

# **A DICTIONARY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**Roger Scruton**

**Macmillan Reference Books**

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**A**  
**Dictionary of**  
**Political Thought**

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## A Note on Composition

The first draft of this dictionary was written continuously, so as to achieve maximum consistency of style and minimum overlap. The articles were sent out separately to the advisors, two of whom were asked to comment on each article. The final draft was then composed, taking into account, as far as possible, all the comments received. The list of entries was gradually amended and developed in the course of writing, partly in response to suggestions received, partly in response to a developing perspective. Because of the novelty of the project, and the attempt to bring together disparate but related disciplines, it cannot be hoped that a uniform standard has been reached throughout, or that some fundamental items of political thought have not been overlooked. However, a certain synthesis has emerged, which may permit development and clarification in any future edition.

I have benefited greatly from the comments offered, and from friendly advice given by Michael Oakeshott, Amartya Sen, John Vickers and William Waldegrave. In particular, I have received inestimable benefit from the painstaking work of Sally Shreir, who read through the whole dictionary suggesting countless additions, improvements and amendments. Without her help and guidance this project would have been far more arduous and far less rewarding than it has been. It is not to be expected, however, that all errors have been eliminated, and I alone am responsible for those that remain, as well as for the tone and manner of the work, and for any expressions of opinion or manifestations of outlook.

London, April 1982

Roger Scruton.

## Note

Cross-references are indicated by an asterisk; they occur only when a major intellectual connection is in issue. Reference to authors and texts have been kept to a minimum, but are included wherever an idea seems to be specific to the thoughts of a particular school or person.

Because this is a dictionary of concepts, it has been necessary to provide not only definitions but also the sketches of arguments. These are necessarily incomplete, and may also be one-sided. The intention is to illustrate the concept, rather than to persuade the reader, and it should be borne in mind that no article can do more than suggest the arguments given for or against any particular position.

## Preface

'Political thought' denotes something that all human beings engage in, whether or not knowingly. It also denotes various specialized academic disciplines which seek to explore, to support or to undermine our everyday political persuasions. Several such disciplines have contributed their terminology to this dictionary, among them political science, philosophy, sociology and economics. In addition the reader will find terms from the practical arts of law, politics and religion, together with words designed at least to draw attention to, if not to resolve, important modern controversies.

An apology may not be necessary for what follows, but some explanation of the aims and principles of such a dictionary may help the reader to gauge its utility. It is impossible to include in one small volume reference to all the concepts involved in the practice of politics, or in its related academic disciplines. The intention has been to extract, both from active debate, and from the theories and intuitions which surround it, the principal ideas through which modern political beliefs find expression. The emphasis of the dictionary is conceptual rather than factual, exploring the formulation of doctrines rather than their specific application. Political events are mentioned only when they cast light on intellectual conceptions. For this reason the few proper names contained in the dictionary are those of thinkers rather than those of political figures. Likewise nations, treaties, battles and laws are seldom mentioned, and, while it has been necessary to include discussions of the major movements and parties in contemporary politics, the detailed history of the modern world has been passed over, as outside the scope of a dictionary of concepts.

Political terms are often as obscurely understood by the person who uses them as by the person who is puzzled in hearing them used. The main purpose of this dictionary is to provide not just definitions but, where possible, clarifications of political terminology. Sometimes, as in the case of Marxism, the task is made easier by the existence of a definite and articulated theory, which the dictionary articles need only condense into appropriate form. In other cases (and this is particularly true of the main items of conservative thought) the absence of theory presents a peculiar difficulty. Here the dictionary must itself attempt a small part of a task that has not been accomplished, and perhaps not even attempted, with the rigour that the subject demands. For this reason, while many entries will be recognized as summaries of existing doctrines, others will appear to present conceptual

novelties. It is hoped that the two kinds of entry will so interlock as to give structure and coherence to the whole. It goes without saying that every attempt has been made to be impartial, and to provide equal, and equally clear, expression to the major beliefs and concepts which enjoy favour in the modern climate of political opinion. But impartiality is itself a kind of partiality, and the reader should approach the dictionary with as many inverted commas at his disposal as he might require for his peace of mind.

Some doubt may be felt as to the number of disciplines which have been called upon in the construction of this work. Why, for example, should the social sciences figure so prominently in a book designed to clarify the language of actual political discourse? It would certainly be odd to include, in a dictionary of mathematical concepts, entries dealing with the sociology of mathematical thought and practice. For what bearing could such entries have on concepts like those of number, proof, validity and integration? A sociological explanation of our mathematical habits casts no light upon their true internal logic. However, the same is not true of politics. Political thought, unlike mathematics, is permeable to its own explanation. A sociology of political belief will not leave its subject unaffected. Consider the concept of 'commodity fetishism'. While this purports to provide an explanation of certain persistent economic beliefs and practices, it contains within itself a novel way of criticizing what it explains. No sooner did the concept exist than it was used to give expression and support to political beliefs which seemed to gain in cogency through the adoption of this technical term. Similarly no exposition of modern political thought can avoid encroaching on those disciplines – economics, sociology and political science – which have political thought as part of their subject matter. Both the language and the art of politics are formed and reformed under pressure from these disciplines, borrowing their concepts, their theories, their truths and above all their confusions in the compulsive search for self-justification.

It should not be thought, however, that the subject-matter of this dictionary is either recondite or truly theoretical. On the contrary, it belongs to the mental repertoire of all active, thinking beings, and it is to be hoped that, by treating impartially of conceptions which enter, however hazily, into so many current debates and disagreements, this dictionary will make some small contribution to their clarity.

## A

**abdication.** See \*monarchy.

**abnormality.** A deviation from a \*norm. Abnormality is to be distinguished from eccentricity, which is the presence of noteworthy and uncommon characteristics in a \*normal individual. Eccentricity is usually permitted if harmless, abnormality often regarded with suspicion whether harmless or not. Different political arrangements draw the line between the two in different ways, and the problem of defining what is normal in human nature makes dispute inevitable. Moreover the human desire to hold others responsible for the characteristics which distinguish them gives a motive to confusion. An abnormality is not part of the moral character, but part of the amoral circumstances, of the person who possesses it. To represent it as a harmful eccentricity is to justify treatment intended either to conceal the victim, or to force him to change. This thought has been extremely important in \*politicized theories of \*psychotherapy. The idea of the individual as essentially \*responsible for his eccentricities underlies some doctrines of \*authenticity.

**abortion.** The issue of abortion is intractable, partly because of the absence of any other case to which it can be assimilated. The relationship between a woman and her unborn child is both non-transferable and original: the child comes into existence in and through the woman, and the question of its rights and welfare cannot be considered in complete isolation from the question of the rights and welfare of its mother. Some deny that an unborn child is a \*person, and on that ground deny it the \*right to life. On this view the only question of *rights* is that which concerns the woman: does she have a 'right to choose' whether to give birth? If the pregnancy is unwanted, what right has another to compel her to proceed with it? It seems arbitrary, however, to say that the divide between person and non-

person occurs at birth. The alternative positions are many: some see the foetus as a person, but believe that the case is one of *conflicting* rights. Others argue that the language of rights is wholly inadequate to capture the nature of the \*obligation towards the unborn child. See, in general, \*consequentialism, \*rights.

**absenteism.** See \*industrial action.

**absolutism.** The theory and practice of absolute \*government, i.e. government which is not \*limited by any \*agency internal to itself. Absolute government should be distinguished from absolute \*power. Power is always contained, limited or diverted by other powers within the state; but government can be absolute even without possessing absolute power. It is so whenever there are no constitutional \*checks and balances, so that no exercise of government can be criticized or opposed in the *name* of government. The principal limitation of government is the law. Defenders of absolutism, such as \*Bodin and \*Hobbes, have often been motivated by the thought that all government requires \*sovereignty – that is, a body of decisions which cannot be questioned. Since sovereignty must be exercised through law, the sovereign himself cannot be criticized by the law, which is no more than his own command. On this view law is authoritative simply by virtue of the status of the person who commands it, and not by virtue of its content or of its moral or intellectual credentials.

Absolutism must be distinguished from \*totalitarianism. It involves, not the total supervision by a central power of all the functions of society, but simply the possession of an unfettered power of government, which may or may not be used, and which need not be applied universally, or in every area of social existence. Sometimes, as in the European absolutism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this power may be used in order to limit the concentration of power in bodies that are not themselves sovereign, such as the nobility, the church, or the empire. Sometimes it may be used to

eliminate \*opposition and to establish a complete \*dictatorship, as with Hitler and Stalin. Absolute rule may vest in an individual, in an \*office (absolute monarchy), in a party (\*democratic centralism), or in a system of administration (classical Chinese \*bureaucracy).

**abundance.** Goods are abundant in a society whenever any member of it can obtain such of those goods as he desires by the expenditure of minimum labour. It is sometimes thought to be a criterion of \*welfare that all goods which people need should also be abundant, and that the economy should have this abundance of necessities as its aim. (See \*need.) It is also sometimes argued that the abundance of luxuries (i.e. goods which are not needed but only desired) may be an evil: see \*consumerism.

**academic freedom.** 1. Freedom to pursue teaching, learning and research without regard for the public utility of what is taught or studied, and unconstrained by external directives (whether from the state or from elsewhere) as to the form, content or conclusions of the subject. This freedom includes the freedom to publish the results of research.

2. Specifically, the freedom of an educational body to provide its own constitution, appoint its own staff and students, and determine its own curriculum, whatever the \*ideological content of what is taught. It is a disputed question whether this specific freedom does exist, or can or ought to exist. It implies that those who buy or provide the services of academics should have no power to prescribe the nature of the service rendered. Hence the provision of academic freedom requires the abolition of any contractual relation between the academy and the public.

The issue of academic freedom is to be distinguished from that of whether academic institutions ought to raise their funds, and recruit their students, without aid or direction from the state.

**acceleration principle** (or: accelerator principle). The hypothesis in economics, that investment in an industry varies

according to the rate of change (rather than according to the level) of its output. Under standard conditions in capitalist modes of production a certain amount of capital will be required to produce a particular rate of output. If this rate of output changes then, *ceteris paribus*, the amount of capital invested must also change. It is, however, not possible to assume that the relation between them is one of direct proportionality.

This hypothesis plays an important part in theories of the \*trade cycle. It implies that an increase in demand for any product brings about an increase in demand for the machines etc. used to make it. Thus a small change in the output of consumer goods tends to result in a much bigger (i.e. accelerated) change in the output of the goods used to make them. Conversely a small fall in the output of consumer goods may result in a much larger fall in the output of capital goods. It is also argued that the 'accelerator' can be brought into play by a very slight *variation* in the rate of change of output of a consumer good. Thus if output of a particular product increases by five per cent in one year and continues to increase, but only by four per cent, in the next year, this may precipitate an actual *fall* in the output of capital goods, and in the amount of capital invested.

**access.** The concept of political access has become increasingly important in sociological studies of political power, since, it is argued, 'power of any kind cannot be reached by a political interest group or its leaders without access to one or more key points of decision in government' (David B. Truman: *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, 1951). Access is the probability of obtaining the attention and influencing the decisions of the relevant officers of government. 'Effective access' is usually given as a function of three variables: the strategic position of the group within society, the internal characteristics of the group, and the nature of the institutions of government. A group may be without access (such as the lowest

\*caste in a caste system), with effective access, or with 'privileged access' (which arises when decision makers automatically take a group's interests into account). The UK aristocracy has always had privileged access, and also 'direct' access, to power through the House of Lords, whereas most other classes have had varying degrees of effective but indirect access.

Sociologists further distinguish 'loose' from 'taut' patterns of access, the first existing when there is a multiplicity of points of access to political decisions, the second when there are defined channels of \*representation through which groups exert their influence. Access seems to have shifted, in the US and postwar Europe, from \*party to \*pressure group, perhaps as a result of modern \*bureaucracy, and of the decline of trust in representation.

**accommodation.** 1. In sociology, the state or process of social adjustment to conflict. To be distinguished from adaptation (structural changes brought about by biological variation and selection), assimilation (the process whereby two groups or cultures fuse), and \*acculturation. Accommodation allows two groups to harmonize overtly, while leaving the real source of conflict unresolved. Thus first generation immigrants may be accommodated by adopting the food, clothes etc. of the country in which they find themselves, but they may not be acculturated, where this implies full participation in the culture of the native population.

2. In politics, accommodation is usually distinguished from \*confrontation and from \*conciliation. It is the process whereby hostile powers establish a *modus vivendi* which enables each to fulfil as many of its purposes as it can without overt \*aggression towards the other.

**accountability.** Sometimes distinguished from responsibility. A is accountable to B if B may sanction and forbid his actions. It does not follow that B is responsible for A: chains of responsibility run downwards by \*delegation, chains of accountability upwards; if the two chains

coincide, then this is a political achievement.

**acculturation.** An Americanism meaning the process whereby an individual or group acquires the cultural characteristics of another through direct contact. Acculturation is a one-way process, whereby one culture absorbs another, and is to be distinguished from the two-way process of assimilation, in which homogeneity results from changes in both. The phenomenon is of increasing political significance, as war, communication and migration force the states of the world to decide whether to open or to close their frontiers to one another. Their decisions may often be affected by the extent to which acculturation of new arrivals is considered possible.

**accumulation.** The amassing of \*capital, for purposes of either investment or expenditure. If there is to be a 'means of production' over and above what is provided by nature, then there must be accumulation, in the form of 'produced means of production'. In a \*capitalist economy accumulation is in private hands; in a \*socialist economy, in theory, every accumulation of any significance is \*socially owned. In between those two, infinite varieties of \*mixed economy can be envisaged.

Moral and political discussions of \*private property often involve objections to certain levels of accumulation. Some think that all accumulation gives the person who has \*control over it a further control over the lives of others. (See \*exploitation.) Some also believe that the laws of inheritance ought not to permit constant accumulation of property across generations. Nevertheless it is difficult to envisage systems of private property rights without rights of transfer of property, and if transfer is permitted, then accumulation is always possible. Modern uses of \*taxation can often be seen as attempts to permit maximum mobility of private property through exchange, while preventing accumulations beyond a certain level. (See also \*primitive accumulation.)

**activism.** The German *Activismus* was used at the end of the First World War to denote the active engagement of \*intellectuals in political transformation. 'Activists' are distinguished by the extent of their involvement in politics, and by the methods that they are inclined to sanction in pursuit of transformation, rather than by the nature of their views. They are not necessarily \*extremists, nor are they necessarily opposed to constitutional forms of political change. \*Sorel, however, defended activism in terms that also sanction extremism, arguing that activism is a necessary part of any serious political standpoint, since doing is everything, and thought only a \*rationalization of what is done. On such a view it is incoherent to present a recipe for, or exhortation to, political transformation in advance of the attempt to precipitate it. Activism becomes essential to politics, and, Sorel thought, essentially violent.

**act of state.** 1. Philosophical. Any act which can be attributed to no single citizen or group of citizens, and which is done for reasons connected with the interests, rights, privileges etc. of a \*state, can be considered to be an act of state. Thus a declaration of war, while conveyed between statesmen and usually through diplomatic channels, is the act of one state towards another, it being impossible for any \*agency less than the state to declare war. Some acts of state are directed towards other states, as in the example. Others are directed towards citizens and subject associations. It is the state that punishes the criminal, that expropriates the property owner, that nationalizes industries and enacts laws. The state can act through its officers, or through a monarch; it may also endorse or \*ratify the actions of private citizens undertaken independently (as when the state annexes as a colony land captured by an adventurous citizen). In general a state has all the capacities for agency that an individual person has. Its actions may be intentional or unintentional, reasonable or unreasonable, moral or immoral. It may also *have* reasons for what it does,

and respond to reasons for or against courses of action (the idea of a 'process' of government). Thus, it is often said, the state has will and responsibility, and this is one argument for thinking that, like a company in law, it is to be regarded more as an autonomous person than as an organic aggregate of subjects. This thought is given elaboration in the philosophies of \*Rousseau and \*Hegel.

2. Legal. Acts of state are usually defined legally so as to include only actions *between* states. Thus in English law an act of state is an act of the sovereign power performed by virtue of the \*prerogative, and in the course of its relations with other powers or with the \*subjects of other powers. It cannot be challenged in the courts since it lies outside their jurisdiction. Hence in English law (as also in US law), there can be no act of state against an individual subject (i.e. one who owes allegiance), and the plea of act of state can never be used by government officers in defence of an encroachment on a subject's rights. Certain provisions in other constitutions might be interpreted as allowing the same effective immunity for government actions against citizens as is granted to government actions against other states: e.g. rights to enter and search without warrant, to imprison without trial, and so on, in cases of sedition.

**actually existing socialism.** Soviet and East European term for the systems of government in present-day communist countries, as they really are, rather than as they ought to be. Its use is usually ironical, and is largely confined to \*dissidents; it implies a distance between the actual state of communist societies and the official claims that are made for them.

**adjudication.** The settlement of a dispute by judicial decree, hence, in English and US law, the judgement or decision of a court.

More broadly the term is used to refer to the process of settling disputes peacefully by referring them to some body with authority to make a decision or award binding upon the parties. Thus it covers

awards made by mixed commissions and arbitral tribunals as well as those made by the courts. It is a method of resolving conflicts, to be contrasted with such processes as \*arbitration and \*mediation, in that it issues in a statement of \*rights under the law. Its nature is of great concern to students both of \*jurisprudence, and of politics. It represents a particular style of government that may not exist in all places and in all times, and which may be criticized and defended for the characteristics that distinguish it. Some argue that the settling of all disputes by adjudication may confer legislative power upon judges, and thus violate the supposed requirement of a \*separation of powers. Others argue that disputes should be capable of settlement by less tortuous or costly means, and that too great an emphasis on adjudication serves to limit the possibilities of settlement. Advocates of the politics of \*confrontation may argue that adjudication is a way of ensuring the peaceful victory of the powers that be, through their servants, the \*judiciary. Advocates of the politics of \*conciliation, by contrast, value adjudication as one among many possible means of translating powers into rights while avoiding \*violence. (See \*judiciary, \*law.)

**admass.** Term coined by J. B. Priestley in 1955 to denote the society that he thought to be emerging in postwar Europe, formed under the combined influence of \*advertising and the mass \*media. He considered the entire social structure to be threatened by a drive towards consumer goods, and towards all that is least serious and most expendable among the objects of human desire. (See \*consumerism.) The term has since come to be used in many of the political criticisms made of the role of advertising in Western societies.

**administered prices.** \*Prices which are determined by the policy of some agency which can control them, rather than by \*market forces, or by whatever other less deliberative mechanism might be held to determine them. Prices can be adminis-

tered by a \*monopoly, by an \*oligopoly, by a \*cartel, or by a government.

**administrative law.** The branch of law which governs the activities of state administrative bodies, such as ministries, state departments, local government, commissions, and agencies. To be distinguished from \*constitutional law, which is concerned not with the subordinate organs of government but with the supreme executive and legislative bodies. (There is also a large grey area between the two.) In modern government there is increasing \*delegation both of government power, and, through delegated legislation, of government authority. Hence the question arises of what remedy the citizen has against a body which acts, or purports to act, with the authority of the state. In France, as a result of traditional centralization, reinforced by Napoleonic edicts, administrative bodies are now subject to strict control by special administrative courts, and by the *conseil d'état*. Hence no special remedy is provided whereby the aggrieved subject can obtain relief from an ordinary court of law. In the UK and the US there are, by contrast, established procedures of appeal to the courts, regarded as important parts of the constitutional freedom of the subject.

In the US, the supervision of the Supreme Court can prevent administrative bodies from acting \**ultra vires*, it being always possible for the aggrieved citizen to seek judicial review on the grounds that he has been denied \*due process of law. In the UK the courts can overturn administrative decisions by special prerogative writs. These are summonses issued to the administrative body on behalf of the aggrieved party, calling on it in the name of the Crown to account for its actions. Among such writs is the celebrated \*habeas corpus, and also *mandamus* (ordering a public officer to perform some neglected function), and *certiorari* (asking for the records of a decision to be submitted). Of particular relevance in any subsequent proceedings are the principles of natural justice: has the administrative body effectively 'stood in

judgement' on the plaintiff? If so, did it allow him the right of hearing? Did it review the relevant evidence? And so on. This survival of the doctrine of \*natural justice in administrative law is vital if the state is to be seen as dealing at all levels on open terms with its citizens.

**Adorno, Theodor (1903–69).** German philosopher and social theorist. See \*critical theory, \*Frankfurt school, \*progress.

**adversary system.** The mode of legal procedure in criminal cases whereby the prosecution (the state) acts through a counsel who is opposed in court by another counsel acting on the instructions of the accused. Each party is 'represented' before a third (the judge and jury) whose impartiality is necessary to justice, and whose existence and independence are often taken to be fundamental constituents in the \*rule of law. The adversary system is to be contrasted with systems that involve 'confessional' trials, trials by ordeal, and \*show trials, where the individual is pitted directly against the state as his accuser and required to exonerate himself or be condemned. Here prosecutor and judge are identical, although this identity might be masked – for example by the presence of a judge who is acting under instructions from the prosecution (the normal procedure in Soviet-style 'show trials'). Some argue that there can be no true adversary system unless the defendant who cannot afford a lawyer to represent him has an automatic right to public defence (US) or legal aid (UK).

The expression is sometimes used to describe a political system in which \*opposition has a recognized function, with a place within the institutions of government, perhaps supported from public funds.

**advertising.** The declaration that goods or services are available for purchase, usually accompanied by attempts to persuade the public to buy them. The nature of advertising has changed radically during the course of the present century, with the development of new techniques

of persuasion. Advertising has helped to form the existing character of \*capitalist societies, and achieved a place in the life of the individual not unlike the place usually accorded to \*propaganda in communist systems. It is the object of persistent criticism on many grounds. Some argue, for example, that advertising is an economic evil, since it creates a barrier to entry into a market, preventing firms which cannot afford expensive advertising campaigns from selling their products. Others argue that it radically alters the perceived quality of purchase and exchange, by imbuing them with acquisitive and \*fetishistic impulses. Thus products become desired not because of their ability to satisfy human needs, but for reasons wholly unconnected with that, such as the desire for enhanced \*status, the sense of a 'magic' power, the desire merely to have and to hold that which one is taunted for not possessing. Many go further and argue that advertising *creates* the wants that it offers to satisfy, and whose satisfaction it keeps just beyond our reach, by making sure that new wants are always created in the place of old. Thus it has an 'enslaving' effect, not unlike that described by nineteenth-century theories of \*alienation. Through advertising, it is argued, the purchaser's being and activity are diverted from their natural fulfilment, in the interests of another party, so that one person is effectively \*controlled by another.

From the economic point of view advertising is sometimes seen as a form of indirect \*taxation, whereby the mass media are subsidized by the consumer: hence the association of the two in the term '\*admass'. This is one of the few arguments that are given in its favour (namely, that it is used in support of something else). It is also sometimes said that advertising is a necessary evil, since without it the supposedly beneficial effects of competition in a market will not be obtained.

**aesthetics and politics.** The term 'aesthetic', introduced into modern philosophy by A. G. Baumgarten (1714–62), is now

normally used to denote a kind of imaginative experience, whose object is conceived as an end in itself. It arises from the contemplation of appearances, in which questions of ultimate purpose and scientific truth are held in suspension. It was plausibly suggested by \*Kant that such experience is not only essential to the life of a \*rational being, but also itself inherently rational, issuing in judgements held forth as objectively binding. Moreover, despite its abstraction from particular purposes, it provides an intimation of the inherent 'purposiveness' of reality. Two questions arise: what are the political consequences, and what the political causes, of aesthetic \*values so conceived?

(i) The political consequences. Some argue that, despite its non-functional character, aesthetic experience is essential both to understanding and to acting on the world. In every action appearance has a dominant part to play, since it is largely through appearances that we respond to our environment. Hence the saving of appearances may be a persistent political purpose: it is this, for example, which explains much of the concern of 'conservationists' for landscape and townscape. When people agitate on behalf of some valley that is threatened by development, they are certainly not agitating on behalf of its rights. Nor are they truly concerned with the rights of themselves or future generations. The beauty of the landscape itself seems to give sufficient reason to act. Some argue, however, that such aesthetic activism has its ultimate *raison d'être* in social life. The regard for beauty reflects a deep need for social harmony, and in agitating on behalf of aesthetic values people are really agitating on behalf of the forms of life which are consonant with them. It is certainly indisputable that appearances are of overwhelming importance in social existence, and that the sense of manners, etiquette, and 'good form' are both intimately related to the aesthetic, and also integral to our understanding of one another as persons. Hence demands for aesthetic continuity can plausibly be seen as

extensions of a sense of social 'belonging'; aesthetic values seem to nourish our understanding of the ends of social existence, and therefore inevitably qualify our pursuit of the political means. Such arguments were very popular in the nineteenth century, for example among \*cultural conservatives, among certain kinds of pastoral socialists, and among thinkers like Ruskin, \*Morris and the critics of \*industrialism. Such thinkers also extolled the aesthetic interest of the cognoscenti, as an index of the social needs of the common people. Their vision of the political significance of aesthetic value formed part of a general doctrine of the interdependence between high and common \*culture.

(ii) Political causes. It is evident that aesthetic values may reflect \*ideological commitments. Some argue that the 'aesthetic' way of seeing things arose, like its name, in the \*bourgeois period of Western civilization. Aesthetic values arise in the mind of the person who wishes to console his economic position by a species of passive and 'functionless' contemplation that shows to be harmonious what is in reality far from being so. This is then seen as part of an ideological attempt to \*naturalize reality with consoling representations; other social orders will not require, and therefore will not produce, this kind of mystery. (Thus Bertolt Brecht: *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 1939, published 1967.) That is one example of a theory which tries to find the causes of our love of beauty in social and political circumstances. Others, unpersuaded by that, may nevertheless see individual aesthetic outlooks as reflecting both particular political arrangements, and also the position of the individual within them. The eighteenth-century aesthetic of nature, for example, may be represented as an offshoot of aristocratic control exerted over the landscape. In contemplating the beauty of nature, the aristocrat was consoled by a vision of the 'natural' quality of his power. (See also \*architecture, \*art and politics.)

**affirmative action.** An Americanism,

used to denote action taken in order to advance, rather than merely to conform to, the political vision underlying a doctrine of legal rights. Thus, if it is determined that, in matters of employment, blacks and women are to be given the same rights as white men, then affirmative action on the part of an employer involves not merely conforming to the code by giving equal consideration to all candidates independently of race and sex, but also actively seeking applications from women and blacks, so 'affirming' the underlying political vision which, if merely 'conformed to', might result in the perpetuation of existing inequalities. Affirmative action is sometimes defended as a necessary part of enforcing just distribution, sometimes criticized as a form of unjust discrimination in favour of those whose position is advanced by it. It is to be distinguished from a system of 'quotas', which requires a particular outcome, rather than a particular effort.

**affluence.** The condition of \*abundance, in which all human needs are easily satisfiable and generally catered for, and in which productive activity is directed increasingly to the production of luxuries (i.e. goods for which there is no natural \*need).

In *The Affluent Society*, 1958, J. K. Galbraith argued that, when widespread poverty and want are abolished, people come to have a standard expectation of comfort. In such a society received ideas of economic theory (which tend to involve the assumption that at least *something* necessary is also scarce) cannot be applied. It is no longer rational for the \*private sector to pursue increasing production or for the \*public sector to refrain from interference in the means of production, distribution and exchange. In fact, however, firms continue to seek the expansion of demand, and continue to see the public sector as an obstacle to the needed diversion of resources. This unbridled private expansion can persist only by the creation of artificial or 'synthesized' demands, through \*advertising and the expansion of the credit system. Be-

cause of the neglect of public works the result is a condition of private affluence accompanied by public squalor: private cars but not enough roads for them, private wealth but insufficient police to protect it, and so on.

The rise of the 'affluent worker' – i.e. the worker who receives a wage that is more than sufficient to meet the needs of himself and his family, and so more than is necessary to reproduce his \*labour power – is a salient feature of modern Western \*capitalism. It is held to count against the \*Marxian theory of \*surplus value, and to mitigate the charge of \*exploitation levelled against the capitalist system. Modern advocates of state control of the economy sometimes accept this, and then go on to found new criticisms based on hostility to affluence as such. Some of these criticisms repeat age-old arguments against \*luxury; others expand the objection – implicit in Galbraith's analysis – to the 'synthesized' demand, perhaps connecting this phenomenon with \*alienation and \*commodity fetishism. In all such discussions a distinction must be drawn between affluence that is concerned only with \*consumption, and that which directs itself towards a style of life, involving, say, sumptuous ceremony and display. It is contended, e.g. by \*Veblen, that the latter is simply a conspicuous version of the former. However, Veblen also argues that such conspicuous consumption provides part of the motive of accumulation and so cannot be eliminated from the productive process, which requires accumulation if it is to proceed at all. Others argue that, until naturalized by the trappings of civilization and leisure, conspicuous consumption is merely the object of envy, and so of social discontent.

**agency.** The faculty of action. Changes are divided into things that happen and things that are done, and philosophers and jurists dispute over the grounds and significance of the distinction. Only some forces in the world are also agencies: the wind, for example, does nothing, although it causes much to happen. Some