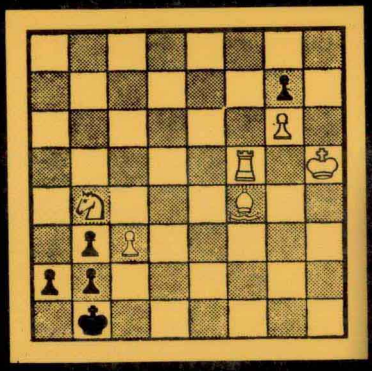
# MODERN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT



Alan R Ball

Second Edition

# MODERN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

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# PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book is intended as an introduction to the study of modern politics and political institutions. No exhaustive approach can be found within the pages of one book, especially in view of the wide-ranging nature of the subject, whose boundaries are still a matter of academic dispute. For some teachers of politics the problem of definition is solved by a concentration on the politics and political institutions of one country; for others the certainties of constitutional law become the only reliable guide to the complexities of what is termed the political process. The study of comparative government, with its advancing methodology, offers avenues of escape from a culture-bound prison, but it presupposes, from the nature of its approach, an awareness of the basic principles of the study of politics.

I have attempted to present a framework which will allow the student to understand the nature and the significance of political activity, the relevance of political institutions and the place of politics in the broader context of society. This approach hopes to raise more questions than it answers, yet intends to secure a firm foundation for students to follow more specialised courses in political science and, at the same time, to allow students who wish to specialise after the first year of degree studies in other social science disciplines to find a wider appreciation of the relevance of political studies to their own subject.

There are no attempts to see how particular countries are governed, or to examine in detail the political institutions of individual states. Instead, the contrasting political processes of various countries are used to illustrate the wider nature of the political process. The aim is to continually emphasise political interrelationships and therefore the field of reference is wide, yet, it

is hoped, comprehensible to first-year undergraduates.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One examines the nature of political activity and some elementary problems of methodology, and attempts to relate these to political institutions and society by discussing such concepts as the political system, the political culture and political socialisation. Part Two concentrates on what are termed the 'inputs' of the political system, i.e. parties and pressure groups, and examines the impact of public opinion through elections and the mass media in the context of theories of representation. Part Three looks at the structure of government, not in a descriptive way, but in a search for the institutional connecting threads in political systems, and emphasises similarities, differences and the functions of government structures, which when studied in isolation may appear unique and incomparable. Part Four briefly examines the more difficult problems of evaluating political activity and political structures, and the pitfalls that accompany attempts to compare and measure the values of different systems. The place of political ideologies within the political system and their relationship to political change will also be examined.

This approach has the advantage of emphasising the interconnectedness of various aspects of political behaviour and of political institutions, and illustrates the basic unity of politics as an academic discipline. Also, by looking beyond the British political system it underlines the aspects common to all political activity, and there is then less danger of attributing certain political behaviour and institutions to isolated national genius or to an act of God. The difficulties that will be presented to the student by this wide field of reference are not underestimated, but the approach hopes to stir the imagination of the students by showing that the study of politics involves a wider and more fascinating field of investigation than perhaps was previously visualised.

I wish to thank my colleagues Mr Adrian Lee and Mrs Sylvia Horton for the help and advice they have given me with the subject matter and the structure of the book. The errors and lack of judgement are, however, my own responsibility.

# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I have tried to minimise the changes in the second edition. There has been some revision of the supporting examples in view of recent political changes. I have also substantially altered Chapters 3, 5 and 13 to offer a less dogmatic approach and to elaborate the complexity of some of the problems of classification and conceptualisation. However, the structure of the book does remain basically unchanged.

I would like to thank my colleagues Sylvia Horton and Geoffrey Williams for the advice they have given – and, in particular, Frances Millard, without whose criticism this second edition would have been less necessary.

*Portsmouth* Alan Ball
*September 1976*

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*PART ONE*

# THE NATURE OF POLITICS

# 1 THE STUDY OF POLITICS

## *The Problem of Boundaries*

There is a marked lack of agreement on what constitutes the best approach to the study of politics. The bewildering array of titles of degree courses in Britain at present illustrates some of the confusion: names such as Government, Politics, Political Institutions, Political Science are umbrellas protecting the various specialisms of Public Administration, Political Theory, Political Philosophy, Comparative Government and International Politics.[1] The Oxford English Dictionary defines politics as: 'The science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organisation and administration of a state, or part of one, and with the regulation of its relations with other states.' The restriction of politics to that of concern mainly with public institutions and state activities is certainly disputed by most contemporary students of the subject, and the emphasis on the science of politics often leads to crude and confused analogies with the methods of the natural sciences. Nevertheless, Professor W. J. M. Mackenzie has pointed to some advantages of the term political science:

> So far as I can judge, 'political science' is still the name which carries meaning to the general public. . . . The word science here indicates simply that there exists an academic tradition of the study of politics, a discipline communicated from teacher to pupil, by speech and writing, for some 2,500 years now. It does not mean that this discipline claims to be a 'natural science', or that it could be improved by copying the methods of physics and chemistry more exactly.[2]

However, even with agreement on a title, or at least a

recognition where the disagreements lie, there still remains the problem of the content and orientation of the subject. This difficulty has been underlined by the dominance of American political scientists, especially since 1945, and their emphasis on quantitative methods made possible by the vaster resources of American universities. There has also been a more extensive borrowing of methods and concepts from other social science disciplines, such as economics, sociology and psychology, with varying degrees of success. These new developments which have been superimposed on traditional approaches to the subject have led to confusions of terminology as well as method, and partly result from the political changes in the twentieth century, in which the certainties of liberal democracy have been assaulted by the rise of popularly supported totalitarian regimes. It is understandable that under-graduates fresh to the subject may feel rather uncertain as to what actually constitutes the study of politics. At the risk of promoting more confusion, it is proposed, therefore, to briefly survey the various approaches to the academic study of politics before examining, in Chapter 2, the nature of political activity itself.

## *Traditional Approaches*

Before 1900, the study of politics was largely dominated by philosophy, history and law. To use the label 'traditional' is neither a criticism nor a refutation of the obvious fact that they still play important roles in modern political studies although no longer monopolising the avenues of approach. The modern student of politics is still faced with the works of great philosophers such as Plato or Hegel that require textual analysis and new interpretations, but the search for universal values concerning political activity tends to be avoided. At present 'ought' questions are not fashionable, although not all critics of traditional political philosophy would travel as far as T. D. Weldon in his reduction to trivia and linguistic misunderstandings such ancient political concepts as freedom, justice, obedience, liberty and natural rights.[3]

It could not be thought that traditional political philosophy

was concerned only with *a priori* deductions, that is, conclusions reached with little observation of political facts. Plato's search for his philosopher king, or Hobbes's 'leviathan', an all-powerful government that would end civil disorder, may be balanced by Aristotle's exhaustive collection of studies of the constitutions of Greek city-states, and Machiavelli's political advice resting on his observations and participation in the governments of Italian Renaissance states. But the seekers after the perfect state did base their answers on oversimplified assumptions on a wide variety of matters; thus Thomas Hobbes, with a generalised view of human nature, could speak of 'a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death'.[4]

The classical political theorists are still important even in regard to the nature of the questions they posed, and certainly ignorance concerning them would isolate any student of politics from much of the communications that pass between political scientists. Moreover, the descriptive work of these political philosophers, no matter how shaky their grand edifices, did supply the first explorations of the field of comparative government. Also, there is significant interplay between the political theories and the nature of the society and its politics in which the theory originates. We can learn a great deal of the English revolution of 1688, its origins, the character and political aims of the men who controlled and guided it, by reading the political philosophy of John Locke. The nature of the American constitutional settlement of 1788–9 becomes clearer after examining the propaganda of the Federalist Papers. No student of the government and politics of the Soviet Union could avoid reference to Lenin's reformulation of Marxist philosophy.

Given these particular approaches to political studies, it is easy to see why the historian has played such a significant part in the discipline. The historical–descriptive technique is to examine past events through what evidence is available and draw tentative conclusions as to some aspects of contemporary political activity. The sources will vary from memoirs and biographies of important statesmen to journalistic accounts of particular events. The historian becomes a synthesiser, using

his own intellectual judgement and commonsense to fit the various parts of the jigsaw into a coherent pattern. It is clear that many of the political institutions and political practices of the present day are explicable in terms of these historical records, but past evidence does leave alarming gaps, and political history is often simply a record of great men and great events rather than a comprehensive account of total political activity. In British political studies, Sir Ivor Jennings, with his studies of parliament and cabinet government, favoured this approach, digging deep into nineteenth-century history to trace the growth of the office of prime minister or the rise of modern political parties. Robert McKenzie's pioneering work on British political parties lays great stress on their historical evolution. A similar orientation may be seen in the major work on the British cabinet by J. P. Mackintosh. An American scholar, Professor Samuel Beer, devotes a major part of his analysis of British parties and theories of representation to historical development.[5]

The study of constitutional law formed the third cornerstone of traditional political studies. There is now a closer relationship between the study of law and politics in the continental European tradition; in Anglo-Saxon countries the divorce has become more complete. Before 1900, a British student of politics would have devoted a major part of his energies to the study of legal institutions, and Dicey's *Law of the Constitution*, first published in 1885, loomed large on any politics reading list. Although arguments on such topics as the legal sovereignty of the British parliament, the rule of law, the separation of powers are not in their former context regarded as of first importance, the links between law and politics are not completely broken, the gap being bridged by bringing aspects of the judicial system firmly into the field of the political process.[6]

The strongest legacy that philosophy, history and law have bequeathed to the study of politics is in the field of descriptive and institutional approaches. Political scientists still, in spite of recent developments, concentrate chiefly on examining the major political institutions of the state such as the executive, legislature, the civil service, the judiciary and local government, and from these examinations valuable insights as to their

organisation can be drawn, proposals for reform discussed, and general conclusions offered. However, despite the point that all description involves some conceptualisation, no wide-reaching theories are propounded from these studies. Bernard Crick's *Reform of Parliament* is representative of the British approach in this field, and Bailey and Samuel's *Congress at Work* offers an American example. They seek to explain how various political institutions work, and from that description come tentative proposals on how to remedy possible faults and inefficiencies.

There can, of course, be various different approaches within this descriptive–analytic field. If one were to study the contrasting examinations of the role of the president within the American system of government one could travel from the legal formalism of Edward Corwin's *The President – Office and Powers* to the invigorating emphasis on informal processes in Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power*. Both, however, are concerned with the analysis of the president's role in American politics and seek to support their conclusions by citing case histories, personal observations and documentary evidence. They seek to show how that particular political institution works. It is interesting to note that some of the major contributions to this approach have been made not only by political scientists confined to their university desks, but by men actively engaged in public affairs. Walter Bagehot, for example, was a practising journalist when he wrote *The English Constitution* in 1867, but he produced a classic analysis of the working of the political process, an analysis that still has contemporary relevance.

### *Comparative Studies*

Comparative government and politics was to provide the link between the traditional approaches to political science and the more recent developments in the discipline. We have already noted that the comparative method is a very old one; its origins and development can be traced from Herodotus and Aristotle through Bodin and Montesquieu. Yet despite the

longevity of comparative political studies, many problems remain. It is not simply the difficulty of collecting enough relevant facts about different political systems but the organisation of the information gathered. Comparative politics has been mainly concerned with the advanced European and North American states, but the enforced widening of horizons to countries referred to as 'developing' states, a pseudonym for 'poor', has led to a greater scrutiny of what units are to be compared. A comparison of formal institutions such as legislatures and executives may be attempted only in a broader context. One cannot extract a particular political institution from its organic context and compare it with institutions in other countries without taking into account the whole political system in which that institution is set. Robert Dahl attempted a comparison of political oppositions in various liberal democracies, and reached the conclusion that it is a concept that only has a particular meaning and relevance in the British system of government.[7] The attempted transfer of European political institutions to former colonial territories, especially on the African continent, has illustrated the difficulty in a practical way. Parliamentary procedures, competitive party systems, neutral civil servants and soldiers grow out of integrated relationships and cannot be individually exported and expected to function in a similar manner.

Of course, the comparative method does not necessarily mean that the comparison must be cross-national to be rewarding. The existence of fifty American states with some degree of independence of the federal government provides a fertile field for comparison. Even the apparent uniformity of English local government allows some scope for comparison.[8] Nor does the comparative method imply a disinterest in the political processes of one's own country, on the contrary it may be the most rewarding means of discovering information about the politics of one particular state. However, the recent advances in the methodology of the political sciences have resulted partly from the fact that the basic questions of the comparative approach such as 'Why do certain types of political institutions and political activity exist in certain states?' are still largely unanswered. To some extent it has been in response to these problems that political science has attempted to formulate