

John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and [Anne Phillips](#) Introduction

Book section

Original citation:

Originally published in Dryzek, John S., Honig, Bonnie and Phillips, Anne, (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. Oxford Handbooks of Political Science. Oxford University Press, Oxford, U.K. ISBN 9780199270033

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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“What's your line of business, then?”
“I'm a scholar of the Enlightenment,” said Nicholas.
“Oh Lord!” the young man said. “Another producer of useless graduates!”
Nicholas felt despondent.

(Lukes 1995: 199)

IN *The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat*—Steven Lukes' fictionalized round-up of contemporary political theory—the hapless professor has been kidnapped by the resistance movement and sent off to search for grounds for optimism. In Utilitaria, he is asked to give a lecture on “Breaking Free from the Past;” in Communitaria, on “Why the Enlightenment Project Had to Fail.” Neither topic is much to his taste, but it is only when he reaches Libertaria (not, as one of its gloomy inhabitants tells him, a good place to be unlucky, unemployed, or employed by the state) that he is made to recognize the limited purchase of his academic expertise. At the end of the book, the professor still has not found the mythical land of Egalitaria. But he has derived one important lesson from his adventures: in the pursuit of any one ideal, it is disastrous to lose sight of all the others.

This *Handbook* is not organized around categories such as utilitarianism, communitarianism, or libertarianism, and though it also notes the continuing elusiveness of egalitarianism, it does not promote any single ideal. The *Handbook* seeks, instead, to reflect the pluralism of contemporary political theory, a pluralism we regard as a key feature and major strength of the field. In this introduction, we clarify what we understand by political theory, identify major themes and developments over recent decades, and take stock of the contemporary condition of the field. We end with an explanation of the categories through which we have organized the contributions to the *Handbook*.

1 WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

Political Theory is an interdisciplinary endeavor whose center of gravity lies at the humanities end of the happily still undisciplined discipline of political science. Its traditions, approaches, and styles vary, but the field is united by a commitment to theorize, critique, and diagnose the norms, practices, and organization of political action in the past and present, in our own places and elsewhere. Across what sometimes seem chasms of difference, political theorists share a concern with the demands of justice and how to fulfill them, the presuppositions and promise of democracy, the divide between secular and religious ways of life, and the nature and identity of public goods, among many other topics.

Political theorists also share a commitment to the humanistic study of politics (although with considerable disagreement over what that means), and a skepticism towards the hegemony sometimes sought by our more self-consciously “scientific” colleagues. In recent years, and especially in the USA, the study of politics has become increasingly formal and quantitative. Indeed, there are those for whom political theory, properly understood, would be formal theory geared solely towards the *explanation* of political phenomena, where explanation is modeled on the natural sciences and takes the form of seeking patterns and offering causal explanations for events in the human world. Such approaches have been challenged—most recently by the Perestroika movement (Monroe 2005)—on behalf of more qualitative and interpretive approaches. Political theory is located at one remove from this quantitative vs. qualitative debate, sitting somewhere between the distanced universals of normative philosophy and the empirical world of politics.

For a long time, the challenge for the identity of political theory has been how to position itself productively in three sorts of location: in relation to the academic disciplines of political science, history, and philosophy; between the world of politics and the more abstract, ruminative register of theory; between canonical political theory and the newer resources (such as feminist and critical theory, discourse analysis, film and film theory, popular and political culture, mass media studies, neuroscience, environmental studies, behavioral science, and economics) on which political theorists increasingly draw. Political theorists engage with empirical work in politics, economics, sociology, and law to inform their reflections, and there have been plenty of productive associations between those who call themselves political scientists and those who call themselves political theorists. The connection to law is strongest when it comes to constitutional law and its normative foundations (for example, Sunstein 1993; Tully 1995, 2002; this connection is covered in our chapters by Stimson and by Ferejohn and Pasquino).

Most of political theory has an irreducibly normative component—regardless of whether the theory is systematic or diagnostic in its approach, textual or cultural in its focus, analytic, critical, genealogical, or deconstructive in its method, ideal or piecemeal in its procedures, socialist, liberal, or conservative in its politics. The field welcomes all these approaches. It has a core canon, often referred to as Plato to NATO, although the canon is itself unstable, with the rediscovery of figures such as Sophocles, Thucydides, Baruch Spinoza, and Mary Wollstonecraft, previously treated as marginal, and the addition of new icons such as Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas. Moreover, the subject matter of political

theory has always extended beyond this canon and its interpretations, as theorists bring their analytic tools to bear on novels, film, and other cultural artifacts, and on developments in other social sciences and even in natural science.

Political theory is an unapologetically mongrel sub-discipline, with no dominant methodology or approach. When asked to describe themselves, theorists will sometimes employ the shorthand of a key formative influence—as in “I’m a Deleuzean,” or Rawlsian, or Habermasian, or Arendtian—although it is probably more common to be labeled in this way by others than to claim the description oneself. In contrast, however, to some neighboring producers of knowledge, political theorists do not readily position themselves by reference to three or four dominant schools that define their field. There is, for example, no parallel to the division between realists, liberals, and constructivists, recently joined by neoconservatives, that defines international relations theory. And there is certainly nothing like the old Marx–Weber–Durkheim triad that was the staple of courses in sociological theory up to the 1970s.

Because of this, political theory can sometimes seem to lack a core identity. Some practitioners seek to rectify the perceived lack, either by putting political theory back into what is said to be its proper role as arbiter of universal questions and explorer of timeless texts, or by returning the focus of political theory to history. The majority, however, have a strong sense of their vocation. Many see the internally riven and uncertain character of the field as reflective of the internally riven and uncertain character of the political world in which we live, bringing with it all the challenges and promises of that condition. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, liberal, critical, and post-structuralist theorists have (in their very different ways) responded to the breakdown of old assumptions about the unitary nature of nation-state identities. They have rethought the presuppositions and meanings of identity, often rejecting unitary conceptions and moving towards more pluralistic, diverse, or agonistic conceptions in their place. These reflections have had an impact on the field's own self-perception and understanding. Happily for political theory, the process has coincided with a movement within the academy to reconceive knowledge as more fundamentally *interdisciplinary*. This reconsideration of the function and role of the boundaries of the academic disciplines may help others, as well as political theorists, to see the field's pluralism as a virtue and a strength, rather than a weakness in need of rectification.

1.1 Relationship with Political Science

Political theory's relationship to the discipline of political science has not always been a happy one. Since the founding of the discipline in the late nineteenth century, there have been periodic proclamations of its newly scientific character. The “soft” other for the new science has sometimes been journalism, sometimes historical narrative, sometimes case-study methods. It has also, very often, been political theory. Beginning in the 1950s, behavioral revolutionaries tried to purge the ranks of theorists—and had some success at this in one or two large Midwestern departments of political science in the USA. The later impact of rational choice theory encouraged others, like William Riker (1982a: 753), to reject “belles lettres, criticism, and philosophic speculation” along with “phenomenology and hermeneutics.” For those driven by their scientific aspirations, it has always been important to distinguish the

“true” scientific study of politics from more humanistic approaches—and political theory has sometimes borne the brunt of this.

Political theorists have noted, in response, that science and objectivity are steeped in a normativity that the self-proclaimed scientists wrongly disavow; and theorists have not been inclined to take the description of political “science” at face value. They have challenged the idea that their own work in normative theory lacks rigor, pointing to criteria *within* political theory that differentiate more from less rigorous work. While resisting the epistemic assumptions of empiricism, many also point out that much of what passes for political theory is profoundly engaged with empirical politics: what, after all, could be more “real”, vital, and important than the symbols and categories that organize our lives and the frameworks of our understanding? The French have a word to describe what results when those elected as president and prime minister are representatives of two different political parties: *cohabitation*. The word connotes, variously, cooperation, toleration, sufferance, antagonism, and a sense of common enterprise. Cohabitation, in this sense, is a good way to cast the relationship between political theory and political science.

1.2 Relationship with History

History as a point of reference has also proven contentious, with recurrent debates about the extent to which theory is contained by its historical context (see Pocock and Farr in this volume), and whether one can legitimately employ political principles from one era as a basis for criticizing political practice in another. When Quentin Skinner, famous for his commitment to historical contextualism, suggested that early principles of republican freedom might offer a telling alternative to the conceptions of liberty around today, he took care to distance himself from any suggestion that “intellectual historians should turn themselves into moralists” (Skinner 1998: 118). He still drew criticism for abandoning the historian's traditional caution.

In an essay published in 1989, Richard Ashcraft called upon political theorists to acknowledge the fundamentally historical character of their enterprise. While contemporary theorists recognize the “basic social/historical conditions which structure” their practice, “this recognition does not serve as a conscious guideline for their teaching and writing of political theory.” Ashcraft continued: “On the contrary, political theory is taught and written about *as if* it were great philosophy rather than ideology” (Ashcraft 1989: 700). For Ashcraft, acknowledging the ideological character of political theory meant embracing its political character. The main objects of his critique were Leo Strauss and his followers, whom Ashcraft saw as seeking evidence of universally valid standards in canonical political theorists and calling on those standards to judge their works. For Straussians, the wisdom of the ancients and greats is outside history.

Ashcraft also criticized Sheldon Wolin, who shared Ashcraft's displeasure with Straussians, on the grounds of their inadequate attention to politics (see Saxonhouse's contribution to this volume). Although Wolin acknowledged the historicity of the texts he had examined in his seminal *Politics and Vision* (1960), Ashcraft claimed that Wolin resisted the “wholesale transformation” that would result, in both his view and Ashcraft's, from putting that historicity at the center of his interpretative practice. Wolin is famous for championing what, in the style of Hannah Arendt, he termed “the

political:” politics understood, not in its instrumental capacity (Harold Lasswell's (1961) “Who gets what, when, and how”), but rather in its orientation toward the public good coupled with a commitment to the “public happiness” of political participation. Contra Ashcraft, one might see Wolin's move to the political as a way of splitting the difference between a Straussian universalism and the thick contextualism of Ashcraft's preferred historicist approach.

“The political” is a conceptual category, itself outside of history, that rejects the idea that politics is about universal truths, while also rejecting the reduction of politics to interests. “The political” tends to connote, minimally, some form of individual or collective action that disrupts ordinary states of affairs, normal life, or routine patterns of behavior or governance. There are diverse conceptions of this notion. To take three as exemplary: the political takes its meaning from its figuration in Wolin's work by contrast primarily with statism, constitutionalism, and political apathy; in Arendt's work by contrast with private or natural spheres of human behavior; and in Ranciere's (1999) work by contrast with the “police.”

1.3 Relationship with Philosophy

The most un-historical influence on political theory in recent decades has been John Rawls, whose work represents a close alliance with analytic philosophy. On one popular account, Rawls arrived from outside as political theory's foreign savior and rescued political theory from the doldrums with the publication in 1971 of *A Theory of Justice* (see Arneson in this volume). Rawls' book was an ambitious, normative, and systematic investigation of what political, economic, and social justice should look like in contemporary democracies. With the distancing mechanisms of a veil of ignorance and hypothetical social contract, Rawls followed Kant in looking to reason to adjudicate what he saw as the fundamental question of politics: the conflict between liberty and equality. Writing from within the discipline of philosophy, he returned political theory to one of its grand styles (Tocqueville's two-volume *Democracy in America*, also written by an outsider, would represent another). Much subsequent work on questions of justice and equality has continued in this vein, and while those who have followed Rawls have not necessarily shared his conclusions, they have often employed similar mind experiments to arrive at the appropriate relationship between equality and choice. The clamshell auction imagined by Ronald Dworkin (1981), where all the society's resources are up for sale and the participants employ their clamshells to bid for what best suits their own projects in life, is another classic illustration. Starting with what seems the remotest of scenarios, Dworkin claims to arrive at very specific recommendations for the contemporary welfare state.

As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, one strand of current debates in political theory revolves around the relationship between the more abstracted or hypothetical register of analytic philosophy and approaches that stress the specificities of historical or contemporary contexts. Those working in close association with the traditions of analytic philosophy—and often preferring to call themselves political philosophers—have generated some of the most interesting and innovative work in recent decades. But they have also been repeatedly challenged. Communitarians and post-structuralists claim that the unencumbered individual of Rawlsian liberalism is not neutral but an ideological premise with significant, unacknowledged political effects on its theoretical conclusions (Sandel 1982; Honig 1993). Feminists criticize

the analytic abstraction from bodily difference as a move that reinforces heteronormative assumptions and gender inequalities (Okin 1989; Pateman 1988; Zerilli and Gatens in this volume). As we indicate later in the introduction, analytic liberalism has made some considerable concessions in this regard. In *Political Liberalism*, for example, Rawls no longer represents his theory of justice as addressing what is right for all societies at all times, but is careful to present his arguments as reflecting the intuitions of contemporary liberal and pluralistic societies.

1.4 Relationship with “Real World” Politics

The way political theory positions itself in relation to political science, history, and philosophy can be read in part as reflections on the meaning of the political. It can also be read as reflections on the nature of theory, and what can—or cannot—be brought into existence through theoretical work. The possibilities are bounded on one side by utopianism. Political theorists have seemed at their most vulnerable to criticism by political scientists or economists when their normative explorations generate conclusions that cannot plausibly be implemented: principles of living, perhaps, that invoke the practices of small-scale face-to-face societies; the or principles of distribution that ignore the implosion of communism or the seemingly irresistible global spread of consumerist ideas (see Dunn 2000, for one such warning). There is an important strand in political theory that relishes the utopian label, regarding this as evidence of the capacity to think beyond current confines, the political theorist's version of blue-sky science. Ever since Aristotle, however, this has been challenged by an insistence on working within the parameters of the possible, an insistence often called “sober” by those who favor it. At issue here is not the status of political theory in relation to political science, but how theory engages with developments in the political world.

Some see it as failing to do so. John Gunnell (1986) has represented political theory as alienated from politics, while Jeffrey Isaac (1995) argues that a reader of political theory journals in the mid 1990s would have had no idea that the Berlin Wall had fallen. Against this, one could cite a flurry of studies employing empirical results to shed light on the real-world prospects for the kind of deliberative democracy currently advocated by democratic theorists (see for example the 2005 double issue of *Acta Politica*); or testing out theories of justice by reference to empirical studies of social mobility (Marshall, Swift, and Roberts 1997). Or one might take note of the rather large number of political theorists whose interest in contemporary political events such as the formation of a European identity, the new international human-rights regime and the politics of immigration, the eschewal of the Geneva Convention at the turn of the twentieth century, or the appropriate political response to natural disasters leads them to think about how to theorize these events. Concepts or figures of thought invoked here include Giorgio Agamben's (1998) “bare life” of the human being to whom anything can be done by the state, Michel Foucault's (1979) “disciplinary power” that conditions what people can think, Carl Schmitt's (1985) “state of exception” wherein the sovereign suspends the rule of law, Ronald Dworkin's (1977) superhuman judge “Hercules,” Jacques Derrida's (2000) “unconditional hospitality” to the other, or Etienne Balibar's (2004) “marks of sovereignty” which signal the arrogation to themselves by political actors in civil society of rights and privileges of action historically assumed by states.

As is clear from the contributions in this *Handbook*, political theorists take their cue from events around them, turning their attention to the challenges presented by ecological crisis; emergency or security politics; the impact of new technologies on the ways we think about privacy, justice, or the category of the human; the impact of new migrations on ideas of race, tolerance, and multiculturalism; the implications of growing global inequalities on the way we theorize liberty, equality, democracy, sovereignty, or hegemony. In identifying the topics for this collection, we have been struck by the strong sense of political engagement in contemporary political theory, and the way this shapes the field.

1.5 Institutional Landscape

Institutionally, political theory is located in several disciplines, starting of course with political science, but continuing through philosophy and law, and including some representation in departments of history, sociology, and economics. This means that the professional associations and journals of these disciplines are hospitable (if to varying degrees) to work in political theory. Among the general political science journals, it is quite common to find political theory published in *Polity* and *Political Studies*, somewhat less so in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics*. On the face of it, the *American Political Science Review* publishes a substantial number of political theory articles, but the majority of these have been in the history of political thought, with Straussian authors especially well represented. In philosophy, *Ethics* and *Philosophy and Public Affairs* are the two high-profile journals most likely to publish political theory. Some of the more theoretically inclined law journals publish political theory, and so do some of the more politically inclined sociology journals.

Political theory's best-established journal of its own is *Political Theory*, founded in 1972. Prior to its establishment, the closest we had to a general political-theory academic periodical were two book series. The first was the sporadic *Philosophy, Politics and Society* series published by Basil Blackwell and always co-edited by Peter Laslett, beginning in 1956 and reaching its seventh volume in 2003. Far more regularly published have been the NOMOS yearbooks of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy, which began in 1958 and continue to this day. Recent years have seen an explosion in political theory journal titles: *History of Political Thought*; *Journal of Political Philosophy*; *The Good Society*; *Philosophy, Politics and Economics*; *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*; *European Journal of Political Theory*; *Contemporary Political Theory*; *Constellations*; and *Theory and Event* (an online journal). The *Review of Politics* has been publishing since 1939, although its coverage has been selective, with a Straussian emphasis for much of its history. Political theorists can often be found publishing in related areas such as feminism, law, international relations, or cultural studies. Journals that feature their work from these various interdisciplinary locations include *differences*; *Politics, Culture, and Society*; *Daedalus*; *Social Text*; *Logos*; *Strategies*; *Signs*; and *Millennium*. However, political theory is a field very much oriented to book publication (a fact which artificially depresses the standing of political theory journals when computed from citation indexes, for even journal articles in the field tend to cite books rather than other articles). All the major English-language academic presses publish political theory. Oxford University Press's *Oxford Political Theory* series is especially noteworthy. While the world of the Internet

changes rapidly, at the time of writing the Political Theory Daily Review is an excellent resource that opens many doors.¹

Political theory is much in evidence at meetings of disciplinary associations. The Foundations of Political Theory section of the American Political Science Association is especially important, not just in organizing panels and lectures and sponsoring awards but also in hosting what is for a couple of hours every year probably the largest number of political theorists in one room talking at once (the Foundations reception). The field also has associations of its own that sponsor conferences: the Conference for the Study of Political Thought International, and the Association for Political Theory (both based in North America). In the UK, there is an annual Political Theory conference in Oxford; and though the European Consortium for Political Research has tended to focus more on comparative studies, it also provides an important context for workshops on political theory.

2 CONTEMPORARY THEMES AND DEVELOPMENTS

As befits a relentlessly critical field, political theory is prone to self-examination. We have already noted controversies over its relationship to various disciplinary and interdisciplinary landscapes. Occasionally the self-examination takes a morbid turn, with demise or death at issue: the most notorious example being when Laslett (1956) claimed in his introduction to the 1956 *Philosophy, Politics and Society* book series that the tradition of political theory was broken, and the practice dead. Even the field's defenders have at times detected only a faint pulse.

Concerns about the fate of theory peaked in the 1950s and 1960s with the ascendancy of behavioralism in US political science. Such worries were circumvented, but not finally ended, by the flurry of political and philosophical activity in the USA around the Berkeley Free Speech movement (with which Sheldon Wolin 1969, and John Schaar 1970, were associated), the Civil Rights movement (Arendt 1959), and protests against the Vietnam war and the US military draft (Walzer 1967, 1970). At that moment, the legitimacy of the state, the limits of obligation, the nature of justice, and the claims of conscience in politics were more than theoretical concerns. Civil disobedience was high on political theory's agenda.² Members of activist networks read and quoted Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, and others in support of their actions and visions of politics.

Throughout the 1960s, the struggle over the fate of theory was entwined with questions about what counted as politics and how to find a political-theoretical space between or outside liberalism and Marxism. It was against this political and theoretical background that John Rawls was developing the ideas gathered together in systematic form in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), a book devoted to the examination of themes that the turbulent 1960s had made so prominent: redistributive policies,

¹ <http://www.politicaltheory.info/>

² See notably Marcuse's "Repressive Tolerance" contribution in Wolff, Moore, and Marcuse (1965), Pitkin (1966), Dworkin (1968), the essay on "Civil Disobedience" in Arendt (1969), and Rawls (1969).

conscientious objection, and the legitimacy of state power. Later in that decade Quentin Skinner and a new school of contextualist history of political thought (known as the Cambridge school) rose to prominence in the English-speaking world. Still other works of political theory from this period give the lie to the idea that political theory was in need of rescue or revivification. The following stand out, and in some cases remain influential: Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (1953), Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) and *On Revolution* (1963), Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision* (1960), Friedrich A. von Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), Michael Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics* (1962), James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock's *The Calculus of Consent* (1962), Judith Shklar's *Legalism* (1964), Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Brian Barry's *Political Argument* (1964), and Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969).

2.1 Liberalism and its Critics

Looking at the field from the vantage point of the first years of the twenty-first century, there is certainly no indication of political theory failing in its vitality: this is a time of energetic and expansive debate, with new topics crowding into an already busy field. For many in political theory, including many critics of liberal theory, this pluralistic activity obscures a more important point: the dominance that has been achieved by liberalism, at least in the Anglo-American world. In its classic guise, liberalism assumes that individuals are for the most part motivated by self-interest, and regards them as the best judges of what this interest requires. In its most confident variants, it sees the material aspects of interest as best realized through exchange in a market economy, to the benefit of all. Politics enters when interests cannot be so met to mutual benefit. Politics is therefore largely about how to reconcile and aggregate individual interests, and takes place under a supposedly neutral set of constitutional rules. Given that powerful individuals organized politically into minorities or majorities can turn public power to their private benefit, checks across different centers of power are necessary, and constitutional rights are required to protect individuals against government and against one another. These rights are accompanied by obligations on the part of their holders to respect rights held by others, and duties to the government that establishes and protects rights. Liberalism so defined leaves plenty of scope for dispute concerning the boundaries of politics, political intervention in markets, political preference aggregation and conflict resolution mechanisms, and the content of rights, constitutions, obligations, and duties. There is, for example, substantial distance between the egalitarian disposition of Rawls and the ultra-individualistic libertarianism of Robert Nozick (1974).³ Liberalism's conception of politics clearly differs, however, from the various conceptions of the political deployed by Arendt, Wolin, Ranciere, and others, as well as from republican conceptions of freedom explored by Quentin Skinner (1998) or Philip Pettit (1997).

³ Other important works in the vast liberal justice literature include Gauthier (1986), Barry (1995), and Scanlon (1998).

In earlier decades, liberalism had a clear comprehensive competitor in the form of Marxism, not just in the form of real-world governments claiming to be Marxist, but also in political theory. Marxism scorned liberalism's individualist ontology, pointing instead to the centrality of social classes in political conflict. The market was seen not as a mechanism for meeting individual interests, but as a generator of oppression and inequality (as well as undeniable material progress). Marxism also rejected liberalism's static and ahistorical account of politics in favor of an analysis of history driven by material forces that determined what individuals were and could be in different historical epochs. Different versions of this were hotly debated in the 1970s, as theorists positioned themselves behind the "humanist" Marx, revealed in his earlier writings on alienation (McLellan 1970),⁴ or the "Althusserian" Marx, dealing in social relations and forces of production (Althusser 1969; Althusser and Balibar 1970). Disagreements between these schools were intense, although both proclaimed the superiority of Marxist over liberal thought. In the period that followed, however, the influence of academic Marxism in the English-speaking world waned. The fortunes of Marxist theory were not helped by the demise of the Soviet bloc in 1989–91, and the determined pursuit of capitalism in China under the leadership of a nominally Marxist regime.

Questions remain about liberalism's success in defeating or replacing this rival. One way to think of subsequent developments is to see a strand from both liberalism and Marxism as being successfully appropriated by practitioners of analytic philosophy, such as Rawls and G. A. Cohen (1978). Focusing strictly on Marxism vs. liberalism, however, threatens to obscure the presence of other vigorous alternatives, from alternative liberalisms critical (sometimes implicitly) of Rawlsianism, such as those developed by Richard Flathman (1992), George Kateb (1992), Jeremy Waldron (1993), and William Galston (1991), to alternative Marxisms such as those explored by Jacques Ranciere (1989) and Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991), and Nancy Hartsock (1983). Michael Rogin combined the insights of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis to generate work now considered canonical to American studies and cultural studies (though he himself was critical of that set of approaches; see Dean's essay in this *Handbook*). Rogin (1987) pressed for the centrality of race, class, property, and the unconscious to the study of American politics (on race, see also Mills 1997).

Liberal theory's assumptions about power and individualism were criticized or bypassed from still other perspectives through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a fecund period during which political theorists had a wide range of approaches and languages from which to choose in pursuit of their work. In France, social theorists writing in the 1970s (in the aftermath of May 1968) included, most famously, Michel Foucault, whose re-theorization of power had a powerful influence on generations of American theorists. In Germany, a discursive account of politics developed by Jürgen Habermas (for example, 1989, first published in German 1962) captured the imaginations of a generation of critical theorists committed to developing normative standards through

⁴ See also the work of the US-Yugoslav Praxis group, and their now-defunct journal *Praxis International*.

which to assess the claims of liberal democratic states to legitimacy. The 1970s Italian *Autonomia* movement inspired new Gramscian and Foucaultian reflections on equality, politics, violence, and state power (Virno 2004). For much of this period, feminism defined itself almost as an opposite of liberalism, drawing inspiration initially from Marxism, later from psychoanalytic theories of difference, and developing its own critique of the abstract individual. In Canada and at Oxford, Charles Taylor (1975) was thinking about politics through a rereading of Hegel that stressed the importance of community to political autonomy, influencing Michael Sandel (1982) and many subsequent theorists of multiculturalism. Deleuze and Guattari combined post-structuralism and psychoanalysis into a series of difficult ruminations on the spatial metaphors that organize our thinking at the ontological level about politics, nature, and life (1977; see also Patton in this volume). Ranging from Freudian to Lacanian approaches, psychoanalysis has provided political theorists with a perspective from which to examine the politics of mass society, race and gender inequalities, and personal and political identity (Butler 1993; Laclau 2006; Žizek 2001; Irigara 1985; Zerilli 1994; Glass in this volume).

2.2 Liberal Egalitarianism

As the above suggests, alternatives to liberalism continue to proliferate, and yet, in many areas of political theory, liberalism has become the dominant position. Marxism has continued to inform debates on exploitation and equality, but in a shift that has been widely replayed through the last twenty-five years, reinvented itself to give more normative and analytic weight to the individual (Roemer 1982, 1986; Cohen 1995, 2000). There has been a particularly significant convergence, therefore, in the debates around equality, with socialists unexpectedly preoccupied with questions of individual responsibility and desert, liberals representing equality rather than liberty as the “sovereign virtue” (Dworkin 2000), and the two combining to make liberal egalitarianism almost the only remaining tradition of egalitarianism. One intriguing outcome is the literature on basic income or basic endowment, which all individuals would receive from government to facilitate their participation in an otherwise liberal society (van Parijs 1995; Ackerman and Alstott 1999).

For generations, liberalism had been taken to task for what was said to be its “formal” understanding of equality: its tendency to think that there were no particular resource implications attached to human equality. In the wake of Rawls’s “difference principle” (see Arneson in this volume) or Dworkin’s “equality of resources” (see Williams in this volume), this now seems a singularly inappropriate complaint. At the beginning of the 1980s, Amartya Sen posed a question that was to frame much of the literature on distributive justice through the next decade: equality of what? This generated a multiplicity of answers, ranging through welfare, resources, capabilities (Sen’s preferred candidate), to the more cumbersome “equality of ‘opportunity’ for welfare,” and “equality of access to advantage.”⁵ None of the answers could be dismissed as representing a merely formal understanding of equality, but all engaged

⁵ Key contributions to this debate include Sen (1980, 1992); Dworkin (1981, 2000); Arneson (1989); and G. A. Cohen (1989).

with key liberal themes of individuality and responsibility. The subsequent explosion of liberal egalitarianism can be read as a radicalization of the liberal tradition. But the convergence between what were once distinctively liberal and socialist takes on equality can also be seen as demonstrating the new dominance of liberal theory. Much of the literature on equality is now resolutely individualist in form, running its arguments through thought experiments designed to tease out our intuitions of equality, and illustrating with stories of differently endowed individuals, exhibiting different degrees of aspiration and effort, whose entitlements we are then asked to assess. It is not always clear what purchase this discourse of individual variation (with a cast of characters including opera singers, wine buffs, surfers, and fishermen) has on the larger inequalities of the contemporary world. “What,” as Elizabeth Anderson has asked, “has happened to the concerns of the politically oppressed? What about inequalities of race, gender, class, and caste?” (Anderson 1999, 288).

In the course of the 1990s, a number of theorists voiced concern about the way issues of redistribution were being displaced by issues of recognition, casting matters of economic inequality into the shade (Fraser 1997; also Markell and Squires in this volume). There is considerable truth to this observation, but it would be misleading to say that no one now writes about economic inequality. There is, on the contrary, a large literature (and a useful web site, The Equality Exchange⁶) dealing with these issues. The more telling point is that the egalitarian literature has become increasingly focused around questions of individual responsibility, opportunity, and endowment, thus less engaged with social structures of inequality, and less easily distinguishable from liberalism.

2.3 Communitarianism

One central axis of contention in the 1980s was what came to be known as the liberal–communitarian debate (for an overview, see Mulhall and Swift 1996). Communitarians like Michael Sandel (1982), influenced by both Arendt and Taylor, argued that in stressing abstract individuals and their rights as the building blocks for political theory, liberalism missed the importance of the community that creates individuals as they actually exist. For communitarians, individuals are always embedded in a network of social relationships, never the social isolates that liberalism assumes, and they have obligations to the community, not just to the political arrangements that facilitate their own interests. This opposition between the liberal’s stripped-down, rights-bearing individual and the communitarian’s socially-embedded bearer of obligations seemed, for a period, *the* debate in political philosophy. But voices soon made themselves heard arguing that this was a storm in a teacup, a debate within liberalism rather than between liberalism and its critics, the main question being the degree to which holistic notions of community are instrumental to the rights and freedoms that both sides in the debate prized (Taylor 1989; Walzer 1990; Galston 1991). Liberalism, it is said, was misrepresented. Its conception of the individual was never as atomistic, abstracted, or self-interested, as its critics tried to suggest.

⁶ <http://aran.univ-pau.fr/ee/index.html>

2.4 Feminism

In the 1980s, feminists had mostly positioned themselves as critics of both schools. They shared much of the communitarian skepticism about disembodied individuals, and brought to this an even more compelling point about the abstract individual being disembodied, as if it made no difference whether “he” were female or male (Pateman 1988; also Gatens in this volume). But they also warned against the authoritarian potential in holistic notions of community, and the way these could be wielded against women (e.g. Frazer and Lacey 1993). Growing numbers challenged impartialist conceptions of justice, arguing for a contextual ethics that recognizes the responsibilities individuals have for one another and/or the differences in our social location (Gilligan 1982; Young 1990; Mendus in this volume). Still others warned against treating the language of justice and rights as irredeemably masculine, and failing, as a result, to defend the rights of women (Okin 1989).

As the above suggests, feminism remained a highly diverse body of thought through the 1980s and 1990s; but to the extent that there was a consensus, it was largely critical of the liberal tradition, which was represented as overly individualistic, wedded to a strong public/private divide, and insufficiently alert to gender issues. There has since been a discernible softening in this critique, and this seems to reflect a growing conviction that liberalism is not as dependent on the socially isolated self as had been suggested. Nussbaum (1999: 62) argues that liberal individualism “does not entail either egoism or normative self-sufficiency;” and while feminists writing on autonomy have developed their own distinctive understanding of “relational autonomy,” many now explicitly repudiate the picture of mainstream liberal theory as ignoring the social nature of the self (see essays in MacKenzie and Stoljar 2000). Some of the earlier feminist critiques overstated the points of difference with liberalism, misrepresenting the individual at the heart of the tradition as more self-contained, self-interested, and self-centered than was necessarily the case. But it also seems that liberalism made some important adjustments and in the process met at least part of the feminist critique. It would be churlish to complain of this (when you criticize a tradition, you presumably hope it will mend its ways), but one is left, once again, with a sense of a tradition mopping up its erstwhile opponents. Some forms of feminism are committed to a radical politics of sexual difference that it is hard to imagine liberalism ever wanting or claiming (see Zerilli in this volume). But many brands of feminism that were once critical of liberalism have made peace with the liberal tradition.

2.5 Democracy and Critical Theory

In the literature on citizenship and democracy, liberalism has faced a number of critical challenges, but here, too, some of the vigor of that challenge seems to have dispersed. Republicanism predates liberalism by two thousand years (see Nelson in this volume), and emphasises active citizenship, civic virtue, and the pursuit of public values, not the private interests associated more with the liberal tradition. Republicanism enjoyed a significant revival through the 1980s and 1990s as one of the main alternatives to liberal democracy (Sunstein 1990; Pettit 1997); indeed, it looked, for a time, as if it might substitute for socialism as *the* alternative to the liberal tradition. Nowadays, even the republican Richard Dagger (2004: 175) allows that “a republican polity must be able to count on a commitment to principles generally

associated with liberalism, such as tolerance, fair play, and respect for the rights of others;” this is not, in other words, a total alternative. Deliberative democracy also emerged in the early 1990s as a challenge to established liberal models that regarded politics as the aggregation of preferences defined mostly in a private realm (J. Cohen 1989). For deliberative democrats, reflection upon preferences in a public forum was central; and again, it looked as though this would require innovative thinking about alternative institutional arrangements that would take democracies beyond the standard liberal repertoire (Dryzek 1990). By the late 1990s, however, the very institutions that deliberative democrats had once criticized became widely seen as the natural home for deliberation, with an emphasis on courts and legislatures. Prominent liberals such as Rawls (1997, 771–2) proclaimed themselves deliberative democrats, and while Bohman (1998) celebrates this transformation as “the coming of age of deliberative democracy,” it also seems like another swallowing up of critical alternatives.

The recent history of critical theory—and more specifically, the work of Jürgen Habermas—is exemplary in this respect. Critical theory's ancestry extends back via the Frankfurt School to Marx. In the hands of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972; first published 1947) in particular, critique was directed at dominant forms of instrumental rationality that defined modern society. Habermas rescued this critique from a potential dead end by showing that a communicative conception of rationality could underwrite a more congenial political order and associated emancipatory projects. Habermas's theory of the state was originally that of a monolith under sway of instrumental reason in the service of capitalism, which had to be resisted. Yet come the 1990s, Habermas (1996) had redefined himself as a constitutionalist stressing the role of rights in establishing the conditions for open discourse in the public sphere, whose democratic task was to influence political institutions that could come straight from a liberal democratic textbook (see Scheuerman in this volume).

2.6 Green Political Theory

Green political theory began in the 1970s, generating creative proposals for ecologically defensible alternatives to liberal capitalism. The center of gravity was left-libertarianism verging on eco-anarchism (Bookchin 1982), although (at least in the 1970s) some more Hobbesian and authoritarian voices were raised (Ophuls 1977). All could agree that liberal individualism and capitalist economic growth were antithetical to any sustainable political ecology. In his chapter, Meyer charts the progress of “post-exuberant” ecological political theory, characterized by engagement with liberalism. Not all green theory has moved in this direction. For example, Bennett and Chaloupka (1993) work more in the traditions of Thoreau and Foucault, while Plumwood (2002) draws on radical ecology and feminism to criticize the dualisms and anthropocentric rationalism of liberalism.

2.7 Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is often seen as merely critical rather than constructive. This mistaken impression comes from a focus on the intersections between post-structuralist theory and liberal theory. Some post-structuralist theorists seek to supplement rather than supplant liberalism, to correct its excesses, or even to give it a conscience that, in the opinion of many, it too often seems to lack. Hence Patton's

suggestion (in this volume) that the distance between post-structuralist and liberal political theory may not be as unbridgeable as is commonly conceived. And some versions of liberal theory are more likely to be embraced or explored by post-structuralists than others: Isaiah Berlin, Richard Flathman, Jeremy Waldron, and Stuart Hampshire are all liberals whose work has been attended to in some detail by post-structuralist thinkers.

But post-structuralists have also developed alternative models of politics and ethics not directly addressed to liberal theory. One way to canvas those is with reference to the varying grand narratives on offer from this side of the field. Post-structuralism is often defined as intrinsically hostile to any sort of grand narrative, a claim attributed to Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984). This claim is belied by a great deal of work in the field that does not so much reject grand narrative as reimagine and reiterate it (Bennett 2002). Post-structuralists do reject foundational meta-narratives: those that present themselves as transcendentally true, for which nature or history has an intrinsic purpose, or that entail a two-world metaphysic. Those post-structuralists who do use meta-narratives tend to see themselves as writing in the tradition of social contract theorists like Hobbes, whose political arguments are animated by imaginary or speculative claims about the origins and trajectories of social life. Post-structuralists, however, are careful to represent their post-metaphysical views as an “onto-story whose persuasiveness is always at issue and can never be fully disentangled from an interpretation of present historical circumstances” (White 2000, 10–11; see also Deleuze and Guattari 1977).

What post-structuralists try to do without is not the origin story by means of which political theory has always motivated its readers, nor the wagers by way of which it offers hope. Rather, post-structuralists seek to do without the ends or guarantees (such as faith, or progress, or virtue) which have enabled some enviable achievements (such as the broadening of human rights), but in the name of which cruelties have also been committed (in the so-called “developing” world, or in the West against non-believers and non-conformists).⁷ These ends or guarantees have sometimes enabled political theorists to evade full responsibility for the conclusions they seek, by claiming the goals or values in question are called for by some extra-human source, like god or nature.

3 POLITICAL THEORY AND THE GLOBAL TURN

Liberalism has demonstrated an almost unprecedented capacity for absorbing its competitors, aided by the collapse of its rival, Marxism, but also by its own virtuosity in reinventing itself and incorporating key elements from opposing traditions. Yet this is not a triumphalist liberalism, of the kind proclaimed in Fukuyama's (1989) “end of history,” which celebrated the victory of liberal capitalism in the real-world competition of political-economic models. The paradox is that liberalism's absorption of some of its competitors has been accompanied by increasing anxiety about the way

⁷ On the role of progress in India, see Mehta (1999). On the fate of non-conformists in Rawls, for example, see Honig (1993).

Western liberalism illegitimately centers itself. The much discussed shift in the work of Rawls is one classic illustration of this, for while the Rawls of *A Theory of Justice* (1971) seemed to be setting out “the” principles of justice that would be acceptable to any rational individual in any social context, the Rawls of *Political Liberalism* (1993) stressed the reasonableness of a variety of “comprehensive doctrines,” including those that could be non-liberal, and the Rawls of *The Law of Peoples* (1999) encouraged us to recognize the “decency” of hierarchical, non-liberal societies that are nonetheless well-ordered and respect a certain minimum of human rights.

Having won over many erstwhile critics in the metropolitan centres, liberals now more readily acknowledge that there are significant traditions of thought beyond those that helped form Western liberalism. They acknowledge, moreover, that the grounds for rejecting these other traditions are more slippery than previously conceived. The critique of “foundationalism” (for example, Rorty 1989) used to arouse heated debate among political theorists. Many were incensed at the suggestion that their claims about universal justice, equality, or human rights had no independent grounding, and accused the skeptics of abandoning normative political theory (see, for example, Benhabib *et al.* 1995). In the course of the 1990s, however, anti-foundationalism moved from being a contested minority position to something more like the consensus. Post-structuralist critiques of foundationalism led to liberalism’s late twentieth-century announcement that it is “post-foundational” (Rawls 1993; Habermas 1996)—although with no fundamental rethinking of the key commitments of liberal theory. In the wake, however, of Rawls and Habermas disavowing metaphysical support for their (clearly normative) projects, Western political theorists have increasingly acknowledged the historical contingency of their own schools of thought; and this is generating some small increase in interest in alternative traditions. The awareness of these traditions does not, of itself, signal a crisis of confidence in liberal principles (arch anti-foundationalist, Richard Rorty, certainly has no trouble declaring himself a liberal), but it does mean that political theory now grapples more extensively with questions of moral universalism and cultural or religious difference (e.g. Euben 1999; Parekh 2000; Honig 2001).

The explosion of writing on multiculturalism—largely from the 1990s—is particularly telling here. Multiculturalism is, by definition, concerned with the multiplicity of cultures: it deals with what may be radical differences in values, belief-systems, and practices, and has been especially preoccupied with the rights, if any, of non-liberal groups in liberal societies. The “problem” arises because liberalism is not the only doctrine on offer, and yet the way the problem is framed—as a question of toleration, or the rights of minorities, or whether groups as well as individuals can hold rights—remains quintessentially liberal. Will Kymlicka (1995) famously defended group rights for threatened cultural communities on the grounds that a secure cultural context is necessary to individual autonomy, such that the very importance liberals attach to individual autonomy requires them to support multicultural policies. His version of liberal multiculturalism has been widely criticized (see Spinner-Halev and Kukathas in this volume); and many continue to see liberalism as at odds with multiculturalism (for example, Okin 1998, 2002; Barry 2001). But in analyzing the “problem” of multiculturalism through the paradigm of liberalism, Kymlicka very much exemplifies the field of debate. Liberalism simultaneously makes itself the defining tradition and notices the awkwardness in

this. Its very dominance then seems to spawn an increasing awareness of traditions other than itself.

It is not entirely clear why this has happened now (liberalism, after all, has been around for many years) but that useful shorthand, globalization, must provide at least part of the explanation. It is difficult to sustain a belief in liberalism as the only tradition, or in secularism as the norm, when the majority of the world's population is patently unconvinced by either (Gray 1995, 1998). And although political theorists have drawn heavily on the liberal tradition in their explorations of human rights or global justice, the very topics they address require them to think about the specificity of Western political thought. Political theory now roams more widely than in the past, pondering accusations of ethno-centricity, questioning the significance of national borders, engaging in what one might almost term a denationalization of political theory. That description is an overstatement, for even in addressing explicitly global issues, political theory draws on concepts that are national in origin, and the assumptions written into them often linger into their more global phase. Terms like nation or state are not going to disappear from the vocabulary of political theory—but the kinds of shift Chris Brown (in this volume) discerns from international to global conceptions of justice are being played out in many corners of contemporary political thought.

It is hard to predict how this will develop, although the combination of a dominant liberalism with a concern that Western liberalism may have illegitimately centered itself looks unstable, and it seems probable that pockets of resistance and new alternatives to liberalism will therefore gain strength in future years. It seems certain that moves to reframe political theory in a more self-consciously global context will gather pace. This is already evident in the literature on equality, democracy, and social justice, where there is increasing attention to both international and global dimensions. It is also becoming evident in new ways of theorizing religion. Religion has been discussed so far in political theory mainly in the context of the “problem” of religious toleration, with little attention to the internal structure of religious beliefs. But other dimensions are now emerging, including new ways of understanding the politics of secularism, and closer examination of the normative arguments developed within different religions. It seems likely that new developments in science (particularly those associated with bio-genetics) will provide political theorists with difficult challenges in the coming decade, especially as regards our understanding of the boundaries between public and private, and the prospects for equality. And while the prospect of a more participatory or deliberative democracy remains elusive, we can perhaps anticipate an increasing focus on the role of pleasure and passion in political activism.

It is harder to predict what will happen in the continuing battle to incorporate issues of gender and “race” into mainstream political theory. The contributors to this *Handbook* include people who have played significant roles in the development of feminist political theory, but it is notable that few have chosen to make feminism and/or gender central to their essays. The optimistic take on this is that gender is no longer a distinct and separate topic, but now a central component in political thought. The more pessimistic take is suggested in the final comment of Linda Zerilli's chapter: that the attempt to think politics outside an exclusively gender-centered frame may end up reproducing the blind spots associated with the earlier canon of political

thought. The likely developments as regards “race” are also unclear. We can anticipate that racial inequality will continue to figure in important ways in discussions of affirmative action or political representation, but the explosion of work on multiculturalism has focused more on “culture” or ethnicity, and political theory has not engaged in a thoroughgoing way with the legacies of colonialism or slavery. The essays in this *Handbook* suggest, however, that important new developments are under way.

4 POLITICAL THEORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE: CURRENT TRAJECTORIES

We noted earlier the sometimes difficult relationship between political theory and the rest of political science. We return to this here, but more with a view to areas of cooperation. In addition to its interdisciplinary locations, political theory has a place in the standard contemporary line-up of sub-fields in political science, alongside comparative politics, international relations, public policy, and the politics of one's own country. Here and there, methodology, public administration, political psychology, and public law might be added; and truly adventurous departments may stretch to political economy and environmental politics. All these sub-fields have a theoretical edge that potentially connects with the preoccupations of political theory. These connections confirm the importance of political theory to the rest of political science.

International relations has a well-defined sub-sub-field of international relations (IR) theory, and we have noted that this is defined largely in terms of the three grand positions of realism, constructivism, and liberalism. Confusingly, liberalism in IR is not quite the same as liberalism in political theory. In IR theory, liberalism refers to the idea that actors can co-operate and build international institutions for the sake of mutual gains; it is therefore linked to a relatively hopeful view of the international system. Realism, in contrast, assumes that states maximize security in an anarchy where violent conflict is an ever-present possibility. Constructivism points to the degree to which actors, interests, norms, and systems are social constructions that can change over time and place. Each of these provides plenty of scope for engagement with political theory—even if these possibilities are not always realized. Despite its differences, IR liberalism connects with the liberalism of political theory in their shared Lockean view of how governing arrangements can be established, and when it comes to specifying principles for the construction of just and legitimate international institutions. Realism is explicitly grounded in the political theory of Thomas Hobbes, interpreting the international system in Hobbesian “state of nature” terms. Thucydides has also been an important if contestable resource for realism (Monoson and Loriaux 1998). Constructivism has been represented (for example, by Price and Reus-Smit 1998) as consistent with Habermasian critical theory. As Scheuerman (this volume) points out, critical theory has reciprocated, in that it now sees the international system as the crucial testing ground for its democratic prescriptions. Normative theory is currently flourishing in international relations, and many of the resources for this are

provided by political theory (Cochran 1999), with postmodernists, Rawlsian liberals, feminists, and critical theorists making particularly important contributions.⁸

The connections between comparative politics and political theory are harder to summarize because many of the practitioners of the former are area specialists with only a limited interest in theory. Those comparativists who use either large-*n* quantitative studies or small-*n* comparative case studies are often more interested in simple explanatory theory, one source of which is rational choice theory. But there are also points of engagement with political theory as understood in this *Handbook*. The comparative study of social movements and their relationships with the state has drawn upon the idea of the public sphere in democratic political theory, and vice versa. Accounts of the role of the state in political development have drawn upon liberal constitutionalist political theory. More critical accounts of the state in developing societies have drawn upon Marxist theory. In the last two decades democratization has been an important theme in comparative politics, and this work ought to have benefited from a dialogue with democratic theory. Unfortunately this has not happened. Studies of democratization generally work with a minimalist account of democracy in terms of competitive elections, developed in the 1940s by Joseph Schumpeter (1942), ignoring the subsequent sixty years of democratic theory. Recent work on race and diaspora studies in a comparative context is perhaps a more promising site of connection, invoking Tocqueville (see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999; Hanchard 2003). And theorists working on multiculturalism and race have been especially attentive to comparative politics questions about the variety of governmental forms and their interaction with cultural difference (Carens 2000; Kymlicka 2001; Taylor 1994; Gilroy 2000).

Methodology might seem the sub-field least likely to engage with political theory, and if methodology is thought of in terms of quantitative techniques alone, that might well be true. However, methodology is also home to reflection on what particular sorts of methods can do. Here, political theorists are in an especially good position to mediate between the philosophy of social science on the one hand, and particular methods on the other. Taylor (1979) and Ball (1987) point to the inevitable moment of interpretation in the application of all social science methods, questioning the positivist self-image of many of those who deploy quantitative methods. The interdisciplinarity that characterizes so much political theory provides especially fruitful material for methodological reflection.

Public policy is at the “applied” end of political science, but its focus on the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and political practice invites contribution from political theory; and many political theorists see themselves as clarifying the normative principles that underpin policy proposals. From Rawls and Dworkin onwards, work on principles of justice and equality has carried definite policy implications regarding taxation, public expenditure on health, the treatment of those with disabilities, and so on. While it has rarely been possible to translate the theories

⁸ See, for example, Pogge (2002), Lynch (1999), Connolly (1991), der Derian (2001), Elshtain (2003), Walker (1993), Rawls (1999), and Habermas (2001a, 2001b).

into specific recommendations (Dworkin's hypothetical insurance market and Amartya Sen's theory of capabilities are often said to be especially disappointing in this respect), they are undoubtedly directed at public policy. Normative reasoning applied to public policy largely defines the content of *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, though this reasoning involves moral philosophy as much as or more than political theory.⁹ Political theorists working on questions of democracy and representation have also drawn direct policy conclusions regarding the nature of electoral systems or the use of gender quotas to modify patterns of representation (Phillips 1995).

Policy evaluation and design are important parts of the public policy sub-field, and both require normative criteria to provide standards by which to evaluate actual or potential policies. Again, political theory is well placed to illuminate such criteria and how one might think about handling conflicts between them (for example, when efficiency and justice appear to point in different directions). It is also well placed to explore the discourse aspects of public policy, an aspect that has been an especial interest of the Theory, Policy, and Society group of the American Political Science Association. Among the linkages this group develops are those between deliberative democratic theory and policy analysis, between the logic of political argument and interventions by analysts and advocates in policy processes, and between interpretive philosophy of social science and policy evaluation (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003).

Cutting across all the sub-fields of political science in recent decades has been rational choice theory, grounded in microeconomic assumptions about the wellsprings of individual behavior. Indeed, to some of its practitioners, rational choice is what should truly be described as political theory. For these practitioners, rational choice theory is “positive” political theory, value free, and geared toward explanation, not prescription. This claim does not hold up: as explanatory theory, rational choice theory is increasingly regarded as a failure (Green and Shapiro 1994). But many believe that it is very useful nevertheless. Game theory, for example, can clarify what rationality *is* in particular situations (Johnson 1991), thereby illuminating one of the perennial questions in political theory. And despite the frequent description of rational choice theory as value free, it has provided for plenty of normative theorizing among its practitioners. Arch-positivist Riker (1982*b*) deploys Arrow's social choice theory to argue that democracy is inherently unstable and meaningless in the outcomes it produces, and uses this to back a normative argument on behalf of a minimal liberal democracy that allows corrupt or incompetent rules to be voted out—but nothing more. The conclusions of rational choice theory are often bad news for democracy (Barry and Hardin 1982); but it is possible to reinterpret this edifice in terms of critical theory, as showing what *would* happen if everyone behaved according to microeconomic assumptions. The political challenge then becomes one of how to curb this destructive behavioral proclivity (Dryzek 1992). There are many other connections between rational choice theory and political theory, exploratory as well as critical; we only touch on them in this *Handbook* because they will be more

⁹ See the compilations of Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon (1974*a*, 1974*b*, 1977); also Goodin (1982).

extensively reviewed in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, also in this series.

Leading comparativist Bo Rothstein (2005) has expressed the worry that the empirical arm of the discipline has lost its moral compass. To use his running example, its “technically competent barbarians” would have no defense against lining up in support of a political force like Nazism, should that be expedient. Rothstein himself sees the remedy in political theory: “The good news is that, unlike other disciplines, I think we have the solution within our own field of research. This, I believe, lies in reconnecting the normative side of the discipline—that is, political philosophy—with the positive/empirical side” (2005, 10). Despite the likelihood of some resistance to this from both sides of the divide, the examples discussed above suggest that such connection (or reconnection) is indeed possible.

5 ORGANIZATION OF THE *HANDBOOK*

We turn now to the way we have organized this *Handbook*. Part II, “Contemporary Currents,” assesses the impact, and considers the likely future trajectory, of literature that proved especially influential in framing debate through the last decades of the twentieth century and opening years of the twenty-first. The selection is not, of course, meant to sum up what political theory has been about over that period: if it did that, there would be little need for the remaining essays in the *Handbook*. We have included three figures—Rawls, Habermas, and Foucault—whose work has so shaped the field that it became possible for a time to label (although somewhat misleadingly) other political theorists by their adherence to one of the three. We have also included three thematic styles of theory—feminism, pluralism, and linguistic approaches—that have sought (successfully or not) to refocus debate in a different direction. The theorists and themes addressed in this section are ones that have particularly marked out this moment in political theory, and the chapters assess their continuing influence.

Part III, “The Legacy of the Past,” focuses on historical work in political thought. As James Farr notes in his chapter, the history of political thought has been a staple of university instruction since the end of the nineteenth century, long recognized as a branch of political theory. But the role and object of historical inquiry has been much debated in recent decades, and the idea that one should search the classical texts for answers to the perennial problems of political life has been subjected to especially searching critique. Some theorists have been happy to jettison any study of historical traditions, regarding it as a merely antiquarian exercise. But the greater attention now given to context—to what can and cannot be thought at any given period in history—has also enabled radically new readings of political thought. The essays in this section can give only a taste of the wealth of scholarship in this field, and have been selected with an eye to that continuing discussion about the legacy of the past and its relationship with the present. They include a meta-level discussion of the relationship between political theory and the discipline of history; a disciplinary history of the history of political thought; and essays on a number of historical traditions that have been subject to significant re-evaluation and reinterpretation in the recent literature.

Questions of context are spatial as well as temporal, for even the most abstract of political theories cannot transcend its location, and the issues with which theorists become preoccupied reflect the histories and concerns of the worlds in which they

live. The chapters in Part IV, “Political Theory in the World,” make matters of location more explicit. They explore differences, misconceptions, and mutual influences between Western and non-Western political traditions, with the latter represented here by Confucianism and Islam, and look at how ideas of America on the one hand and Europe on the other enter into and shape ideas of democracy, representation, and nation. This section should be understood as a gesture, but just that, towards de-centering what has come to be known as Anglo-American theory. This *Handbook* of political theory is published in Oxford and written in the English language, but one modest objective, nonetheless, is to highlight the specificity of *all* work in political theory, and the way the questions addressed reflect particular histories and locations.

The chapters in Part V, “State and People,” combine historical analysis of the shifting understandings of state and people with normative explorations of democracy, constitutionalism, and representation. As the essays indicate, the last decades have been a time of very considerable innovation. For much of the twentieth century, democracy was conceptualized as a matter of universal suffrage (sometimes quaintly equated with one man one vote), competitive party elections, and the rule of law. The outstanding problems were not thought to be theoretical, but centered on how to spread this conception more widely; and much of the work on democracy (often comparative, or dealing with the conditions for democratization) was carried out by political scientists rather than theorists. This picture has since changed radically, with a complex of concerns about the nature and limits of constitutionalism, the exclusions practised under the name of democracy, and the possibilities of wider and deeper practices of popular control. As reflects the breadth of these debates, this is one of the largest sections in the *Handbook*.

Part VI, “Justice, Equality, and Freedom,” evokes the combination of concerns that runs through the work of John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and the liberal egalitarian tradition: the idea, for example, that justice is a matter of treating people as equals rather than treating them equally; or that egalitarians must recognize individuals as responsible agents, accountable for their own choices. The chapters in this section reflect that legacy, but also problematize it by reference to arguments drawn from the feminist literature and work on recognition. They include essays on the relationship between equality and impartiality, and the relationship between treating people as equals and recognizing them as different; and address the questions about individual responsibility that became central to the literature on justice and equality through the last decades. The literature on historical injustice goes back further, but has drawn new sustenance from debates on reparations for slavery and the treatment of indigenous peoples.

Part VII, “Pluralism, Multiculturalism, and Nationalism,” reflects areas of debate that have proved particularly fruitful over the last thirty years. As noted earlier in our introduction, it also reflects explorations of the implications and/or limits of the liberal tradition. The literature on multiculturalism has its precursor in a sociological literature on cultural pluralism, but as normative political theory dates from the 1980s. Theoretical work on toleration or the right of nations to self-determination is not, of course, new. But the recent synthesis of liberalism with nationalism is more unexpected, as is the reframing of long-established liberal principles of toleration to take account of issues of identity as well as belief. This last point is part of what

unites the chapters in this section. All engage with arguments that have been central to the liberal tradition, but in relation to the new questions that arise when people make claims on the basis of identity. The authors reach very different conclusions—including, at its most heretical, that the pursuit of justice may not be such a compelling concern.

Part VIII, “Claims in a Global Context,” takes this from the national to the global level. It explores the debates that have developed between seemingly universal discourses of secularism or human rights and more relativist emphases on cultural difference; examines the connection between multicultural and post-colonial theory; and considers the challenges globalization presents to current conceptions of justice. Although justice has been at the heart of recent debates in normative political theory, the dominant conceptions have been very state-centered—and often very Western state-centered. The chapters in this section consider what happens in the move from national to global—and what theoretical possibilities become available if the center of gravity shifts from the Western to non-Western world.

Part IX, “The Body Politic,” takes what has long been employed as a metaphor for the political community at its face (or bodily) value, and uses it to engage with new areas of theoretical debate. These include the way the body itself has been politicized in the theoretical literature, including in the literature on self-ownership; and the way the social “body” has been politicized, as in the discussion of crises and paranoia. A number of the chapters in this section begin with changes in the social world: the impact of global migration, for example, and the way this alters our understanding of the individual subject; the development of new medical technologies, and the dilemmas these present about organ transplants or genetic engineering; the developments in surveillance technology combined with radical changes in the relation between the sexes, and the challenge this poses to our understanding of the relationship between public and private space. This reconceptualizing of the political space owes much to the influence of feminism, as do a number of the essays themselves.

We have argued in our introduction that political theory is something of a mongrel sub-discipline, made up of many traditions, approaches, and styles of thought, and increasingly characterized by its borrowing from feminist and critical theory, film theory, popular culture, mass media, behavioral science, and economics. These tendencies will be evident throughout the chapters in the *Handbook*, but are most directly addressed in Part X, “Testing the Boundaries.” Here, we include essays that set political theory in dialogue with work in cultural studies, political economy, social theory, and the environment. The current academy confronts two opposing trends. One draws the boundaries of each discipline ever more tightly, sometimes as part of a bid for higher status, sometimes in the (not totally implausible) belief that this is the route to deeper and more systematic knowledge. Another looks to the serendipitous inspirations that can come through cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work; or more simply and modestly, realizes that there may be much to learn from other areas of study. It is hard to predict which of these will win out—and most likely, both will continue in uneasy combination for many years to come. The essays in this section reflect the importance we attach to the second trend.

All the *Handbooks* in this series end with what is perhaps unhappily termed the “Old and New” section. In this case, it provides the opportunity for two highly influential but very different political theorists—Arlene Saxonhouse and William Connolly—to reflect on their experiences and perceptions of theory as it has changed, developed, improved, and/or worsened in the course of their careers. Where other contributors were asked to weave their own distinctive take on a topic into essays that would also work as overviews of the sub-field, our last contributors were encouraged to write from a more personal angle.

6 CONCLUSION

Ours is not the first or only handbook of political theory. We believe this *Oxford Handbook* is distinctive in its exploration of political theory's edges as well as its several cores, its global emphasis, and its contemplation of the challenges that contemporary social and technological change present to the field. Political theory is a lively, pluralistic, and contested field, and we invite readers to construct their own summary interpretations and embark on their own imaginative theorizing by sampling the wide variety of options on the palette that follows.

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