Theories of the State

Theories of the State

The politics of liberal democracy

Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O'Leary

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To Donal O'Leary and Vincent Dunleavy

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Preface

No body of thought in social science can be very usefully assessed on its own. We make theoretical progress by comparing and contrasting one interpretation with another. Yet much of the available literature in political science is unhelpful, since it largely consists of expositions of a single theoretical viewpoint by someone committed to that intellectual approach and normally disinclined to say much about alternatives. The problem of comparing one theory with another is most acute for new students, who are often asked to wrestle with literature written by authors from radically different world-views.

This book developed from a series of joint lectures on the theory of the state given between 1983 and 1986 to our students at the LSE. We have tried to advance beyond existing statements of individual theories of the state in three fundamental ways. First, we have carefully structured the book so that each theory we describe is covered in a comparable format to the other viewpoints. By describing the same elements in each approach we hope that student readers in particular will find it much easier to refer backwards and forwards between theories, and to establish where they differ or converge. The final chapter sets out in a detailed way the points of overlap and divergence that we have found instructive, and argues that each of our five theories of the

liberal democratic state confronts a similar set of internal options for characterizing state/society relations.

Second, we have tried to write the book in a way which gives the most compelling and clearest account possible of each of the theories included. This aim created dilemmas which cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all our readers. Many parts of the theories we cover are not yet systematized – different writers within each approach take individually distinctive views, often partially contradicting each other. We have seen the task of exegesis as requiring us to sift the available interpretations and to draw attention to the most fundamental differences – while simultaneously running together those variations of terminology, argument or method which seemed to us less fundamental. The result is that we have constructed a set of deliberately simplified theoretical positions that will not be wholly subscribed to by any one author or set of authors. We discuss some major internal divisions within each of the five theories of the state covered here, but this elaboration is unlikely to satisfy readers who hunger after total respect for the integrity of every modern theoretician's thought. We regret the sacrifice of detail and biographical sensitivity entailed but believe that in developing an effective comparative picture this cost is worthwhile.

Third, we have tried hard to avoid the anachronism which commonly afflicts comparative discussions of theoretical positions in political science. Our account is specifically orientated to explaining how theories of the state analyse *contemporary* Western liberal democracies. We have also accorded full weight to two recently influential liberal positions which most other accounts ignore or treat simply as unimportant variants of mainstream pluralism, namely, the new right view (Ch. 3) and neo-pluralism (Ch. 6).

This book is a completely joint work. Although we each produced first drafts for half the book, our previous discussions of ideas and our mutual revisions of each other's work have been so extensive that it is now impossible for us to say whose contribution is which. We both deserve half the credit or blame for any analysis contained here.

We probably could not have written what we have in any other institution. Our students in the 1983–6 period provided

a testing audience whose interest, curiosity and knowledge were a powerful stimulus. We are indebted to Alan Beattie, George Jones, Nick Ellison, Paul Heywood, and John Kelly at the LSE, and to Steven Kennedy, Keith Povey, Lorelei Watson and Sheila Dunleavy, all of whom commented helpfully on various drafts of chapters. To many others who helped in innumerable smaller ways go our many thanks.

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