfastness in the face of the reiterated word 'dangerous'. On the rational level the dichotomy is between placation and the implacable, reason and unreason. In addition, the speech outlines a crescendo of reaction—that is to say, the future-oriented threat of amplified intensity. Finally, the undercurrent of strong leadership is emphasized through the self-exclusion of Blair from the ranks of the faint-hearted and his demand for an unequivocal decision from Parliament—apparently but not effectively leading, rather than following, the Prime Minister. Generally, the House complimented Blair on the power of his speech and the sincerity of his convictions, whether accepting or rejecting the rational case for intervention.

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[44] T. Blair, *Hansard*, vol. 401, 18 March 2003, 765–74.

It is not the use of rhetoric and metaphor per se that concerns us, but its intensifying role with respect to political language, concepts, values and ideas. Thus, democracy is 'naturally' linked with peace, and the hesitation of democratic regimes is portrayed as a sign of long-term strength, precisely because the reasonable use of time is a measure of judgement and debate that, one assumes, accompany liberal understandings of democracy. Concurrently, the danger of misinterpretation of such reflective 'laxity' if it continues for too long underscores the parallel capacity that democracy possesses to generate strong leadership and resolve. The implicit threat of forcefulness (in this case the menace of war) is described as an attribute of democratic systems as much as their deliberative reasonableness is, and is intended to associate democracy with the exercise of justifiable force and to augment it as a political system that can defend its values effectively. The speech thus attempts to rally its audience not only around specific policies but to instil in them a renewed belief in the overriding vitality of the political values they apparently share.

Clearly, rhetoric overlaps both with rational persuasion and with emotion. Although we continuously confront categories possessing vague boundaries and shared features, the importance of identifying the distinct categories resides, nonetheless, not only in the marking out of divergent areas but more subtly in the different emphases given to the shared elements. In the usage conferred on it here, rhetoric diverges from rational persuasion in not being centrally focused on logic as a form of compelling argumentation, and it eschews the scholarly standards of proof or validation that one would expect of a professional text in political theory. But it is also not identical to the simple expression of emotion in speech as well as writing. Some forms of emotion are rhetorical, and some forms of rhetoric are emotive. As an art, rhetoric has employed emotions carefully, by design. That emotional distance from emotion—that is to say, manufacturing and manipulating emotion rationally rather than giving vent to it—is however merely one facet of the far more complex phenomenon of emotion in speech and writing, be it ever so important to the category of rhetoric itself. The reflection of a state of upset, or worry, or happiness, in discourse need not employ rhetoric at all. Conversely, metaphor, for example, need not have recourse to the expression of emotion.

5. EMOTION

Rational persuasion exercises power by making something important, superior, and reflectively deserving of precedence. Rhetoric exercises power by making something attractive, appealing, and impressing. Emotion exercises power by making something immediate, affecting, and stirring. Variable intensification heightens all these attributes. In the case of emotional appeal,

we are looking at the instant, or more durable, pointedness or passion of political language that attaches itself to psychological or visceral features of human beings and that consequently reinforces political discourse, not through content or structure but through the arousal of additional non-verbal reactions in the speaker or writer. As Ost contends with respect to party politics, 'the pursuit of power requires an almost constant mobilization of emotion in order to solidify partisan identification among the electorate.'[45] Commenting on Foucault, Burkitt suggests that power could not incite, induce, or seduce 'without the fact that human relations are always charged with emotion'.[46] Generally, in de Sousa's words, 'emotions are among the mechanisms that control the crucial factor of *salience* among what would otherwise be an unmanageable plethora of objects of attention, interpretation, and strategies of inference and conduct'.[47]

The illocutionary and perlocutionary attributes of speech acts pertain, of course, also to the manifestation of emotion in the relevant texts or speeches and the production of emotion in the targeted audience. All combinations are possible here: an emotive discourse that generates either similar or different emotions among its consumers; an emotive discourse that does not generate emotions, or that generates emotions that fail to change thought-behaviour; a non-emotional discourse that generates an emotional response. There is also the crossover effect of emotions with sufficient intensity to change thought-practices in general. The emphasis here is not on the resulting emotional state of the consumers—whether they are, say, happy or fearful, or what their psychological and physiological state is. It is not on emotions, such as despair, frustration, or hope, created *by* political processes. Rather, emotions are assessed mainly as power bestowers on the processes and forms of thinking. We need to extract the additional information and conceptualizations that relate to the speech act or text available to the consumer as an inevitable interpreter of political language, once emotional intensifiers are appended to concepts and arguments. If, for example, emotions 'sustain our commitments', the question for the political theorist of political thinking is how they are brought to bear on the construction and reception of political language rather than on how they dispose us towards the world.[48]

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[45] D. Ost, 'Politics as the Mobilization of Anger: Emotions in Movement and in Power', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 7 (2004), 237.

[46] I. Burkitt, 'Complex Emotions: Relations, Feelings and Images in Emotional Experience', in J. Barbalet (ed.), *Emotions and Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 165.

[47] R. de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. xv.

[48] Barbalet's otherwise excellent discussion of the relation between emotions and politics does not explore the specific dimension of political thought as a repository and arouser of emotion. See J. Barbalet, 'Emotions in Politics: From the Ballot to Suicide Terrorism', in S. Clarke, P. Hoggett and S. Thompson (eds), *Emotion, Politics and Society* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2006), p. 38, which concentrates on the strategic use of emotions by activists in political and institutional practice.

It is a given, then, that political speech acts and the semantic units of political thought—political concepts—are accompanied by, and intersect with, emotional qualifiers and heighteners. As Hobson acknowledged, though in plaintive voice, discussing politics: 'Everywhere the beginnings of these sciences are cumbered by a litter of these "idols of the market", popular concepts laden with diverse emotional contents. . . . Yet they cannot be shed. . . . Most even of the phraseology in which early abstract thinkers couch their thoughts, such as "the natural rights of man", "equality of opportunity", "the product of labour", "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality", has been a terrible impediment to disinterested science, not only by reason of its slipperiness, but because of the interested and often impassioned burdens it carries.'[49] Some scholars associate emotional intensity with duration, suggesting that strong short-term emotions exist side-by-side with 'more enduring but less perceptible sentiments'.[50] But intensification is far more likely to relate to emotions that are, in Berezin's phrase, 'ontologically in the moment', situated in specific time and space.[51] Durable emotions are the background hum, and short-term emotions 'in the moment' constitute the power surges. Those views of emotion importantly reinforce the insight that politics is the meeting between the patterned and the particular, and that its concrete emotional manifestations are always in the here and now. Utterances are produced at a point in time, and generally speaking heard at that point in time, or shortly afterwards, if disseminated on the mass media. But texts may be consumed either in the here and now or at another time: their consumption, and hence their emotional impact, are in continuous flux on a time-continuum, as a transmitted message navigates through what is to become its own history. In both cases, however, once consumed the impact may be instant. The immediacy of a transmitted emotion, oral or written, may affect a corresponding immediacy in the make-up of any particular political concept or argument. And immediacy, like urgency, is a potent intensifier.

Examples of emotional appeal, are typically, but by no means only, found in nationalist literature. Mazzini's *The Duties of Man*, concurrently an instance of powerful rhetoric, exudes intense appeal to his readers and aims at arousing their passions as well: 'If you do not embrace the whole human family in your love, if you do not confess your faith in its unity . . . and in the brotherhood of the Peoples . . . if whenever one of your fellow men groans . . . you do not feel yourself called, being able, to fight for the purpose of relieving the deceived or oppressed—you disobey your law of life.' And later, 'The Country . . . is the

[49] J.A. Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), pp. 20–1.

[50] See S. Clarke, P. Hoggett, and S. Thompson, 'The Study of Emotion: An Introduction' in Clarke, Hoggett and Thompson, op. cit., p. 10.

[51] M. Berezin, 'Secure States: Towards a Political Sociology of Emotions' in J. Barbalet (ed.), *Emotions and Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 35.

sentiment of love, the sense of fellowship which binds together all the sons of that territory.'[52] Here the conjuring up of emotions of sympathy, solidarity, affection, and distress at the plight of others acts as intensifiers in the process of mobilizing for a cause. But most political texts have a clear emotional accompaniment. Liberalism, usually associated with a rational as distinct from an emotional register, is no instance of that false antinomy either, as I have argued elsewhere.[53] Mill wrote about 'the feeling of repugnance which characterises the sentiment' of injustice and was 'the source of the character-istic intensity of the sentiment'.[54] Fervour, to the contrary, is a particularly zealous intensification of some emotions, often linked to intolerance and to the rigidity of a conceptual configuration removed from liberalism. Of course, intensification through emotions are a power (and therefore political) feature of any kind of thinking. Illustrating that would, however, take us on too extensive a voyage. Suffice it to say that in a specific sense the emotions accompanying core political speech and text acts, and that permeate any of the other five features of political thinking in preponderant manner, become an integral component of each of those features.

6. MENACE AND THREATS

The fourth category, menace by means of threats—which itself can be rational and/or emotional—merits separate consideration because threats are even more immediate exercises of power than the other modes we have considered. Threats have been termed 'key coercive moves'. Among others, 'language intensity seems particularly salient for conveying the credibility of a threat or promise and for assessing the intentionality of threats in negotiations'.[55] Threats are the verbal equivalent of direct action, corresponding to compul-sion, force, or violence in physical and institutional practice and therefore constituting a major sub-class of power in linguistic form. As has frequently been observed, 'effective threats will accomplish their purpose without being carried out'[56]—their very utterance is an instance of the most severe

[52] G. Mazzini, 'The Duties of Man' in O. Dahbour and M.R. Ishay (eds), *The Nationalism Reader* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), pp. 91, 96.

[53] M. Freeden, 'Liberal Passions: Reason and Emotion in Late and Post-Victorian Liberal Thought', in P. Ghosh and L. Goldman (eds), *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 136–49.

[54] J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Dent, 1910), p. 56.

[55] P. Gibbons, J.J. Bradac, and J.D. Busch, 'The Role of Language in Negotiations: Threats and Promises', in L.L. Putnam and M.E. Roloff (eds), *Communication and Negotiation* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), pp. 159, 164.

[56] D. Snow and E. Brown, *International Relations: The Changing Contours of Power* (New York: Longman, 2000), p. 45.

illocutionary force.[57] Examples of menace and threats are less common in major texts of political theory, though they are frequently *written about* in classic works, such as those authored by Machiavelli, or in Realpolitik literature. When we do find them, they appear in texts of policy intent, for instance those aimed at revolutionary movements and crafted on a 'friend–enemy' basis. Thus Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* address the bourgeoisie: 'You must, therefore, confess that by "individual" you mean no other than the bourgeois, than the middle class owner of property. This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way, and made impossible.' And later, 'The Communists . . . openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution.'[58] Most threats are far cruder than that, however, but appear in other forms of thinking politically, such as in international relations discourse or in party-political squabble, the latter directed both outwardly and inwardly. And threats obviously appear frequently in normal vernacular usage as forms of social control, retribution, or plain aggression.

In slightly more subtle forms, Searle has demonstrated how the empathic commitment of pledging and promising—whose power we have already confronted in Chapter Five—can be harnessed to intensify threats, as in the sentence 'if you don't hand in your paper on time, I promise you I will give you a failing grade',[59] replicated in a 2012 report of the Cairo BBC correspondent that 'both sides have promised to take to the streets tomorrow'.[60] Though promising suggests a high degree of attempted precision, threats benefit also from the ambiguity of language, which can then act as a general deterrent.[61] Indeed, the anticipation of danger—the perception of a threat—may be sufficient to serve as a power constraint.[62] With regard to credibility, both personal and institutional power relationships, in a manner quite typical for menace and threats, supplement the power *in* statements with the power *through* them. One common garb of threats is an allusion to a crisis, described as 'an all-pervasive rhetorical metaphor . . . as a means of dramatising perceptions of social pathology, social breakdown and disorganisation, and to give full vent to feelings as to the intolerability of the present'.[63] The notion of a crisis as an

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[57] To that extent Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are incorrect in asserting that all argumentation 'is a substitute for the physical force which would aim at obtaining the same kind of results by compulsion'—unless we restrict their point to reflective rational argumentation alone (op. cit., p. 54).

[58] K. Marx and F. Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto' in D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 233, 246.

[59] Searle, op. cit., p. 58.

[60] BBC TV News, 10 December 2012.

[61] D.A. Baldwin, 'Thinking about Threats', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 15 (1971), 75.

[62] R. Cohen, 'Threat Perception in International Crisis', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 93 (1978), 93–107.

[63] R.J. Holton, 'The Idea of Crisis in Modern Society', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 38 (1987), 502, 504.

immediate 'sense of disorder' (as distinct from the discursive employment of 'permanent crisis') involves, according to one analysis, 'three key components—threat, uncertainty, urgency', encompassing 'time compression' as a defining element.[64] The 'fiscal cliff', referring to impending tax rises and spending cuts in the USA, was described both as a threat and a crisis by American commentators,[65] its urgency intensified by the looming 1 January 2013 deadline for its solution.

Threats understandably echo with emotional resonance, but the cultural content of what constitutes harm and what triggers fear will both vary and converge, causing the intensity of the same utterance to fluctuate when its comparative consumption is explored. Alternatively, the intensity of that speech act may be significantly high either for its substantive positive or negative connotations. A threat to disenfranchise an individual may carry weight among, and upset, the politically aware but not among the politically apathetic. An appeal to the legitimate authority of the monarch may inspire royalists but dismay republicans. A call to name and shame criminals may be greeted with fervour in one society but disgust those in another. The urge to export freedom and democracy may anger theocrats, depress realists, and excite moralists. And climate change has a long way to go if it is to be considered on a par with a threat to national self-determination.

All four categories are power *variables*, and it is the variability of power that is far too infrequently explored among political theorists. Any discourse can be consciously or unconsciously ratcheted up through any one of the above devices—it can, in other words, be a site of power surges—and there are few instances of speech and text addressed to collectivities that do not exercise one or more of those modes of power. Our task as political theorists interested in the political aspect of thought and of its expression is to be alert to all such intensifiers. That entails a switch of emphasis away from Skinner's focus, which was to link illocutionary and perlocutionary acts as two instances of *intentionality*.[66] Instead, the political theorist might approach Austin's terms from another angle, and link those categories as two instances of applying *intensity* to the wielding of discursive power, irrespective of the intentionality issue. All that necessitates the assumption of a roughly shared language among political theorists and political practitioners as a precondition to endeavouring to trace variable intensity and to identifying what counts as a more powerful or less powerful instance of political language.

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[64] A. Boin, P. Hart, E. Stern, and B. Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 2–3.

[65] 'Seven Ways the "Fiscal Cliff" Crisis could End', CNBC, 21 December 2012, http://www.cnbc.com/id/100335283 (accessed 27.4.2013).

[66] Q. Skinner, 'A Reply to my Critics', in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 260–1.

7. REFACING POWER

We can further explore the nature of power in political thinking by placing it in the context of what Bachrach and Baratz identified as the first, and Lukes identified as the third, face of power. The first face, associated among others with Dahl, relates to overcoming overt and intentional conflict among agents with different preferences.[67] That is far from a necessary feature of power as intensity. It could simply be a means to remove an acquiescent consumer of language beyond the threshold of agreement into the realm of action, a nudge involving little or no conflict. No less crucially, while the successful wielding of power is indisputably located in a relationship among more than one individual or group, the analysis of power offered here focuses on the illocutionary aspect of applying intensity, initially irrespective of the perlocutionary consequences of its impact to which the first face relates. Most significantly, unlike the first face of power, the voicing of the intensity incorporated in language occurs whether or not it comprises a conscious intention and attempt to make a difference. Only consequently may intensity have an impact. The chronology of power in political thinking possesses a triple formation: it begins with the expression of particular linguistic formations and conceptual configurations. It then often—but certainly not invariably—proceeds to adapting these tools and devices to the presumed contextual and epistemological receptiveness of their targeted audiences and readers. Finally, its messages are absorbed by audiences and readerships.

The third face, too, explores a different aspect of power from the one mooted here.[68] It is concerned primarily with the effects of power, mainly of a negative and exploitative nature, effects that are hidden from the view of the object of power but not necessarily unintentional on the part of the agents of power. To the extent that the exercise of power is intentional, exploitation is linked to manipulation. But Lukes' emphasis is on the unintentional, on structures and processes that constrain and distort all actions in a society. That is to say, the third face identifies the structural oppressiveness and exploitation of some social arrangements that cannot be seen as the product of any particular agent.[69]

The focus of the discussion in these pages, to the contrary, is centred on observable forms of power in oral and written discourse, observable at least to the trained analyst but also to the enlightened participant—because

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[67] P. Bachrach and M.S. Baratz, 'Two Faces of Power', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 56 (1962), 947–52. In this article and other writings they argue for the second face of power as a form of non-decision-making deliberately designed to eradicate signs of having exercised power.

[68] S. Lukes, *Power* (1974), op. cit., pp. 21–5.

[69] In the second edition of his book, Lukes retracted that view (p. 12), but it is still common among many political theorists.

language is empirically detectable, even when the meanings it contains may be occluded. Granted that many of its unintentional forms are ineliminable, they have no umbilical link to the acknowledgement of whatever potentially oppressive consequences they may have—or to their subsequent preferred removal, from the viewpoint of a radical ethicist operating within Lukes' original framework. The partial ineliminability of unintentionality arises from the surplus of meaning that is attached to any expression of intensity—a property also evident in perlocution, as the example of negotiation explored in Chapter Six illustrates. That surplus, always carrying more meaning than can be intended, emanates from the permanent features of political concepts: ambiguity, indeterminacy, and vagueness. It is frequently masked by the naturalization of epistemological frameworks with their consequent loss of transparency. But the variable reception of meaning entailed by those features cannot be eradicated for any length of time. At any rate, political theorists investigating such issues are focused principally not on the variable intensity residing in discourse, but on the *actual effects* intensification has when analysed through the prism of different epistemological frameworks, cultural contexts, or genres and styles of discourse. They devote insufficient effort to studying the *production* of such effects, intended or not, successful or not.

Intentionality plays an important role in analysing the ways in which power inhabits discourse inasmuch as intensity can be deliberately attached to speech acts in order to produce effects. In rational persuasion that is always the case, but it is also one of the features of rhetoric and of menace. The deployment of emotion renders intentionality more problematic, as it is often far from deliberate. But political thinking is also frequently emotionally manipulative with regard to the ideas and visions it wishes to promote. Hence emotion can be deliberately 'switched on', though that too may be more appropriately subsumed under rhetoric. Even in democratic systems, calculated recourse to emotion is a symptom of the high stakes invested in the electoral process. Conversely, there are many instances when a speaker/writer may be carried away by his/her emotions or they may be more obvious to the listener/reader than to the speaker. In sum, intentionality and unintentionality co-exist in tandem as a rule, and any investigation of intensity has to recognize that simultaneity. Despite the bad press that intentionality has received when considered to be a weakness of midtwentieth-century positivist social science, and despite its—challenged—association with individual agents, a political theory text or utterance is unquestionably and primarily an intentional act at *some* level of consciousness, and it is produced by an identifiable agent. Whether that intentional agent is in complete control over the conveyed messages is another matter, as we know from the study of ideologies. And whether or not power is intentionally manipulative, the performative features of speech and text always are power acts.

One final point on the difference between power as an exercise and power as a capacity. Lukes has come round to Morriss' view that 'power is a capacity not the exercise of that capacity',[70] and therefore need not be in evidence. However, in the analysis of political discourse that distinction is problematic. True, silence may be a deliberate attempt to prevent the expression of some forms of political thinking from a given agenda (known as the second face of power), or an unintentional exclusion of that thinking. But the intensity of discourse is patently an *immediate* form of exercising power. We are not talking about the *capacity* to use language—having a brain that operates in a distinctive way, vocal chords, or a means of putting ink to paper—but its *actual* usage and expression. The argument that capacity *itself* is a power relates to the resources at the disposal of who is about to wield it, but it has little bearing on the analysis of thinking politically and on the exercise of power in language. The dispute to which Lukes and Morriss refer lies in the realm of physical and social power. It is between those who claim that the resources that may be marshalled to employ power are themselves the locus of power and those for whom that potential is insufficient, and for whom power exists only when an act takes place. Thus a rich person may be seen as powerful even if her riches are unknown and never used, or a rich person may be seen as powerful only when those riches are common knowledge and employed to have an impact on others. But in the case of talking and writing, a speech *act* has already occurred in the very formulation and enunciation of language. And it is that act that inevitably makes it an instance of power. To speak and write a language is already to engage in an *exercise*, part of which is captured through the notion of power.

To elaborate on what has been intimated above, the subtle dividing lines affecting power and thinking politically lie in fact elsewhere. For there is a significant middle stage between illocution and perlocution that can serve to illuminate the power feature of thinking politically. If illocution identifies the force in saying something and perlocution traces its effects, the middle stage recognizes that the power embedded *in* and emanating *from* speech and text may have no effect on thought, emotion, or physical action. It may be deflected from transmission to its targeted audience, or misinterpreted and not make a difference to that audience's thought patterns, let alone conduct, so that they drift away without being the recipients of a power impact. As Bourdieu remarked, 'the competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as acceptable in all the situations in which

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[70] Lukes, *Power* (2005), op. cit., p. 12, and P. Morriss, 'Steven Lukes on the Concept of Power', *Political Studies Review*, vol. 4 (2006), 125–35. See also P. Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

there is occasion to speak.'[71] In that 'no-man's land' power is still immanent in the speech act—it is plainly there to be decoded, say, by a trained observer—but it is not yet an act of perlocutionary power that is consumed by the targeted others.

There is another permutation, however, that pertains to an effect that negates the intention of the speaker or writer; that is to say, a failed effect from the perspective of the originator of the discourse, but one that may nonetheless provoke an unanticipated outcome. For example, a political leader addresses a restless crowd with the intention of pacifying and dispersing them, but the result of that speech act is to enrage the audience, who then become violent. Here both illocutionary and perlocutionary power *have* been exercised from the viewpoint of the analyst, but is it hardly successful from the viewpoint of the agent. On that subjective dimension it remains merely an *attempt* to exercise power; yet the fact is that power, albeit with a different outcome, has been wielded. Alternatively, if the speech act does make a difference, it may be trivial rather than significant and its intensity will be low. All that is tacked on to an additional problem: although there must be a pool of generally recognized speech acts for anyone to identify them as power bearers (e.g. there must be rough agreement on the implications of the word 'absolutely' and its equivalents in other languages), there will be a considerable cultural variation and semiotic range in identifying the power components of some speech acts.

The category in which capacity—and imputed capacity—does matter refers not to power in language but to power *through* language. Rational persuasion may be influenced by the intellectual or professional status and authority of the persuader. Rhetoric may be enhanced by views on the sincerity of the rhetorician as well as by the context in which the rhetoric has a particular resonance, in which case the context itself becomes a resource. Emotion may gain extra depth by the known circumstances of either the speaker or the consumers. Only in the case of menace do those secondary considerations blend with the primary message of menace itself. Unlike the other forms of discursive power, menace is always intended to coerce targeted groups to comply with something they are reluctant to do. Hence the cutting edge of plausibility that menace requires is furnished by hard evidence of the costs of non-compliance that are extraneous to the speech act. That background information is neither essential nor necessary for the other forms of discursive power. Menace has both immediate illocutionary and perlocutionary force of an unpleasant kind with the additional threat of physical or psychological follow-ups. That is why threats strike one as a particularly aggravated, violent form of power.

[71] Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 55.

8. PAST INTENSITIES

The question of intensity has arisen in the past among political theorists. Dahl launched the subject with a chapter on intensity as a problem of determining preferences. He linked intensity to the passionate preference of a group for a particular (democratic) outcome and presented it as an ethical and stability problem associated with majority rule, when apathetic majorities are confronted with intense minorities.[72] The objective of Dahl's analysis was not, however, to determine how power is wielded in and through discourse, but to find approximate measurements for intense feeling, as well as to offer an early version of the pluralism that recognizes minority vulnerability. True, he did refer to identifying instances when 'speech and manner are marked by tension, frustration, irritation, anger, anxiety',[73] but that was no more than a precursor to the current literature on contentious politics that focuses mainly on negative feelings. Subsequent treatments of intensity jumped straight from the feeling to the action of choosing, omitting its linguistic expressions.[74] Hence, there was no attempt to differentiate between various political speech acts and texts, their purposes, their intended recipients, whether they are mass reactions of public opinion or individual articulations, or whether they are participatory or analytical discourses—all of which involve the intense transmission of diverse kinds of messages as well as their separate evaluation. The reason that intensity has virtually disappeared from the agenda of political science has something to do not only with doubts surrounding its assimilation into democratic theory (e.g. how do we handle multiple intense minorities pulling in different directions?) but with its failure to meet empirical tests of measurability, and thus present criteria for utility as a guide to expressing preference, particularly in voting. But that is an insufficient reason for not employing it in other ways.

Activities (as distinct from acts) and persistence—that is to say, physical deeds, and durability over time—were for Dahl the indicators of intensity.[75] The first is of no direct interest to the study of political texts—creating a text has far more significance as a social practice than as a physical activity; the second can only refer to the text or speech act if reproduced or cited repeatedly, but even that is no automatic indication of intensity but quite possibly of banality, poverty of expression, conventional routine or manipulative control—though repetition may itself be a rhetorical device. At any rate, the

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[72] See also W. Kendall and G.W. Carey, 'The "Intensity" Problem and Democratic Theory', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 62 (1968), 5–24.

[73] R. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 101.

[74] D. Rae and M. Taylor, 'Some Ambiguities in the Concept of Intensity', *Polity*, vol. 1 (1969), pp. 297–308.

[75] Dahl, op. cit., p. 109.

temporal dimension offers only one perspective for understanding the political thought-practice itself. That practice is more likely to change over time if it is supposed to retain its intensity among evolving linguistic and conceptual contexts. The bulldog resilience of a Churchill or the rabble-raising emotionalism of a Hitler only convey power in certain cultural environments and may seem incomprehensible, ridiculous, or off-putting in others. Durability is only important inasmuch as it pertains to the generic practice, not to the practice's particular contents.

A rare allusion to the intensity of argumentation is to be found in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's study of rhetoric. They write that: 'An efficacious argument is one which succeeds in increasing [the] intensity of adherence among those who hear it in such a way as to set in motion the intended action . . . or at least in creating in the hearers a willingness to act.'[76] However, that notion of variable intensity refers to supporting certain theses presented for assent and then proceeding to do something. In these pages I refer rather to the intensity of the speech act or text themselves as performative acts; to the intensity embedded in the production of utterances, not to the intensity of commitment to them or support for them—a topic relevant to Chapter Five. In exploring intensity in discourse the political theorist should be focusing not on a psychological state of mind, nor even on a general emotional commitment to a given ideology. Evidently, one may attach oneself with different degrees of intensity to an ideology and that has important political implications. But the issue concerning an ideology here is not how important it is for me, or how attached I am to it, but how do the articulators of a given ideology use language to drive their points home as hard as they can? That is what the study of rhetoric would term its eristic or disputational capacity. It requires matching an ideology's own promoters' understanding of its effectiveness, in terms of its epistemology, with an external scholarly assessment of its discursive impact. Whether or not one may infer from a text or speech that its perceived persuasiveness, rhetoric, passion, or menace indicate a genuine state of mind and feeling on the part of its producer(s) is of no greater relevance to students of politics than the question whether the wielding of power is crucially informed by psychological factors. The expressions of power are, notwithstanding, still part of the speech act.

Those who in the past thought that intensity was a sign of ethical authenticity, and hence of decisive interest to democratic political scientists, were way off the mark. Intensity is directly a political, and only circuitously an ethical, feature; and preferences may be ethical, unethical, or non-ethical. Thus, whether rhetoric is manipulative or utilitarian is not the issue at hand in understanding, rather than ethically assessing, political thought. In the *production* of political language, constraints and enabling factors such as

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[76] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, op. cit., p. 45.

ideational context are of far greater central concern as the map of political language unfolds, and with it the possible paths open and closed to political thinkers. In the *consumption* of political language, conventions and perceptions of intensity and hermeneutic renderings of interpretation are what count in the effectiveness of political discourse and argument. Ultimately, from our viewpoint as interpretative analysts, consumer understandings remain a key consideration even more than producer intentionality. But the focus should be on the intensity a consumer *perceives* in a discourse, not on the intensity with which the consumer then adheres to the consumed discourse. The speech act and its interpretation, not personal or social conduct, are the objects of studying power in language.

9. RANKING AND INTENSITY

Recall that power is a feature of political thinking that permeates the other five features elaborated in this book. In so doing it will adopt some of the properties of those spheres while remaining analytically separate. But ranking is particularly connected to intensity. In providing intensity to their messages, both rational persuasion and rhetoric converge on the political role of ranking, of establishing a hierarchy of priorities of value or concepts, emphasizing a rising significance. The relationship between ranking and power as intensity is that of a Venn diagram. Ranking can be a shielding device for some values or concepts, offering a degree of immunity from change and reclassification; or a hierarchical device, located more comfortably in the spheres of legitimacy and authority. The overlapping area between ranking and intensity concerns the *structural* salience they accord to the objects of their attention, through the (unequal) distribution of significance. One may look no further than at the layout of a newspaper, in which page one is designed to be consumed before page seventeen, and its content and typography exude greater importance. In rhetoric this appears as the highlighting of the sequence in which the speaker or writer wishes to be understood; the establishing of a rhythm that draws its audience or readership into a train of thought. Although not the most efficient means for apportioning intensity, the visibility of what comes first or top supplies a modicum of enhancement. It is a lexical *ordering* of meaning: its units of significance may either be a set of items in which priority is accorded (for example, 'women and children first'), or a linked sequence, in which access to the units has to proceed through a logically dependent chain: I want property, for which I need liberty, for which I require life—hence life, liberty, property. Emotions, too, may confer a particular kind of salience and prioritization, as discussed in Chapter Four, but their effect goes beyond the purely structural. And we have already encountered the urgency dimension of

ranking—indeed, the word 'urgently' is itself another modulating intensifier—whose appeal is both rational and emotional and whose structure propels it temporarily to the head of a policy queue. Its rhetorical element, however, is entirely optional. On issues of securitization, for instance, the prioritization achieved through urgency may effectively be conveyed through rhetoric,[77] as when 'the enemy are at the gates', or 'better death than dishonour' but it can equally be conveyed through an air-raid siren or the deadpan declaration of a state of emergency.

One of the most remarkable instances of structural salience wedded to rhetoric occurs in Mark Antony's funeral speech in *Julius Caesar*, an eloquent discursive crescendo in which the main message appears towards the end, not the beginning, of the speech, in the course of an argumentative build-up. Beginning with the imputed weaknesses of Caesar, the nobility of his character is resurrected, climaxing with the contents of his will, in which every Roman citizen is to receive seventy five drachmas and his gardens are to be made public.[78] Here rhetoric is used to sequence a political argument in rising intensity in a mixture of rational and emotional prose. Conversely, though, not all of the Ten Commandments need be understood as standing in an ordinal queue of intensity; and not each emotional appeal or rhetorical flourish involves the perception of the structure of the discourse.

If we refocus our gaze on political concepts as the units of meaning of political thought, we will find a telling relationship between them and intensity. Most concepts need to have intensity pinned on to them in the various ways discussed in this chapter, or accrue intensity only within certain ideological and cultural settings (liberty, authority, or sovereignty might be such instances, or a sentence such as 'obedience is a prime duty'). But some concepts have intensity built into them. Thus a right—human, natural, social, or legal—already emits intensity, though it tells a far broader story of the protection and significance of fundamental social values. As contended in Chapter Four, a right is a ranking device par excellence. From the standpoint of this chapter, it possesses an intensity dimension in the domain of rational persuasion. The claiming of a right is a very strong way of asserting a preference. The intensity is provided by transforming a speech act from something negotiable and socially unrecognized (a want), through something non-negotiable and socially unrecognized (a need), to something that is both non-negotiable and claiming recognition by others (a right) which, in addition, acts as a trump on other (non-rights protected) claims. For liberals, at the very least, the tagging of the word 'right' to a claimed good is a rational intensifier—often with emotional undertones—as well as a declaration of priorities and an ordering and protection of values. There may be a fourth,

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[77] See Buzan et al., op. cit., p. 26.
[78] W. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 2.

even more intense, instance that uses a register that bypasses the area of rights as already recognized claims. 'Recognize our rights or else . . .' (assuming the threat is credible) employs terminology that is non-negotiable and coercive. It may be a reaction to a breach of an expectation/promise or simply the desire to obtain a particular good by hook or by crook. The greater intensity of a threat, unlike that of a right, derives from its cutting through the normal field of appraised political concepts and directly enlisting coercive force.

10. NON-VERBAL POWER: A NOTE

Previous chapters have had recourse to some of the physical and symbolic forms of thinking politically, as in types of protest or in ceremonies. The presence of the external manifestations of the power of and in thinking deserves brief mention as an extension of the standard purview of political theorists that relies predominantly on texts. Art and design, architecture and city planning, advertising and the uniforms of officials, all exude illocutionary political force. They all are non-verbal texts inscribed with power. Concrete space and structure proffer real-world maps of ranking and significance that are concurrently heavily symbolic. Content, colour, size, rhythm, and movement confer emotional impact and urgency through feelings such as awe, fear, or pride. The two-mile long Mall in Washington, DC, is a parade of federal power and of collective memory designed to impress on its viewers the grandeur of American history and politics and to command respect for its institutions. The architecture of Courts of Justice, legislatures, early-modern Italian palazzi, skyscrapers, gated communities, national cemeteries, places of worship such as Westminster Abbey, the Taj Mahal, or the Kaaba, all elicit emotions relating to the messages of power they possess, and serve as authority stand-ins, quite apart from their other roles. The use of propaganda through posters, state sponsored sculpture, or documentary films, the power to shock, recruit, and seduce through advertising, and the satirical effect of political cartoons have pronounced illocutionary force with regard to political pasts and presents as well as appropriating the future through plastic visions. The aural impact of ceremonial music or of national anthems is, similarly, a locus of power and its transmission.[79]

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[79] See e.g. N.J. O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); B. Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); V. Goldberg, *The Power of Photography* (New York: Abbeville, 1991); R. van Toorn, 'Architecture as Political Practice', Roemer van Toorn in conversation with Markus Miessen, *Conditions*, 15 January 2009 http://www.conditionsmagazine.com/archives/1472#_ftn3 (accessed 23.12.2012); G. Therborn, 'Monumental Europe: The National Years. On the Iconography of European Capital Cities', *Housing, Theory and Society*, vol. 19 (2002), 26–47.

The power in language, verbal and visual, is always around us, and it is of our making. It pervades our thoughts, speech, and actions; it is both the energy within us, and the energy directed against us. We may have cause to moan about the discipline it imposes, but we also have every reason to embrace it as part of our humanity and as the portal to the fashioning of collective life.

Epilogue

'Political theory . . . needs to get a firmer grip on the hard particularities of the present moment. But the language within which it is cast, a language of summings up rather than of workings out, seriously inhibits most of it from doing so.'[1]

In this book I have endeavoured to offer a glimpse into the anatomy of a central human thought-practice. It is a complex one that contains within its ambit a range of different thought-practices, each with its own distinctive features. Thinking politically cannot be reduced neatly to any one big thing, however reasonable that might be for essentialists; nor captured in a single definition, however enticing that might be for lexicographers. Rather, it is a field of overlapping processes. Many of its features cut across one another to provide more intricate clustered combinations, but all possess a common element. That element is not, as is often the case with understandings of the political, a type of organizational and institutional structure. It is not a set of processes and transactions, such as those that have in recent years gone under the name of governance. It is not the uncovering of a radical democratic spirit suppressed under the weight of deliberate or unintentional social mechanisms. It is not located in certain elite sectors of a social hierarchy. It is not confined to one side of a divide that is then termed 'public' as against private, or 'state' as against civil society (not to mention the family). It is not the working out of optimal, ethically required standards of the good (social) life. It is not simply characterized by exploitation, manipulation, or obfuscation. All of these *pertain* to thinking politically but they are not a distillation of that phenomenon. They identify social sites and behavioural patterns those thought-practices inhabit; they encapsulate some of the particular shapes those thought-practices adopt; and they are incarnations of some of the ideological configurations that people invoke when thinking *about* politics.

What the diverse thought-practices of thinking politically have in common is to offer various ubiquitous themes, reflections, intimations, and feelings on

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[1] C. Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 227–8.

the living of collective life with the aim or consequence of making sense of that life and making it possible, solving its tensions, its dilemmas, working out its dreams and fantasies, revelling in its illusions, or undermining its foundations, in ways that are attractive to some, abhorrent to others, and of little or no interest to others still. The failure of, or resistance to, some (but never all) of these aims or consequences are also endemic to thinking politically. True, power in its many subtleties infuses all the features of thinking politically, but it would be a gross simplification to claim that by identifying power we can walk away satisfied. Those engagements with collective life respond to the common drive for finality—partly psychological, partly utopian—that is so central to the human psyche in its social manifestations, and whose frustration is part of that life, as are its achievements. Making sense—however temporary and fleeting, but necessarily—is what that finality means. Its micro-forms of determining control, distributing significance, mobilizing and withholding support, conjuring order and undermining it, projecting common futures, and attempting to bring about a difference, are what constitute the political in our everyday thinking.

Those six features appear in different weightings relative to each other, and on occasion one of them may be very faint or even absent. And the cross-overs among the six are too legion to be enumerated or traced. Intensity, for example, is evident in most of them; the distribution of significance underpins them all, support and contention are locked into the endless cycle of sustaining organized social life and its disintegration, and order and disorder are endemic to language in general. A precarious finality runs through them all, but even that common element cannot do justice to the infinite richness of its myriad ideational habitats. Thinking politically may be concentrated more sharply, and in a higher density, in some fields of human interaction rather than others, but it is universally present in all expressions of thought. And when we extract those particular patterns from the general, variegated, pool of human thinking we may call them political. The clue lies *in* the thought-practices; they are not epiphenomena, incidentals, side-constraints, *Mitläufer* of physical action and institutional facts, but the alpha and omega of the political. Indeed, the alpha takes us back to the colonization of social beginnings, explored in Chapter Three while the omega propels us forward to the anticipation of social futures, explored in Chapter Seven, some stretching out to the end of human imagination.

If we accept that political thinking possesses at least the six features explored in these pages, their selection and presentation in actual discourse of thinking about politics—vernacular or professional—tells its own story. That story is one that analysts of ideologies will be keen to elaborate. For which of the six features is thought of as more emblematic of politics than the others, which is omitted, how those features are themselves ranked in order of significance, and—within each feature—which of their components is decontested as the salient or representative one, is the subject matter of political

ideologies and the cultural constraints operating on diverse understandings of politics. We refer here not only to the usual macro- and micro-ideologies that compete over the control of political language and policy-making—the grand ideological families and their offshoots—but to the specific ideological filters through which understandings of the political reflect different social and value maps in the minds of those who, wherever human beings reside, grapple with the nature of the political itself.

Not all of the features of the political lend themselves easily to a plurality of ideological decontestations. The practice of distributing and ranking significance is obvious in whatever perspectives on politics are adopted. The assignment of a moment of originary self-creation to decision-making is well-known in many religious systems, and is also habitual in constitutional discourse, but is less consciously obvious in other conceptualizations of the political and may therefore be wrongly marginalized or ignored. On the other hand, what counts as mobilizing or withholding support will vary greatly as different ideologies employ a diverse range of legitimating strategies. Many ideological positions refrain from talking about politics in terms of order, and many are averse to the language of visions. That is not to imply that order and visions are lacking in those ideologies, but their stated and acceptable vocabulary may obscure their salience. Not least, the power feature of politics is embarrassing for many liberals and humanists. They eschew the word, but far less frequently the thought-practice; while authoritarian ideologies often exaggerate wildly the effective power at their disposal. Underlining the problems engendered by openness and plurality, one finds that the tendency to single out one property of the political, whatever that may be, covers a range of explicit and implicit ideological assumptions about what is normal or abnormal in communal conduct, about how human groups recognize or ignore each other, or about the place of cooperation and conflict in social affairs. That tendency is itself both expressive of the simplifying character of ideologies and of a rigorous selection process in comprehending human experience.

For most people politics is the art of doing, mainly doing what is possible, now or later. For a preponderant number of political theorists, their profession concerns recommendations for such action. What then is this book about? I recently recounted an experience at an American Ivy League University a few years ago when, after a lecture I gave on languages of political support, a distinguished political philosopher asked me what the urgency of my message was, and by urgency he implied a call to radical action. My retort was that the urgency of my message lay in asking political theorists to reconsider what they were doing as political theorists.[2] This is the overall message of this book—not

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[2] Freeden, 'The Professional Responsibilities of the Political Theorist', in B. Jackson and M. Stears (eds), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 270.

to replace existing approaches, not to deny their validity, but to extend the academic mission of the discipline and to reflect on some of the peculiarities of its subject-matter. Political theory, too, needs to be the art of the possible, but in this instance a possible that relates more intimately, and with open eyes, to the nature of the domain it explores.

Where should we be heading as political theory looks at its future trajectories? The relationship between political theory and philosophy has been strong and productive, but it has also been far too dominant and distorting in recent decades. There is much potential for political theory in developing other disciplinary ties and intersections. In part this means going back to history, but this time not just to the standard history of political thought. That history has anyhow an assured life of its own in offering an invaluable narrative about what, retrospectively, have become the central, even iconic, political values and arguments reflected in thinking about politics—though it is also doubles up as an intellectual catechism and a belaboured and selective telling of a vastly more complex story. This time the area of conceptual history, too, needs to be cajoled more closely into the domain of political theory, where it is has begun to operate on its margins, because the interaction between concept and context is enormously revealing of the anatomy of political thinking. This time, too, political theory needs to recentre itself away from the canons and questions and ideologies of Europe and North America if it is to make serious inroads into the global practice of thinking politically, rather than remain a parochial enterprise—a description of its current state that no philosopher, of course, could countenance, parochialism not being a currency of philosophers.

Any political theorist trained in European or American universities (by which I refer to the American continent as a whole), or those influenced by the methods and substantive issues such universities promote, will come to the study of politics with certain traditions of analysis, discourse, and questioning in tow. I am no exception, and it is a vitally important matter to recognize that rather different conceptions of the political may be located in other parts of our planet. The challenge is not just to identify those, but to explore whether different categories—kinship, dignity, charity, piety, honour, and many others—cannot nonetheless be translated into some of the analytical categories proffered in this book. It then remains to be seen, even were such translation to be moderately successful, whether it covers most of the reasonable ground that different, 'non-Western' (a tricky and grossly misleading generalization in itself) conceptions of the political embrace. That task must be left to others with the kind of expertise I do not possess, but it is undoubtedly a crucial task. In the extreme case, the identification of a separate practice called political theory may itself be challenged, as it too abstracts from the host of thought-practices in which it is invariably embedded or interwined. Its visibility may not be nearly as obvious in some cultures as it is in the ones from which this book emanates. Semantic specialization and differentiation is one

of the stories of human evolution, but it is vastly asymmetric when culture is compared with culture.

It is of course the case that most methods within the discipline of politics seek and claim universality qua method, and the question then shifts to the adequacy of the method in terms of intellectual enlightenment, or explanatory power, or predictive capacity, or understanding, rather than solely to the cultural origins of those approaches. Inasmuch as no method can eschew bias, the issue revolves around its illuminatory power rather than its fantasmic objectivity or neutrality. Asking questions from any disciplinary perspective may be partial, but that does not rule out the possibility of identifying forms of human thought-behaviour that people share because of some existential similarities; and dwelling on the political is a notable instance of that ubiquity. For apart from the intercultural transmission of ideas, it is not unreasonable to assume that activities pertaining to issues of collective life, order, support and resistance, ranking priorities and wielding power—and their parallel discursive existence as well—are not specific to any given group or culture but are part of the human condition. Nor does that necessitate an old-fashioned universalism, because bound in that contention is the appreciation that the concrete manifestations of these general categories will have innumerable aspects; it would be deeply disturbing were that not the case.

I have already had brief recourse to conceptual history in previous chapters and I will not dwell on that theme further in these concluding thoughts. But I want to say a bit more about comparison. What strikes one repeatedly with regard to that component of political science known as comparative politics is that its advocates do not regard political thinking as a practice worth analysing in its own right. Rather, mention is made of something like the need for pluralist behaviour and beliefs, but what those beliefs are as produced, voiced, transmitted, and consumed is not the subject of analysis. At best, attitudes and beliefs are investigated comparatively, but not the underlying features of which they are partial manifestations. Inasmuch as comparative politics is empirically grounded, one might expect that the evidence for thinking politically would come under intense scrutiny as an observable political phenomenon. And that would normally fall within the methodological parameters of comparativists, as well as excite their interest in conceptual frameworks. Instead we are faced with political scientists who overlook the practice of thinking politically even though it takes place under their noses, with political theorists who overlook the patterns of thinking politically because their sub-discipline doesn't accommodate comparison, and with philosophers who commandeer thinking politically into their own non-empathetic epistemological domain and deplete it. Nonetheless, a comparative initiative can and should emanate from within the ranks of political theorists.

Some scholars have indeed reacted in recent years to that series of problematics by launching what they term 'comparative political theory'. That

intellectual movement, initially associated with theorists such as Fred Dallmayr,[3] combines the pursuit of the worthy goal of introducing non-Western political thought into the academic canon with a strong normative bias in favour of creating a global set of values and perhaps even a global political language. It is in effect the attempt to craft a cosmopolitan political theory,[4] confident not only that a transmission and exchange of political ideas among societies takes place, but that a unified set of guiding ideas can prevail to which right-minded people should subscribe. That is a wholly legitimate response, in the vein of idealized political theory, but not one endorsed or pursued in these pages. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz was convincing in asserting that 'political theory, which presents itself as addressing universal and abiding matters concerning power, obligation, justice and government in general and unconditional terms, the truth about things as at bottom they always and everywhere necessarily are, is in fact, and inevitably, a specific response to immediate circumstances.' Yes, of course it is, and Geertz is quite right in that methodological observation about the 'pervasive raggedness of the world.'[5] Yet there is a partly converse perspective: starting out from those undeniable concrete and local diversities, we may nonetheless be intrigued not by immutable truths about values and goods, but by the emergence of empirically detectable patterns and commonalities. A far more fascinating question than the one asked by some advocates of 'comparative political theory', concerns not whether there is a universal way of addressing and unifying the *substance* of political thought but whether within the great varieties there do not lie shared and perhaps ineluctable features of human thinking and conceptualization. Geertz grants that is an issue in contending that 'what unity there is . . . is going to have to be negotiated, produced out of difference'. That has been the undertaking of this book, but it is slightly more optimistic than Geertz is about the possibility he moots of 'locating those intersections, entwinements, connectings, and tensions'.[6]

The fact is that the comparative study of political thought is still in its infancy, in contrast with other practices of comparison within the academic discipline of politics. Historians of political thought have engaged in a curtailed comparison over time, but most political theorists and philosophers have neither explored comparison across space nor have they sought to establish a framework for such analysis. One aim of this study is to broach a way forward.[7] To begin with, a proper comparative political theory needs to

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[3] F. Dallmayr (ed), *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999).

[4] See also F. Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), whose approach to that trend is rather more critical.

[5] Geertz, op. cit., pp. 218, 221.   [6] Ibid., p. 227.

[7] For some suggestions, see M. Freeden and A. Vincent (eds), *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013).

accept as dispassionately as possible the variety of political thinking on this planet—without passing judgement on it—in an attempt to understand its contours, its overlaps, and its discontinuities. That of course requires a recalibrating of the balance of political thinking at least in part away from Western value preferences, but it has also to explore aspects that for some of us might be distasteful, including non-democratic and anti-human rights discourses. There are of course precedents for that in the study of Western political thought, in particular the plethora of serious analyses of fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. But comparison need not seek out the most worrying forms of political thinking, either. There are various participatory, legitimating, ranking, or commitment procedures that depart from the ethical models we often carry in our minds, in the non-Western world as well as in the Western world itself, and many of those need not attract ethical opprobrium. What some refer to as nepotism is an ethico-political requisite in other societies. The maintaining of analytical distance benefits enormously from factoring in geographical distance and from levelling a cooler and more accommodating gaze at the observable concreteness of conjoint patterns of thinking.

The political theory of political thinking can only meet the challenges to accepting it as a significant form of analytically investigative political theory by demonstrating the complexity and rigour of its analysis and the interpretative significance of its findings. It will do so through excavating and emphasizing the political; through establishing the empirical and evidential investigation of political thinking; through developing the analytical categories best suited to the tasks in hand; through the meticulous insistence on discerning both distinctions and the configurations in which they occur; through the micro-analysis of the varieties of political language as conceptual as well as symbolic; through the sensitivity to political practices as containing ideational import and to political thinking itself as a social practice located at all points of human interaction and articulation; through the recognition that intentionality and unintentionality, agency and culture, reason and emotion, interact and inform each other mutually in the political sphere; through the incorporation of temporal and spatial flexibilities and shifts into the fluid processes of the formation of political meaning; and through acknowledging the untidiness of human thought alongside its quest for neatness and order.

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