

NATURES AND FUTURES FOR POLITICAL THEORY

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What are the problematics, histories, forms, aims, conditions, methods, and topics proper to political theory? Plainly, these change from one context to another; and yet they may remain stable enough to be prescribed for a curriculum, a lifetime, perhaps even a civilization. In each of these domains, I spin a cocoon of issues for current political theory and thus for the essays to follow. No such scheme should try or pretend to be complete. The one at hand is offered in order to introduce and illuminate some major themes of the chapters to come. Of course, the more you make up your own categories for comprehending those pieces in particular and political theories in general, the more you will be theorizing in your own right: a transcendence of the letter of this introduction which nonetheless would be precisely in its spirit.

PROBLEMATICS

Arguments about priority projects for current political theory can follow in large part from arguments about the proper character of political theorizing, plus claims about the shape of our present situation. Of course, inferences can and sometimes should run in the other direction also. For the moment, however, this interdependence of issues means that quests after futures for political theory can be summarized adequately through questions about natures of political theory. In turn, such questions can be grouped into four basic problematics. These problematics dominate the conduct of recent political theory. Unsurprisingly, they are well represented in the other essays of the anthology at hand. Put briefly, the four problematics concern distinctions and ties between: (1) the humanities and social sciences, (2) theory, (3) politics, and (4) epistemology. Let me present them in this order.

The first problematic involves relationships between the humanities and social sciences. Regarded as a field of inquiry, political theory prospers as an oddity within the humanities and social sciences. It persists as an enterprise of the humanities yet makes its home in a discipline of the

social sciences. Moreover, in addition to finding its first home in departments of political science, it may be argued to enjoy a second home in departments of philosophy and even a third in departments of history. Thus one continuing concern of current political theory comes out of the tensions and opportunities defined by such a peculiar academic situation. At least implicitly, then, most inquiries into natures and futures for political theory are considerations of past and possible relationships between the humanities and social sciences.

As a prime meeting ground of the two, political theory is bound to be inclined to recurrent, if not necessarily systematic, reflections on such epistemic matters as meaning, method, and communication. Similarly, this strange academic situation encourages and advantages political theory in its long-standing aspirations to synthesis, totality, and universal vision. Like many other self-professed political theorists in the present day, I came and cleaved to the field because it is one of the few places left in academia for the generalist. As an isthmus among more rigorous disciplines and limiting commitments, political theory thrives on eclecticism and protects its practitioners from at least some of the narrowing of mind produced by the more communally constrained inquiries on either side. As a promontory above more restricted studies and specialized research, political theory reaches for horizons and projects its practitioners toward at least some of the broadening of vision traduced by the more strictly academic inquiries on every side.

No doubt, these virtues are not divorced from some of the vices decried in the essays to follow, including my own. Still, they are among the initial and enduring reasons for my joy of joining in political theory. And I know the same to be true of many others in this field, discipline, profession, vocation, vacation: call it what you will. These academic advantages and intellectual glories of political theory must not be lost or forgotten, no matter what else may be done or said about its current condition. Whether in its topics, terms, or even tests, in all its tasks, freedom and ambition are surely among the most important components of what political theory should be now.

The second problematic coalesces around the ambiguity of theory. From many angles, the anthology at hand is right to return repeatedly to a multitude of issues about theory. What is a theory? What is a theory of politics? How are we to secure such theories? And what are we to do with them? These questions have received poor attention from political scientists generally, and even from

political theorists particularly. Yet they are not idle issues borrowed from abstract arguments about the logic of knowledge; they are aspects of a problematic crucial for the everyday practice of research in the humanities and social sciences. Choices about research topics, methods, materials, evidence, conclusions, explanations, and expositions revolve around conceptions of theory. Indeed, even the premise of the first problematic is controversial when examined from some of the conceptions of theory now popular. In this sense, the second problematic of this collection brings the first one into question.

Increasingly, there are self-professed political theorists who object to the semi-official classification of political theory as one among several fields within the academic discipline of political science. They are developing many different (and sometimes conflicting) reasons for rejecting "field" conceptions and practices of political theory. Some push a conception of theory which makes it synonymous with scientific endeavor as a whole. Thereby, they imply that all properly scientific studies of politics (and nothing else) constitutes political theory. Others argue that theory is a much broader category, with most academic work seeking its main fruition in theory of some kind. When all fields of academic inquiry into politics are regarded as properly or potentially theoretical, then segregating political theory into a single field seems impossible or foolish. Further, at least a few people believe such a starting point almost inevitably supports a perverse academization or professionalization of what should be a richer and more diverse (if also more diffuse) body of study. And still others contend that treating political theory as a field of inquiry obscures the proper place of political theory in action, in political practice. This is claimed to hold whether political theory is seen as a field within some larger academic discipline like political science or as a discipline unto itself. In all these variations and more, some of the subsequent essays discuss how political theory has been, is now, or should be a specific field of study. Thus this second problematic covers questions about individuated arenas of discourse, academic communities of inquiry, and all other models of enterprises in any sense theoretical.

The third problematic of political theory concerns the ambiguity of politics. Partly, this is a matter of the many ways in which political theorists will always learn new things by battering their heads against different definitions of their subject. Because a multitude of conceptions of politics, along with extensive sets of political positions and methodologies, have distinguished themselves during the

last several decades, challenges of comparison, synthesis, and choice are now unusually acute. By including contributors with a wide variety of views, who are nonetheless eager to learn from one another, this anthology expresses and benefits from the way in which political theory has become a major meeting place for virtually every approach, paradigm, school, worldview, method, and ideology of intellectual life. Hence another part of the third problematic involves facing up to our current (and apparently lasting) **intellectual pluralism**. In turn, that means facing up to the possibility that politics has a certain primacy in most "theoretical" endeavors aimed at human beings: political theory notable (but not exceptional) among them.

Insofar as politics is rhetoric, style, and strategy (or vice versa, as can also be argued), recent intellectual pluralism seems to leave politics as a pivot for much work in the humanities and social sciences. At a minimum, the standard academic splits between theory and practice are called into question by recognizing the difficulty of eliminating politics from even "academic" undertakings. How theorizing about politics might or should be theorizing within politics now stands as a major issue for political theorists, and hence for the anthology here at hand. Just as the second problematic challenges the first, then, so does the third problematic in turn challenge the second.

Perhaps political theory should cease to be (or pretend to be) "theoretical?" Maybe recent political theory has become insufficiently "political?" Possibly political theory suffers from too little theoretical sensibility and too much political commitment? Can the apparent "politics" of our times be too deficient or corrupt to permit a clear vision (let alone a good practice) of political theory? Indeed, is political theory needed all the more urgently because of the condition of current politics? These kinds of conjectures have become increasingly common in political theory. They insure that all such questions about politics and action must form a third problematic of this volume.

The fourth problematic points to needs and dangers of **epistemology** as part of political theorizing. Our intellectual pluralism requires attention to the "roots" and "grounds" of knowledge and belief. Otherwise, how can we compare, synthesize, and choose among political theories? Plainly, political theorists must strive for adequate conceptions of their projects, just as they must produce suitable sets of standards for self-criticism. Does this not mean that political theorists must keep an eye on epistemology, if not engage continually in it? In fact, is not this collection itself an exercise in epistemological reflection for political

theorists?

That it is, obviously; but still any current consideration of political theory must (as this anthology does) address as well the chronic temptation to substitute meta-theory for truly substantive studies of politics, let alone for politics per se. How can political theory meet its real epistemological needs without transforming itself into knowledge theory? This task is complicated by the recent political importance of science and language, since their study leads ineluctably toward epistemological concerns. How to conceive and practice epistemology while doing truly political theory is bound to be a big issue of this or any other such web of essays.

In pushing toward continual self-criticism, this fourth problematic tends to interrupt and even supplant the third problematic of politics. Epistemology leads political theory away from immediate concerns of action and political participation. Such reflection seldom avoids some sort of confrontation with the assumptions and aims which guide political involvement. The obvious danger of the epistemological problematic as a whole is therefore parallel to the very problem of epistemology that it engages: how to keep a legitimate concern for epistemological problems (or even the problem of epistemology itself) from producing a paralysis of theory and politics. How can the political theorist prevent epistemological reflections from spinning him into a steel cocoon of endless self-criticism? How can the very essays in this volume stop from sliding into sterile abstractions about political theory, when the need is for specific improvements in political theory?

As far as the book before you is concerned, the strategy to escape sheer pontificating about epistemology is simple: balance all arguments about doing political theory with substantive arguments about politics. Thus this collection contains roughly equal proportions of papers on political theory and papers in political theory. Moreover, as much as possible, contributors have tried to integrate both those projects within each essay. The collection at hand reveals once again that this is not an easy task. But making the effort has probably produced better essays, individually and collectively, than might otherwise have eventuated.

More generally, the fourth problematic of epistemology must find limits and criticisms in the other problematics of political theory, especially the first one of the humanities and social sciences. By straddling the humanities and social sciences, political theorists are in an excellent position to reach an unusually diverse and helpful set of

methods, ideas, and audiences in dealing with theoretical tasks. Indeed, through current projects of substantive theory and ever-available resources of imagination afforded by the peculiar intellectual environs of political theory, every theorist receives a rich variety of reminders that concretely political theory can and must be done. To tap such resources, wise theorists will attend carefully to the first problematic of the humanities and social sciences, seeking in it a better sense of the potential of political theory.

Brought full circle by these four problematics, I have provided one sort of reasonably succinct summary of issues shared across the essays to come. But other perspectives on the common contexts and concerns of these essays can be garnered from a brief survey of the recent history of political theory, principally in its American incarnations. I would shy from this as an exercise in hubris, save for the fact that several other contributors offer their own capsule histories, insuring a decent diversity of views about the sources and structures behind our current situation. Despite a fair degree of agreement about at least some salient facts and factors, these accounts are hardly redundant, for they differ in subtle yet significant respects. And in any case, this historical sketch clarifies some of the concerns which have helped to organize the anthology as a whole.

HISTORIES

The nature and future of political theory have been assessed and reassessed continually since the Second World War. (After all, these are reflective times.) Still, the special perspective of the present moment offers several advantages that justify the network of essays presented in this book. The very possibility of political theory seems no longer in significant doubt, as it once was. Instead of being preempted by the terrors of twentieth-century politics or the methods of behavioral science, political theory appears all the more necessary for addressing these and other aspects of our current condition. Moreover, the bare desirability of political theory is much harder to question than several decades ago. No more need political theorists shrink into sheer speculation, retreat into mere tradition, or fall back into other devices of self-defense. The days when they felt forced to cluster into small, inwardly directed schools just to protect the very enterprise of

political theory seem to be permanently behind us. Now that there has been enough time for a variety of projects to reach some sort of fruition, it is appropriate to reckon achievements and failures, opportunities and needs, complements and conflicts among the many endeavors claiming the mantle of political theory.

This anthology comes from the conviction that a more specific and informed sense of the strengths and weaknesses of different modes of study can and must be attained, at least in some significant measure. It is committed to the idea that a willingness to talk across positions is the key requirement in achieving this aim. Most directly (for the contributors) and only a little less directly (for those who can now read their arguments and reflections), this collection plans to move political theorists a few steps closer to such a condition, taking a good look at the current lay of the land and gaining an even higher ground for future efforts in political theory.

The devastation and degeneracy of the Second World War was disruptive and disillusioning for political theorists. It provoked a time of realism, cynicism, and even despair: both about Western politics and civilization in general and about political theory in particular. Optimists believed that the old political theory had become discredited as romantic, utopian, speculative, evaluative, and inexact. Already it was being supplanted, they hoped, by the new political science. Grand ideological conflicts and programs were no longer needed or welcome in a time of management science and technical adjustments. Pessimists thought that the old political theory had become irrelevant to the new and terrible threats unleashed against public life and private integrity. If Auschwitz rendered poetry *passé* or perverse, could political theory prove itself any more respectable?

On both sides, of course, there were many different conceptions of "the old political theory." And there continues to be great controversy about the past of political theory (more about that below). But the agreement across these two sides is probably more revealing than the disagreement. On both sides, there was a tendency to blame previous ("traditional") political theorists for the ideas and institutions which had either engendered or ended in the travesties of our times. Furthermore, there was an attempt to celebrate a spirit of pragmatism as the antidote to the poisons of political theorizing. Repeatedly, optimists and pessimists alike fixed upon American institutions and ideologies (although that latter word was seldom used in this connection) as the most resistant to atrocity and disaster in the twentieth century. And equally often, both sides

believed that the shrewd genius of the Founders or the deft dynamics of the Constitution and subsequent laws came from a practical (even antitheoretical) turn of mind and deed.

America's relative success in staying above the bloody tides of history was time and again attributed to the American antagonism to abstraction, complication, wishfulness, and all the other features identified with the old political theory. Increasingly, theory was equated with Ideology: in the perversely partisan and arrogantly absolutist sense that Americans have long associated with the Old World and its interminable, irrational conflicts. In popular culture, the animus against theory extended also to politics itself, which has seldom been seen to rise above selfish conniving. The paradoxical task of the post-World War II period was to save or revive an adequate political sensibility, structure political institutions sufficient for the new situation, and yet somehow avoid the presumed problems of political theory. Given that neither optimists nor pessimists seemed to have any significant power or likelihood of future power, however, the only device available for effecting these changes remained that very vehicle of political theory which both sides doubted or even disparaged.

The deepest and fittest irony in all this was that some of the most despairing and compelling indictments of political theory were themselves outstanding works of political theory: Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Judith Shklar's *After Utopia*, Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History*, Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics*, and even (in its rather different way) Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision*.¹ The same could be said of a host of essays by people such as Isaiah Berlin, Alfred Cobban, Ralf Dahrendorf, Robert Dahl, Ernst Cassirer, Hans Morgenthau, and David Easton.² To be sure, these and other

¹ See: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (1951), fourth edition, 1973; Judith N. Shklar, *After Utopia*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1957; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, New York, Scribner's, 1952; Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1952; Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1960.

theorists had already begun to remake political theory in many different ways: some subtle and some blatant. Spurred by the arguably unprecedented troubles and treasures of the twentieth century, they had already begun to turn out a seemingly unprecedented torrent of writing about politics. They appeared to take for their motto the declaration of Thomas Mann that "in our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms."

Just as these theorists inclined toward treating politics as the category of totality, analyzing almost anything and everything in terms of political foundations or implications, so did other writers practice the perspective expressed in Mann's observation. More than a few of the novels, poems, and stories written since the Second World War could be claimed as political theory, albeit expressed through fictional forms. While American literature of the last decade or so has offered a strange echo of the pragmatist animus against politics (but not theory), portraying political life in absurdist and dismissive terms, literature written earlier or elsewhere has been remarkable for its political insight and intensity. American literature of the first two postwar decades and much of the notable literature from other lands has been acutely and astutely political, worthy of serious attention as statements of political theory. Sophisticated political argument has become common as well in most of the social sciences, plus several quarters of journalism. In short, it is clear that earlier announcements of the death of political theory were preludes to its rebirth rather than its burial.

The plight and flight of a phoenix are easily

² See: Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?," in Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman, eds., *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1962, pp. 1-33; Alfred Cobban, "The Decline of Political Theory," *Political Science Quarterly*, 68, 3, September, 1953, pp. 321-337; Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Social Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, 64, 2, September, 1958, pp. 115-127; Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1956; Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1946; Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946; David Easton, *The Political System*, New York, Knopf, (1953), second edition, 1971.

confusing, so that this condition of decrying and doing political theory in the same breath should not be surprising. But beneath these debates about the death of political theory lurk other, less expected peculiarities. Those declaring the old political theory to be dead or dying have talked in terms of a Western tradition of discourse stretching back to ancient Athens. As John Gunnell has argued, however, this tradition may have been more created than cremated in our times. Insofar as there could be said to be such a tradition, it seems to be largely an artifact of twentieth-century attempts both to produce and to resist a postmodern science of politics. In this respect, the history of political theory, both in this century and before, is not only an open question but a crucial issue for any consideration of what political theory should be now. As a category and as a set of practices, political theory is decidedly more ambiguous than the debate about its death would indicate. Furthermore, reminders about the ambiguity of political theory apply with equal force to the next important development to be discussed regarding its recent history.

In short order, the behavioral revolution started and then swept successfully through the American study of politics. A sort of social movement within political studies, behavioralism left behind an academic discipline primarily committed to emulating the rigorous methods and deductive theories taken to characterize the natural sciences. Something of the old political theory was incorporated into this celebration of science, but other projects of the "normative" or "traditional" study of politics were gradually left to a ghetto of the newly restructured discipline of political science. Unfortunately, this internal split has troubled political science ever since.

Behavioralism began an insistence on increasingly sophisticated statistics and quantification. This shows no sign of dying away, even though its earlier militance may be fading as a greater diversity of methods and a better understanding of the foundations of measurement spread throughout political science. The behavioralist requirements of "empirical research," "scientific formation of concepts," "systematic sampling of large populations," and so on have been institutionalized with fair success. Largely lost in its processes of institutionalization, however, has been the single most important part of the revolutionary rhetoric of behavioralism: its commitment to revitalizing the conception and production of political theories. For far too long, American political scientists generally forgot that behavioralism was supposed to supplant the allegedly "barefoot" empiricism of previous decades, even as it was dedicated to

turning from speculation and evaluation toward the scientific formulation and testing of truly descriptive theories. The reasons for defaulting on the theoretical promise of behavioralism are too complicated to discuss here. But the important point is that only in the last decade or less have large numbers of political scientists started to think carefully about the requirements of theory and to renew their commitments to reasonably general or otherwise significant explanations of important political events.

While behavioralists were working their way toward the lately proclaimed era of postbehavioralism, political theorists were preoccupied with sorting out solutions to the pseudoproblems of an isolated field of the humanities in a discipline fully dominated by social-scientific commitments. To say "pseudoproblems" is to admit from the outset that not even the reasons for regarding political theory as a field can justify its fairly effective isolation, which was somewhat self-imposed, from the rest of political science. Part of the effort of political theorists was given over to contesting the philosophies of inquiry pushed by behavioralists. Necessary though that was, it nonetheless encouraged a flight from substantive political theorizing into the distinct subject of epistemology. It also left political theory at war with itself, since much of the remainder of the effort of political theorists went to carving out separate projects from those of the behavioralists. These endeavors were to be pursued instead of or (at best) as a complement to the standard projects of other political-science fields, even while the epistemological arguments of political theorists were undermining such separations.

Intellectual history (that is, studying previous political theories, theorists, and their contexts rather than theorizing directly on one's own) became perhaps the biggest activity in the ghetto of political theory. Political theory as intellectual history could shade over into political history in general, since behavioralists were neglecting that subject almost on principle. Because behavioralists emphasized the "empirical" basis of their work, many political theorists accepted or even celebrated the supposedly "normative" basis of the field of political theory. At the same time, the very dichotomy on which this separation was established became less and less respected throughout political science (not to mention philosophy, from whence it first came).

Because behavioralists divided the tasks of science into the empirical (synthetic) and the logical (analytic), many political theorists came to cast their work as conceptual clarification, which presumably could be pursued

without bias even as it could be done without the array of methods and statistics thought to be required for the empirical parts of political science. Of course, the analytic/synthetic dichotomy, which was originally borrowed by political scientists from philosophers, was itself under severe philosophical challenge at the time. But almost no one in political science noticed this until the past decade, and real recognition of the objections this implies for most statements of method is still close to nonexistent in the discipline as a whole. Because behaviorists proclaimed science to be restricted to description and prediction, many political theorists saw their avowedly unscientific work in terms of imagination and speculation. With behaviorists stressing the disinterested pursuit of scientific truth, many political theorists promoted political action and commitment. While behaviorists engaged in explanation, many political theorists sought understanding. And as behaviorists attempted to refine the genre of the research report, many political theorists tried to revive the pleasures and practices of literary style and complexity.

Meanwhile, political scientists in fields other than theory were revising their behaviorist assumptions and procedures. They were deciding that, in order to be better social scientists, they would have to face up to the problem and importance of theory. For some, this now means taking the project of deduction seriously for the first time. Self-named "positive" or "analytical" political theorists (the best-known of which are the rational-choice theorists) insist upon the intricacies of axiomatic systems in theorizing. Other formal theorists argue that fairly sophisticated mathematics (previously foreign to political scientists) are needed to produce and express real political theories, given the complexity of political phenomena. For others, this commitment to theory implies a more imaginative political inquiry of mixed methods and daring inferences. Many of these political scientists are edging away from the deductivist conception of theory toward patterning and argumentative models. To complicate the picture still further, there may even be a mild revival of case-study techniques and concomitant conceptions of political theory.

Slow acceptance of the challenges to behaviorist dichotomies has allowed a full-fledged renaissance of public-policy research in political science. Because the old isolation of normative and empirical concerns makes no sense in the study of public policies, political scientists are now scrambling toward revised ideas and practices of objectivity. During this same period, an upswing of ideological debate within the field of political theory has brought into

question the standards and defenses of academic objectivity that had previously dominated the writing of political theorists. They had been relying on appeals to presumably transcendental interests argued to characterize political theory in particular and the humanities in general. But an increasing involvement of political theorists in issues of the day leaves the earlier appeals more problematic than before. Even in the academic discipline of philosophy, where the enterprise of political philosophy had been abandoned by analytical professionals as illogical and unempirical, there is now a dramatic return to substantive issues of politics and ethics. Thus in all these settings, renewed attention to public questions of current concern can be cited as both cause and effect of a very real recovery of political controversy and social commitment.

In its years of relative isolation, the academic field of political theory borrowed shamelessly (indeed, almost systematically) from ideas and projects throughout the humanities and social sciences. In assimilating these loans, political theorists have become divided among a multitude of approaches and paradigms. Partly, this reflects the more general phenomenon of academic specialization within disciplines. But it also evidences the tendency of isolation to produce fragmentation of what would have been communities of inquiry into a myriad of small research sects. The gain from reaching out to other fields has up to this point been reduced by the loss from failing to communicate effectively within the field of political theory. And of course, that loss is compounded by poor communication at the theoretical level throughout the discipline of political science. Still, most of the approaches now popular among academic political theorists have been able to develop on their own to the point of tremendous opportunities for mutual instruction and synthesis, as a preparation for broader initiatives in theorizing about politics.

In something approaching this way, the last thirty or forty years have led political scientists and philosophers to a common interest in the nature and future of political theory. The next section elaborates various dimensions of this interest into a direct explanation of current needs for addressing what political theory should be now. And indeed, this anthology offers a fairly extensive sample of the many ways in which such needs might be met.

FORMS

Thus has political theory passed in the last few decades from doubts about its possibility, through virtual segregation as a single subfield of political science, into internal turmoil and tentative outreach toward a variety of projects in the humanities and social sciences. On the whole, this history promotes a particular version of the title question of this book, for we are led to ask: what should political theory be, once the ghetto is gone?

This question is increasingly urgent, not only due to the developments just traced, but also because of recent work within and about political theory. Beyond any doubt, the old walls between political science and political theory have been breached by the simple, but expansive virtuosity of writings from several current political theorists. (These theorists are represented generously in the essays which follow.) Moreover, repeated assaults on the basic justifications of the old partitions have left them with little foundation in fact and even less conviction in principle. (As indicated before, many of the best critics of the earlier assumptions and arrangements are also among the contributors to this volume.) Still further, there are now emerging across a great range of scholars from the social sciences and humanities closely related commitments to reassess the requirements of theorizing, especially as they concern the political needs of the near future. (Advocates of diverse variants of this view are on hand here as well.) Above all, though, this anthology addresses the desire to generate new (or regenerate old) projects of political theory which will speak better to the aspirations and experiences of people in the strange political forms that seem likely to appear in years to come. (Among other things, this accounts for the collection's especially strong contingent of younger theorists.)

In our situation of potentially renewed responsibility for political theory, there must be a sense of priorities for the problems now pressing in upon us. Lest all coherence be lost in an explosion of possibilities, political theory must consider with care its current identities and directions. Its relationships to philosophy, ideology, language, history, myth, science, and especially political action and policy-making must be assessed with sobriety and imagination. The place of politics with regard to the realms of psyche, society, economy, religion, art, technology, and the like must be weighed with tolerance and vision. In the end, the very challenge of coherence must itself be confronted:

whether and in what senses should political theory have a discrete identity and a common core of commitments?

For fending off the confusions of our times, there must be a structure of perspectives to pattern the phenomena now perplexing us. With recent political positions as puzzling as professional ones, political theorists need new histories, concepts, and values to cope with their changing arrangements. More than those, political theorists need new notions of history, analysis, evaluation, and all other aspects of inquiry and action in order to find their bearings in this era. If, as argued elsewhere in this proposal, political theory includes some interesting, perhaps even promising efforts toward these ends, then this book should help to sort through them, as well as imagining others.

In its current condition of substantial opportunity, political theory requires a set of names for the new forms of theorizing now taking shape or soon to come. Political theorists should be seeking to clarify where political theory can, should, or maybe even must go. This means that the essays to follow must examine the tasks, tools, and temptations thrown up by emergent issues and strategies of our times. But it means much beyond that. In addition, these essays must constitute a call for deeper self-consciousness, asking what political theory is now becoming, and why? They must be an invitation to richer imagination, wondering what political theory could become, and how? They must be a challenge to better choice, selecting what political theory should become, and in whom? Most fully, then, they must be an active aid in meeting all these aims and more.

AIMS

Four goals are commonly given for political theory: to comprehend, to conserve, to criticize, and to create. Each project in political theory tends to prize one or two of these ends, ignoring or denigrating the others. At a minimum, reasons are required for celebrating one such purpose and subjugating or castigating another. And that by itself makes useful a better understanding of recent issues regarding each goal. Moreover, there is no general reason for believing that all four must be incompatible. And indeed, every project in political theory tends to produce distinctive ways of pursuing each goal, if only tacitly. Thus inquiry into natures and futures for political theory must ask in what ways these aims are apt, or even urgent,

and for whom. In terms of current political theory, each aim evokes at least four further issues. By identifying them, I can clarify the four goals and their challenges to those tackling the title question of this book.

Insofar as political theory is political inquiry, it intends to comprehend politics. Since the nineteenth century, the aim of comprehension has been troubled by ambiguity between (scientific) explanation and (humanistic) understanding. From German debates over *Erklären* and *Verstehen* to Anglo-American dichotomies between the nomothetic and the idiographic, a panoply of distinctions has been deployed and deplored in efforts to resolve disputes about the character of theoretical comprehension. Political theory has been deeply touched by this difficulty. Urgent calls for making the study of politics "more theoretical" persist partly because there is little understanding and less agreement about what this could or should mean.

The other three issues of comprehension coil closely around the first. Controversies of value and method in political theory often turn on the second question of comprehension: how can and should political theory be objective? Differences over what "objectivity" should mean and how it should be effected continue to distinguish many schools of theory from one another. Likewise, political theorists still debate how political theory can and should be a study of totality, if at all. Should theorists seek to see "The Big Picture?" If so, what moves must they make? And how can they stay adequately self-critical in such an aspiration? Of course, answers to these and virtually all other questions, whether of comprehension or other ends of political theory, must depend importantly upon how politics itself is conceived. Hence the fourth issue of comprehension is how "politics" can and should be defined. No collection of essays in political theory could be complete without considerable reflection on that.

As political history of several sorts, political theory seeks to conserve both politics and itself. Plainly, the aim of conservation appears in a vast variety of ways. Currently, though, there are four preeminent issues under this heading. First, what is the past of political theory; and how should that past relate to future political theory? Second, should political theory form a tradition (paradigm, universe of discourse, etc.); and if so, what kind? Third, how can perennial issues or other continuing components of political theory best be identified and approached, if at all? And fourth, how can classics of political theory best be identified and addressed? All four questions have lately been the subject of remarkably intense and interesting

scrutiny by people with highly disparate positions. As you would expect, this grid of controversies over conservation is easily visible in the essays to come.

Issues of criticism, also, are especially prominent in current controversies over natures and futures for political theory. Primarily, the aim of criticism comes into political theory as a matter of political community, although there are other avenues for its appearance. Of late, the poor political prospects of some political theories and theorists have produced a profusion of self-consciously and often self-inclusively critical works. One such species of political writing even brands itself "Critical Theory." Current questions of criticism are numerous and sometimes diffuse, but I find four of them to be truly urgent. Most generally, how have description and prescription been related in political theory; and how should they be related by current and future theorists? Most paradigmatically, how can and should political theory be partisan? Most particularly, how can and should political theory include dystopian visions and degenerative political projections or programs? And most practically, how can and should political theory be political education? In these and other respects, this collection seethes with suggestions about strengths, weaknesses, and strategies of criticism.

Creation is perhaps the main aim of political theory as political action. This purpose of political theory has drawn relatively little attention from Anglo-American political theorists, who have usually worked within and reflected upon the first three aims instead. Very recently, though, there are signs of some challenges and changes for the policy, signs readily discernible in several arguments posed by later chapters. Here the basic question is simply how political theory can and should be political action. But in our times, this points to at least three more specific issues. With the general goal of comprehension in mind, we must wonder how prediction and prophecy have been related in political theory and how they should be related by current and future theorists. Thinking of the broad end of conservation, we must ask how political theory can and should speak to and for the future. And remembering the aim of criticism, we must inquire how political theory can and should include utopian visions and progressive political projections or programs.

Comprehension, conservation, criticism, and creation: all four ends informed the planning and preparation of this book. And all four aims figure mightily in its general object of political theory.

CONDITIONS

No other component of this inquiry into natures and futures for political theory can be understood adequately, unless existing conditions of political inquiry and argument are taken into account. To some extent, of course, this is the province of histories of politics and political theory. Yet a creative concern with futures for political theory keeps the issue of conditions from being covered completely by categories of the past. To our own observations, experiences, hopes, and speculations, as well as to the best available histories, we must put questions about real and desirable situations for political theorizing.

Most personally, we need to know about the real and proper characteristics of those who participate in the enterprises of political theory. What are their forms and contents of political experience: directly and indirectly, actively and vicariously? Are their conditions of inquiry structured by tolerance or persecution, skepticism or activism, alienation or enthusiasm, hope or despair? Are their endeavors primarily matters of scholarship or self-criticism, imagination or resignation, invention or destruction?

Most rhetorically, we should seek to understand the actual and possible features of those who read, listen, and react to the projects of political theory. Audiences differ by size, interest, power, preparation, political experience, composition, opportunities for participation, and so on. Forums and media differ in related ways. Without some sense of such conditions, there is little hope for coming to good terms with any political theory.

Most historically, we must investigate the marks of civilizations, cultures, and subcultures on the pursuits of political theory. Structures of class, myth, aspiration, technology, geography, and the like can be expected to shape the spirits and specifics of all political theories, although seldom in simple, decisive, or deterministic manners. Perhaps the same may be said of all conditions for political theory. But that just makes them all the more intricate and interesting to study.

METHODS

Methods are approaches and techniques of inquiry or argument. In one way or another, virtually every essay in this book carries repercussions for matters of method. How are recent approaches to political theory now to be changed, tested, applied, emphasized, synthesized, supplemented, or ironized? Any good answer to this kind of query must cut across the usual blockade between epistemic and substantive issues. In itself, that is daunting enough. But worse, any decent response to this sort of concern must provide or presume a useful feeling for the field of recent approaches to political theory. Basically, to offer such an orientation is the business of the anthology as a whole; so I make no pretense of giving even an initial sensibility through this introduction. Nonetheless, a supply of labels might be helpful for starters; and that, I can attempt here.

First come the formal theories: most as emigres from economics, but a few from other quarters. Rational-choice (e.g., Anthony Downs) or, more broadly, public-choice (James Buchanan) theories predominate now; but change is in the wind. Axiomatized (Robert Axelrod) and mathematized (G. R. Boynton) theories of politics are no longer confined to dubious assumptions of individualism, rationalism, and the other substantive postulates of most earlier efforts at formal political theory. Such assumptions have hardly vanished, but they no longer monopolize the market in formal theories of politics. Increasingly, analogies and principles from cybernetics rule this particular roost.

Marxian theories continue to proliferate, even in largely anti-Marxist America. There are so many hybrids with other species of political theory that no short list (and few long ones) can approach completion. Worth such mention (and exemplification) are: the Critical Marxists (the Frankfurt School, including Jurgen Habermas), the Existential Marxists (Jean-Paul Sartre or Maurice Merleau-Ponty), the Freudian Marxists (Herbert Marcuse or Russell Jacoby), the Hegelian Marxists (Georg Lukacs), the Humanist Marxists (Mihailo Markovic or Leszek Kolakowski), the Liberal Marxists (Shlomo Avineri or Michael Harrington), the Phenomenological Marxists (Enzo Paci or Maurice Merleau-Ponty), the Praxical Marxists (Antonio Gramsci), and the Structural Marxists (Louis Althusser), to name a few.

Psychological theories are similarly numerous in branches, if not adherents. Depth psychologies are perhaps the most popular source of political inspiration. They

started with Freudian, Jungian, Reichian, Lacanian, and Ego theories; but already others are taking shape. Close on the heels of behaviorist theories (B. F. Skinner) have been those spawned by research on psychophysics and psychophysiology. Then in rapid profusion, there are also cognitive theories (Robert Ornstein), genetic theories (Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg), gestalt theories (Wolfgang Kohler and Merleau-Ponty again), humanist theories (Abraham Maslow), and learning theories (John Dollard). Political science is reasonably rich with advocates of political theory informed by (and maybe modeled upon) each of these psychologies. But, perhaps appropriately, the political scientists are not nearly as well known as the psychologists who inspire them. Hence I have named the latter rather than the former.

There are many versions of structural and functional theories of politics, including many of the psychological approaches just noted. Beyond them, I might mention: the comparative surveys of Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, and so many other political scientists; the symbolic forms of Ernst Cassirer and quite a few casual imitators in political science; and the sociobiologies lately fathered by Edward O. Wilson.

The ranges of interpretive and analytical theory are notably interrelated. The former include: the Hermeticist or Kabbalist theories of Leo Strauss and following, the symbolist theories of Paul Ricoeur and company, the hermeneuticist theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer and others, and the communications theories of Habermas and emulators. Among the latter are: ordinary- and extraordinary-language theories (Ludwig Wittgenstein); speech and action theories (J. L. Austin, John Searle, and Stuart Hampshire); systems theories (Talcott Parsons, David Easton, and Morton Kaplan); and philosophical theories (John Rawls and Robert Nozick). Whether wisely or not, these have recently become real growth areas of political theory, as is evident from the chapters to come.

Less conventional groups of theories may also be identified. These could include distinctively phenomenological, existential, archeological, and practical theories of politics. Of phenomenological theories, there is reason to recognize those which are: eidetic theories (Alfred Schutz), perceptual theories (Merleau-Ponty), interactionist theories (Peter Berger), and frame theories (Erving Goffman). Of existential theories, I would highlight projects of: deic theory (Gabriel Marcel), ontic theory (Martin Heidegger), epic theory (Hannah Arendt), and ironic theory (Soren Kierkegaard). Examples of archeological enterprises span:

idealist theories (Giambattista Vico and G. W. F. Hegel), poetic theories (Friedrich Nietzsche), epistemic theories (Michel Foucault), and deconstructive theories (Jacques Derrida). Finally, there are many, many variants of what I would call practical theories of politics: tactical theories (Hans Morgenthau and Ronald Dworkin), strategic theories (Michael Walzer), polemical theories (George F. Will and Garry Wills), and ethical theories (Willard Gaylin and Richard Sennett).

Of course, such labels and lists help only if you are already fairly familiar with the terrain of current political theory. If so, then you will be pleased to see that the preponderance of these schools and projects appear in the pages ahead. If not, then you can safely ignore these lists for now, confident in the expectation that they will make a good deal more sense once the rest of this book has been read.

TOPICS

After my treatment of methods, you may worry that this last section will attempt a detailed list of every tiny topic touched upon in the entire anthology. Fear not: that is the job of the index, not the introduction. Instead, I end this survey of themes and theses by noting the three main needs served by the book as a whole. For in the largest sense, they are the true topics of this undertaking.

This book is justified by a need to review the recent drift of political theory. It seems unlikely that the disparate directions of intellectual history, conceptual analysis, epistemological abstraction, and ethical clarification deserve equal attention with one another, let alone that they are the only courses capable of being charted for political theory. Furthermore, the aims and methods for these aspects of recent political theory have been appropriated from other enterprises of scholarship, more often than not. Political theorists are only beginning to work through their implications and rework their specifications to fit the distinctive contours of theorizing about politics. Surely there is no reason for political theorists to renounce all involvement in intellectual history, conceptual analysis, or the like. But there is good reason to recognize old reservations and new recommendations with regard to them. More importantly, there is strong reason to remember that each of these endeavors has evidenced a tendency to replace doing

original political theory with studying the old political theory of others. And of course, there is every reason to resolve to make any kind of work better than before.

This book is justified also by a need to improve the quantity and quality of discussion across the different schools that have gradually established enclaves in political theory. The present imperative is to produce better dialogue between existentialists and behavioralists, Wittgensteinians and Jungians, Marxists and mathematicians, dramatists and sociobiologists, and so on and on. Thus this collection includes people standing for as many different camps as seemed practicable, while preserving the coherence necessary for substantive and reflective interaction. By no means are all the current schools of political theory represented here. Partly, that is because not even this book is big enough to include so much; and partly, it is due to the limited number of issues which could be considered coherently in one volume. Still, this collection can claim to offer a decent start in confronting the current and future status of political theory.

Finally, this book is justified by a need to remove remaining barriers between political theory as an endeavor of the humanities and political theory as an enterprise of the social sciences. People on both sides need to learn a lot more from one another than they have in the recent past. Far more often than many have wanted to admit, projects limited to either side of the fence have been less valid and successful than if they had been able or encouraged to straddle it. At the least, arguments currently in the air suggest that differences between the two sides have been radically misconceived. Explicitly or implicitly, several of the subsequent essays address what best distinguishes the humanities and social sciences, as well as what accommodation political theory could and should make between them. Similarly, some of the following essays consider what relationships could and should hold among the various academic disciplines sharing projects in political theory: notably, history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, and (of course) political science.

In all these endeavors, this book is neither a beginning nor an end. Better than either, it offers both continuation and innovation along paths of political theory past and present. It provides both the savor of earlier reflections and the vigor of further thoughts on natures and futures for political theory.