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Andrew Heywood

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For Jean

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USES AND ABUSES OF POLITICAL CONCEPTS

Concepts have a particular importance for students of politics and international relations. It is no exaggeration to suggest that political argument often boils down to a struggle over the legitimate meaning of terms. Enemies may argue, fight and even go to war, each claiming to be 'defending freedom', 'upholding democracy' or 'supporting justice'. The problem is that words such as 'freedom', 'democracy' and 'justice' have different meanings to different people, so that the concepts themselves come to seem problematic.

At least three reasons can be suggested to explain the unusual importance of concepts in political analysis, whether domestic or international. The first is that political analysis typically deals in generalizations. The significance of this can be highlighted by considering differences between politics and history in this respect. Whereas a historian is likely to want to make sense of a particular event (say, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution or the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989–91), a political analyst is more likely to study such events with a view to making sense of a larger or more general phenomenon, in this case the phenomenon of revolution. For historians, a special study of the concept of 'revolution' is of marginal value, because their primary interest is in what is different, even unique, about a particular set of events. For political analysts, on the other hand, a study of the concept of 'revolution' is not only necessary, it is the very process through which political enquiry proceeds.

The second reason is that the language used by students of politics is largely the same as that used by practitioners of politics, and particularly by professional politicians. As the latter are interested primarily in political advocacy rather than political understanding, they have a strong incentive to use language to manipulate and sometimes to confuse. This, in turn, forces students of politics to be especially careful in their use of language. They must define terms clearly and refine concepts with precision to safeguard them from the misrepresentations often current in everyday political debate.

The final reason is that political concepts are frequently entwined with ideological beliefs. Since the emergence of modern political ideologies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, not only has a new language of political discourse emerged, but the terms and concepts of political debate have also been imbued with complex, and often conflicting, meanings. Political concepts are therefore particularly challenging creatures: they are often ambiguous and not infrequently the subject of rivalry and debate; and they may come 'loaded' with value judgements and ideological implications of which their users may be unaware.

WHAT IS A CONCEPT?

A concept is a general idea about something, usually expressed in a single word or a short phrase. A concept is more than a proper noun or the name of a thing. There is, for example, a difference between talking about a cat (a particular and unique cat) and having a concept of a 'cat' (the idea of a cat). The concept of a cat is not a 'thing' but an 'idea', an idea composed of the various attributes that give a cat its distinctive character: 'a furry mammal', 'small', 'domesticated', 'catches rats and mice' and so on. In the same way the concept of 'presidency' refers not to any specific president, but rather to a set of ideas about the organization of executive power. Concepts are therefore 'general' in the sense that they can refer to a number of objects, indeed to any object that complies with the general idea itself.

What, then, is the value of concepts? Concept formation is an essential step in the process of reasoning. Concepts are the 'tools' with which we think, criticize, argue, explain and analyse. Merely perceiving the external world does not in itself give us knowledge about it. To make sense of the world we must, in a sense, impose meaning on it, and we do this through the construction of concepts. Quite simply, to treat a cat as a cat, we must first have a concept of what it is. Precisely the same applies to the process of political reasoning: we build up our knowledge of the political world not simply by looking at it, but through developing and refining concepts that will help us make sense of it. Concepts, in that sense, are the building blocks of human knowledge. Nevertheless, concepts can also be slippery customers, and this is particularly the case in relation to political concepts. Among the problems posed by political concepts are that they are often value-laden, that their meanings may be subject to argument and debate, and that they are sometimes invested with greater substance and significance than they actually possess.

NORMATIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE CONCEPTS

Normative concepts are often described as 'values', and they refer to moral principles or ideals which *should*, *ought* or *must* be brought about. A wide range of political concepts are value-laden in this sense – 'liberty', 'rights', 'justice', 'equality', 'toleration', and so on. Values or normative concepts therefore advance or prescribe certain forms of conduct rather than describe events or facts. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to disentangle political values from the moral, philosophical and ideological beliefs of those who advance them. In contrast, descriptive or positive concepts refer to 'facts' that supposedly have an objective and demonstrable existence: they refer to what *is*. Concepts such as 'power', 'authority', 'order' and law' are in this sense descriptive rather than normative. It is possible to ask whether they exist or not.

The distinction between facts and values is often regarded as a necessary precondition for clear thinking. Whereas values may be regarded as a matter of opinion, facts can be proved as either true or false. As a result, descriptive concepts are thought to be 'neutral' or value-free: they stand up to the rigour of scientific exami-

nation. Indeed, under the influence of positivism, the pressure to develop a science of politics meant that in the middle decades of the twentieth century normative concepts were often discarded as being 'metaphysical' and therefore nonsense. However, the problem with political concepts is that facts and values are invariably interlinked, even apparently descriptive concepts being 'loaded' with a set of moral and ideological implications. This can be seen, for example, in the case of 'authority'. If authority is defined as 'the right to influence the behaviour of others', it is certainly possible to use the concept descriptively to say who possesses authority and who does not, and to examine the basis on which it is exercised. However, it is impossible to divorce the concept completely from value judgements about when, how and why authority *should* be exercised. In short, no one is neutral about authority. For example, whereas conservatives, who emphasize the need for order to be imposed from above, tend to regard authority as rightful and healthy, anarchists, who believe government and law to be evil, invariably see authority as being nakedly oppressive. All political concepts, descriptive as well as normative, therefore need to be understood in the light of the ideological perspectives of those who use them.

One response to the value-laden character of political concepts that has been particularly influential since the late twentieth century has been the movement to insist on 'political correctness' in the use of language. Political correctness, sometimes simply known as PC, has been advocated by feminists, civil rights activists and representatives of minority groups generally, who wish to purge language of racist, sexist and other derogatory or disparaging implications. It is based on the belief that language invariably reflects the power structure in society at large, and so discriminates in favour of dominant groups and against subordinate ones. Obvious examples include the use of 'Man' or 'mankind' to refer to the human race, references to ethnic minorities as 'negroes' or 'coloureds', and the description of developing world countries as 'third world' or 'underdeveloped' (though 'developing world' is also attacked for implying that the Western model of development is applicable throughout the world). The goal of political correctness is to develop bias-free terminology that enables political argument to be conducted in non-discriminatory language. The difficulty with this position, however, is that the hope of an unbiased and objective language of political discourse is illusory. At best, 'negative' terms can be replaced by 'positive' ones; for example, people who are 'disabled' can be referred to as 'differently abled', and 'negroes' can be described as 'black'. Critics of political correctness argue, however, that it imposes an ideological straitjacket on language that both impoverishes its descriptive power and denies expression to 'incorrect' views.

CONTESTED CONCEPTS

A further problem is that political concepts often become the subject of intellectual and ideological controversy. It is not uncommon, as pointed out above, for political argument to take place between people who claim to uphold the same principle or ideal. Conceptual disagreement is therefore one of the battlegrounds of politics

itself. This is reflected in attempts to establish a particular conception of a concept as being objectively correct, as in the case of 'true' democracy, 'true' freedom, 'true' justice and so on. A way out of this dilemma was suggested by W. B. Gallie (1955–6), who suggested that in the case of concepts such as 'power', 'justice' and 'freedom', controversy runs so deep that no neutral or settled definition can ever be developed. These concepts should be recognized, he argued, as 'essentially contested concepts'. In effect, each term encompasses a number of rival concepts, none of which can be accepted as its 'true' meaning. To acknowledge that a concept is 'essentially contested' is not, however, to abandon the attempt to understand it, but rather to recognize that competing versions of the concept may be equally valid.

The notion that most, if not all, concepts are many-faced or 'essentially contested' has nevertheless been subject to criticism, particularly by Terence Ball (1988). Two lines of argument have been advanced. The first notes that many theorists who attempt to apply Gallie's insights (as, for example, Lukes (2004) in relation to 'power') continue to defend their preferred interpretation of a concept against its rivals. This refusal to accept that all versions of the concept are equally valid produces ongoing debate and argument which could, at some stage in the future, lead to the emergence of a single, agreed concept. In other words, no concept is 'essentially' contested in the sense that rivalry and disagreement are fundamental to its nature. The second line of argument points out that Gallie's analysis is ahistorical. Certain concepts are now contested which were once the subject of widespread agreement. It is notable, for example, that the wide-ranging and deep disagreement that currently surrounds 'democracy' only emerged from the late eighteenth century onwards alongside new forms of ideological thinking. As a result, it is perhaps better to treat contested concepts as 'currently' contested (Birch, 2007) or as 'contingently' contested (Ball, 1997).

WORDS AND THINGS

A final problem with concepts is what may be called the fetishism of concepts. This occurs when concepts are treated as though they have a concrete existence separate from and, in some senses, holding sway over, the human beings who use them. In short, words are treated as things, rather than as devices for understanding things. Max Weber (1864–1920) attempted to deal with this problem by classifying particular concepts as 'ideal types'. An ideal type is a mental construct in which an attempt is made to draw out meaning from an otherwise almost infinitely complex reality through the presentation of a logical extreme. Ideal types are thus explanatory tools, not approximations of reality; they neither 'exhaust reality' nor offer an ethical ideal. Concepts such as 'democracy', 'human rights' and capitalism' are thus more rounded and coherent than the shapeless realities they seek to describe. Weber himself treated 'authority' and 'bureaucracy' as ideal types. The importance of recognizing particular concepts as ideal types is that it underlines that concepts are only analytical tools. For this reason it is better to think of concepts or ideal types not as being 'true' or 'false', but merely as being more or less 'useful'.

Further attempts to emphasize the contingent nature of political concepts have been undertaken by so-called postmodern theorists. They have attacked the 'traditional' search for universal values acceptable to everyone on the grounds that this assumes there is a moral and rational high point from which all values and claims to knowledge can be judged. The fact that fundamental disagreement persists about the location of this high point suggests that there is a plurality of legitimate ethical and political positions, and that our language and political concepts are valid only in terms of the context in which they are generated and employed. However, perhaps the most radical critique of concepts is developed in the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism. This distinguishes between 'conventional' truth, which constitutes nothing more than a literary convention in that it is based on a willingness among people to use concepts in a particular way, and 'absolute' truth, which involves the penetration of reality through direct experience and so transcends conceptualization. In this view, thinking of all kinds amounts to a projection imposed on reality, and therefore constitutes a form of delusion. If we mistake words for things we are in danger, as the Zen saying puts it, of mistaking the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself.

KEY CONCEPTS: THEIR MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

ABSOLUTISM

Absolutism is the theory or practice of absolute **government**. Government is 'absolute' in the sense that it possesses unfettered **power**: government cannot be constrained by a body external to itself. The most prominent manifestation of absolute government is the absolute **monarchy**. However, there is no necessary connection between monarchy and absolute government. Unfettered power can be placed in the hands of the monarch, but it can also be vested in a collective body such as the supreme legislature. Absolutism nevertheless differs from modern versions of **dictatorship**, notably **totalitarianism**. Whereas absolutist regimes aspire to a monopoly of political power, usually achieved by excluding the masses from **politics**, totalitarianism involves the establishment of 'total power' through the politicization of every aspect of social and personal existence. Absolutism thus differs significantly from, for example, **fascism**.

Significance

Absolutism was the dominant political form in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was usually linked to the claim that **sovereignty**, representing unchallengeable and indivisible legal **authority**, resided in the monarchy. Absolutist rule was justified by both rationalist and theological theories. Rationalist theories of absolutism, such as those of Jean Bodin (1530–96) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), advanced the belief that only absolute government can guarantee **order** and social stability. Divided sovereignty or challengeable power is therefore a recipe for chaos and disorder. Theological theories of absolutism were based on the doctrine of divine right, according to which the absolute control a monarch exercises over his or her subjects derives from, and is analogous to, the power of God over His creation.

However, absolutist theories are now widely regarded as politically redundant and ideologically objectionable. They are politically redundant because the advance of **constitutionalism** and **representation** has fragmented power and resulted in a strengthening of checks and balances, and because, where dictatorship has survived, it has assumed a quite different political character. It is ideologically objectionable because absolutism serves as a cloak for tyranny and arbitrary government, and is, by definition, irreconcilable with ideas such as individual **rights** and democratic accountability. Nevertheless, a form of constitutional absolutism can be seen to survive in political systems based on respect for the principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability means answerability; it implies a duty to explain one's conduct and be open to criticism by another. Accountability requires that the duties, powers and functions of government bodies are defined in such a way that the performance of subordinate ones can be monitored and evaluated by 'higher' bodies. In this sense, **accountability** can operate only in a context of **constitutionalism**; being accountable does not mean being subject to arbitrary **authority** or capricious **punishment**. However, accountability may also amount to a weak form of **responsibility**, since it establishes a duty to answer and explain one's conduct, but not necessarily to bear guilt and accept punishment.

Significance

Accountability is an important feature of limited **government**, effective policy-making and **democracy**. It limits government **power** by establishing mechanisms of political control through which one institution oversees the working and performance of another. It can promote the quality of public **policy** by ensuring that policy proposals are carefully scrutinized and political performance is rigorously monitored. When this is achieved through regular and competitive elections, it amounts to a system of public control, public accountability being the practical face of democratic rule. However, accountability is effective only under certain circumstances. These include that the mechanisms for monitoring performance are rigorous; that 'higher' institutions or bodies have sufficient access to information to make critical and informed judgements; and that appropriate sanctions can be applied in the event of blunders or under-performance. The main drawback of accountability is that it may constrain independent judgement and action. For example, the accountability of civil servants to ministers can lead to politicization and allow bureaucratic power to be harnessed to the needs of the government of the day.

ANARCHISM

Anarchism is an **ideology** that is defined by the central belief that political **authority** in all its forms, and especially in the form of the **state**, is both evil and unnecessary (**anarchy** literally means 'without rule'). Anarchists believe that the state is evil because, as a repository of sovereign, compulsory and coercive authority, it is an offence against the principles of **freedom** and **equality**, the core value of anarchism being unrestricted personal **autonomy**. The state and the accompanying institutions **government** and **law** are therefore rejected as corrupt and corrupting. However, the belief that the state is unnecessary is no less important to anarchism. Anarchists reject 'political' **order** but have considerable faith in 'natural' order and spontaneous social harmony, ultimately underpinned by optimistic assumptions about **human nature**. Government, in other words, is not the solution to the problem of order, but its cause.

Nevertheless, the anarchist preference for a stateless society in which free individuals manage their own affairs through voluntary agreement and cooperation has been developed on the basis of two rival traditions: socialist **communitarianism** and liberal **individualism**. Anarchism can thus be thought of as a point of intersection between **socialism** and **liberalism**, the point at which each ideology generates anti-statist conclusions. Anarchism has therefore been thought of as a combination of 'ultra-socialism' and 'ultra-liberalism', taking the form, respectively, of collectivist anarchism and individualist anarchism. *Collectivist anarchism* (sometimes called 'classical' anarchism or 'social' anarchism) is rooted in the idea of social solidarity, or what Pyotr Kropotkin (1842–1921) called 'mutual aid', the belief that the natural and proper relationship among people is one of sympathy, affection and harmony. Collectivist anarchists have typically stressed the importance of social equality and common ownership, supporting Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's (1809–65) famous assertion that 'Property is theft', most radically expressed in the form of anarcho-communism. *Individualist anarchism* is based on the idea of the sovereign individual, the belief that individual conscience and the pursuit of self-interest should not be constrained by any collective body or public authority. Individualist anarchism overlaps with **libertarianism** and is usually linked to a strong belief in the **market** as a self-regulating mechanism, most obviously manifest in the form of anarcho-capitalism.

Significance

Anarchism is unusual among political ideologies in that it has never succeeded in winning **power**, at least at a national level. As no society or **nation** has been re-modelled according to anarchist principles, it is tempting to regard anarchism as an ideology of lesser significance. As a political movement, anarchism has suffered from three major drawbacks. First, its goal, the overthrow of the state and all forms of political authority, is often considered to be simply unrealistic. The most common criticism of anarchism is that it is an example of **utopianism** in its negative sense, in that it places excessive faith in 'human goodness' or in the capacity of social institutions, such as the market or social ownership, to maintain order and stability. Second, in viewing government as corrupt and corrupting, anarchists have rejected the conventional means of political activism, such as forming **political parties**, standing for **election** and seeking public office, and have relied instead on the willingness and capacity of the masses to engage in spontaneous rebellion. Third, anarchism does not constitute a single, coherent set of political ideas: apart from anti-statism, anarchists disagree profoundly about the nature of an anarchic society and particularly about property rights and economic organisation.

However, the significance of anarchism is perhaps less that it has provided an ideological basis for acquiring and retaining political power, and more that it has challenged. and thereby fertilized, other political creeds. Anarchists have highlighted the coercive and destructive nature of political power, and in so doing have countered statist tendencies within other ideologies, notably liberalism, socialism and **conservatism**. In this sense, anarchism has had growing influence on modern political thought. Both the New Left and New Right, for instance, have exhibited

libertarian tendencies, which bear the imprint of anarchist thinking. Indeed, the continuing importance of anarchism is perhaps merely concealed by its increasingly diverse character. In addition to, and in some ways in place of, established political and class struggles, anarchists address issues that range from ecology, transport and urban development to sexual relations, and they have been in the forefront in the campaign against neoliberal or 'corporate' **globalization**. To argue that anarchism is irrelevant because it has long since lost the potential to become a mass movement perhaps misses the point. As the world becomes increasingly complex and fragmented, it may be that it is mass **politics** itself that is dead.

ANARCHY

Anarchy literally means 'without rule', the absence of a supreme or sovereign **power**. In domestic politics, anarchy suggests there is no authority higher than the individual (or, possibly, the group). In international politics, anarchy suggests there is no authority higher than the **nation-state**. The term nevertheless generally carries heavily pejorative connotations, implying chaos, disorder and, not uncommonly, violence. In sharp contrast, within **anarchism**, anarchy is not only viewed as compatible with order, but it is taken to be the very foundation of stable and peaceful existence.

Significance

The concept of anarchy has played an important role in both mainstream **political theory** and **international relations** theory. In the former, it has been used to establish the legitimacy of the state and provide a basis for political **obligation**. Social-contract theorists, dating back to Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), have argued that citizens should behave as though the state had arisen out of a voluntary agreement, or social contract, made by individuals who recognized that only the establishment of a sovereign power could safeguard them from the insecurity, disorder and brutality of the 'state of nature' (a stateless or anarchic society). Without a state, individuals abuse, exploit and enslave one another; but with a state, order and civilized existence are guaranteed and liberty is protected. The obligation to obey and respect the state thus arises, ultimately, from self-interest and the awareness that anarchy would degenerate into a 'civil war of each against all' (Hobbes).

In a tradition that can be traced back to Thucydides (c. 460–406 BCE), such thinking about the link between anarchy and disorder has been applied to relations between societies and not merely within societies, becoming a major component of international relations theory through the influence of **realism**. It nevertheless gained greater prominence from the 1970s onwards through the rise of neorealism or 'structural realism'. Neorealists shifted their attention from the state to the international system, and placed primary emphasis on the implications of anarchy. The characteristics of international life were thus taken to stem from the fact that states (and other actors) operate within a domain that has no formal central authority. Neorealists argue that international anarchy necessarily tends towards tension,

conflict and the unavoidable possibility of war, for two main reasons. In the first place, as states are separate, autonomous and formally equal political units, they must ultimately rely on their own resources to realize their interest. International anarchy therefore results in a system of 'self-help', because states cannot rely on anyone else to 'take care of them'. Second, relationships between states are characterized by uncertainty and suspicion. This is best explained through the **security dilemma**. Uncertainty about motives therefore forces states to treat all other states as enemies, meaning that permanent insecurity is the inescapable consequence of living in conditions of anarchy.

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Animal rights are rights to which all animals, or certain categories of animals, are entitled. The idea underpinning animal rights is that the grounds for allocating rights to humans also applies to some or all non-human animals, and to deny rights to the latter amounts to 'speciesism', an arbitrary and irrational prejudice, akin to **racism** or sexism. As such, animal rights differ from 'special' rights, such as women's rights and **minority rights**, which belong only to a specific group, and are based on the particular needs and interests of that group. A distinction should nevertheless be drawn between the notion of animal welfare and the more radical idea of animal rights. Animal welfare reflects an altruistic concern for the well-being of other species, but does not necessarily place them on the same level as humans. To view all or some animals as rights-holders endows them with a moral status in their own right, and so goes beyond the desire to treat animals with dignity and respect, which stems from human moral sensibilities, notably compassion. The latter position may, at times, be compatible with killing and eating animals, or holding them captive, actions that would clearly be ruled out by the former position.

Significance

The notion of animal rights surfaced in the early 1960s, alongside burgeoning interest in 'green' or environment issues. It gained particular prominence through the growth of the animal liberation movement (sometimes called the animal rights movement), which embraces a form of deep **ecologism** that extols the virtues of 'bio-equality' and rejects any form of anthropocentrism (human-centredness). The case for animal rights was put forward by Tom Regan (2004). In his view, all creatures that are 'the subject of a life' qualify for rights. This implies that, as the right to life is the most fundamental of rights, the killing of an animal, however painless, is as morally indefensible as the killing of a human being. Regan acknowledges, however, that in some cases rights are invested in human beings on very different grounds, notably that they, unlike animals, are capable of rational thought and moral judgement. Rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of worship, as well as the right to education or to political participation, would thus seem bizarre if they were invested in animals. Others nevertheless point out that, as we learn more about the capacity of higher primates in particular to reason

and use language, the moral distinction between humans and animals becomes blurred.

Critics of animal rights tend to adopt one of two lines of attack. This first is that once we allow that the doctrine of rights can jump the species barrier, it is difficult to see how it can subsequently be confined. If the distinction between humans and animals is called into question, how adequate are the distinctions between mammals and fish, and between animals and trees and plants? Apart from anything else, if living is a sufficient basis for having, at a minimum, a right to life, it is difficult to see how the human species could long survive, or how rights could be denied to viruses and bacteria, say. The second line of attack is that, as human constructs, rights have been devised specifically to address predicaments that confront humans as morally self-conscious creatures, something that does not apply in the case of other species, despite the capacity they may possess to think and communicate. How meaningful is it, for example, to treat animals as rights holders when they are unaware that they possess such rights, have no ability to demand their rights, and cannot, in any reasonable sense, be expected to fulfil the duties that their rights may entail?

ANTI-POLITICS

Anti-politics refers to a rejection of, and/or alienation from, conventional politicians and political processes, especially mainstream political parties and established representative mechanisms. One aspect of anti-politics is a decline in civic engagement, as citizens turn away from **politics** and retreat into private existence. This is reflected most clearly in a fall in voter turnout and a decline in levels of both party membership and party activism, suggesting that political parties are failing in their traditional role as agents of popular mobilization and political participation. However, anti-politics does not only reflect a breakdown in trust between the public and the political elite; it has also spawned new forms of politics, which, in various ways, articulate resentment or hostility towards political structures and seek to offer more 'authentic' alternatives. These include 'fringe' parties, whose attraction is linked to their image as political 'outsiders' untainted by the exercise of power, and protest movements that embrace an activist-based style of politics, part of whose appeal is that they appear to resist compromise.

Significance

The rise of anti-politics is often seen as part of a malaise from which many, if not most, mature democracies have come to suffer. Evidence of this malaise can be found in a trend of declining political participation, particularly since the 1970s, in countries such as Canada and Japan, across much of Western Europe, and in parts of Latin America. The other manifestation of anti-politics is the emergence of populist leaders, movements and parties ('anti-party' parties) in many parts of the world, particularly since the early 2000s. However, even if anti-politics is taken to be a meaningful phenomenon in its own right, it is less clear why this is happening. Possible explanations or contributory factors include:

- The narrowing of the ideological divide between parties, meaning that modern politicians appear to lack vision and moral purpose, all of them looking the same and sounding the same.
- The tendency of the media to breed a climate of cynicism by 'hyping' political events (all 'problems' become 'crises'), in their attempt to make the coverage of politics 'sexy' and attention-grabbing.
- The flaw in electoral democracy that forces politicians to promise more in the campaign than they can deliver in office, thus ensuring inevitable dissatisfaction among voters.
- The fact that complex, modern societies are increasingly difficult to govern because of, among other things, the expanding power of corporate and other vested interests and an increasingly globalized economy.
- The emergence of a distinct political class whose members have little experience outside politics and so appear to be unable to relate to ordinary people.

ARMS RACE

An arms race is a concerted military build-up that occurs as two or more states acquire weapons or increase their military capacity in response to each other. Classic examples include the UK–German arms race that preceded World War I, and the US–Soviet nuclear arms race during the Cold War. Arms races may be fuelled by defensive calculations or miscalculations (the **security dilemma**), or they may occur as one or more states seek military advantage in order to pursue offensive policies. Arms races often take place in a context of technological innovation, as new or more sophisticated weapons or weapons systems become available. However, arms races are seldom 'pure', or seldom remain 'pure' for very long, in the sense that they are driven by an essentially military or technological dynamic, as they invariably become entangled with institutional, political, ideological and other factors.

Significance

The central debate about the significance of arms races concerns their relationship to **war**. While arms races may increase the likelihood of war, by heightening fear and paranoia, and strengthening **militarism** and aggressive **nationalism**, they may also help to maintain an overall **balance of power** and so to ensure **deterrence**. The spread of nuclear weapons during the Cold War period, either by their acquisition by more states or other actors (*horizontal* proliferation), or their accumulation by established nuclear states (*vertical* proliferation), is often used as an example of how arms races can promote peace and stability. Not only did the vertical proliferation of nuclear arms tend to preserve the balance of power, albeit through a 'balance of terror', but the technological innovations that enabled such devastating weapons to be developed also made them, in effect, 'unusable'. However, there was no guarantee that nuclear proliferation would preserve the Cold War balance of power, and the possibility that a temporary nuclear imbalance could have been exploited by an

aggressive state could not have been ruled out. It is also possible that the dynamics usually associated with an arms race do not apply in the case of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

AUTHORITARIANISM

Authoritarianism is a belief in, or the practice of, **government** 'from above', in which political rule is imposed on society regardless of its **consent**. Authoritarianism thus differs from **authority**. The latter rests on **legitimacy**, and in that sense arises 'from below'. Authoritarianism is a very broad classification of government. It can be associated with monarchical **absolutism**, traditional **dictatorships** and most forms of military rule; and left-wing and right-wing versions of authoritarianism can be identified, associated, respectively, with **communism** and **capitalism**. However, authoritarianism is usually distinguished from **totalitarianism**, on the grounds that it is primarily concerned with the repression of opposition and political liberty, rather than with the more radical goal of obliterating the distinction between the **state** and **civil society**. Authoritarian regimes may therefore tolerate a significant range of economic, religious and other freedoms.

Significance

Authoritarianism was the dominant political form in pre-constitutional and pre-democratic societies, usually taking the form of monarchical rule and aristocratic privilege. Theories of authoritarianism can be traced back to thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), who argued that the belief in the principle of authority, as opposed to individual **freedom**, is the only reliable means of securing **order**. In modern politics, however, authoritarianism is usually viewed as a regime type that differs from both **democracy** and totalitarianism. The value of the term is nevertheless limited by the fact that, while authoritarian regimes rely on command and obedience, they exhibit a wide range of political and ideological features. For example, so-called 'old' authoritarian regimes, such as General Franco's Spain, were often conservative in that they set out to protect traditional elites and de-politicize the masses, while 'new' authoritarian regimes, commonly found in the developing world, aim to bring about economic mobilization and, to some extent, rely on political agitation. Indeed, such regimes may develop authoritarian-populist features which resemble Bonapartism (after Louis Napoleon's regime in France, 1848–70), a style of government that fused personal leadership with conservative **nationalism**, or Peronism (after Juan Peron's regime in Argentina, 1946–55), a dictatorship that based its support on the impoverished masses and the promise of economic and social progress.

However, the stark authoritarian/democratic distinction is often misleading because authoritarian traits can be identified in democratic regimes. Examples of this include the McCarthyite 'witch hunts' of the 1950s in the USA and Thatcherism in the UK – the latter a combination of neo-liberal economics and neo-conservative social policies that has been interpreted as a form of 'authori-

tarian populism' (Hall and Jacques, 1983). Finally, authoritarianism has also been viewed as a psychological or sociological phenomenon linked to a disposition to obey orders unthinkingly or a rigid insistence on obedience from subordinates. The classic contribution to this approach to authoritarianism was the idea of the 'authoritarian personality', developed by Adorno *et al.* (1950), which explains unquestioning obedience and rigidity of character in terms of an 'extreme intolerance to ambiguity'; in other words, it is a response to deep insecurities precipitated by uncertainty and choice.

AUTHORITY

Authority, in its broadest sense, is a form of **power**, sometimes thought of as 'legitimate power'. Whereas power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others, authority is the right to do so. Authority is therefore based on an acknowledged duty to obey rather than any form of coercion or manipulation. In this sense, authority is power cloaked in **legitimacy** or rightfulness. However, authority may be used as either a normative or a descriptive term. As a normative term, used by political philosophers, it refers to a 'right to rule' and takes the form of a moral claim. This implies that it is less important that authority is obeyed than that it *should be* obeyed. Leaders, for example, could in this sense continue to claim the right to rule, on the basis of election results, constitutional rules, divine right or whatever, even though the majority of the population does not recognize that right.

Political scientists and sociologists, on the other hand, treat authority as a descriptive term. Max Weber (1864–1920) defined authority simply as a matter of people's belief about its rightfulness, regardless of where that belief came from and whether it is morally justified. Authority, in this sense, is 'legitimate power'. Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority, based on the different grounds on which obedience can be established. *Traditional authority*, in this sense, is rooted in history and tradition; *charismatic authority* stems from the power of personality; and *legal-rational authority* is grounded in a set of impersonal rules associated with an office rather than the office holder. An alternative distinction can be made between de jure and de facto authority. *De jure* authority, or authority in law, operates according to a set of procedures or rules that designate who possesses authority and over what issues. People described as being 'in authority' can be said to possess de jure authority: their 'powers' can be traced back to a particular office. Both traditional and legal-rational authority can therefore be viewed as forms of de jure authority. *De facto* authority, or authority in practice, operates in circumstances in which authority is exercised but cannot be traced back to a set of procedural rules. This includes all forms of charismatic authority, and what is called expert authority, when a person is recognized as being 'an authority' by virtue of his or her specialist skills or knowledge.

Significance

Authority has been one of the most basic and enduring issues in political anal-

ysis. In a sense, all studies of **government** or the **state** are in fact examinations of the nature and workings of political authority. Indeed, probably no system of rule could survive long without exercising some measure of authority, since to rule through power alone involves such a great expenditure of coercive resources as to be unsustainable. Nevertheless, there are recurrent debates regarding both the nature of authority and its value. Liberals and socialists tend to view authority as being instrumental, believing that it arises 'from below' through the **consent** of the governed. From this perspective, authority is rational, purposeful and limited, a view reflected in a preference for legal-rational authority and public **accountability**. Conservatives, by contrast, see authority as arising from natural necessity, being exercised 'from above' by virtue of the unequal distribution of experience, social position and wisdom. Those who exercise authority do so for the benefit of others, but this does not set clear limits or checks on authority, and it may blur the distinction between authority and **authoritarianism**.

The justifications for authority include, most basically, that it is essential for the maintenance of **order** and is thus the only means of escape from the barbarity and injustice of the 'state of nature', a society without political rule. Authority also establishes common norms and values that bind society together, and thereby gives individuals a social identity and sense of rootedness. Critics of authority, including, in particular, libertarians and anarchists, point out that authority is by definition the enemy of **freedom**; that it threatens reason and critical understanding by demanding unquestioning obedience; and that it is psychologically, and perhaps morally, corrupting in that it accustoms people to controlling or dominating others.

AUTONOMY

Autonomy literally means self-rule or self-government. **States**, institutions or groups can be said to be autonomous if they enjoy a substantial degree of independence, though autonomy in this connection is sometimes taken to imply a high measure of self-government, rather than sovereign independence. Applied to the individual, autonomy is linked closely with **freedom**. However, since it suggests not merely being 'left alone' but being rationally self-willed, autonomy is best classified as a form of positive freedom. By responding to inner or 'genuine' drives, the autonomous individual is seen to achieve authenticity and personal fulfilment.

Significance

In international politics, autonomy is widely used as an index of sovereignty, autonomous states being independent and self-governing. However, it is now widely accepted that very few, if any, states are autonomous in this sense, and pluralist theorists in particular now use autonomy in a relative, not an absolute, sense. As a constitutional principle, referring to institutions or levels of **government**, autonomy is linked closely to **decentralization**. Autonomy in this context is justified through an essentially liberal belief in fragmenting **power**, though the checks and balances thus established imply interdependence as well as independence. The term is also

used in the analysis of the state, the autonomy of the state implying that it articulates its own interests and is not merely an instrument or agent through which powerful groups act in society at large. Liberals have traditionally defended this image of state autonomy against the Marxist theory of the class state, even though modern Marxists are prepared to accept the 'relative autonomy' of the state. Finally, the ideal of personal autonomy can be seen as the underlying value of libertarian and anarchist thought, self-governing individuals needing little or no guidance in the form of political **authority**. Autonomy in this sense is often linked with **democracy**, but may nevertheless also limit the jurisdiction of democracy, as it emphasizes individuality rather than collective or majority rule.

BALANCE OF POWER

The term 'balance of power' has been used in a wide variety of political contexts, but it features most prominently in **international relations**, where it has been accorded a number of meanings. As a *policy*, the balance of power refers to a deliberate attempt to promote a power equilibrium, using diplomacy, or possibly war, to prevent any individual state from achieving a predominant position. As a *system*, it refers to a condition in which no single state predominates over others, tending to create general equilibrium and curb the hegemonic ambitions of all states. Although such a balance of power may simply be fortuitous, neorealists argue that the international system tends naturally towards equilibrium because states are particularly fearful of a would-be hegemon, or dominant power, The term is also sometimes use to refer to power relationships generally, unconnected with the idea of equilibrium. This makes it possible to talk, for example, about 'the changing balance of power'.

Significance

The idea of the balance of power has played a central role within **realism**, even being viewed by Kenneth Waltz (1979) as the theory of international relations. For realists, the balance of power is the principal means through which the tendencies within international politics towards conflict and **war** can be constrained. However, while classical realists treat the balance of power as a product of prudent statecraft, neorealists see it more as a consequence of structural interactions that take place within the international system, which are, in turn, shaped by the distribution of **power** (or capacities) between and among states. From the neorealist perspective, the likelihood of a balance of power, and therefore the prospect of war or peace, largely boil down to the number of **great powers** operating in the international system, or what is called polarity (the existence within a system of one or more significant actors, or 'poles'). Bipolarity, as typified by the **superpower** rivalry of the Cold War period, is usually taken to be more favourable for the emergence of a balance of power than is multipolarity, the latter being biased in favour of fluidity and increasing the scope for great-power conflict.

However, liberals have generally been critical of the idea of the balance of power,

believing that it legitimizes and entrenches power politics and international rivalry. This is because the basic premise of the balance of power is that other states, or coalitions of states, pose a threat to **security**, and this can only be contained through a build-up of power or the formation of a rival alliance. A balance-of-power mindset is therefore more likely to cause war than prevent it. Constructivists, for their part, have emphasized the extent to which any assessment of the balance of power is dependent on perception, ideas and beliefs. In short, paraphrasing Wendt's (1992) oft-quoted assertion about **anarchy**, the balance of power is what states make of it.

BEHAVIOURALISM

Behaviouralism is the belief that social theories should be constructed only on the basis of observable behaviour (as opposed to behaviourism, which is the school of psychology that holds that human behaviour can ultimately be explained in terms of conditioned reactions or reflexes). The behavioural approach to political analysis developed out of **positivism**, adopting its assertion that scientific knowledge can be developed only on the basis of explanatory theories that are verifiable or falsifiable. Behavioural analysis typically involves the collection of quantifiable data through research surveys, statistical analysis and the construction of empirical theories that have predictive capacity.

Significance

The so-called 'behavioural revolution' of the 1950s made behaviouralism the dominant force in US **political science** and a powerful influence elsewhere, notably in the UK. The attraction of behaviouralism was that it allowed political analysis to break away from its concern with **constitutions** and normative theory, and gave the study of **politics**, perhaps for the first time, reliable scientific credentials. This fuelled the belief, expressed by political analysts such as David Easton (1979), that politics could adopt the methodology of the natural sciences through the use of quantitative research methods in areas such as voting behaviour and the behaviour of legislators, lobbyists and municipal politicians. Behaviouralism, however, came under growing pressure from the 1960s onwards. In the first place, it constrained the scope of political analysis significantly, preventing it going beyond what was directly observable. While behavioural analysis produced, and continues to produce, invaluable insights in fields such as voting studies, a narrow obsession with quantifiable data threatens to reduce the discipline of politics to little else.

Moreover, the scientific credentials of behaviouralism were called into question, in that its claim to be objective, reliable and 'value-free' is compromised by a range of unstated biases. For example, if **democracy** is redefined in terms of observable behaviour, it means what goes on in so-called democratic political systems in the developed West, and is disengaged from ideas such as popular participation and public accountability. Behaviouralism has, finally, been criticized for treating human behaviour as predictable and determined by the interaction of objective

factors, when in fact it is shaped by a variable mix of psychological, social, cultural and historical circumstances. The now more common stance of post-behaviouralism differs from behaviouralism in that it goes further in recognizing the role of theory in imposing meaning on data, and acknowledges the degree to which theoretical perspectives may impinge on seemingly objective observations.

BICAMERALISM

Bicameralism is the fragmentation of legislative **power**, established through the existence of two chambers or houses in the **parliament**. Bicameral systems are usually classified according to the role, powers and composition of the 'second' chamber or 'upper' house. Most second chambers are constitutionally and politically subordinate to the first chamber, which is usually seen as the locus of popular **authority**. This is particularly the case in parliamentary systems in which **government** is generally responsible to, and drawn, largely or wholly, from the lower house. Second chambers often also exercise limited legislative power, meaning that they function essentially as 'revising' chambers. Not uncommonly, such weaker versions of bicameralism reflect the restrictive representative basis of the upper house, which may be selected through indirect elections, partial elections, appointment or, though rarely, inheritance. A stronger version of bicameralism is found in assemblies with two popularly elected chambers that have broadly equal powers. The US Congress is perhaps the only example of a legislative body that has a dominant upper chamber (while all taxation must be introduced in the House of Representatives, the Senate alone exercises ratification and confirmation powers).

Significance

Bicameralism is usually seen as a central principle of liberal **constitutionalism**. The chief benefits of bicameralism are that second chambers can check the power of first chambers and prevent majoritarian rule; that bicameral assemblies check the power of the executive more effectively; that the existence of two chambers widens the basis of **representation** and interest articulation; that the legislative burden of the first chamber can be relieved and legislation can be more thoroughly scrutinized; and that the second chamber can act as a constitutional safeguard, preventing or delaying the passage of controversial legislation. The representative advantages of bicameralism may be particularly important in systems in which **federalism** or **devolution** operate, as the second chamber can help to overcome conflict between the centre and the periphery by representing provincial or regional interests at the national level.

However, there was a clear trend towards unicameralism in the post-1945 period (with second chambers being abolished in New Zealand, Denmark and Sweden), and bicameralism has been criticized for a number of reasons. Unicameral assemblies may be more efficient, because the existence of a second chamber can make the legislative process unnecessarily complex and difficult. Second chambers may act as a check on democratic rule, particularly when their members are non-