Chapter 5

Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Introduction

All politics is about power. The practice of politics is often portrayed as little more than the exercise of power, and the academic subject as, in essence, the study of power. Without doubt, students of politics are students of power: they seek to know who has it, how it is used and on what basis it is exercised. Such concerns are particularly apparent in deep and recurrent disagreements about the distribution of power within modern society. Is power distributed widely and evenly dispersed, or is it concentrated in the hands of the few, a 'power elite' or 'ruling class'? Is power essentially benign, enabling people to achieve their collective goals, or is it a form of oppression or domination? Such questions are, however, bedevilled by the difficult task of defining power. Perhaps because power is so central to the understanding of politics, fierce controversy has surrounded its meaning. Some have gone as far as to suggest that there is no single, agreed concept of power but rather a number of competing concepts or theories.

Moreover, the notion that power is a form of domination or control that forces one person to obey another, runs into the problem that in political life power is very commonly exercised through the acceptance and willing obedience of the public. Those 'in power' do not merely possess the *ability* to enforce compliance, but are usually thought to have the *right* to do so as well. This highlights the distinction between power and authority. What is it, however, that transforms power into authority, and on what basis can authority be rightfully exercised? This leads, finally, to questions about legitimacy, the perception that power is exercised in a manner that is rightful, justified or acceptable. Legitimacy is usually seen as the basis of stable government, being linked to the capacity of a regime to command the allegiance and support of its citizens. All governments seek legitimacy, but on what basis do they gain it, and what happens when their legitimacy is called into question?

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Power

Concepts of power abound. In the natural sciences, power is usually understood as 'force' or 'energy'. In the social sciences, the most general concept of power links it to the ability to achieve a desired outcome, sometimes referred to as power *to*. This could include the accomplishment of actions as simple as walking across a room or buying a newspaper. In most cases, however, power is thought of as a relationship, as the exercise of control by one person over another, or as power *over*. A distinction is, nevertheless, sometimes drawn between forms of such control, between what is termed 'power' and what is thought of as 'influence'. Power is here seen as the capacity to make formal decisions which are in some way binding upon others, whether these are made by teachers in the classroom, parents in the family or by government ministers in relation to the whole of society. Influence, by contrast, is the ability to affect the content of these decisions through some form of external pressure, highlighting the fact that formal and binding decisions are not made in a vacuum. Influence may therefore involve anything from organised lobbying and rational persuasion, through to open intimidation. This, further, raises questions about whether the exercise of power must always be deliberate or intentional. Can advertising be said to exert power by promoting the spread of materialistic values, even though advertisers themselves may only be concerned about selling their products? In the same way, there is a controversy between the 'intentionalist' and 'structuralist' understandings of power. The former holds that power is always an attribute of an identifiable agent, be it an interest group, political party, major corporation or whatever. The latter sees power as a feature of a social system as a whole.

   One attempt to resolve these controversies is to accept that power is an 'essentially contested' concept and to highlight its various concepts or conception, acknowledging that no settled or agreed definition can ever be developed. This is the approach adopted by Steven Lukes in *Power: A Radical View* (1974), which distinguishes between three 'faces' or 'dimensions' of power. In practice, a perfectly acceptable, if broad, definition of power can encompass all its various manifestations: if A gets B to do something A wants but which B would not have chosen to do, power is being exercised. In other words, power is the ability to get someone to do what they would not otherwise have done. Lukes's distinctions are nevertheless of value in drawing attention to how power is exercised in the real world, to the various ways in which A can influence B's behaviour. In this light, power can be said to have three faces. First, it can involve the ability to influence the making of decisions; second, it may be reflected in the capacity to shape the political agenda and thus

prevent decisions being made; and third, it may take the form of controlling people's thoughts by the manipulation of their perceptions and preferences.

Decision-making

The first 'face' of power dates back to Thomas Hobbes's suggestion that power is the ability of an 'agent' to affect the behaviour of a 'patient'. This notion is in fact analogous to the idea of physical or mechanical power, in that it implies that power involves being 'pulled' or 'pushed' against one's will. Such a notion of power has been central to conventional political science, its classic statement being found in Robert Dahl's 'A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model' (1958). Dahl (see p. 223) was deeply critical of suggestions that in the USA power was concentrated in the hands of a 'ruling elite', arguing that such theories had largely been developed on the basis of reputation: asking where power was believed or reputed to be located. He wished, instead, to base the understanding of power upon

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

English political philosopher. Hobbes was the son of a minor clergyman who subsequently abandoned his family. He became tutor to the exiled Prince of Wales, Charles Stuart, and lived under the patronage of the Cavendish family. Writing at a time of uncertainty and civil strife, precipitated by the English Revolution, Hobbes developed the first comprehensive theory of nature and human behaviour since Aristotle.

Hobbes' major work *Leviathan* ([1651], 1968), defended absolutist government as the only alternative to anarchy and disorder. He portrayed life in a stateless society, the state of nature, as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', basing this upon the belief that human beings are essentially power-seeking and self-interested creatures. He argued that citizens have an unqualified obligation towards the state, on the grounds that to limit the power of government is to risk a descent into the state of nature. Any system of political rule, however tyrannical, is preferable to no rule at all. Hobbes thus provided a rationalist defence for absolutism (see p. 164); however, because he based authority upon consent and allowed that sovereign authority may take forms other than monarchy, he upset supporters of the divine right of kings. Hobbes's pessimistic view of human nature and his emphasis upon the vital importance of authority had considerable impact upon conservative thought (see p. 138); but his individualist methodology and the use he made of social contract theory prefigured early liberalism (see p. 29).

systematic and testable hypotheses. To this end, Dahl proposed three criteria that had to be fulfilled before the 'ruling elite' thesis could be validated. First, the ruling elite, if it existed at all, must be a well-defined group. Second, a number of 'key political decisions' must be identified over which the preferences of the ruling elite run counter to those of any other group. Third, there must be evidence that the preferences of the elite regularly prevail over those of other groups. In effect, Dahl treated power as the ability to influence the decision-making process, an approach he believed to be both objective and quantifiable.

According to this view, power is a question of who gets their way, how often they get their way, and over what issues they get their way. The attraction of this treatment of power is that it corresponds to the commonsense belief that power is somehow about getting things done, and is therefore most clearly reflected in decisions and how they are made. It also has the advantage, as Dahl pointed out, that it makes possible an empirical, even scientific, study of the distribution of power within any group, community or society. The method of study was clear: select a number of 'key' decision-making areas; identify the actors involved and discover their preferences; and, finally, analyse the decisions made and compare these with the known preferences of the actors. This procedure was enthusiastically adopted by political scientists and sociologists, especially in the USA, in the late 1950s and 1960s, and spawned a large number of community power studies. The most famous such study was Dahl's own analysis of the distribution of power in New Haven, Connecticut, described in *Who Governs?* (1963). These studies focused upon local communities, usually cities, on the grounds that they provided more manageable units for empirical study than did national politics, but also on the assumption that conclusions about the distribution of power at the national level could reasonably be drawn from knowledge of its local distribution.

In New Haven, Dahl selected three 'key' policy areas to study: urban renewal, public education and the nomination of political candidates. In each area, he acknowledged that there was a wide disparity between the influence exerted, on the one hand, by the politically privileged and the economically powerful, and, on the other hand, by ordinary citizens. However, he nevertheless claimed to find evidence that different elite groups determined policy in different issue areas, dismissing any idea of a ruling or permanent elite. His conclusion was that 'New Haven is an example of a democratic system, warts and all'. Indeed, so commonly have community power studies reached the conclusion that power is widely dispersed throughout society, that the face of power they recognise – the ability to influence decisions – is often referred to as the 'pluralist' view of power, suggesting the existence of plural or many centres of power. This

is, however, misleading: pluralist conclusions are not built into this understanding of power, nor into its methodology for identifying power. There is no reason, for example, why elitist conclusions could not be drawn if the preferences of a single cohesive group are seen to prevail over those of other groups on a regular basis. However, a more telling criticism is that by focusing exclusively upon decisions, this approach recognizes only one face of power and, in particular, ignores those circumstances in which decisions are prevented from happening, the area of non-decision-making.

Agenda-setting

To define power simply as the ability to influence the content of decisions raises a number of difficulties. First of all, there are obviously problems about how hypotheses about the distribution of power can be reliably tested. For example, on what basis can 'key' decisions, which are studied, be distinguished from 'routine' ones, which are ignored; and is it reasonable to assume that the distribution of power at the national level will reflect that found at community level? Furthermore, this view of power focuses exclusively upon behaviour, the *exercise* of power by A over B. In so doing, it ignores the extent to which power is a possession, reflected perhaps in wealth, political position, social status and so forth; power may exist but not be exercised. Groups may, for example, have the capacity to influence decision-making but choose not to involve themselves for the simple reason that they do not anticipate that the decisions made will adversely affect them. In this way, private businesses may show little interest in issues like health, housing and education – unless, of course, increased welfare spending threatens to push up taxes. In the same way, there are circumstances in which people defer to a superior by anticipating his or her wishes without the need for explicit instructions, the so-called 'law of anticipated reactions'. A further problem, however, is that this first approach disregards an entirely different face of power.

In their seminal essay 'The Two Faces of Power' ([1962] 1981), P. Bachrach and M. Baratz described non-decision-making as the 'second face of power'. Although Bachrach and Baratz accepted that power is reflected in the decision-making process, they insisted that 'to the extent that a person or group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power'. As E.E. Schattschneider succinctly put it, 'Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out'; power, quite simply, is the ability to set the political agenda. This form of power may be more difficult but not impossible to identify, requiring as it does an understanding of the dynamics of non-decision-making. Whereas the

decision-making approach to power encourages attention to focus upon the active participation of groups in the process, non-decisions highlight the importance of political organization in blocking the participation of certain groups and the expression of particular opinions. Schattschneider summed this up in his famous assertion that 'organization is the mobilization of bias'. In the view of Bachrach and Baratz, any adequate understanding of power must take full account of 'the dominant values and the political myths, rituals and institutions which tend to favour the vested interests of one or more groups, relative to others'.

A process of non-decision-making can be seen to operate within liberal-democratic systems in a number of respects. For example, although political parties are normally seen as vehicles through which interests are expressed or demands articulated, they can just as easily block particular views and opinions. This can happen either when all major parties disregard an issue or policy option, or when parties fundamentally agree, in which case the issue is never raised. This applies to problems such as debt in the developing world, divisions between the North and South and the environmental crisis, which have seldom been regarded as priority issues by mainstream political parties. A process of non-decision-making also helped to sustain the arms race during the cold war. During much of the period, Western political parties agreed on the need for a military deterrent against a potentially aggressive Soviet Union, and therefore seldom examined options such as unilateral disarmament. Similar biases also operate within interest-group politics, favouring the articulation of certain views and interests while restricting the expression of others. Interest groups that represent the well-informed, the prosperous and the articulate stand a better chance of shaping the political agenda than groups such as the unemployed, the homeless, the poor, the elderly and the young.

The analysis of power as non-decision-making has often generated elitist rather than pluralist conclusions. Bachrach and Baratz, for instance, pointed out that the 'mobilization of bias' in conventional politics normally operates in the interests of what they call 'status quo defenders', privileged or elite groups. Elitists have, indeed, sometimes portrayed liberal-democratic politics as a series of filters through which radical proposals are weeded out and kept off the political agenda. However, it is, once again, a mistake to believe that a particular approach to the study of power predetermines its empirical conclusions. Even if a 'mobilization of bias' can be seen to operate within a political system, there are times when popular pressures can, and do, prevail over 'vested interests', as is demonstrated by the success of campaigns for welfare rights and improved consumer and environmental protection. A further problem nevertheless exists. Even though agenda-setting may be recognized with decision-

making as an important face of power, neither takes account of the fact that power can also be wielded through the manipulation of what people think.

Thought control

The two previous approaches to power – as decision-making and non-decision-making – share the basic assumption that what individuals and groups want is what they say they want. This applies even though they may lack the capacity to achieve their goals or, perhaps, get their objectives on to the political agenda. Indeed, both perspectives agree that it is only when groups have clearly stated preferences that it is possible to say who has power and who does not. The problem with such a position, however, is that it treats individuals and groups as rational and autonomous actors, capable of knowing their own interests and of articulating them clearly. In reality, no human being possesses an entirely independent mind; the ideas, opinions and preferences of all are structured and shaped by social experience, through the influence of family, peer groups, school, the workplace, the mass media, political parties and so forth. Vance Packard (1914–96), for instance, described this ability to manipulate human behaviour by the creation of needs in his classic study of the power of advertising, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1960).

This suggests a third, and most insidious, 'face' of power: the ability of A to exercise power over B, not by getting B to do what he would not otherwise do, but, in Steven Lukes's words, by 'influencing, shaping or determining his very wants'. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse (see p. 280), the New Left theorist, took this analysis further and suggested that advanced industrial societies could be regarded as 'totalitarian'. Unlike earlier totalitarian societies, such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, which repressed their citizens through terror and open brutality, advanced industrial societies control them through the pervasive manipulation of needs, made possible by modern technology. This created what Marcuse called 'a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom'. In such circumstances, the absence of conflict in society may not attest to general contentment and a wide dispersal of power. Rather, a 'society without opposition' may be evidence of the success of an insidious process of indoctrination and psychological control. This is what Lukes termed the 'radical view' of power.

A central theme in the radical view of power is the distinction between truth and falsehood, reflected in the difference between subjective or 'felt' interests, and objective or 'real' interests. People, quite simply, do not always know their own minds. This is a conception of power that has been particularly attractive to Marxists and postmodern theorists. Capitalism,

Marxists argue, is a system of class exploitation and oppression, within which power is concentrated in the hands of a 'ruling class', the bourgeoisie. The power of the bourgeoisie is ideological, as well as economic and political. In Marx's view, the dominant ideas, values and beliefs of any society are the ideas of its ruling class. Thus the exploited class, the proletariat, is deluded by the weight of bourgeois ideas and theories and comes to suffer from what Engels (see p. 83) termed 'false consciousness'. In effect, it is prevented from recognizing the fact of its own exploitation. In this way, the objective or 'real' interests of the proletariat, which would be served only by the abolition of capitalism, differ from their subjective or 'felt' interests. Lenin (see pp. 83–4) argued that the power of 'bourgeois ideology' was such that, left to its own devices, the proletariat would be able to achieve only 'trade union consciousness', the desire to improve their material conditions but within the capitalist system. Such theories are discussed at greater length in relation to ideological hegemony in the final part of this chapter.

Postmodern thinkers (see p. 7), influenced in particular by the writings of Michel Foucault, have also drawn attention to the link between power and systems of thought through the idea of a 'discourse of power'. A discourse is a system of social relations and practices that assign meaning and therefore identities to those who live or work within it. Anything from institutionalized psychiatry and the prison service, as in Foucault's case, to academic disciplines and political ideologies can be regarded as discourses in this sense. Discourses are a form of power in that they set up antagonisms and structure relations between people, who are defined as subjects or objects, as 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. These identities are then internalized, meaning that those who are subject to domination, as in the Marxist view, are unaware of the fact or extent of that domination. Whereas Marxists associate power as thought control with the attempt to maintain class inequality, postmodern theorists come close to seeing power as ubiquitous, all systems of knowledge being viewed as manifestations of power.

This 'radical' view of power, however, also has its critics. It is impossible to argue that people's perceptions and preferences are a delusion, that their 'felt' needs are not their 'real' needs, without a standard of truth against which to judge them. If people's stated prefer- ences are not to be relied upon, how is it possible to prove what their 'real' interests might be? For example, if class antagonisms are submerged under the influence of bourgeois ideology, how can the Marxist notion of a 'ruling class' ever be tested? Marxism has traditionally relied for these purposes upon its credentials as a form of 'scientific socialism'; however, the claim to scientific status has been abandoned by many modern Marxists and certainly by post-Marxists. One of the problems of the

Michel Foucault (1926–84)

French philosopher and radical intellectual. The son of a prosperous surgeon, Foucault had a troubled youth in which he attempted suicide on several occasions and struggled to come to terms with his homosexuality. His work, which ranged beyond philosophy and included the fields of psychology and psychopathology, was influenced by the Marxist, Freudian and structuralist traditions but did not fall clearly into any of them.

Foucault set out to construct a 'history of the present' through what he called 'archaeologies' – large-scale analyses that blended philosophy with the history of ideas. His purpose was to uncover the implicit knowledge that underpins particular social practices and institutions. In his first major work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), he examined the birth of the asylum through changes in social attitudes towards madness that had led it to be viewed as incompatible with 'normal' society. He undertook similar analyses of the genesis of the clinic and the prison in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *Discipline and Punishments* (1975). Foucault's most influential work, *The Order of Things* (1966), was portrayed as an 'archaeology of the human sciences'. It advanced the idea that a series of 'epistemes' have characterized the thinking and practices of successive historical periods by establishing a broad framework of assumptions. The more flexible notion of 'discursive formations' replaced epistemes in Foucault's later writings. In the *History of Sexuality* (1976) he explored the formation of the desiring subject from ancient Greek times onwards, and examined changing attitudes towards male sexuality.

postmodern view that knowledge is socially determined and, usually or always, contaminated with power, is that all claims to truth are at best relative. This position questions not only the status of scientific theories but also the status of the postmodern theories that attack science. Lukes's solution to this problem is to suggest that people's real interests are 'what they would want and prefer were they able to make the choice'. In other words, only rational and autonomous individuals are capable of identifying their own 'real' interests. The problem with such a position, however, is that it begs the question: how are we to decide when individuals are capable of making rational and autonomous judgements?

Authority

Although politics is traditionally concerned with the exercise of power, it is often more narrowly interested in the phenomenon called 'authority', and especially 'political authority'. In its broadest sense, authority is a form of power; it is a means through which one person can influence the behaviour

of another. However, more usually, power and authority are distinguished from one another as contrasting means through which compliance or obedience is achieved. Whereas power can be defined as the *ability* to influence the behaviour of another, authority can be understood as the *right* to do so. Power brings about compliance through persuasion, pressure, threats, coercion or violence. Authority, on the other hand, is based upon a perceived 'right to rule' and brings about compliance through a moral obligation on the part of the ruled to obey. Although political philosophers have disputed the basis upon which authority rests, they have nevertheless agreed that it always has a moral character. This implies that it is less important that authority *is* obeyed than that it *should* be obeyed. In this sense, the Stuart kings of England could go on claiming the authority to rule after their expulsion in 1688, even though the majority of the population did not recognise that right. Likewise, a teacher can be said to have the authority to demand homework from students even if they persistently disobey.

A very different notion of authority has, however, been employed by modern sociologists. This is largely derived from the writings of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920). Weber was concerned to explain why, and under what circumstances, people were prepared to accept the exercise of power as rightful or legitimate. In other words, he defined authority simply as a matter of people's belief about its right-fulness, regardless of where that belief came from and whether or not it is morally justified. Weber's approach treats authority as a form of power; authority is 'legitimate power', power cloaked in legitimacy. According to this view, a government that is obeyed can be said to exercise authority, even though that obedience may have been brought about by systematic indoctrination and propaganda.

The relationship between authority and an acknowledged 'right to rule' explains why the concept is so central to the practice of government: in the absence of willing compliance, governments are only able to maintain order by the use of fear, intimidation and violence. Nevertheless, the concept of authority is both complex and controversial. For example, although power and authority can be distinguished analytically, in practice the two tend to overlap and be confused with one another. Furthermore, since authority is obeyed for a variety of reasons and in contrasting circumstances, it is important to distinguish between the different forms it can take. Finally, authority is by no means the subject of universal approval. While many have regarded authority as an essential guarantee of order and stability, lamenting what they see as the 'decline of authority' in modern society, others have warned that authority is closely linked to authoritarianism and can easily become the enemy of liberty and democracy.

Power and authority

Power and authority are mutually exclusive notions, but ones that are often difficult in practice to disentangle. Authority can best be understood as a means of gaining compliance which avoids both persuasion and rational argument, on the one hand, and any form of pressure or coercion on the other. Persuasion is an effective and widely used means of influencing the behaviour of another, but, strictly speaking, it does not involve the exercise of authority. Much of electoral politics amounts to an exercise in persuasion: political parties campaign, advertise, organize meetings and rallies, all in the hope of influencing voters on election day. Persuasion invariably involves one of two forms of influence: it either takes the form of rational argument and attempts to show that a particular set of policies 'make sense', or it appeals to self-interest and tries to demonstrate that voters will be 'better off' under one party rather than another. In both cases, the elector's decision about how to vote is contingent upon the issues that competing parties address, the arguments they put forward and the way they are able to put them across. Quite simply, parties at election time are not exercising authority since voters need to be persuaded. Because it is based upon the acknowledgement of a 'duty to obey', the exercise of authority should be reflected in automatic and unquestioning obedience. In this case, political parties can only be said to exercise authority over their most loyal and obedient supporters – those who need no persuasion.

Similarly, in its Weberian sense, authority can be distinguished from the various manifestations of power. If authority involves the right to influence others, while power refers to the ability to do so, the exercise of power always draws upon some kind of resources. In other words, power involves the ability to either reward or punish another. This applies whether power takes the form of pressure, intimidation, coercion or violence. Unlike rational argument or persuasion, pressure is reflected in the use of rewards and punishments, but ones that stop short of open coercion. This can be seen, for instance, in the activities of so-called pressure groups. Although pressure groups may seek to influence the political process through persuasion and argument, they also exercise power by, for example, making financial contributions to political parties or candidates, threatening strike action, holding marches and demonstrations and so on. Intimidation, coercion and violence contrast still more starkly with authority. Since it is based upon the threat or exercise of force, coercion can be regarded as the antithesis of authority. When government exercises authority, its citizens obey the law peacefully and willingly; when obedience is not willingly offered, government is forced to compel it.

Nevertheless, although the concepts of power and authority can be distinguished analytically, the exercise of power and the exercise of

authority often overlap. Authority is seldom exercised in the absence of power; and power usually involves the operation of at least a limited form of authority. For example, political leadership almost always calls for a blend of authority and power. A prime minister or president may, for instance, enjoy support from cabinet colleagues out of a sense of party loyalty, because of respect for the office held, or in recognition of the leader's personal achievements or qualities. In such cases, the prime minister or president concerned is exercising authority rather than power. However, political leadership never rests upon authority alone. The support which a prime minister or president receives also reflects the power they command – exercised, for example, in their ability to reward colleagues by promoting them or to punish colleagues by sacking them. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 6, the authority of law rests, in part, upon the power to enforce it. The obligation to live peacefully and within the law would perhaps be meaningless if law was not backed up by the machinery of coercion, a police force, court system, prison service and so forth.

It is clear that authority is very rarely exercised in the absence of power. The UK monarchy is sometimes presented as an example of authority without power. Its remaining powers are either, like the ability to veto legislation, never used, or they are exercised by others, as in the case of the appointment of ministers and the signing of treaties. Nevertheless, the British monarchy is perhaps best thought of not as an example of authority without power but rather as an institution that no longer possesses any significant authority. The royal prerogative, the monarchy's right to rule, has largely been transferred to ministers accountable to Parliament. In the absence of both power and significant authority, the monarchy has become a mere figurehead, little more than a symbol of constitutional authority. Examples of power being exercised without authority are no more easy to identify. Power without authority suggests the maintenance of political rule entirely through a system of intimidation, coercion and violence. Even in the case of totalitarian dictatorships like those of Hitler, Pol Pot or Saddam Hussein, some measure of authority was exerted, at least over those citizens who were ideologically committed to the regime or who were under the spell of its charismatic leader. The clearest case of power without authority is perhaps a military coup – although even here the successful exercise of power depends upon a structure of authority persisting within the military itself.

A final difficulty in clarifying the meaning of authority arises from the contrasting uses of the term. For example, people can be described as being either 'in authority' or 'an authority'. To describe a person as being *in* authority is to refer to his or her position within an institutional hierarchy. A teacher, policeman, civil servant, judge or minister exercises authority in

precisely this sense. They are office-holders whose authority is based upon the formal 'powers' of their post or position. By contrast, to be described as *an* authority is to be recognised as possessing superior knowledge or expertise, and to have one's views treated with special respect as a result. People as varied as scientists, doctors, teachers, lawyers and academics may be thought of, in this sense, as 'authorities' and their pronouncements may be regarded as 'authoratative'. This is what is usually described as 'expert authority'.

Some commentators have argued that this distinction highlights two contrasting types of authority. To be *in* authority implies the right to command obedience in the sense that a police officer controlling traffic can require drivers to obey his or her instructions. To be *an* authority, on the other hand, undoubtedly implies that a person's views will be respected and treated with special consideration, but by no means suggests that they will be automatically obeyed. In this way, a noted historian's account of the origins of the Second World War will elicit a different response from academic colleagues than will his or her instruction to students to hand in their essays on time. In the first instance the historian is respected as *an* authority; in the second he or she is obeyed by virtue of being *in* authority. In the same way, a person who is respected as *an* authority is regarded as being in some sense 'superior' to others, whereas those who are merely *in* authority are not in themselves superior to those they command; it is only their office or post that sets them apart.

Kinds of authority

Without doubt, the most influential attempt to categorize types of authority was undertaken by Max Weber. Weber was concerned to categorize particular 'systems of domination', and to highlight in each case the grounds upon which obedience was established. He did this by constructing three 'ideal-types', which he accepted were only conceptual models but which, he hoped, would help to make sense of the highly complex nature of political rule. These ideal-types were traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority, each of which laid the claim to exercise power legitimately on a very different basis. In identifying the different forms which political authority could take, Weber also sought to understand the transformation of society itself, contrasting the system of domination found in relatively simple, 'traditional' societies with those typically found in industrialised and highly bureaucratic modern ones.

Weber suggested that in traditional societies authority is based upon respect for long-established customs and traditions. In effect, traditional authority is regarded as legitimate because it has 'always existed' and was

accepted by earlier generations. This form of authority is therefore sanctified by history and is based upon 'immemorial custom'. In practice, it tends to operate through a hierarchical system which allocates to each person within the society a particular status. However, the 'status' of a person, unlike modern posts or offices, is not precisely defined and so grants those in authority what Weber referred to as a sphere of 'free grace'. Such authority is nevertheless constrained by a body of concrete rules, fixed and unquestioned customs, that do not need to be justified because they reflect the way things always have been. The most obvious examples of traditional authority are found amongst tribes or small groups, in the form of 'patriarchalism' – the domination of the father within the family or the 'master' over his servants – and 'gerontocracy' – the rule of the aged, normally reflected in the authority of village 'elders'. Traditional authority is thus closely tied up with hereditary systems of power and privilege. Few examples of traditional authority have survived in modern industrial societies, both because the impact of tradition has diminished with the enormous increase in the pace of social change, and because it is difficult to square the idea of hereditary status with modern principles like democratic government and equal opportunities. Nevertheless, vestiges of traditional authority can be found in the survival of the institution of monarchy, even in advanced industrial societies such as the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain.

Weber's second form of legitimate domination was charismatic authority. This form of authority is based entirely upon the power of an individual's personality, his or her 'charisma'. The word itself is derived from Christianity and refers to divinely bestowed power, a 'gift of grace', reflected in the power which Jesus exerted over his disciples. Charismatic authority owes nothing to a person's status, social position or office, and everything to his or her personal qualities and, in particular, the ability to make a direct and personal appeal to others. This form of authority must always have operated in political life because all forms of leadership require the ability to communicate and the capacity to inspire loyalty. In some cases, political leadership is constructed almost entirely on the basis of charismatic authority, as in the case of fascist leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler, who, in portraying themselves as 'The Leader', deliberately sought to achieve unrestricted power by emancipating themselves from any constitutionally defined notion of leadership. It would be a mistake, nevertheless, to think of charismatic authority simply as a gift or natural propensity. Political leaders often try to 'manufacture' charisma, either by cultivating their media image and sharpening their oratorical skills or, in cases such as Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler and Mao Zedong (see p. 84), by orchestrating an elaborate 'cult of personality' through the control of a propaganda machine.

Whether natural or manufactured, charismatic authority is often looked upon with suspicion. This reflects the belief that it is invariably linked to authoritarianism, the demand for unquestioning obedience, the impositions of authority regardless of consent. Since it is based upon personality rather than status or office, charismatic authority is not confined by any rules or procedures and may thus create the spectre of 'total power'. Furthermore, charismatic authority demands from its followers not only willing obedience but also discipleship, even devotion. Ultimately, the charismatic leader is obeyed because submission carries with it the prospect that one's life can be transformed. Charismatic authority has frequently therefore had an intense, messianic quality; leaders such as Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin each presented themselves as a 'messiah' come to save, liberate or otherwise transform his country. This form of authority may be less crucial in liberal democratic regimes where the limits of leadership are constitutionally defined, but is nevertheless still significant. It is important to remember, moreover, that charismatic qualities are not only evident in the assertive and, at times, abrasive leadership of Margaret Thatcher or Charles de Gaulle, but also in the more modest, but no less effective, 'fireside chats' of F.D. Roosevelt and the practised televisual skills of almost all modern leaders.

The third form of domination Weber identified was what he called legal-rational authority. This was the most important kind of authority since, in Weber's view, it had almost entirely displaced traditional authority and become the dominant mode of organisation within modern industrial societies. In particular, Weber suggested that legal-rational authority was characteristic of the large-scale, bureaucratic organizations that had come to dominate modern society. Legal-rational authority operates through the existence of a body of clearly defined rules; in effect, legal-rational authority attaches entirely to the office and its formal 'powers', and not to the office-holder. As such, legal-rational authority is clearly distinct from any form of charismatic authority; but it is also very different from traditional authority, based as it is upon a clearly defined bureaucratic role rather than the broader notion of status.

Legal-rational authority arises out of respect for the 'rule of law', in that power is always clearly and legally defined, ensuring that those who exercise power do so within a framework of law. Modern government, for instance, can be said to operate very largely on the basis of legal-rational authority. The power which a president, prime minister or other government officer is able to exercise is determined in almost all circumstances by formal, constitutional rules, which constrain or limit what an office-holder is able to do. From Weber's point of view, this form of authority is certainly to be preferred to either traditional or charismatic authority. In the first place, in clearly defining the realm of authority and

attaching it to an office rather than a person, bureaucratic authority is less likely to be abused or give rise to injustice. In addition, bureaucratic order is shaped, Weber believed, by the need for efficiency and a rational division of labour. In his view, the bureaucratic order that dominates modern society is supremely efficient. Yet he also recognized a darker side to the onward march of bureaucratic authority. The price of greater efficiency, he feared, was a more depersonalized and inhuman social environment, typified by the relentless spread of bureaucratic forms of organization.

An alternative means of identifying kinds of authority is the distinction between *de jure* authority (authority in law), and *de facto* authority (authority in practice). *De jure* authority operates according to a set of procedures or rules which designate who possesses authority, and over what issues. For example, anyone described as being 'in authority' can be said to possess *de jure* authority: their 'powers' can be traced back to a particular office. In that sense, both traditional and legal-rational authority, as defined by Weber, are forms of *de jure* authority. There are occasions, however, when authority is undoubtedly exercised but cannot be traced back to a set of procedural rules; this type of authority can be called *de facto* authority. Being 'an authority', for example, may be based upon expertise in a definable area but it cannot be said to be based upon a set of authorising rules. This would also apply, for instance, in the case of a passer-by who spontaneously takes charge at the scene of a road accident, directing traffic and issuing instructions, but without having any official authorization to do so. The person concerned would be exercising *de facto* authority without possessing any legal right or *de jure* authority. All forms of charismatic authority are of this kind. They amount to *de facto* authority in that they are based entirely upon an individual's personality and do not in any sense refer to a set of external rules.

Defenders and detractors

The concept of authority is not only highly complex, but also deeply controversial. Questions about the need for authority and whether it should be regarded as an unqualified blessing, go to the very heart of political theory and correspond closely to the debate about the need for government, discussed in Chapter 3. Since the late twentieth century, however, the issue of authority has become particularly contentious. On the one hand, the progressive expansion of individual rights and liberties in modern society, and the advance of a tolerant or permissive social ethic, has encouraged some to view authority in largely negative terms, seeing it either as outdated and unnecessary or as implicitly oppressive. On the other hand, this process has stimulated a backlash encouraging defenders

of authority to reassert its importance. In their view, the erosion of authority in the home, the workplace, and in schools, colleges and universities, brings with it the danger of disorder, instability and social breakdown.

The social contract theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provide a classic justification for authority. These proceed by constructing the image of a society without an established system of authority, a so-called 'state of nature', and emphasize that the result would be barbarity and injustice as individuals struggle against one another to achieve their various ends. This implies, however, an ambivalent attitude towards authority, an ambivalence that has been inherited by many liberal theorists. It suggests, in the first place, that the need for authority will be recognized by all rational individuals, who respect authority both because it establishes order and stability and because authority defends individual liberty from the encroachments of fellow citizens. In that sense, liberals always emphasize that authority arises 'from below': it is based upon the consent of the governed. At the same time, however, authority necessarily constrains liberty and has the capacity to become a tyranny against the individual. As a result, liberals insist that authority be constrained, preferring legal-rational forms of authority that operate within clearly defined legal or constitutional boundaries.

Conservative thinkers have traditionally adopted a rather different attitude to authority. In their view, authority is seldom based upon consent but arises out of what Roger Scruton (2001) called 'natural necessity'. Authority is thus regarded as an essential feature of all social institutions; it reflects a basic need for leadership, guidance and support. Conservatives point out, for example, that the authority of parents within the family is in no meaningful sense based upon the consent of children. Parental authority arises instead from the desire of parents to nurture, care for and love their children. In this sense, it is exercised 'from above' for the benefit of those below. From the conservative perspective, authority promotes social cohesion and serves to strengthen the fabric of society; it is the basis of any genuine community. This is why neo-conservatives have been so fiercely critical of the spread of permissiveness, believing that by under-mining the authority of, say, parents, teachers and the police, it has created a 'pathless desert' leading to a rise in crime, delinquency and general discourtesy.

It has, further, been suggested that the erosion of authority can pave the way for totalitarian rule. Hannah Arendt (see p. 58), who was herself forced to flee Germany by the rise of Nazism, argued that society is, in effect, held together by respect for traditional authority. Strong traditional norms, reflected in standards of moral and social behaviour, act as a form of cement binding society together. The virtue of authority is that it

Conservatism

Conservative ideas and doctrines first emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a reaction against the growing pace of economic and political change, which was in many ways symbolised by the French Revolution. However, from the outset, divisions in conservative thought were apparent. In continental Europe, an authoritarian and reactionary form of conservatism developed that rejected out of hand any idea of reform. A more cautious, more flexible, and ultimately more successful form of conservatism nevertheless emerged in the UK and the USA that prudently accepted 'natural' change, or 'change in order to conserve'. This stance enabled conservatives from the late nineteenth century onwards to embrace the cause of social reform under the banner of paternalism and social duty. Nevertheless, such ideas came under increasing pressure from the 1970s onwards as a result of the development of the New Right.

Conservatives have typically distrusted the developed theories and abstract principles which characterize other political traditions, preferring instead to trust in tradition, history and experience. An enduring theme in conservative thought is the perception of society as a moral community, held together by shared values and beliefs, and functioning as an organic whole. This inclines conservatives to advocate strong government and the strict enforcement of law and order but, mindful of the danger of despotism, they have usually insisted upon a balanced constitution. Although traditional conservatives have been firm supporters of private property, they have typically advocated a non-ideological and pragmatic attitude to the relationship between the state and the individual. Whereas conservatism in the USA carries with it the implication of limited government, the paternalistic tradition, evident in 'One Nation conservatism' in the UK and Christian Democracy in continental Europe, overlaps with the welfarist and interventionist beliefs found in modern liberalism (see p. 29) and social democracy (see p. 308).

The New Right encompasses two distinct and, some would argue, conflicting traditions: economic liberalism and social conservatism. Economic liberalism or neo-liberalism, often seen as the dominant theme within the New Right, draws heavily upon classical liberalism and advocates rolling back the frontiers of the state in the name of private enterprise, the free market and individual responsibility. As a backlash against the steady growth of state power perpetrated through much of the twentieth century by liberal, socialist and conservative governments, neo-liberalism can be seen as a manifestation of the libertarian tradition (see p. 337). Social conservatives, or neo-conservatives, draw attention to the perceived breakdown of order and social stability that has resulted from the spread of liberal and permissive values. They highlight the dangers implicit in moral and cultural diversity, propose that traditional values be strengthened, and argue for a restoration of authority and social discipline.

Conservative political thought has always been open to the charge that it amounts to ruling-class ideology. In proclaiming the need to resist change, it

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legitimizes the status quo and defends the interests of dominant or elite groups. Other critics allege that divisions between traditional conservatism and the New Right runs so deep that the conservative tradition has become entirely incoherent. However, in their defence, conservatives argue that they are merely advancing certain enduring, if unpalatable, truths about human nature and the societies we live in. That human beings are morally and intellectually imperfect, and seek the security that only tradition, authority and a shared culture can offer, merely underlines the wisdom of 'travelling light' in theoretical terms. Experience and history will always provide a sounder basis for political theory than will abstract principles such as liberty, equality and justice.

Key figures

Edmund Burke (see p. 348)   Burke was the father of the Anglo-American conservative political tradition. A supporter of the American Revolution of 1776, he was deeply opposed to the French Revolution on the grounds that wisdom resides not in abstract principles but in experience, tradition and history. In Burke's view, society is a partnership between 'those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born'. Burke had a gloomy view of government, recognizing that, although it can prevent evil, it rarely promotes good.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59)   A French politician, political theorist and historian, de Tocqueville gave an ambivalent account of an emerging democratic society which has had a profound effect upon both conservative and liberal theory. He highlighted the dangers associated with greater equality of opportunity and social mobility. In particular, he warned against the growth of atomized individualism brought about through the erosion of traditional social bonds and structure, and the dangers of a 'tyranny of the majority', the tendency of public opinion in a democratic polity to discourage diversity and independent thought, paving the way for the rise of demagogic politics. De Tocqueville's most important work is his epic *Democracy in America* ([1835–40]1954).

Michael Oakeshott (1901–90)   A UK political philosopher, Oakeshott made a major contribution to conservative traditionalism. By highlighting the importance of civil association and insisting upon the limited province of politics, he developed themes closely associated with liberal thought. Oakeshott outlined a powerful defence of a non-ideological style of politics, arguing in favour of traditional values and established customs on the grounds that the conservative disposition is 'to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to misery, the actual to the possible'. Oakeshott's best-known works include *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (1962) and *On Human Conduct* (1975).

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Irving Kristol (**1920–**)   A US journalist and social critic, Kristol has been one of the leading exponents of American neo-conservatism. He was a member of a group of intellectuals and academics, centred around journals such as *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, who in the 1970s abandoned liberalism and became increasingly critical of the spread of welfarism and the 'counterculture'. Whilst accepting the need for a predominantly market economy and fiercely rejecting socialism, Kristol criticizes libertarianism in the marketplace as well as in morality. In particular, he defends the family and religion as the indispensable pillars of a decent society. Kristol's best known writings include *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978) and *Reflections of a Neo-Conservative* (1983).

Further reading

Honderich, T. *Conservatism*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990.
Kirk, R. *The Conservative Mind*, 7th edn. London: Faber, 1986.
Scruton, R. *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 3rd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

provides individuals with a sense of social identity, stability and reassurance; the 'collapse of authority' leaves them lonely and disorientated, prey to the entreaties of demagogues and would-be dictators. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt suggested that the decline of traditional values and hierarchies was one of the factors which explained the advent of Nazism and Stalinism. In her view, a clear distinction exists between authoritarian and totalitarian societies. In the former, political opposition and civil liberty may routinely be suppressed but a considerable degree of individual freedom is nevertheless permitted, at least in the realm of economic, social and cultural life. By comparison, totalitarian regimes stamp out individual freedom altogether by controlling every aspect of human existence, thereby establishing 'total power'.

Authority has also, however, been regarded with deep suspicion and sometimes open hostility. The central theme of this argument is that authority is the enemy of liberty. All forms of authority may be regarded as a threat to the individual, in that authority, by definition, calls for unquestioning obedience. In that sense, there is always a trade-off between liberty and authority: as the sphere of authority expands, liberty is necessarily constrained. Thus there may be every reason to celebrate the decline of authority. If parents, teachers and the state no longer command unquestionable authority, surely this is reflected in the growing responsibilities and freedom of, respectively, children, students and individual citizens. From this point of view, there is particular cause to fear forms of

authority that have an unlimited character. Charismatic authority, and indeed any notion that authority is exercised 'from above', create the spectre of unchecked power. What, for instance, restricts the authority which parents can rightfully exercise over their children if that authority is not based upon consent?

Authority can, furthermore, be seen as a threat to reason and critical understanding. Authority demands unconditional, unquestioning obedience, and can therefore engender a climate of deference, an abdication of responsibility, and an uncritical trust in the judgement of others. Such tendencies have been highlighted by psychological studies that have linked the exercise of authority to the development of authoritarian character traits: the inclination towards either domination or submission. In *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* ([1933] 1975), Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) presented an account of the origins of fascism which drew attention to the damaging repression brought about by the domination of fathers within traditionally authoritarian families. This analysis was taken further by Theodor Adorno (see p. 280) and others in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). They claimed to find evidence that individuals who ranked high on the 'F-scale', indicating fascist tendencies, included those who had a strong propensity to defer to authority. The psychologist Stanley Milgram (1974) claimed to find experimental evidence to support this theory. This shows that people with a strong inclination to obey authority can more easily be induced to behave in a barbaric fashion, for example, by inflicting what they believe to be considerable amounts of pain upon others. Milgram argued that his evidence helps to explain the inhuman behaviour of guards in Nazi death camps, as well as atrocities that were carried out by the US military during the Vietnam War.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is usually defined simply as 'rightfulness'. As such, it is crucial to the distinction between power and authority. Legitimacy is the quality that transforms naked power into rightful authority; it confers upon an order or command an authoritative or binding character, ensuring that it is obeyed out of duty rather than because of fear. Clearly, there is a close relationship between legitimacy and authority, the two terms sometimes being used synonymously. As they are most commonly used, however, people are said to have authority whereas it is political systems that are described as legitimate. Indeed, much of political theory amounts to a discussion about when, and on what grounds, government can command legitimacy. This question is of vital importance because, as noted earlier, in the absence of legitimacy, government can only be sustained by fear,

intimidation and violence. As Rousseau (see p. 242) put it in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1969), 'The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty.'

Deep disagreement nevertheless surrounds the concept of legitimacy. The most widely used meaning of the term is drawn, once again, from Weber. Weber took legitimacy to refer to nothing more or less than a belief in the 'right to rule', a *belief* in legitimacy. In other words, providing its peoples are prepared to comply, a system of rule can be described as legitimate. This contrasts sharply with the inclination of most political philosophers, which is to try to identify a moral or rational basis for legitimacy, thereby suggesting a clear and objective difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of rule. For instance, Aristotle (see p. 69) argued that rule was legitimate only when it operated to the benefit of the whole society rather than in the selfish interests of the rulers, while Rousseau argued that government was legitimate if it was based upon the 'general will'. In *The Legitimation of Power* (1991), David Beetham attempted to develop a social-scientific concept of legitimacy but one that departs significantly from Weber's. In Beetham's view, to define legitimacy as nothing more than a 'belief in legitimacy' is to ignore how it is brought about. This leaves the matter largely in the hands of the powerful, who may be able to manufacture rightfulness by public relations campaigns and the like. He therefore proposed that power can be said to be legitimate only if three conditions are fulfilled. First, power must be exercised according to established rules, whether embodied in formal legal codes or informal conventions. Second, these rules must be justified in terms of the shared beliefs of the government and the governed. Third, legitimacy must be demonstrated by the expression of consent on the part of the governed.

In addition to disagreement about the meaning of the term, there is also debate about the *means* through which power is legitimized, or what is referred to as the 'legitimation process'. Following Beetham, it can be argued that legitimacy is conferred only upon regimes that exercise power according to established and accepted principles, notably regimes that rule on the basis of popular consent. Others, however, have suggested that most, and perhaps all, regimes attempt to manufacture legitimacy by manipulating what their citizens know, think or believe. In effect, legitimacy may simply be a form of ideological hegemony or dominance. Moreover, there are also questions about when, how and why political systems lose their legitimacy and suffer what are called 'legitimation crises'. A legitimation crisis is particularly serious since it casts doubt upon the very survival of the regime or political system: no regime has so far endured permanently through the exercise of coercion alone.

Constitutionalism and consent

Liberal democracy is often portrayed as the only stable and enduringly successful form of government. Its virtue, its supporters argue, is that it contains the means of its own preservation: it is able to guarantee continued legitimacy by ensuring that government power is not unchecked or arbitrary but is, rather, exercised in accordance with the wishes, preferences and interests of the general public. This is achieved through two principal devices. In the first place, such regimes operate within certain 'rules of power', taking the form of some kind of constitution. These supposedly ensure that individual liberty is protected and government power is constrained. Second, liberal democracies provide a basis for popular consent in the form of regular, open and competitive elections. From this point of view, legitimacy is founded upon the willing and rational obedience of the governed; government is rightful only so long as it responds to popular pressure.

A constitution can be understood, in its simplest sense, as the rules which govern the government. Constitutions are thus sets of rules which allocate duties, powers and functions to the various institutions of government and define the relationship between individuals and the state. In so doing, constitutions define and limit government power, preventing government acting simply as it chooses. However, constitutions can take a variety of different forms. In most countries, and virtually all liberal democracies, so-called 'written' or codified constitutions exist. These draw together major constitutional rules in a single authoratative document, 'the Constitution'. The first example of such a document was the US Constitution, drawn up at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. The 'written' constitution itself is a form of higher or supreme law, which stands above statute laws made by the legislature. In this way, codified constitutions both entrench major constitutional rules and invest the courts with the power of judicial review, making them the 'guardians of the constitution'. In a small number of liberal democracies – the UK and Israel are now the only examples – no such codified document exists. In these so-called 'unwritten' constitutions, supreme constitutional authority rests, in theory, with the legislature, in the UK's case Parliament. Other constitutional rules may be found in sources as diverse as conventions, common law and works of constitutional authority.

Constitutions confer legitimacy upon a regime by making government a rule-bound activity. Constitutional governments therefore exercise legal-rational authority; their powers are authorized by constitutional law. Historically, the demand for constitutional government arose when the earlier claim that legitimacy was based upon the will of God – the Divine Right of Kings – was called into question. However, the mere existence of

a constitution does not in itself ensure that government power is rightfully exercised. In other words, constitutions do not merely confer legitimacy; they are themselves bodies of rules which are subject to questions of legitimacy. In reality, as Beetham insists, a constitution confers legitimacy only when its principles reflect values and beliefs which are widely held in society. Government power is therefore legitimate if it is exercised in accordance with rules that are reasonable and acceptable in the eyes of the governed. For instance, despite the enactment of four successive constitutions – in 1918, 1924, 1936 and 1977 – the Soviet Union strove with limited success to achieve legitimacy. This occurred both because many of the provisions of the constitution, notably those stipulating individual rights, were never respected, and because major principles like the Communist Party's monopoly of power simply did not correspond with the values and aspirations of the mass of the Soviet people.

Conformity to accepted rules may be a necessary condition for legitimacy, but it is not a sufficient one. Constitutional governments may nevertheless fail to establish legitimacy if they do not, in some way, ensure that government rests upon the consent or agreement of the people. The idea of consent arose out of social contract theory and the belief that government had somehow arisen out of a voluntary agreement undertaken by free individuals. John Locke (see p. 268), for instance, was perfectly aware that government had not in practice developed out of a social contract, but argued, rather, that citizens ought to behave as if it had. He therefore developed the notion of 'tacit consent', an implied agreement among citizens to obey the law and respect government. However, for consent to confer legitimacy upon a regime it must take the form not of an implied agreement but of voluntary and active participation in the political life of the community. Political participation is thus the active expression of consent.

Many forms of political rule have sought legitimacy through encouraging expressions of popular consent. This applies even in the case of fascist dictatorships like Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, where considerable effort was put into mobilizing mass support for the regime by plebiscites, rallies, marches, demonstrations and so on. The most common way in which popular consent can be demonstrated, however, is through elections. Even one-party states, such as orthodox communist regimes, have found it desirable to maintain elections in the hope of generating legitimacy. As these were single-party and single-candidate elections, however, their significance was limited to their propaganda value. Quite simply, voters rarely regard non-competitive elections as a meaningful form of political participation or as an opportunity to express willing consent. By contrast, open and competitive electoral systems, typically found in liberal democracies, offer citizens a meaningful choice, and so

give them the power to remove politicians and parties that are thought to have failed. In such circumstances, the act of voting is a genuine expression of active consent. From this perspective, liberal-democratic regimes can be said to maintain legitimacy through their willingness to share power with the general public.

Ideological hegemony

The conventional image of liberal democracies is that they enjoy legitimacy because, on the one hand, they respect individual liberty and, on the other, they are responsive to public opinion. Critics, however, suggest that constitutionalism and democracy are little more than a facade concealing the domination of a 'power elite' or 'ruling class'. Neo-Marxists such as Ralph Miliband (1982) have, for example, portrayed liberal democracy as a 'capitalist democracy', suggesting that within it there are biases which serve the interests of private property and ensure the long-term stability of capitalism. Since the capitalist system is based upon unequal class power, Marxists have been reluctant to accept that the legitimacy of such regimes is genuinely based upon willing obedience and rational consent. Radical thinkers in the Marxist and anarchist traditions have, as a result, adopted a more critical approach to the legitimation process, one which emphasizes the degree to which legitimacy is produced by ideological manipulation and indoctrination.

It is widely accepted that ideological control can be used to maintain stability and build legitimacy. This is reflected, for example, in the 'radical' view of power, discussed earlier, which highlights the capacity to manipulate human needs. The clearest examples of ideological manipulation are found in totalitarian regimes which propagate an 'official ideology' and ruthlessly suppress all rival creeds, doctrines and beliefs. The means through which this is achieved are also clear: education is reduced to a process of ideological indoctrination; the mass media is turned into a propaganda machine; 'unreliable' beliefs are strictly censored; political opposition is brutally stamped out, and so on. In this way, national socialism became a state religion in Nazi Germany, as did Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union.

Marxists, however, claim to identify a similar process at work within liberal democracies. Despite the existence of competitive party systems, autonomous pressure groups, a free press and constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, Marxists argue that liberal democracies are nevertheless dominated by what they call 'bourgeois ideology'. The concept of 'ideology' has had a chequered history, not least because it has been ascribed such very different meanings. The term itself was coined by Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to describe a new 'science of ideas'. This meaning

did not, however, long survive the French Revolution, and the term was taken up in the nineteenth century in the writings of Karl Marx (see p. 371). In the Marxist tradition, 'ideology' denotes sets of ideas which tend to conceal the contradictions upon which all class societies were based. Ideologies therefore propagate falsehood, delusion and mystification. They nevertheless serve a powerful social function: they stabilize and consolidate the class system by reconciling the exploited to their exploitation. Ideology thus operates in the interests of a 'ruling class', which controls the process of intellectual production as completely as it controls the process of material production. In a capitalist society, for example, the bourgeoisie dominates the educational, cultural, intellectual and artistic life. As Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1970), 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.'

This is not, however, to suggest that these 'ruling ideas' monopolize intellectual life and exclude all rival views. Indeed, modern Marxists have clearly acknowledged that cultural, ideological and political competition does exist, but stress that this competition is unequal, in that the ideas and views which uphold the capitalist order enjoy a crushing advantage over the ideas and theories which question or challenge it. Such indoctrination may, in fact, be far more successful precisely because it operates behind the illusion of free speech, open competition and political pluralism. The most influential exponent of such a view has been Antonio Gramsci (see p. 84), who drew attention to the degree to which the class system was upheld not simply by unequal economic and political power but also by what he termed bourgeois 'hegemony', the ascendancy or domination of bourgeois ideas in every sphere of life. The implications of ideological domination are clear: deluded by bourgeois theories and philosophies, the proletariat will be incapable of achieving class consciousness and will be unable to realize its revolutionary potential. It would remain a 'class in itself' and never become what Marx called a 'class for itself'.

A similar line of thought has been pursued by what is called the 'sociology of knowledge'. This has sometimes been seen as an alternative to the Marxist belief in a 'dominant' or ruling ideology. One of the founding fathers of this school of sociology, Karl Mannheim (1893–1947), described its goal as uncovering 'the social roots of our knowledge'. Mannheim (1960) held that 'how men actually think' can be traced back to their position in society and the social groups to which they belong, each of which has its own distinctive way of looking at the world. Ideologies, therefore, are 'socially determined' and reflect the social circumstances and aspirations of the groups which develop them. In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1971), Berger and Luckmann broadened this analysis by suggesting that not only organized creeds and ideologies but everything that passes for 'knowledge' in society is socially constructed. The political

significance of such an analysis is to highlight the extent to which human beings see the world not as it is, but as they *think* it is, or as society tells them it is. The sociology of knowledge has radical implications for any notion of legitimacy since it implies that individuals cannot be regarded simply as independent and rational actors, capable of distinguishing legitimate forms of rule from non-legitimate ones. In short, legitimacy is always a 'social construction'.

One of the most influential modern accounts of the process of ideological manipulation has been developed by the US radical intellectual and anarchist theorist, Noam Chomsky. In works such as (with Edward Herman) *Manufacturing Consent* (1994), Chomsky developed a 'propaganda model' of the mass media which explains how news and political coverage are distorted by the structures of the media itself. This distortion operates through a series of 'filters', such as the impact of private ownership of media outlets, a sensitivity to the views and concerns of advertisers and sponsors, and the sourcing of news and information from 'agents of power' such as governments and business-backed think-tanks. Chomsky's analysis emphasizes the degree to which the mass media can subvert or 'deter' democracy, helping, in the USA in particular, to mobilize popular support for imperialist foreign policy goals. The dominant-ideology model of the mass media has nevertheless also been subject to criticism. Objections to it include that it underestimates the extent to which the press and broadcasters, particularly public service broadcasters, pay attention to counter-establishment views and movements. Moreover, the assumption that media output shapes political attitudes is determinist and neglects the role played by people's own values in filtering, and possibly resisting, media messages.

Legitimation crises

Whether legitimacy is conferred by willing consent or is manufactured by ideological indoctrination, it is, as already emphasized, essential for the maintenance of any system of political rule. Attention has therefore focused not only on the machinery through which legitimacy is maintained but also upon the circumstances in which the legitimacy of a regime is called into question and, ultimately, collapses. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), the neo-Marxist Jurgen Habermas (see p. 280) argued that within liberal democracies there are 'crisis tendencies' which challenge the stability of such regimes by undermining legitimacy. The core of this argument was the tension between a private-enterprise or capitalist economy, on one hand, and a democratic political system, on the other; in effect, the system of capitalist democracy may be inherently unstable.

The democratic process forces government to respond to popular pressures, either because political parties outbid each other in attempting to get into power or because pressure groups make unrelenting demands upon politicians once in power. This is reflected in the inexorable rise of public spending and the progressive expansion of the state's responsibilities, especially in economic and social life. Anthony King (1975) described this problem as one of government 'overload'. Government was overloaded quite simply because in attempting to meet the demands made of them, democratic politicians came to pursue policies which threatened the health and long-term survival of the capitalist economic order. For instance, growing public spending created a fiscal crisis in which high taxes became a disincentive to enterprise, and ever-rising government borrowing led to permanently high inflation. Habermas's analysis suggest that liberal democracies cannot permanently satisfy both popular demands for social security and welfare rights, and the requirements of a market economy based upon private profit. Forced either to resist democratic pressures or to risk economic collapse, capitalist democracies will, in his view, find it increasingly difficult to maintain legitimacy.

To some extent, fears of a legitimation crisis painted an over-gloomy picture of liberal-democratic politics in the 1970s. Habermas claimed to identify 'crisis tendencies' which are beyond the capacity of liberal democracies to control. In practice, however, the electoral mechanism allows liberal democracies to adjust policy in response to competing demands, thus enabling the system as a whole to retain a high degree of legitimacy, even though particular policies may attract criticism and provoke unpopularity. Much of liberal-democratic politics therefore amounts to shifts from interventionist policies to free-market ones and then back again, as power alternates between left-wing and right-wing governments. There is a sense, however, in which the rise of the New Right since the 1970s can be seen as a response to a legitimation crisis. In the first place, the New Right recognized that the problem of 'overload' arose, in part, out of the perception that government could, and would, solve all problems, economic and social problems as well as political ones. As a consequence, New Right politicians such as Reagan in the USA and Thatcher in the UK sought to lower popular expectations of government. This they did by trying to shift responsibility from the state to the individual. Thus welfare was portrayed as largely a matter of individual responsibility, individuals being encouraged to provide for themselves by hard work, savings, medical insurance, private pensions and so forth. Moreover, unemployment was no longer seen as a responsibility of government: there was a 'natural rate' of unemployment which could only be pushed up by workers 'pricing themselves out of jobs'.

More radically, the New Right attempted to challenge and finally displace the theories and values which had previously legitimized the progressive expansion of the state's responsibilities. In this sense, the New Right amounted to a 'hegemonic project' that tried to establish the ascendancy of a rival set of pro-market values and theories. This amounted to a public philosophy which extolled rugged individualism and denigrated the 'nanny' state. This project had two themes, a neo-liberal and neo-conservative one. Neo-liberal theories attempt to reassert the autonomy of the market by proclaiming, in essence, that 'the economy works best when left alone by government'. In this way, economic and social life is portrayed as a private sphere over which the state exercises no rightful influence. Neo-conservatives, on the other hand, call for the restoration of authority, order and discipline. In particular, this reflects a desire to strengthen the authority of government, at least in relation to what the New Right regard as its proper role: law and order, public morality and defence.

While liberal-democratic regimes in the industrialized West have remained relatively immune from legitimation crises, the same cannot be said of liberal-democratic government in the developing world. Few developing-world countries have round it easy to sustain political systems based upon an open and competitive struggle for power and respect for a significant range of civil liberties. Although a growing number have developed liberal-democratic features, enduringly successful ones auch as India are still rare. Liberal-democratic experiments have sometimes culminated in military coups or the emergence of single-party rule. Such developments have about them some of the characteristics of a legitimation crisis. For example, structural problems, such as chronic underdevelopment, an over-reliance upon cash crops, indebtedness to Western banks and so on, make it difficult, and perhaps impossible, for developing-world regimes to satisfy the expectations which democratic government creates. Furthermore, multi-party democracy often appears inappropriate, and may even be regarded as an obstacle, when society is confronted by the single, overriding goal: the need for social development. From another point of view, however, it is questionable whether such regimes ever enjoyed legitimacy, in which case their fall can hardly be described as a legitimation crisis. Liberal-democratic regimes were often bequeathed to newly independent states by former colonial rulers and reflect values like individualism and competition which are foreign to many parts of the developing world.

The collapse of orthodox communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, 1989–91, provides a particularly good example of a legitimation crisis or a series of legitimation crises. These crises had a

political, economic and social dimension. Politically, orthodox communist regimes were one-party states dominated by a 'ruling' communist party whose influence extended over virtually all groups in society. Economically, the centrally planned economies that operated within such regimes proved to be highly inefficient and incapable of generating the widespread, if unequal, prosperity found in the capitalist West. Socially, orthodox communist regimes were undermined by their very achievements: industrialization and the expansion of mass education created a better informed and increasingly sophisticated body of citizens whose demands for the civil liberties and consumer goods thought to be available in the West simply outstripped the capacity of the regime to respond. Such factors progressively undermined the rightfulness or legitimacy of orthodox communism, eventually precipitating mass demonstrations, in 1989 throughout Eastern Europe, and in the Soviet Union in 1991.

Summary

1 Power is central to the understanding and practice of politics. It can be exercised on three levels: through the ability to make or influence decisions; through the ability to set the agenda and prevent decisions being made; and through the ability to manipulate what people think and want.

2 Power is the *ability* to influence the behaviour of others, based upon the capacity to reward or punish. By contrast, authority is the *right* to influence others, based upon their acknowledged duty to obey. Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority: traditional authority based upon custom and history; charismatic authority, the power of personality; and legal-rational authority derived from the formal powers of an office or post.

3 Authority provokes deep political and ideological disagreements. Some regard it as essential to the maintenance of an ordered, stable and healthy society, providing individuals with clear guidance and support. Others warn that authority tends to be the enemy of liberty and to undermine reason and moral responsibility; authority tends to lead to authoritarianism.

4 Legitimacy refers to the 'rightfulness' of a political system. It is crucial to the stability and long-term survival of a system of rule because it is regarded as justified or acceptable. Legitimacy may require conformity to widely accepted constitutional rules and broad public support; but it may also be 'manufactured' through a process of ideological manipulation and control for the benefit of political or social elites.

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