

[Suggested Book Title of which this is the Introduction]

**POLITICS, DEMOCRACY, INTERESTS AND INTEGRATION:
SELECTED ESSAYS BY PHILIPPE C. SCHMITTER**

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These are the reflections of an aging professor who has had a lengthy career researching and teaching “the politics of others” – what is known in the profession as “comparative politics.” Being always on the outside looking in has its advantages – and disadvantages. It should make one less susceptible to presuming that the rules and practices of one’s own polity are normal and, therefore, should provide the standard for judging the politics of others. It also, however, means that the necessarily short exposure to other people’s politics – and it gets shorter and shorter as one gets older – deprives the researcher of the depth of observation that is needed in order to capture their subtleties and secrets. Of course, one can always take refuge in statistical manipulations of data covering many polities that one can gather at home -- without having to go to some

exotic locale. My experience has suggested that there is no substitute for living among and talking with the subjects of one's comparative analysis.

This lengthy essay makes no claim to being scientific. It contains no disprovable hypotheses, no original collection of data, no search for patterns of association and certainly no inferences about causality. It is self-consciously "pre-scientific." Before one can do any science, but especially social science, one must identify and label what it is that one is trying to understand or explain and, at least tentatively, what one needs in order to do the job. This indispensable stage is called "conceptualization" in academic jargon. It is a sort of mapping-out process in which the student tries to specify the goal of his or her trip and anticipate the landmarks that he or she is likely to encounter on the way to reaching it.

For those readers who are in the business of explaining politics to others, I hope you will find this effort useful when generating explicit hypotheses that you can test and, if verified, allow you to make reasonable inferences about why specific forms of power are exercised and what their effects are likely to be.

The essay also contains only a few novelties. Most of its assumptions and concepts have been borrowed from my forerunners in what has been a very lengthy effort to understand the reality of politics. I am convinced that almost everything that is meaningful about politics has already been said – somewhere and often a long time ago. It is just a

matter of finding it and assembling it in a novel manner. And that is what I have tried to do here.

To those who are long or recently gone, I can only apologize for not having cited their eternally valid work. Doing so would have made this essay excessively academic – and much too long. For those who are still around – in many cases, my former students at Chicago, Stanford and the European University Institute – I am sure that they will recognize their respective contributions and hope that they will accept my gratitude for them. I do, however, feel obligated to formally acknowledge the multiple contributions of my wife, colleague and muse, Terry Lynn Karl. Without her support (and not infrequent disagreements), none of this would have been possible. Or, if possible, it would have been inferior.

I have tried to write this essay without excessive professional jargon. Like all social scientists, political scientists have developed a vocabulary of their own and, as we shall see, this poses a serious problem of communication since some of their concepts are identical to those used by the political agents they are studying, but can have a different meaning. Other concepts are unique to their discipline. These can seem esoteric and confusing to the unspecialized reader. In an effort to avoid this, I have made frequent (perhaps, excessive) use of **boldness** to indicate key concepts (as well as emphases) and tried to convey (admittedly only briefly) their meanings.

The Subject Matter

Politics is **a** (if not **the**) quintessential human activity. It brings to bear on the relations between persons many of the qualities that are unique to the human species. All of those involved in politics are **agents** of some kind or another. Some are dissatisfied with their existing situation and, hence, willing to try to change it. In so doing, they are very likely to provoke a response from those who are not so dissatisfied. The latter will react to defend the *status quo* and, therefore, also become agents. To do so, both types have to be able to imagine future conditions and the alternative actions that might improve or threaten the quality of that environment and their existence within it. Moreover to be effective as agents, they have to communicate these complex thoughts to other human beings through a shared spoken and (usually) written language. In order to formulate and communicate such as yet unrealized conditions, they must possess sufficient empathy with other human beings as to be able to anticipate their responses and seek their approval. Since they can rarely achieve their goals alone, they must be capable of committing themselves to contracting with others and trustful enough that the agent and others will honor that contract. On the outcome side of the equation, one must sadly admit that human political agents are also collectively capable of committing acts of malice, cruelty, vengeance and murder that no other primate seems capable of doing.

Which is not to say that all aspects of politics are unique to *Homo Sapiens*. Many primates are capable of physically coercing others of their species to comply with their demands and some of them also have the capacity to command obedience without using force. While language seems to be beyond their comprehension, they can “read” the meanings of gestures and sounds and some species apparently can form mutually beneficial alliances which may be based on an implicit contract.

Power

What we think of as politics among human beings rests on the exercise (or, at least, the threat of the exercise) of **power** and of resistance to its exercise. Power in turn rests on the uneven distribution of resources and returns among human beings living within a given political unit. Some of these differences may be “natural” given the different endowments that human beings receive upon birth, but most will be “social” and rooted in subsequent accomplishments (or non-accomplishments) during their respective life-cycles. Agents seeking to change the *status quo* – whether individuals or organizations – will be tempted to exploit asymmetries when they try to compel others to conform to their preferences, either by threatening to deprive them of resources or by promising to reward them with more resources. The defenders of the *status quo* will resist these efforts and will usually have an intrinsic advantage due to their incumbency. They will try to control the agenda of public choice, influence the decisions if and when they are made, suppress the demands for

change and/or alter the preferences of the challengers and their allies. The “normal” outcome of these challenges and conflicts should be a reaffirmation of the *status quo ante* – **provided** they are contained within a pre-established set of rules and that the incumbents have come to power by observing those rules.

Which is not to say that there are not many “abnormal” outcomes in politics. The logic of action-reaction that underlies the exercise of power is not “thermo-dynamic.” Politics is not physics. The interaction may be reciprocal, but the conflicting agents are rarely equal in their power or effect, and the subsequent outcome may not produce a stable equilibrium. In other words, incumbents do not always prevail. Not only may the decision rules and the means for coming power be ambiguous in specific instances, but the prior conditions presumed by these rules may have changed in ways that incumbents have not discerned or responded to adequately. Their tenure in office may have alienated their supporters and/or mobilized those previously indifferent to participate. Most importantly, the rules themselves may only embody a temporary compromise – an “**arrangement**,” not a stable equilibrium – that is vulnerable to contestation. Only when these clusters of rules have become **institutions** that are valued for themselves by most agents can incumbents rest assured that they are likely to prevail. In other words, they are protected in power by the **legitimacy** of the institutions they govern,

especially when these institutions are clustered together into a coherent **regime**.

Micro-Foundations

Every systematic study – whether of physical or human subjects – rests on micro-foundations. These are the basic assumptions shared by its practitioners and shape the way in which they identify topics and transform them into projects worthy of teaching or researching. Normally, they are invisible – as befits most foundations – and are usually accepted implicitly and without controversy. However, the visible structures of a science – its concepts, hypotheses, methods, data, associations and inferences – are only as valid as these foundations. And the study of politics is no exception to this maxim, even if it is exceptional in the extent to which its micro-foundations have been and still are visible and subject to dispute.

Let us begin with the wise and venerable advice of Aristotle, “It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits.” Therefore, those who would study politics should be resting their research on a set of assumptions that are as “precise” as their subject matter is distinctive. Their problem begins with the intrinsic “imprecision” of that subject matter.

To start with there are two quite different “classes of things” that students of politics have historically tried to explain. In this, I am following

the advice of Niccolò Machiavelli whose micro-foundations consisted of a mixture of three elements: (1) ***necessità*** or the imperative of taking costly and consequential decisions under conditions of scarcity of resources, threat of violence and ambition of persons; (2) ***virtù*** or the capacity of rulers to understand the political context and to exploit it in order to create order and security; and (3) ***fortuna*** or the ever-present likelihood of unforeseen events and irresistible processes. When the later becomes the dominant element, the very nature of politics is different. Without prudent “**men**, when times are quiet, (to) provide for them with dikes and dams,” the necessary exercise of power leads to fortuitous results. Since he found himself in “a country without dams and without dikes,” he had to “enter upon a new way, as yet trodden by anyone else,” i.e. to invent a new science of politics. In normal times Machiavelli implied, politics takes place within established units, i.e. states, and between established institutions, i.e. within a regime, that circumscribe the options of actors and make their behaviours more predictable.

Until recently, this line of demarcation `was supposed to run between international relations and domestic politics, and was used to justify their separate status as sub-disciplines within political science. The former was potentially anarchic, with no higher authority or predictably binding rules above its (allegedly) unitary and sovereign actors – the national states – that were expected to do whatever was necessary to further their particular interests and to defend themselves from predation by others. The latter

took place within a political space pre-defined by formal (if not always constitutional) and informal norms, ordered by a supreme (and sometimes legitimate) authority over a specific territory, and even one in a social setting that possessed a distinctive common 'national' identity.

This distinction within the discipline is no longer valid. International (or, better, interstate) relations have become clogged with a myriad of conventions, treaties, "regimes," inter- and non-governmental organizations and even (especially in the case of Europe) regional supra-national polities and courts. Sovereignty has become more and more of a formality; nationality is less and less exclusive. Meanwhile, the number of putatively sovereign and national states has proliferated and many of them have little or none of the orderly qualities described above. The list of outright "failed states" is getting longer and there is a growing waiting list of "defective ones." Sometime (I suspect in the 1970s or 1980s), the line was crossed and it became statistically more likely that the resident of a given country would be killed in a civil war by one of his or her co-nationals than in an international war by foreigners.

The fact that the empirical loci of these two generic types of politics has shifted does not invalidate the difference in terms of micro-foundations. Both are still very much present in our world and they definitely still require contrasting, not to say antithetic, sets of basic assumptions.

In my work on democratization (Chapters), my micro-foundations were quite consciously designed for the first type of politics, i.e. the one “without dams or dikes.” In the other two fields contained in this volume, interest intermediation (Chapters ...) and regional integration (Chapters ...), I have presumed that the topics to be explained or understood were surrounded by pre-existing norms and institutions that are known to the actors and whose effects are more or less predictable. This does not preclude a lot of misunderstanding about what limits these rules impose and of opportunistic behaviour designed to probe their efficacy, and it does not presume that all of these constraints are formal (much less constitutional), but only that they can be taken as prior “givens” both by researchers and practitioners.

What, then, are the generic components of a solid and well-balanced micro-foundation for the study of politics? These should be *a priori* assumptions that are more or less isomorphic with the situations involving power that are usually faced by politicians – whether of type one or type two – and presumably justifiable with regard to the publics involved. Basing one’s science upon conditions that do not exist or values that cannot be satisfied may be useful for constructing formal models or exhorting people to change their behaviour, but both are, at best, of marginal utility as foundations for building a ‘realistic’ science of politics.

The indispensable elements of such a foundation are precisely the ones I will discuss below. They begin an assertion of the critical

importance of **concepts**, (proceeded by a discussion of the most important and contested of all concepts, namely, **power**). There follows a lengthy disquisition on who the **agents** are and what they are capable of doing. Next comes shorter discussions of **cleavages, motives, processes, mechanisms, units** and, finally, **regimes**. One item will be conspicuously absent, namely, the **telos** of politics. It used to be routinely assumed that politics was heading in a predictable and benevolent direction – that the entire sub-structure of power and authority was moving somewhere over time, however erratically and unevenly, across different units. The Will of God, the power of human rationality, the natural selection by historical evolution, or the greater normative appeal of liberal democracy have been at various times candidates for explaining why better values and institutions would eventually win out. More recently, we have been told that we have fortunately reached “the End of Politics” thanks to the spread of more and more liberal democracies. None of these seems sufficiently plausible to me to waste time including them among the micro-foundations of political research

The exploration I have undertaken below is a personal one, not a doctrinal affirmation valid for everyone who wishes to study politics. Each of these elements has involved and continues to involve controversial choices. Those made by any one student will be a complex function of the fads and fashions present in the discipline, his or her theoretical predisposition and the nature of his or her research topic – maybe

seasoned with some of one's own normative preferences. Whatever they are and however implicit these choices may often be, they cannot be avoided if one is trying to do research on any political topic.

Concepts

Concepts are the building blocks for studying politics. The deep foundations are provided by theories and all concepts are either taken from or inspired by prior theories. Some of them become so commonplace that they are taken for granted and not explicitly defined. Even worse, some of them become divorced from the broader set of assumptions in which they are embedded and are applied indiscriminately as if they always referred to the same phenomenon.

Students of politics have a special problem with concepts because the ones they use are often also used by those whom they are studying. Although it is rare, politicians and the public can even pick up concepts from scholarly works and use them for their own purposes. (I was a perpetrator and victim of this when I re-introduced the concept of **corporatism** into the discipline and kept finding it repeated with wildly different meanings and normative implications). The fancy words for this potential source of confusion are: phenotypical and genotypical. The former are concepts produced by political activity itself; the latter are generated by political science (or the various adjacent disciplines from which it has regularly stolen concepts). Historians who are usually focused

on understanding specific events or processes in bounded time periods tend to be phenotypical since the words that agents use are *eo ipso* pieces of important evidence about their actions and intentions. Political scientists are more interested (usually) in explaining classes of events or processes occurring (at least potentially) in several places or different time periods. Moreover, they tend to be more sceptical about the overt protestations of politicians. For this reason, they need a vocabulary that captures the generic features of actions and intentions. Put simply, historians tend to use “upper-case” words and names and political scientists “lower-case” concepts.

Agents

This is the most distinctive feature of a human as opposed to a natural or physical science. It begins with the assumption that the objects of research are also its subjects. In the case of politics, this means that agents can make choices that are not completely determined by the conditions in which they find themselves. This inevitably introduces significant elements of innovation and unpredictability into the analysis. It also implies that the subjects have the capacity for reflexivity. They are historical in two senses: (1) that their past actions can become valued traditions that are difficult to break when presented with new opportunities; and (2) that their present actions are influenced by reflections (“memories”) from the past and, hence, by learning they may alter their responses to similar situations in the future. Moreover, the very process of researching

the power relations among actors can produce changes in the behaviour or expectations of the agents one is studying.

The vast majority of political science researchers presume that these agents are **individual** and **autonomous human beings** faced with and capable of making choices between alternative and consequential actions. While they tend to agree that these actors are uniquely capable of exerting agency, they differ considerably about the properties that humans are capable of bringing to bear on their choices. Most recently, we have been told that individuals have pre-established and relatively fixed preferences, are able to assign to them a specific intensity and to rank these preferences consistently, possess adequate information about alternative courses of action and theories about their effects, will predictably choose the one that (they think) best realizes those preferences at the least cost, and still have the same preferences once the consequences of their choice have been experienced. Even with the insertion of such caveats as “bounded rationality,” “limited or asymmetric information,” “intransitive preferences,” “transaction costs,” and “logics of appropriateness or habit,” this generic conception of the role of agents accords not only with currently fashionable theories of rational choice, but reflects the much deeper ideological commitment of modern social and political thought to liberal individualism and social progress. Shifting to a different micro-foundation would seem to many participants and observers to be equivalent to declaring that politics is a ‘passionate’ and not a ‘rational’ activity which

would be rooted in raw emotion, blind faith, mindless imitation, instinctual tradition, collective stupidity and/or random events - and, hence, incapable of collectively improving the world that we live it.

I have had two reasons in my research for calling this time-worn foundation into question. The first has to do with the sheer complexity and contingency that surrounds the contemporary individual. He or she cannot possibly know what are the 'real' (or, even, all of the available) alternatives and, even less, what all of their eventual consequences will be. For him or her to even approximate these search conditions in the real world would require so much time and resources that little would be left to subsequently pursue his or her interests – and someone capable of short-cutting the whole process by simply accepting the solutions proposed by pre-existing institutions or ideologies would likely prevail. In short, it would be irrational from a political perspective to act rationally in this fashion!

Moreover, this individual is very likely to discover upon such a complicated and time-consuming reflection that he or she has many conflicting interests or passions – especially over different time horizons – and, hence, cannot pursue them consistently according to rank and intensity.

And, if those reasons were not enough, he or she is typically acting within a multi-layered and poly-centric “nested” set of institutions – some public and some private – all potentially capable of making binding

collective decisions. Acting as a rational individual, he or she would have, not only to discover which of these institutions is relevant, but also, in the likely event that several are involved, to spread and adjust his or her interests accordingly.

My research on interest politics has led me to conclude that agent preferences are not fixed, but contingent upon which policies are proposed and by whom, and probably will change during the course of political exchange between the various layers and centers of power.

The second (and more compelling) reason for resetting one's micro-foundations is even more subversive of the prevailing orthodoxy. What if most of the significant actors engaged in normal politics were permanent **organizations**, not individual persons? Granted that these organizations are composed of individuals and some of them may depend on the contributions and compliance of these persons – but many do not and have developed elaborate rules and sources of support that cannot be reduced to such individual actions. They embody collective choices made long ago and have acquired a reputation and legitimacy of their own. In other words, they are not just the arithmetic sum of independent and individual preferences. Moreover, political parties, interest associations, social movements, non-governmental organizations, business firms, government agencies and private foundations are often in the business of teaching these persons what their preferences should be and committing them to obeying policies made in their name.

As we have just seen, very few individuals can determine alone what their interests, passions or convictions are or should be – much less act alone as effective agents. They require stimuli from their social environment in order to discover what these motives are and coordination with and support from other citizens/subjects in order to act with any chance of success. Moreover, these collective agents of instruction, information and coordination are less and less episodic alliances, clusters of like-minded voters or spontaneous demonstrators. They have become more and more permanent, often highly bureaucratized, organizations, most of which have existed before being joined by their individual members and will survive after they are gone. The most important implication of this omnipresent development is that the agency of these intermediaries between citizens or subjects and their legitimate or illegitimate rulers cannot be reduced to the mere sum of the choices and preferences of their members or followers. These intermediaries have interests of their own related to both their distinctive needs as organizations and to their role in coordinating the diverse interests, passions or convictions of their members or followers. As historical agents, they tend to develop standard-operating-procedures and in-house ideologies. This usually serves to extend their time horizons when calculating their interests, passions or convictions beyond what individuals are likely to do. Moreover, they can also enter into longer-term contracts with other organized interlocutors and state agencies. The latter may even

extend to them rights by which they are guaranteed access to public decision-making and participation in policy implementation. When one adds to these distinctive qualities the fact that very few of these intermediary organizations have competitive internal processes for choosing their leaders or staff, their autonomous contribution to the political process should be abundantly clear – and, therefore included in any “model” of how contemporary polities operate – whether democratic or not.

Contemporary politics whether in an autocracy or a democracy is all about **representation** – about collective intermediaries acting in lieu of individual persons by intervening between them and their rulers. In the former case, the number of those involved is smaller and the criteria for their selection are more restrictive, but organizations are still likely to be the key actors. In the latter, freedom of association, assembly and petition – coupled with the diffusion of organizational skills from the private to the public realm – has made it almost mandatory for individuals to resort to permanent collective bodies if they are to have any impact upon rulers and their policies.

And organizations have, indeed, transformed the nature of politics. By definition, they have solved the dilemma of rational collective action by individuals and, in some cases, they may even have addressed some of the issues involved in the inequality of power resources by combining large numbers of individuals to countervail the concentrated influence of smaller,

privileged groups. Their preferences do not have to be inferred or indirectly revealed; they are articulated publicly through the organization's normal activity. Granted there are bound to be some elements of dissimulation, strategic action and hypocrisy in these activities, but these are minor when compared to those of less well-informed and publicly committed individuals. As we have noted above, organizations are also capable (if they choose) of extending the time horizon for political calculations because they usually outlive their members (and sometimes even the social category they claim to represent). They tend to develop standard operating procedures and official ideologies that greatly facilitate their member's calculation of preferences and they "package" these preferences into acceptable and justified demands, making it much easier for authorities to consult and negotiate with them. It does not seem exaggerated to describe these organizations as "secondary citizens or subjects" with their own rights and obligations – not mention their own channels of access to authorities independent of the electoral one.

It has become customary to distinguish between three types of organized intermediaries. **Political parties** are by far the most studied by political scientists. Indeed, they are often described by them as the exclusive (or, at least, the most legitimate) intermediaries representing citizens/subjects in relation to their elected or self-appointed rulers. Their most distinctive features (which they monopolize in most established democratic regimes) are to nominate candidates, conduct elections,

organize legislatures and form governments. They usually do this by developing a distinctive ideology or image that offers to their members/voters a convincing (and sometimes alternative) set of policies that will benefit them and then promises to use this program to order its priorities if elected. Granted that not all organizations that call themselves parties perform all of these functions (and definitely not all parties deliver on their promised policies when in government) and some other types of political organization do occasionally manage successfully to challenge these monopolistic claims; nevertheless, the competition among political parties or the dominance of a single party is **one** (if not **the**) most salient feature of almost all regimes. Their absence is a sign that the polity is probably a failure and has no regime at all.

The second generic type of organized intermediary is the **interest association**. Its distinctive claim is to represent some social or economic category in its relations with public authorities in such a way as to benefit its own members exclusively, although it is not infrequent that its activities will also benefit “free-riders”-- persons or organizations in the category that are not members. Class, sector and profession are the usual, but not exclusive, functional categories. If there are competing, over-lapping associations claiming to represent the same category, the system of interest intermediation can be described as **pluralist**. If there is only one or only a single cluster of related associations – and even more so if public authorities recognize such a monopoly and grant it privileged access –

then the system is called **corporatist**. While the number of political parties is relatively limited by the very nature of the electoral process and its constituencies, the number of interest associations and the relations among them is not so limited – or, better, only limited on the demand side by the state’s regulation of the freedom of association and on the supply side by the division of labor and the social or cultural categories with which individual citizens/subjects identify collectively.

The **social movement** is the third generic type of organized intermediary – although many of its exemplars pretend that they are not formally organized and certainly not bureaucratized. The most distinctive characteristic of a social movement is its claim to represent a “cause” or a “public good,” i.e. a declared objective that would not benefit only its members, but some larger group -- if not the society as a whole. In other words, interest associations are self-regarding and social movements are other-regarding. Political parties are usually a peculiar mix of both. Needless to say, the causes that can be represented in this fashion are almost infinite and will vary constantly over time from objective to objective. Another distinguishing characteristic is that membership in a movement can be a benefit in itself and not a cost. Members may derive a reward from the interaction with other like-minded persons and from the excitement of participating in group events, especially public demonstrations. The latter incentive is particularly important compared to other forms of intermediation (although it is not absent from them) since

one's own contribution may not make much of a difference to the outcome and, if the movement does produce a difference, the putative member can enjoy the collective good without having paid for it ("free-riding" is the usual term for this behavior).

Except for those with regimes that either prohibit the formation of organized intermediaries altogether or make them subject to control by the state or a single party, all polities have some mix of the three types and together they may form what has been called a **civil society**. As early as the 1830s, this has been identified (by Alexis de Tocqueville and Adam Ferguson) as a distinctive and positive component of democratic regimes. In theory, it is composed of formal organizations and some informal groups that have the following characteristics:

- (1) They are relatively independent of both public authorities **and** private units of production and reproduction, i.e. of firms and families;
- (2) They are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defense or promotion of their interests, passions or convictions;
- (3) But they do **not** seek to replace either state agents or private (re)producers or to accept responsibility for governing the polity as a whole;
- (4) But they **do** agree to act within pre-established rules of a "civil," i.e. mutually respectful and law-abiding, nature.

Needless to say, some polities have much richer, more diverse and more active civil societies than others (and this variation is often correlated with the level of development of the economy and the length of time the polity has been a liberal democracy). The reigning assumption seems to be that the more civil society in a given polity, the greater the likely survival of democracy – which, it seems to me, ignores the possibility that the emerging civil society after a period of autocratic rule may be deeply divided in ethno-linguistic identities, highly fragmented in interests, polarized by religious or cultural passions, or all of the above.

Cleavages

Political power and its diverse outcomes depend on why and how power is being exercised. As we have seen above, it can be used **to** accomplish something and to prevent something **from** being accomplished. Almost always, it involves working **with** someone else and these days (as we have just seen) that more often involves working **through** organizations. Given the growing complexity of human interactions, it cannot always be assumed that it will be confined **within** a single unit, e.g. a national state. More and more often, it will be exercised **across** units – sometimes in global or regional international organizations.

As we have seen from the beginning of this essay, politics begins with the inequality of resources available to agents. Some of these may be “natural” but most will be “artificial,” i.e. produced by their social, economic

and cultural activities. The latter are almost never distributed randomly, as many natural differences tend to be. These purposively generated inequalities tend to be (or to become) **structural**, i.e. embedded in self-reproducing **cleavages**. These enduring differences in interest, passion, conviction and habit (as we shall see in the next segment) are likely to be both multiple and mutable. Where they are not only multiple but tend to cut across each other and, therefore, to produce different winners and losers according to the issues at stake, politics will tend to be **centripetal** in nature and moderate in content. Agents are more likely to compete for support from those with centrist positions and, hence, more likely to reach and accept compromised solutions. On the other hand, if they are cumulative across cleavages and conflicts so that the same persons or groups are always on the winning or losing side, the politics will tend to be **centrifugal** in nature and extremist in content. Agents will claim to represent the preferences of those at opposing ends of the political process and be much less likely to accept compromises as binding on all parties.

Whatever the conflicts, the social, economic and cultural cleavages that give rise to them will change as a result of past political decisions, but also through quite autonomous processes and events. Politics is always deeply embedded in a wider context that it does not and cannot completely control, *pace* the claims of totalitarian regimes. Its rules and institutions are intended by their creators to be immutable – especially if they are

constitutional – but they are constantly being challenged. Hence, political conflict is never just about wielding power within the pre-established parameters of a given polity, but often about changing its rules and institutions.

Motives

Most political struggles, however, are channelled according to pre-established and mutually acceptable rules, i.e. they are being governed by a **regime**. As we shall see *infra*, differences in regime tend to be associated with different ways of exercising power and this leads to different outcomes of conflict.

Roughly speaking, agents form their preferences and motive their actions in one of four ways. Probably the most common in contemporary societies is the pursuit of self-regarding **interests**. It is not unusual for analysts – academic or otherwise – to presume that it is the or, at least, the overwhelming basis of conflict and motive for action. Even more restrictive is the notion that these interests are primarily if not exclusively material in nature and can be pursued as rationally as one may purchase goods and services through the market.

Historically, political thought gave priority to **passions**, i.e. some inbred compulsion to act in response to either to the agent's sense of self identity or his/her personal understanding of the social/ethical norms of some group of reference. Honor, justice, fairness, respect and collective

identity figure prominently in such works, but the principle one has always been “the desire for power” itself. Human beings from the earliest recorded thoughts about politics have been regarded as having an intrinsic passion and, therefore, deriving a distinctive pleasure from dominating other human beings.

Thirdly, there are **convictions**. Historically, this was often connected with religiously inspired **beliefs**. More recently, the key element in more secularized societies has become **ideology** – a system of concepts that provides the agent with a comprehensive understanding of his/her environment and position within it. Needless to say, interests and passions are usually embedded somewhere in such belief systems, but the motive for action is more other-regarding and oriented to the community as a whole. With the emergence of political parties as important competing agents, their appeal to members or voters was (at least, initially) based on some combination of religious, ethnic or class convictions.

Finally, people -- even citizens in a democracy -- may act politically neither intentionally, nor responsively, nor emotionally, but simply out of **habit**. They are socialized to conform to existing rules and norms or they observe the behavior of others who may be more consciously motivated and just imitate what these “relevant others” do. Voting may be an appropriate example of this. Most potential voters have no **interest** in participating since their individual contribution to the outcome is minimal – unless the contest is thought to be very close. Nor are they likely to feel

passionate about such an activity – unless they are particularly attracted to a single candidate’s personality. **Conviction** is only likely to play a role if some social group (religion, family, work unit) makes it a matter of belonging. *Faute de mieux*, most voters probably vote out of **habit**. They did it before, their neighbors are doing it; the norms of citizenship seem to require it. Unfortunately, this habit seems to be waning in virtually all established and many new democracies. The proportion of abstainers has been increasing almost monotonically from one election to the next. Not everyone lives for or because of politics. Some prefer to live without it and to do so more frequently and habitually so.

Whatever the motive(s), the central feature of power is to get some person, group, organization or agency to do something that the agent prefers and that he/she/it would not otherwise do and may even actively oppose. Presumably that “something other” is to the advantage of the power-holder whether because of interest, passion or conviction. Virtually, everyone who has written about power – and there have been many – would agree with this generic definition. Where their disagreement begins (and has not ended) is what has to be done to accomplish this feat.

Processes

Motives have to be put into motion. This involves interacting with others in accordance with their power capabilities. Really powerful agents, especially those backed by legitimacy, may simply refuse to enter into

such annoying transactions, but most agents will not be capable of resisting the politicization of the issue at stake and will, therefore, be compelled or choose to enter the political process. When they do, this usually means (as we have discussed above) acting within some prescribed set of rules – themselves embedded in some type of regime (as we shall see below).

By and large, the mantra of most modern scholars of politics is **competition**. Agents exercise their relative power by competing with each other in order to satisfy their respective interests, passions or convictions. In the case of politics within an established regime, this presumes the existence of a pre-existing institutional context in which conflicting motives are channelled by mutually respected rules into a process that limits the use of specified power resources and the range of possible outcomes. Otherwise, the agents would engage in unruly **conflict** not bound by such constraints and would exercise their power by threatening or exercising violence to impose their interests, passions or convictions.

This seems both a reasonable and realistic assumption and there are certainly many cases of polities in which the use of power has been domesticated in this fashion to the mutual benefit of the agents involved. The major distortion comes when students of politics reduce its application to the process of **electoral** competition. The fact that political parties compete with each other for the representation of territorial constituencies and the right to form governments – even when these elections are freely

and fairly conducted, and their outcomes uncertain – does not exhaust the channels through which political agents compete with each other over “the authoritative allocation of values.” Not surprisingly, these other channels are populated less with individuals than with organizations: competition between interest associations to influence public policy; prosecution of politicians for violating legal norms by law firms or public interest groups; demonstrations by social movements to set the public agenda or to block the implementation of policies; revelations by rival media firms to discredit or support the reputation of rulers. All of these are important (and often highly institutionalized) features of normal politics that deserve at least as much attention as the more regular and routinized conduct of electoral competition

Another process also deserves a more prominent place in the micro-foundations, namely, **cooperation**. If competition is not to degenerate into conflict, political agents have first to cooperate by agreeing upon the rules – formal or informal – that limit and channel their use of power. Many of these consist of habits inherited from previous generations, but they are continuously subject to challenges as power relations and the identity of agents change and therefore require periodic re-affirmation. Moreover, these agents also cooperate in alliance with each other, both to modify the pre-existing rules of engagement and to affect present policy outcomes. While it is understandable that political science should privilege competition – if only because its presence is much more visible and likely

to be more consequential – cooperation deserves more status and attention than it usually receives.

And so does its perverse form: **collusion**, i.e. when agents act in concert to prevent outsiders from competing or cooperating. This process is much more likely to escape detection since the agreements involved are usually secret or implicit. It can, however, be inferred from patterns of behavior – for example, when previously competing political parties develop more similar platforms or even co-sponsor candidates. In the case of autocratic regimes, collusion would seem to be the normal *modus operandi* of the political process. In democracies, it is a rarer occurrence and, when it appears, a sure sign of entropy or decay.

Mechanisms

The instruments or mechanisms for exercising power are not only multiple, but they can be wielded in different combinations as agents attempt to produce their desired outcomes.

Coercion: this is no doubt the most common feature of power-wielding and involves an action or threat by the power-holder to deprive the power-recipient of some valued resource, up to and including his/her/its freedom of action or even of existence. This can be wielded legitimately according to established and mutually acceptable rules – usually, but not always by state institutions – or it can be wielded illegitimately – usually by private agents.

Co-optation: this involves an action or offer that promises rewards to the recipient in exchange for their support either for some given party or policy or against some other party or policies. This usually means offering some positive benefits in return for conformity, but it can also include promises to be left alone and not be subsequently affected by the power-holder.

Manipulation: In this case, the power-holder seeks to limit or distort the information available to the power-recipient either to narrow or widen the agenda for decision-making and/or to alter the conception that agents have of the alternatives available to resolve a given issue. Its utility depends on the availability (or not) of multiple sources of information and the capacity of actors to process information independently and critically and to disseminate their opinions.

Hegemony: This is an extended and deepened version of manipulation in that power is wielded long before it is actually exercised by influencing through indirect, social, cultural and/or educational means the preferences that citizens and subjects have in such a way that they conform to or are compatible with those of the dominant political elite.

As we have observed above with regard to manipulation, the efficacy of these mechanisms does not depend alone on the resources and efforts of those who are in power. It also depends on the resources and efforts of the subjects/citizens whose behaviour they wish to influence. In the case of autocracies, it can be presumed that the resources of opponents and

dissidents will be fewer (and more dangerous to exploit) which in turn means that all or some of the mechanisms may combine to produce lasting **domination** by existing power-holders. How enduring this will be depends on many factors, not the less of which are the evolution in the relative distribution of resources and the ideational changes affecting both sides of the equation. What is novel about the present context is that this contingency is not just a domestic matter. Increasingly, the balance of forces in autocracies are being affected by foreign influences, mostly coming from neighboring democratic countries, but also from international advocacy groups and foreign democracy promotion programmes.

All of these power-exercising mechanisms can also be found in democracies. The great difference, however, is that one can presume that the resources and efforts of competing interests, passions and convictions will be greater (and less dangerous to exploit), but that they will be applied with greater respect for the rules of the game (given the presumably greater legitimacy of power-holders). Moreover, when faced with the inevitable changes in resources and ideas, rulers can adjust peacefully (and usually incrementally) by changing their composition and policies in response to changes in the outcome of elections, the result of pressure from interest associations, and/or the effect of mobilization by social movements. In short, the great historical advantage of democracies in the struggle for power has been that “they can change without changing” and, in so doing, retain the legitimacy of their institutions.

Units

Politics has to be practiced within a unit, usually one bounded by territory and possessing a distinctive population, although there do exist some that are functionally determined and operate across different territories and peoples, e.g. the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ever since Aristotle collected the constitutions of one hundred fifty-eight Greek city-states (it is alleged since only one has survived), the privileged unit in political science for both observation and analysis was supposed to have a relatively autonomous economy, a self-governing polity and a distinctive collective identity—all institutionalized and coinciding with one another in a given territory. Eventually, thanks to the evolution of European polities and their overseas empires, this unit became the **sovereign national state**. It is usually presumed that only within it are agents capable of making choices and implementing them effectively; individuals or organizations able to calculate their interests, passions and convictions; processes of political competition and cooperation capable of operating; and mechanisms of coercion, co-optation, manipulation and domination likely to be effective. Virtually by definition, regimes can only develop their stable and complimentary institutions within such a framework. Nothing is more firmly rooted in the micro-foundations of political science than this assumption. Virtually every existing proposition about politics in the discipline should be prefaced with the following phrase: “Take one (or

more) existing national state(s) and, only then, will ...(X be related to Y) in the following manner.”

However, what if this unit of action and analysis can no longer be taken for granted? What if that presumed coincidence between autonomy, capacity and identity has been disrupted beyond repair? In the contemporary world, no political unit can realistically connect cause and effect and produce intended results without regard for the actions of agents beyond their borders. Virtually all of them have persons and organizations within their borders that have identities, loyalties and interests that overlap with persons and organizations in other polities. Nor can one be assured that polities with the same formal political status or level of aggregation will have the same capacity for agency. Depending on their insertion into multi-layered systems of production, distribution, and governance, their capacity to act or react independently to any specific opportunity or challenge can vary enormously. This is most obviously the case for those units that are subordinate parts of **empires**, but it also is the case for national states that have entered into **supra-national arrangements**, such as the European Union (EU), or signed binding international treaties, such as those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Trade Organization (WTO). Not only do they occasionally find themselves publicly blamed, shamed or even found guilty by such organizations, but also they regularly anticipate such constraints and alter their behavior accordingly. If that were not enough, many national polities have recently granted or been

forced to concede extensive powers to their **sub-national units** and, in some cases, these provinces, cantons, *regioni*, *Länder*, *estados autónomos*, or *départments* have even entered into cooperative arrangements with equivalent units in neighboring national states.

It will not be easy to abandon the presumption of “stateness.” Sovereignty has long been an abstract concept that “everyone knew” was only a convenient fiction, just as they also “knew” that almost all states had social groups within them that did not share a common national identity. One could pretend for analytical purposes that the units were independent of each other in empowering their agents, in institutionalizing their cleavages, processes and mechanisms, in choosing their regimes, and in defending or extending their “national” interests in relation to other similar units – even when one “knew” that much of this was not true. The reason for this convenient fiction was obvious: there existed no other concrete, observable political unit that could do all this. Now that we are beginning to observe supra- and sub-national units that can accomplish some of these feats, should we not at least challenge the monopolistic grip that the “sovereign national state” has had upon the study of politics in general and the discipline of political science in particular? It still seems self-evident to most analysts that this form of organizing political life will continue to dominate all others, spend most publicly generated funds, authoritatively allocate most resources, enjoy a unique source of legitimacy and furnish most people with a distinctive identity. However we may recognize that the

sovereign national state is under assault from a variety of directions – beneath and beyond its borders – its “considerable resilience” has been repeatedly observed and asserted. To expunge it (or even to qualify it significantly) would mean, literally, starting all over and creating a whole new language for talking about and studying politics. The assiduous reader will have noted that I have already tried to do this by frequently referring to “polity” or “unit” in this essay when the normal expression would have been “state” or “nation”. I doubt if many others will follow such a precedent.

Regimes

Most students of politics assume that the political unit they are analyzing has a relatively stable configuration of institutions that are complementary with each other, presumably as the result of a historical experience of trying alternatives and eliminating incompatible ones through competition or conflict. The actions produced by its agents, motives and mechanisms are somehow – functionally, ideationally or intentionally – related to each other at a higher foundational level, such that their nature or importance cannot just be assessed alone and uniformly. They are embedded in an institutionalized (in many cases, constitutionalized) whole that conditions what role can be played by individuals or organizations, self- or other-regarding interests, competitive or cooperative processes.

These regimes are given a label and it is presumed that those in the same generic category will share many foundational elements. At one time, there were three such generic labels: **democratic**, **totalitarian** and **authoritarian** (or, better, **autocratic**, since all regimes depend on authority). More recently, the middle one has dropped out as the result of the collapse of Soviet Communism and the transformation of Chinese Communism. It has been replaced with “**hybrid**” or with some diminutive version of democracy or liberalized version of autocracy.

Needless to say, each of these can be broken down further by the analyst into sub-types. Democracy typically is subdivided into unitary-federal, presidential-parliamentary, two party-multiple party, pluralist-corporatist, majoritarian-consociational – along with an almost infinite number of combinations and permutations of them. Autocracy also attracts at least as many dichotomies, e.g. civil-military, personalistic-bureaucratic, *jefe-junta*, *ad infinitum–pro tempore*, single party-no party, legalistic-arbitrary, domestic-foreign, repressive-homicidal *è così via*. Which of these sub-types is useful will depend on the subject matter the analyst has chosen to investigate. For example, Guillermo O’Donnell and I in our work on regime transitions found it useful to divide the hybrid category into two new ones: **dictablandas** in which elections are regularly held (but in which the incumbents are foregone winners), various civic rights – of association, assembly, petition and media freedom – are formally tolerated (but informally restricted) and arbitrary harassment and

arrest of opponents has declined (although still applied) and **democraduras** in which elections are regularly held and fairly tallied (but under conditions that favour the governing party), various civic rights are protected legally (but erratically enforced) and the harassment and imprisonment of opponents has become rare (but remains a plausible threat).

The implications of this intrusion of “regimes” into the micro-foundations of the discipline are considerable – if still debatable. For one thing, the recognition of such categorical diversity means giving up almost the entire quest for universalistic “covering laws” that can be applied to any agent, motive or mechanism. Individuals or organizations do not behave the same way in democracies and autocracies; the “reasonableness” and “appropriateness” of interests or passions depends on the institutions to which they are addressed; mechanisms such as competitive elections or cooperative multi-party alliances can take on different meanings depending on their complimentary relationship with other mechanisms of competition/conflict or cooperation/collusion. This also may be reflected in the quite noticeable decline in references to “national” or “regional” peculiarities in explaining political behaviour. Adjectives such as “Asian,” “Latin American,” “African,” “Bolivian” or “Albanian” placed in front of substantives such as democracy or political culture tend now to have a descriptive and not an analytic importance. What counts are generic

institutional configurations wherever they are located, rather than geo-cultural specificities.

Democracy has always played a prominent role in the modern study of politics – if only because data about them have been more accessible and academic inquiry – even critical inquiry -- about them has been more protected. Indeed, in some countries, teaching and research about politics is confined almost exclusively to the institutions and practices of democracy.

More accurately said, it has been confined to the institutions and practices of “real-existing democracy” (RED). For what these scholars observe and analyse is not, strictly speaking, *dēmokratía*, i.e. “rule by the people,” but *politokratía*, i.e. “rule by politicians who claim to represent the people.” All REDs are based primarily on the “vicarious” participation of their citizens in decision-making (although sometimes they include elements of direct participation such as referendums, initiatives, plebiscites, demonstrations, riots and so forth). They are also the product of some sequence of historic compromises with other pre-existing political institutions, e.g. monarchy, theocracy, aristocracy, oligarchy and tyranny, and with other principles of legitimate authority, e.g. divine right, inherited privilege, charisma, liberalism, socialism, communism and, above all, capitalism. The first thing to keep in mind when studying “real-existing democracy” is that it is always incomplete and defective when judged by the standards of “ideal-not-yet-existing democracy.” Indeed, it is this

persistent (but periodically widening or narrowing) gap between actual practices and ideal principles that explains in part why REDs are under almost constant pressure to reform themselves. Put differently, REDs are (and should be) “moving targets.” Like all social institutions, they are subject to **entropy**, i.e. a tendency to decline in efficacy, but – thanks to the gap – they benefit from periodic injections of renewed energy – usually from below but occasionally from above.

[For more about the regime of democracy, see Chapters in this volume].

Political Science

Given its ubiquity, it is hardly surprising that politics has been a constant subject of philosophical thought and empirical inquiry -- probably ever since human beings began to live in permanently settled communities. The earliest efforts to understand its peculiarities have been lost to us – either because they were strictly oral or because the material they were written on has perished. Western political thought usually is traced to the ancient Greeks who wrote down and conserved their thoughts and who, appropriately, often disagreed with each other. They and their numerous successors have continued this tradition of contention, but almost all of them agreed upon three things:

(1) Politics is an important component of collective human existence – maybe, as Aristotle claimed, its study could even be described as the

“Master Science” since all other human endeavors depend on the order it is supposed to produce;

(2) Politics is a relational, conflictual and uncertain phenomenon in that one’s action produces another’s reaction and the outcome of such an exchange is not often predictable because its main determinant, power, cannot be accurately assessed until it is applied;

(3) Politics, however unpredictable it may be in specific instances, does tend to settle into relatively stable patterns of behavior (rules and practices) and it is by comparing these patterns across a number of units that a distinctive “science” of politics can be established.

The trajectory of thinking about politics has been relatively linear. It began among the Greeks with a strong emphasis on **passion** as the primary motivating (and threatening) force. The Romans continued along this line but began to add an element of **conviction** based on the values associated with Roman citizenship and tradition. Medieval and early modern political theory was firmly and predominantly associated with the notion that **conviction** rooted in Christianity was (or, better, should be) the most important element determining political behavior and was uniquely capable of overriding the erratic and dangerous passions of individuals. Machiavelli represents the turning point when **interest** makes its appearance – admittedly along with heavy doses of a passion for power among leaders and a downgrading of the role of conviction in mass

publics. Since then the calculated pursuit of self-regarding advantage without consideration for others has become the standard assumed motivation, although mass convictions in the form of various nationalisms, Fascism, Nazism or Communism have periodically injected a stronger, more emotional and less calculated element into the political life of Western polities. As for conviction rooted in religious dogma, it may have declined in the West (except among Christian Fundamentalists in the United States), but it is still very much on display in the Muslim societies of the Middle East and North Africa. Habit or conformity seems to wax and wane in accordance with the stakes attached to winning or losing in the political game. The previously indifferent can suddenly discover that they have a passion, an interest or a conviction that is at stake and enter the game with unpredictable results.

During the past century or so, the study of politics has become increasingly specialized and professionalized through the creation of an academic discipline usually called Political Science or, less commonly, Government. It emerged belatedly compared to the other social sciences of sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics and, when it did, it was frequently combined with related subjects such as law, philosophy or even rhetoric. While it first emerged in Western Europe and North America, today virtually every major university in the world has a department or faculty of political science or government.

While the exercise of power can be found in a great variety of sites, e.g. families, firms, churches, tribes *è così via*, the discipline of political science has focused almost exclusively on its exercise within and around the institutions of the **state**, i.e. the government and other public agencies that are assumed to be capable of making and implementing decisions binding on all persons within a given territory. Virtually by definition (as we have seen above in the discussion of units), it was further presumed that this political unit possessed **sovereignty**, i.e. that its decisions were not just binding within its borders, but also taken autonomously from the power of other political units. Even more controversial has been the assumption that these persons within the unit shared an over-riding common identity, i.e. they formed a **nation**. In the contemporary globalized world with its enormous variety of supra-national organizations and policy regimes, all of these assumptions have become questionable. All states, even the most powerful ones, find that their autonomous capacity to take decisions is not only limited by the actions of other states, but subject to review and modification by institutions exercising power (even legitimate authority) over and above them. And virtually all of them also have social groups within them who consider themselves members of a different nation. The academic discipline of political science has only begun to adapt to these sea-changes in the nature of units.

From its Greek origins in philosophy, the study of politics has always been concerned with social norms and personal values. This can hardly

be surprising since politics itself has always involved judging and acting according to one's assessment of what is good and what is bad, e.g. the famous 13th century facing frescos in the Palazzo Civico of Siena of *il buono e il mal governo*. Even when the choices are manifestly dominated by self-interest, it is at least prudent to justify them in terms of their favorable, other-regarding implications. Of particular importance has been the role played by **ideals** and **ideal-types**. The former are the characteristics of what politics should strive to achieve: liberty, equality and fraternity (to use a familiar trilogy from the French Revolution); the latter are configurations of institutions that best exemplify some over-riding norm: democracy, federalism and limited government (to use an American trilogy), but also to indicate their institutionalized inverse: autocracy, centralization and statist intervention. The point of such speculative exercises is not descriptive, but evocative. By definition such concepts cannot be perfectly realized in a political world that involves compromises and constraints, but they can provide an incentive for action that would approximate reaching them or avoiding them.

The modern discipline of political science has prided itself on its **realism** and even gone so far as to claim that its practitioners only deal with observable facts and are, therefore, free from the potentially distorting influence of their own norms. The discipline observes agents and their effect in the populations it studies, but is presumably unaffected by them. Most of its many faculties and departments do tolerate the presence of a

small group of scholars called “normative political theorists” or “historians of political thought” who do care about the fate of political actors and the outcome of political choices as a sort of artifact inherited from the past, but their contribution only rarely influences the teaching and research of the dominant groups of empirically-minded political scientists. In my view, their claim to practicing a value-free science is not only specious, but also deprives them of access to an enormously rich source of concepts and assumptions.

The Liberal Bias

The study of politics did not begin in the Anglo-American world, but its subsequent development was strongly influenced by scholars coming from the United States of America, Great Britain, Ireland and the countries of the so-called White Commonwealth: Canada, Australia and New Zealand. They brought with themselves a number of normative and empirical assumptions that are rooted in their respective political experiences. The most salient of these are related to **liberalism**. Contrary to the opinion of many, liberalism is not the same thing as democracy. Not only did it precede democracy historically, but several of its basic assumptions (and practices) have been antithetic to democracy – at least in its original unrevised form. “Liberals” (and the nomenclature is itself ambiguous) preferred to confine the practice of citizenship to those with “a stake in the game,” i.e. educated, wealthy males paying sufficient taxes and usually of the dominant religion and race. By the end of the 19th Century, however,

most of them had come to terms with “mass democracy” in which these restrictions on citizenship had been lifted and the role of the state expanded.

The influence of liberal ideology, however, continues to affect core assumptions of much of contemporary political science. I consider them to be the following:

1. Liberalism’s exclusive emphasis on the individual citizen and on individualism -- substantive and procedural as well as methodological – in its analysis and evaluation of existing political practices;
2. Liberalism’s commitment to voluntarism in the form and content of political participation, as well as in the recruitment of politicians who are presumed to be temporarily as well as voluntarily active in politics;
3. Liberalism’s fixation with territorial representation for providing the basic constituencies into which citizens can be meaningfully grouped, and with partisan competition in these constituencies for providing the most legitimate link between citizen and state;
4. Liberalism’s confinement to the bounds of the nation- state and its institutions when applying its precepts, as well as its long-standing (if tacit) complicity with nationalism;

5. Liberalism's indifference to persistent and systemic inequalities in both the distribution of material benefits and the representation of citizen interests.
6. Liberalism's preoccupation with the stability of its institutions (despite the inherent dynamism of the party competition it celebrates) and its efforts to reduce all change to incremental and marginal improvements in the *status quo*.
7. Liberalism concentrates its normative attention on protecting the citizen from eventual sources of illegitimate authority (tyranny) and, therefore, advocates limiting political authority to a minimum, i.e. to the policing of contracts and protection of property.

Most practicing political scientists, especially those from Anglo-America, would agree with these postulates – expect, perhaps, for the last one. They have become so pervasive that they are regarded as commonsensical and rarely contested (or, for that matter, explicitly defended). The problem, however, is empirical. In the contemporary world, virtually every one of these characteristics is threatened by one or another of its major trends: globalization of trade, finance and production systems; change in the role and sources of technological innovation; concentration of ownership of the means of production and distribution and the wealth they generate; formation of supra-national trading blocs and regional organizations; expansion and inter-penetration of communications systems; increased vulnerability to business cycles; necessity for industrial restructuring; liberalization of financial institutions; individuation of life-

situations; and -- last-but-not-least -- growing insecurity due to dramatic changes in the role of Great Powers and declining capacity for government by national institutions alone. Granted that some of these trends are not new and that liberalism and its particular form of democracy have managed to survive analogous challenges in the past; nevertheless, the magnitude and multiplicity of these trends are unprecedented -- as is the absence of any "systemically plausible" alternative regime for coping with them. The discipline of political science is slowly (and, in many cases, reluctantly) adjusting to these changes in the environment in which politics is embedded.

A Sort of Conclusion

Reflecting in a concerted and cumulative way on the nature of politics, as distinct from merely recording the substance of its laws or relating the feats of its leaders, started under very peculiar circumstances in a very specific setting – and we are still indebted to this effort by our Greek predecessors. From its heartlands in Western Europe and North America, it has subsequently spread to virtually all corners of the Earth. New ideas, concepts, methods and even assumptions are now coming from a much wider range of sources and sites. As I have mentioned, almost all major universities in the world have a faculty or department specializing in the subject. Political scientists are also employed in a much greater variety of places outside of academe. Assessing its contribution to the practice of politics is a more difficult task. It certainly is not the case

that it has been uniformly successful in improving the quality of politics, but it has made some observable improvement in some cases – although it would be an exaggeration to claim that politicians who have been trained as political scientists have done a better job at practicing politics.

It has been a privilege to have played a modest role in this reflexive process. And, occasionally, it has even been fun. I must confess, however, that I have never considered myself a scientist. My experience has been closer to that of an artist. A scientist is confident that his or her observations are accurate, valid and definitive, that they conform to reality and that his or her findings are conclusive in the sense that other scientists gathering and manipulating data on the same subject would arrive at similar (if not identical) conclusions. I have never had that sort of confidence in what I have contributed. An artist is always aware that he or she can never completely grasp and represent reality – least of all, condense it into a parsimonious formula, measure it numerically and calculate the significance of its relationships.¹ The best one can do is to produce an approximation or impression of what is an inevitably complex and contingent process of action and reaction whose results are always ephemeral and, then, to attempt to communicate this to others in the form of words which are also only imperfect approximations of reality. From my perspective (and Aristotle's), this "(unfortunate) imprecision in the (political)

¹ Although I must confess to having crunched numbers and estimated the magnitude and significance of correlations from time-to-time. It unfortunately was (and remains) a professional imperative in order to be recognized and valued as a "card-carrying" political scientist.

class of things” should make the student of politics wary of applying the exacting standards of the natural sciences in his or her research. I think it was Bismarck who described politics as “the art of the possible” – *ergo* not “the science of the probable.”

Perhaps, this explains my predilection for the use of “ideal” types in the theoretical work contained in this volume. This is my recognition (however imperfect) that political reality is composed of complex relationships and institutions that can only be captured with concepts composed of a multitude of (presumably) co-variant conditions. A student once complained to me that my definition of corporatism (pp. ...) contained no less than 14 variables! I was a bit embarrassed by this revelation – until I discovered Austria which almost perfectly fit my ideal-type definition. All of the other so-called “corporatist” systems of interest intermediation in Western Europe lacked one or more of its conditions. The definitions of other key concepts in this volume may be somewhat less prolix, but they do represent my effort at trying to seize the complexity of contemporary politics – with all of the attendant problems of comprehension and measurement.

As self-serving as it may sound, I believe that the study of contemporary politics has too many aspiring scientists and not enough aspiring artists. As an academic profession, it is rigged to reward the former and to discredit the latter. My hunch is that, unless the practice of politics becomes dramatically simpler, the time-worn formula of

disaggregating complex phenomena, measuring precisely and analyzing separately their components and then re-combining them synthetically in order to arrive at convincing findings will become less-and-less productive. To the contrary, the world of politics is becoming more and more multi-layered, poly-centric and externally-penetrated at a rapid pace and this implies (to me) that such complex arrangements and institutions are more-and-more likely to produce consequences that cannot be explained or understood by simply adding up their component parts.

The practice of political science does follow, and should incorporate, changes in “real-existing politics” – but it always does so with a considerable delay. The most important generic changes that have occurred in recent decades involve this spread of “complex interdependence.” Many of its anomalies and unexpected political outcomes can be traced to it. There is absolutely nothing new about the fact that formally independent polities have extensive relations with each other. What is novel is not only the sheer magnitude and diversity of these exchanges, but also the extent to which they penetrate into virtually all social, economic and cultural groups and into almost all geographic areas within these polities. Previously, they were mainly concentrated among restricted elites living in a few favored cities or regions. Now, it takes an extraordinary political effort to prevent the population anywhere within national borders from becoming “contaminated” by the flow of foreign ideas and enticements. **Globalization** has become the catch-all concept for

these developments, even if it tends to exaggerate the evenness of their spread and scope across the planet.

Bibliography of own works