Contents

List of Figures, Tables and Boxes x
Preface and Acknowledgements xiii

1 Analytical Perspectives, Analytical Controversies 1
   The scope and limits of political analysis 2
   Analytical perspectives, analytical choices, analytical controversies 6
   Mapping the political science mainstream 7
   Mapping the mainstream in international relations 13
   Analytical strategies in contemporary political science and international relations 27
   The parsimony versus complexity trade-off 29
   The role for and the nature of theory in political analysis 37
   Context and conduct: dealing with the ‘problem’ of agency 50
   The structure of the book 54

2 What’s ‘Political’ About Political Science? 59
   Ontology and epistemology: the ‘political question’ and the ‘science’ question 61
   Specifying and respecifying the political 66
   The nature of politics, the nature of the political 69
   Science, politics and ethics 75
   The retreat from positivism 81
   Conclusion: the limits of political science and the ethics of political analysis 86

3 Beyond Structure versus Agency, Context versus Conduct 89
   What is – and what is not – at stake in the structure–agency debate? 90
   Conceptualising structure and agency 93
   Operationalising structure and agency: the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930s 96
   Positions in the structure–agency debate 101
| The centrality of structure and agency to political explanation | 113 |
| Beyond structure versus agency | 115 |

| Continuity and Discontinuity in the Analysis of Political Change | 135 |
| Time for change? | 136 |
| Analytical strategies for conceptualising change | 143 |
| Time, timing and temporality | 150 |
| Conclusion: structural, agential and ideational factors in the analysis of political change | 163 |

| Divided by a Common Language? Conceptualising Power | 168 |
| The ‘faces of power’ controversy | 171 |
| Power: analytical and critical perspectives | 182 |
| Foucault and the ‘microphysics of power’ | 187 |

| The Discursive and the Ideational in Contemporary Political Analysis: Beyond Materialism and Idealism | 194 |
| The space for ideas in political analysis | 195 |
| Constructivism in and beyond international relations theory | 197 |
| The difference that ideas (can) make | 205 |
| Structure, agency and ideas | 209 |
| Conclusion: paradigms and paradigm shifts | 213 |

| The Challenge of Postmodernism | 216 |
| Modernism and postmodernism as aesthetic sensibilities | 218 |
| Postmodernism as an intellectual sensibility | 225 |
| The contribution of postmodernism to political analysis | 234 |
| The postmodernist challenge to (critical) political analysis | 239 |
| In defence of critical political analysis: resisting postmodernism’s vow of silence | 245 |

<p>| Conclusion: Critical–Political–Analytical | 251 |
| Empirical but not empiricist | 252 |
| Structure and agency | 253 |
| An inclusive and post-disciplinary conception of political analysis | 256 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The causal and constitutive role of ideas</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contingency of political processes</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the issues with which this volume is principally concerned have, arguably, always divided political analysts, it is only in recent years that they have started to receive the sustained theoretical reflection their importance warrants. Political analysts have always been able to choose from a wide diversity of analytical strategies and have, as a consequence, been divided by such strategies as much as by anything else. Yet, the systematic reflection on the means by which one might adjudicate between contending analytical perspectives has tended to be something of a marginal concern. Moreover, where attention has been paid to the choice of analytical strategies in political science and international relations (for instance, King, Keohane and Verba 1994), the range of strategies considered has tended to be limited to those considered consistent with the dominant positivist assumptions of the discipline’s core. Accordingly, the appreciation of alternative analytical strategies and, indeed, the appreciation that there may be more than one way to explore the political world is less widespread than it might be. This is changing – and that is no bad thing.

In this context, the aim of the present volume is two-fold. First, it seeks both to highlight the significance of, and to provide a critical introduction to, a series of issues of contemporary controversy in political analysis. Second, and arguably more significantly, it seeks to contribute to the growing reflexive turn in political science and, perhaps more notably, international relations. In so far as this book can be regarded as a manifesto for anything in particular, it is manifesto for a political analysis more conscious and explicit about the underlying assumptions upon which its choice of analytical strategies is premised and more sensitive to the trade-offs necessarily entailed in any choice of foundational premises. The chapters which follow are, of course, not entirely neutral with respect to such choices. But what they seek to do is to uncover and render explicit the assumptions which make those choices possible. My hope in so doing is to contribute to a political analysis whose internal dialogues, controversies and disputes are char-
acterised by mutual understanding and respect for the analytical choices which lead analysts in often divergent directions.

In this context, the aim of the present chapter is relatively modest. It is to provide the necessary background for the task of later chapters. In it, I consider (briefly) the nature of political analysis itself, before introducing, in a necessarily stylised manner, the core theoretical perspectives which have come to define mainstream debate in political science and international relations today. In the final sections of the chapter, I pare this diversity of perspectives down to three distinct analytical traditions – rationalism, behaviouralism and institutionalism/constructivism. I consider the positions adopted by each with respect to the issues which form the key themes of the volume.

The scope and limits of political analysis

The term ‘political analysis’ is by no means unambiguous. From the outset, then, it is important to be clear what I mean, and what I do not mean, by it in this context. For many, political analysis is synonymous with analytical politics, which is, in turn, synonymous with rational choice theory (see, for instance, Hinich and Munger 1997). That is most definitely not the sense of the term invoked here. While I will have much to say about rational choice theory and rationalism more generally, this is not a book about analytical politics. Indeed, it would be to forejudge the issues of this volume to assume from the outset that political analysis can, or should, be circumscribed by rationalist analytical strategies. This book, in keeping with the spirit of the series of which it forms a part, is about the diversity of analytical strategies available to those engaged in the analysis of ‘the political’. Though rationalism is one such strategy, and a highly distinctive, influential and important one at that, it is but one strategy among many. It has no privileged or exclusive claim on the analysis of the political or the label political analysis.

To talk of political analysis is not, then, in itself to advance a particular perspective. The term, at least in the sense in which it is deployed here, is neutral with respect to analytical strategies and traditions. This particular conception of political analysis is inclusive. Yet the notion of political analysis that I will seek to advance and defend in this and consecutive chapters is inclusive in another sense too.

Here we move from the descriptive to the prescriptive. For while my concern is to explore the full range of analytical strategies that might inform political inquiry, it is not my intention to hide my preference for certain analytical strategies and perspectives over others. Thus, while I
hope to reveal an inclusive conception of the field of political analysis, the political analysis I will seek to defend is inclusive in another sense – its specification of ‘the political’. While acknowledging that many approaches to political analysis confine themselves to the narrowly political analysis of narrowly political variables, I will call for a conception of the political and of political analysis that is very different. It is explored in far greater detail in Chapter 2. In brief, it is encompassing in two senses.

First, the political should be defined in such a way as to encompass the entire sphere of the social. The implication of this is that events, processes and practices should not be labelled ‘non-political’ or ‘extra-political’ simply by virtue of the specific setting or context in which they occur. All events, processes and practices which occur within the social sphere have the potential to be political and, hence, to be amenable to political analysis. The realm of government is no more innately political, by this definition, than that of culture, law or the domestic sphere. Consequently, the division of domestic labour is no less political – and no less appropriate a subject for political analysis – than the regulation of the domestic division of labour by the state. Indeed, one might well argue that any adequate analysis of the politics of the regulation of the domestic division of labour itself entails a political analysis of the domestic division of labour. Yet this raises an obvious question. What makes political analysis political? In other words, what distinguishes political analysis from cultural or sociological analyses which might also claim to encompass the entire sphere of the social? What is here required is a definition of the political itself. What makes a political analysis political is the emphasis it places on the political aspect of social relations. In the same way, what makes a cultural analysis cultural is the emphasis it places on the cultural aspects of social relations. A variety of definitions of the political might be offered and are discussed further in the following chapter. The specific definition that I advance, however, is of politics and the political as concerned with the distribution, exercise and consequences of power. A political analysis is, then, one which draws attention to the power relations implicated in social relations. In this sense, politics is not defined by the locus of its operation but by its nature as a process.

This has interesting implications. For it suggests that the terrain of political analysis, and hence the span of this volume, should include all perspectives, whether consciously political or not, which might have something to say about the distribution and exercise of power. In this sense, the sphere of political analysis is broad indeed, ranging from the narrowly political analysis of narrowly political variables to the sociology of structural inequality within contemporary societies.
This brings us to the second key feature of the political analysis I will seek to defend in this volume. It concerns the role of extra-political variables. Though the definition of the political that I advance in this volume is inclusive, this is not to say that all aspects of the social can be captured in political terms, nor that the political is indistinguishable, say, from the economic or the cultural. Economic and cultural processes may be inherently political – in so far as they concern relations of power they more certainly are – but this does not mean that they are exhausted by this description. This raises the thorny question of the role political analysts should accord to extra-political variables. Again, my approach is inclusive. Political analysts simply cannot afford to leave the analysis of economics to economists, history to historians and so forth. In so far as there are economic and/or cultural conditions of existence of political dynamics, these need to be acknowledged and interrogated by political analysts. Disciplinary boundaries have always been rather arbitrarily drawn and, in an age in which the degree of interdependence between cultural, political and economic processes is increasingly acknowledged those boundaries surely threaten the quality of the analysis we are capable of generating. For, in a world of (acknowledged) interdependence, rigidly disciplinary approaches to social, political and economic analysis will tend to find themselves reliant upon assumptions generated by other disciplinary specialisms whose validity they are either incapable or unwilling to adjudicate. The clear danger is that the conclusions of our analyses may increasingly come to depend upon externally generated assumptions whose empirical content we do not regard ourselves worthy to judge. This is a now all too familiar experience and is nowhere more clear than in the literature on the political economic imperatives globalisation supposedly summons for social democratic regimes. Here the debate circles endlessly around the nature and degree of negotiability of the constraints that economic integration is seen to imply. Opinions vary – wildly (compare Garrett 1998; Gray 1997; C. Pierson 2001; Wickham-Jones 2000). Yet what is almost entirely absent from such discussions is any attempt to describe empirically, let alone to evaluate, the precise nature of social democratic regimes’ external economic relations – with respect to trade, finance and foreign direct investment (FDI). Indeed, in the vast majority of accounts a crude, simplistic and never more than anecdotally empirical business school globalisation orthodoxy is simply internalised and assumed to reflect the limits of our knowledge on such matters, with scant regard to the now substantial empirical evidence. That evidence, for what it is worth, shows if anything a consistent de-globalisation of European economies over the last forty years associated with the process, almost wholly absent from the existing debate, of European economic integration (Hay 2002).
The debate on the constraints implied by globalisation (real or imagined) is but one example. What it, and others like it, suggest is that, as political analysts we simply cannot afford, if ever we could, to get by without a rather more thorough grasp of the cognate disciplines on whose assumptions we have increasingly come to rely. That implies a political analysis which refuses to restrict its analytical attentions to obviously political variables and processes; in one sense it implies, too, an interdisciplinary political analysis.

Issues of interdependence and international economic integration raise a final issue, crucial to the practice of contemporary political analysis and integral to the concerns of this volume. That is the relationship between the domestic and the international and, hence, between political science (as traditionally conceived) and international relations. Here, again, I am an advocate of integration and the need to dispense with an arbitrary and increasingly problematic division of labour within political analysis (see also Coates and Hay 2001). It is worth briefly explaining why. It is tempting to argue, as many have, that the world we inhabit is more complex, interdependent and interconnected than ever before. Yet what is important here is not whether contemporary levels of interdependence are unprecedented historically, but that we inhabit an interdependent world which much be analysed as such. The point is that conventional approaches to the social sciences, based on rigid disciplinary and sub-disciplinary fault lines and demarcations, do not prepare us well for a world of interdependence.

In a world in which the domestic and international, the political and the economic were indeed independent this would not present a problem – though whether such a world can ever have been said to exist is another matter altogether. Arguably, though patterns of spatial interdependence have changed, the interdependence of political and economic processes at a variety of spatial scales is nothing new. Furthermore, the distinction between, say, political and economic variables – and hence between political science and economics as disciplines – was always arbitrary, the boundary between the two necessarily characterised by interdependencies which have remained poorly understood as a consequence of the often sectarian policing of disciplinary boundaries. These are important points in their own right. Yet the key point for now is that if we accept that we live in an interdependent world which does not respect spatial and sectoral divisions of analytical labour (if ever it did), such divisions of labour will no longer suffice. This entails a political analysis which refuses to accept a resolute internal division of labour between political science and international relations just as it refuses to accept that it can leave the analysis of economic variables to economists.
Analytical perspectives, analytical choices, analytical controversies

The approach to political analysis that I seek to adopt in this book is one in which contending analytical perspectives are adjudicated, as much as possible, in their own terms, rather than those imposed upon them from outside. It is also one which seeks to foreground discussion of such matters by focusing on the issues which divide political analysts, rather than the camps into which they divide themselves as a consequence. As such this is a book about contemporary controversies in political analysis much more than it is a book about the analytical perspectives themselves. It is less a book about labels and badges of analytical self-identification than it is about the analytical choices which all approaches to political analysis necessarily face. This is reflected in Chapters 2–6, each of which focuses specifically upon a key contemporary controversy – the boundaries of the ‘political’; the relationship between structure and agency; the strategies appropriate to the analysis of political change; the conceptualisation of power; and the relationship between the realm of political practice and the real of political discourse, respectively. Moreover, while Chapter 7 does focus attention on an increasingly influential perspective to political analysis, namely postmodernism, it does so by exploring the challenges this most self-conscious mode of reflection poses to all other approaches to political analysis, rather than by treating it as a perspective in its own right.

This is perhaps a rather unconventional strategy to adopt, but there are good reasons for it. First, to concentrate attention principally on the analytical choices, strategies and rationales of well-established traditions of political analysis may serve merely to reinforce the dominance of those traditions. This, in turn, may have the effect of diverting attention from original and potentially significant interventions which are not easily reconciled with a conventional mapping of the fault-lines of contemporary debate. It may also serve, in so doing, to discourage innovative and heterodox approaches to issues of ongoing controversy. In short, focusing on the lie of the land at any particular moment in time may blind us to the processes already under way serving to reconfigure that landscape.

Second, as a number of recent commentators have noted, it is more difficult than once it was to delineate clearly the boundaries of contemporary analytical approaches. Many important recent contributions (such as rational choice institutionalism in political science and constructivism in international relations theory) have served to explore and thereby transcend the boundaries between perspectives previously con-

Third, if the conventional approach to mapping the discipline’s principal divisions is more problematic today than once it was, then this should not lead us to overlook the limitations of such a strategy at each and every stage in the discipline’s history. Paradigmatic perspectives have certainly always existed within political science and international relations, but they have rarely been as insular, self-contained, internally consistent and unyielding in their engagement with contending approaches as their invariably clichéd textbook depiction. Accordingly, if political analysis is to be presented as an essentially contested and dynamic field, it is important that we resist the temptation to present it as comprised of a series of timeless, closed and almost entirely self-referential traditions.

The conventional ‘textbook’ presentation of the discipline’s principal fault-lines has never been much more than a crude and distorted cliché – a one-dimensional depiction of a multi-dimensional reality. It is a presentation, as far as possible, that I have sought to resist. In the chapters that follow, then, my aim has been both to respect and to reflect as accurately as possible the positions held by genuine (named) protagonists in the controversies which characterise contemporary political analysis. As far as possible, I have resisted the temptation to fall back on the parsimony and anonymity of the standard ‘textbook’ formulations of approaches such as behaviouralism, neo-realism and rational choice theory. Nonetheless, it is important for what follows that we establish from the outset the range and diversity of strategies in political analysis. In so doing there is some utility in adopting a perspectival approach, if only as a point of departure for what is to follow. In this sense, the present chapter is something of an exception to the general rule. For in the following section I seek briefly to map the contemporary field of political analysis by examining the key themes, assumptions and contributions of the main perspectives in political science and international relations. These are summarised schematically in Tables 1.1–1.8, designed to provide a point of reference for the chapters which follow.

**Mapping the political science mainstream**

It is conventional to see the political science mainstream today as characterised by three distinctive perspectives: rational choice theory; behaviouralism; and the new institutionalism. Each adopts a very different approach to political analysis.
Rational choice theory is, in essence, what you get if you seek to model political behaviour on the simplifying assumption that political actors are instrumental, self-serving utility-maximisers (Table 1.1). In other words, it seeks to construct stylised (and often mathematical) models of political conduct by assuming that individuals are rational and behave as if they engage in a cost-benefit analysis of each and every choice available to them before plumping for the option most likely to maximise their material self-interest. They behave rationally, maximising personal utility net of cost while giving little or no consideration to the consequences, for others, of their behaviour.1

The purpose of rational choice theory is to produce a deductive and
predictive science of the political, modelled on precisely the same assumptions that have proved so influential in neo-classical economics. Its contribution to political science has been considerable, drawing attention to the often perverse and collectively irrational effects of individually rational action. It points, in particular to the problem of ‘free-riding’. Here, despite a situation in which cooperation will secure mutual advantage, actors have a perverse incentive not to participate in such collective action. This sounds paradoxical, but the logic, if we assume rationality, is impeccable. For, in situations where collective action is required to achieve a given end, a rational actor knows that her individual behaviour will not influence significantly the overall outcome. Moreover, if others cooperate she will reap the benefits of their cooperation regardless of her participation. So why incur personal costs by taking unilateral action? In such scenarios, the dependence of a favourable outcome upon coordinated or collective action is sufficient to create (perverse) incentives for actors to free ride on the conduct of others. Tragically, if all individuals behave rationally, no cooperation
arises and an outcome which is both collectively and individually sub-optimal ensues.

A now classic example is the so-called ‘tragedy of the commons’, first identified by Garrett Hardin (1968; for an excellent discussion of the strengths and limitations of this perspective see Pepper 1996: 56–9). It provides an intuitively plausible and all too compelling model of the seemingly intractable problem of environmental degradation in contemporary societies. The systematic exploitation and pollution of the environment, it is argued, is set to continue since individual corporations and states, despite a clear collective interest, choose not to impose upon themselves the costs of unilateral environmental action. Their logic is entirely rational. They know that environmental regulation is costly and, in an open international economy, a burden on competitiveness. Accordingly, in the absence of an international agency capable of enforcing the compliance of all states and all corporations, the anticipation of free-riding is sufficient to ensure that corporations and states do not burden themselves with additional costs and taxes. The long-term effects for the environment are all too obvious. Once again, individual rationality translates into collective irrationality.

Though behaviouralism, too, would claim to advance a predictive science of the political, it proceeds very differently, basing its approach to political analysis not on the deduction of testable hypotheses from simplifying (and ultimately untestable) assumptions about human nature, but upon extrapolation and generalisation from observed empirical regularities (Table 1.2). In the primacy it gives to evidence and to the search for evidence, behaviouralism might be thought neutral with respect to subject matter. As a consequence it is not, like rational choice theory or the new institutionalism, a distinctive theoretical approach associated with a series of key substantive claims so much as a set of analytical techniques and methodologies. These might be applied – in principle – to any area of political analytic inquiry. That having been said, the tendency to emphasise the observable and those variables which might more easily be quantified, has tended to result in certain distinctive features of behaviouralism. These include a focus on power as decision-making and a tendency to assume that an analysis of the inputs into the political system, such as the pressure exerted by interest groups upon the state, is sufficient to account adequately for political outcomes.

Of the three perspectives which serve to define the mainstream in contemporary political science, the new institutionalism is the new pretender (Table 1.3). It has emerged since the early 1980s as a conscious response both to the ‘behavioural revolution’ of the 1960s and to the growing ascendancy of rational choice theory in subsequent decades (see
It marks a return, albeit rather more consciously theorised, to an older tradition of institutional analysis. This had dominated political science in the early decades of the twentieth century. By the 1960s, however, despite the influence it continued to exert on public administration in Europe, it had long since relinquished any ascendancy it had once enjoyed over the discipline as a whole (Peters 1999; Rhodes 1995; W. R. Scott 1995). This was particularly so in the USA, where the legacy of the old institutionalism was negligible.

The new institutionalism departs from the mainstream of the 1980s in two key respects. First, it rejects the simplifying assumptions which make possible rational choice theory’s modelling of political behaviour. Second, it challenges the assumed regularity in human behaviour on which rests behaviouralism’s reliance on a logic of extrapolation and generalisation (or induction). In their place, new institutionalists propose more complex and plausible assumptions which seek to capture and reflect the complexity and open-endedness of processes of social and political change.

Unremarkably, perhaps, new institutionalism emphasises the mediating role of the institutional contexts in which events occur, rejecting what it sees as the input-weighted political analysis of behaviouralism and rational choice theory. In so doing, it draws attention to the significance of history, timing and sequence in explaining political dynamics. It points, in particular, to the ‘path dependent’ qualities of institutional, and hence political, development, as large and frequently irreversible
consequences may follow from seemingly minor or contingent events. This places clear limits on a predictive science of the political (P. Pierson 2000). Institutions, they suggest, tend to become embedded in routine and convention and are, consequently, difficult to transform. Accordingly, political time tends to be characterised by periods of relative tranquillity punctuated, periodically, by phases of rapid and intense institutional change.

From relatively humble origins in the movement to ‘bring the state back into’ the more input-weighted or society-centred political analysis of the times (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985), the new institutionalism has grown significantly, with a number of influential converts from rational choice theory (Knight 1992, 2001; North 1990) and, even, behaviouralism (for a discussion of which see Dunleavy 1996). The result has been a series of hybrid positions and a proliferation of inter-paradigm debates within contemporary political science. The most influ-

<table>
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<th>Table 1.2</th>
<th>Behaviouralism</th>
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| **Aim/contribution** | • To use rigorous statistical techniques in the analysis of political data  
• To develop an inductive science of the political capable of generating predictive hypotheses on the basis of the quantitative analysis of human behaviour at an aggregate level |
| **Key assumptions** | • The logic of induction is sound – general ‘covering laws’ can be inferred from specific empirical observations  
• Political behaviour exhibits regularities over time which allow law-like statements to be generated inductively  
• The neutral and dispassionate analysis of raw political data is possible  
• There is no separation of appearance and reality |
| **Key themes** | • No *a priori* theoretical assumptions should be allowed to inform political analysis  
• All theoretical propositions and assumptions must be exposed to rigorous and systematic empirical testing before they are deployed deductively  
• Ethical judgements must not be allowed to inform, distort or interfere with the systematic collation, recording and analysis of empirical evidence  
• Theoretical hypotheses take the form of probabilistic predictions based on the assumption that exhibited regularities in the data analysed are generalisable beyond the immediate context and time period in which the data was collected |

*cont. opposite*
• Political power is synonymous with decision-making and may, as a consequence, be operationalised quantitatively
• Political outcomes can largely be derived from an analysis of political inputs

Key concepts
• Causation and correlation
• Statistical significance
• Decision-making

Silences and limitations
• Problem of differentiating causation and correlation
• Tends to restrict itself to ‘visible’ variables and to those which can readily be quantified
• Assumptions about regularity problematise the extent to which behaviouralism can inform an analysis of social and political change
• The dependence of inductive inference on the assumption of regularity renders behaviouralism problematic in periods of social and political change
• Lacks a conception of agency
• Suffers from a narrow conception of politics and power

Seminal works
• Ted Gurr’s *Why Men Rebel* (1970)
• Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994)

Mapping the mainstream in international relations

The international relations mainstream is somewhat more complex and contested. It is, partly as a consequence, rather more difficult to specify. Its core is in fact relatively undisputed and comprises classical realism, structural or neo-realism and a position variously referred to as pluralism, liberalism, liberal institutionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, interdependence theory and, as here, neo-liberalism (compare Baldwin 1993; Baylis and Smith 2001; Hollis and Smith 1990b; Jackson and
Political Analysis

Altogether more contentious is the inclusion of constructivism and postmodernism within the mainstream. For there are many who would suggest that constructivism still has much to prove – not least its scientific status and its substantive contribution to the understanding of world politics (Keohane 1989; Moravcsik 2001) – before it can be welcomed into the court of international relations (IR) theory. And if this is said of constructivism, it need hardly be stated that few, if any, of those who regard themselves as defenders of the mainstream would be prepared to

Table 1.3  **New institutionalism**

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<th>Aim/contribution</th>
<th>Key assumptions</th>
<th>Key themes</th>
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<td>• To restore the link between theoretical assumptions and the reality they purport to represent</td>
<td>• ‘Institutions matter’ – political conduct is shaped profoundly by the institutional context in which it occurs and acquires significance</td>
<td>• Rationalism and behaviourism tend to concentrate too heavily on political inputs in explaining political outcomes, ignoring the key mediating role of political institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• To acknowledge the crucial mediating role of institutions in shaping political conduct and translating political inputs into political outcomes</td>
<td>• ‘History matters’ – the legacy the past bequeaths to the present is considerable</td>
<td>• Institutions become embedded in routine and convention and are, consequently, difficult to reform, transform or replace</td>
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<td>• To acknowledge the complexity and contingency of political systems</td>
<td>• Political systems are complex and inherently unpredictable</td>
<td>• The timing and sequence of events matters since history is ‘path dependent’ – large consequences may follow from small or contingent events</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Political systems are complex and inherently unpredictable</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Actors do not always behave instrumentally in pursuit of material self-interest</td>
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<table>
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<th>Key themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Rationalism and behaviourism tend to concentrate too heavily on political inputs in explaining political outcomes, ignoring the key mediating role of political institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Institutions become embedded in routine and convention and are, consequently, difficult to reform, transform or replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The timing and sequence of events matters since history is ‘path dependent’ – large consequences may follow from small or contingent events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Actors are socialised within institutional settings which define informal rules and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accordingly, logics of appropriateness may better explain political behaviour than those which assume instrumental self-interest</td>
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Altogether more contentious is the inclusion of constructivism and postmodernism within the mainstream. For there are many who would suggest that constructivism still has much to prove – not least its scientific status and its substantive contribution to the understanding of world politics (Keohane 1989; Moravcsik 2001) – before it can be welcomed into the court of international relations (IR) theory. And if this is said of constructivism, it need hardly be stated that few, if any, of those who regard themselves as defenders of the mainstream would be prepared to

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*cont. opposite*
credit postmodernism with a seat at the table. Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, few postmodernists would themselves be happy with such an invitation, seeing any inclusion within the mainstream as an alarming portent of assimilation and capitulation.

So why then insist on discussing constructivism and postmodernism in the context of the mainstream? My reasons are, in fact, relatively simple. The first of these is the seemingly inexorable rise of constructivism in recent years. This might be gauged in a variety of ways, from the large number of converts to its position since the 1990s, its impressive hold over a younger generation of international relations scholars,
the extent to which its contribution has been acknowledged, taken seriously and responded to by the mainstream, or just the reception that a seminal constructivist work, such as Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) has received from neo-realists and neo-liberals alike. If there are still those who would be uncomfortable with constructivism’s inclusion within the mainstream, then it is surely only a matter of time before they will be forced to concede that, whether they like it or not, it is already treated as such.

The position of postmodernism is obviously more controversial and there are, I think, good reasons for seeing it less as a (potentially) mainstream perspective than as a challenge to the very notion of a mainstream (see also S. Smith 2001: 241). I include it here for two reasons: (i) because the challenge it poses to the mainstream is, if ultimately problematic, fundamental and worthy of a response; and (ii) because constructivism defines itself, at least in part, in and through its opposition to neo-realism/neo-liberalism on the one hand and postmodernism on the other (Figure 1.2).

In many respects, the key point of departure for all contemporary contenders for mainstream status in international relations theory is *realism* (Table 1.4). It was fashioned as a direct response to the naïve or ‘utopian idealism’ of the period immediately following the Great War (Carr
1939). Such idealism, horrified by the brutality of total war, had sought to build an institutional architecture of international mediation and mutual cooperation that might serve to guarantee perpetual peace. Realism rose to dominance out of the ashes of that optimism in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s. It prided itself upon its sanguine view of world politics, premised on a realist(ic) if depressing view of human nature. Rather like rational choice theory, it effectively derived the instrumental rationality of the state and the anarchical character of a world system in which the state was sovereign from essentially Hobbesian assumptions about human nature. Life was nasty, brutish and, in the context of the late 1930s and early 1940s, all too short. For realists the study of international relations is the study of the interaction between sovereign states whose principal, indeed essentially sole, motivation for action is self-preservation (security) and, in pursuit of that end, the acquisition of power. Realism is, in short, rational choice theory applied at the level of the state system, with states cast in the image of utility-maximising rational actors. The result, a product to a considerable extent of its times, is a most depressing view of human affairs in which conflict is the norm and cooperation a rare and, above all, fragile product not of cooperative intent but of a temporary balancing of strategies of narrow self-interest and mutual distrust.

Neo-realism emerged in the 1970s as an attempt to produce a more refined, rigorous and structural account of world politics – though one still couched very much in realist terms (Table 1.5). It sought to emulate the mathematical rigour (as it saw it) of rational choice theory and, indeed, neo-classical economics through the careful choice of simplifying assumptions on which the rational behaviour of states within the international system might be modelled. Yet rather than proceed from ultimately universal, metaphysical and essentialist assumptions about human nature, as had its realist forebears, it assumed only that states (as unified actors) were rational in the pursuit of relative (rather than absolute) gains. Consequently, given the structure of the international system (anarchy), their behaviour was entirely predictable. For neo-realists, then, the conflictual and competitive nature of inter-state relations was the product not of any innately belligerent or aggressive qualities of states, but merely of the pursuit of national interest under conditions of anarchy.

Neo-liberalism, too, might be seen to share much with realism, though it arose first as a response to realism and was later shaped by its ongoing engagement with neo-realism (Baldwin 1993). (Table 1.6) Moreover, and despite any such similarities, its origins lie in precisely the ‘utopian idealism’ so categorically rejected by realists like E. H. Carr in the late 1930s, an idealism still reflected in its rather more positive and flexible
view of human nature than that of realism. All this having said, neo-liberals like neo-realists and realists before them are, at heart, rationalists, committed to a notion of the human subject as a rational actor carefully weighing up the respective merits and demerits of various courses of action in an attempt to maximise his or her personal utility. Yet here they part company, with neo-liberals drawing rather different conclusions. In particular, and in marked contrast to neo-realism, they emphasise the capacity of human agents to shape their environment and hence their destiny and, in marked contrast to classic realism, their capacity to achieve cooperation for mutual advantage. Characteristically, and as evidence for both, they cite the building of a global capitalist economy regulated by a series of interconnected international institutions. Such achievements, they suggest, demonstrate the conditions under which

| Aim/contribution | • In the context of the 1930s, to re-inject a healthy does of realism into the discussion of international relations following the delusions of idealism  
• To be sanguine and realistic about the frailty of human nature and to trace the implications for the conduct of international relations  
• To render international relations a rigorous and dispassionate science of world politics |
|---|
| Key assumptions | • The realm of international relations is governed by objective laws which have their origins in human nature  
• The pursuit of power by individuals and states is ubiquitous and unavoidable – consequently, conflict and competition is endemic  
• The state is sovereign and the natural unit of analysis in international relations since states recognise no authority above themselves and are autonomous of non-state actors and structures  
• States are unified actors, motivated exclusively by considerations of national interest  
• National interests are objective  
• The principal national interest is that of survival/security  
• There is a total separation of domestic and international politics with the former subordinated to the latter |
| Key themes | • The study of international relations is the study of the interaction between sovereign states  
• The self-interested behaviour of states in the absence of any overarching authority on a global scale produces a condition of anarchy  
| cont. opposite
Analytical Perspectives, Analytical Controversies

Table 1.4  Continued

- In so far as conflict is avoided, this is not because of the pacific intentions of states, but precisely because of the balance produced by the aggressive pursuit of power and security by states
- It is naïve to assume that cooperation rather than conflict is the natural condition of world politics
- The evolution of world politics is cyclical, characterised by timeless laws rooted in human nature

Key concepts
- Security
- Sovereignty
- National interest
- Power politics

Silences and limitations
- Limited attention to the role of non-state actors
- Little or no consideration to economic processes
- Relies on an impoverished conception of human nature and implausible assumptions
- Narrowly state-centric
- Less an accurate theory of world politics than the image in and through which world politics was made – hence, ‘nothing but a rationalisation of Cold War politics’ (Hoffman 1977: 48)

Seminal works
- E. H. Carr’s The Twenty Years’ Crisis (1939)
- Hans Morgenthau’s Politics Among Nations (1948)

cooperation may arise and in which states can pursue absolute rather than relative gains.

Though there are clear differences in emphasis between neo-realists and neo-liberals, successive rounds of the so-called ‘inter-paradigm debate’ have drawn the two perspectives ever closer together such that it is now often difficult to position clearly once prominent neo-realists or neo-liberals (Wæver 1996). This has led to the identification of a ‘neo-neo-synthesis’ which some would see as having come to circumscribe the parameters of theoretical debate in mainstream international relations (Kegley 1995; Lamy 2001; S. Smith 2001).

It is this cosy synthesis that constructivism and, in rather more radical terms, postmodernism, challenge. Like the new institutionalism in political science, constructivism rejects the rationalism on which the neo-neo-synthesis is premised, seeking to render its analytical assumptions more complex and realistic (Table 1.7). It is also characterised, again like the new institutionalism in political science, by its broadening of the field of political analysis to encompass not just interests but the means by which
interests are identified and constructed in the first place and the institutional context in which such interests are expressed, acted upon and revised. This is a more dynamic and open-ended approach to world politics which refuses to accept the primacy of material over ideational factors, thereby opening up for empirical analysis the whole area of social construction which realism, neo-realism and neo-liberalism had closed off. The overriding theme of constructivist work is the problematic nature of the concept of interests. Material interests are by no means transparent and uncontested. Moreover, it is perceptions of interests rather than material interests per se on which states act. Consequently, if we wish to understand world politics we need to explore the means and mechanisms by which states come to identify, act upon and

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1.5</th>
<th>Neo-realism</th>
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| Aim/contribution | • To produce a more systematic, rigorous and structural account of international relations in the realist tradition
• To liberate realism from essentialist and universal assumptions about human nature
• To produce a deductive science of world politics on the basis of parsimonious assumptions about the international system |
| Key assumptions | • World politics can be analysed as if states were unitary rational actors seeking to maximise their expected utility
• The context in which states find themselves – a condition of anarchy – determines the content of the rationality they exhibit
• The behaviour of states can be explained exclusively in terms of the structure of the international system itself, since states are rational and in any given setting there is only one optimal course of action open to them
• The state is again sovereign and the natural unit of analysis in international relations
• However, the role of international institutions in the governance of international relations (both political and economic) cannot be overlooked
• States are, again, unified actors, motivated solely by considerations of national interest
• States seek relative rather than absolute gains |
| Key themes | • The anarchical structure of the international system compels states to act as they do
• Accordingly, conflict is a consequence not of state belligerence but of the pursuit of national interest under conditions of anarchy |

cont. opposite
Though states are inherently conflictual and competitive, actual conflict can be averted in situations in which there is a balance of power.

Though there is always a tendency to instability in the international system, this can be attenuated if a dominant state assumes a leadership (or hegemonic) role.

Under such conditions of hegemonic stability, international institutions can serve to provide a secure basis for cooperation between nations, such as is evidenced in the international economic system which developed in the post-war period.

**Key concepts**
- Balance of power
- Relative (as opposed to absolute) gains
- Hegemonic stability

**Silences and limitations**
- Lacks clarity about the conditions of cooperation and the conditions of conflict in the international system.
- Incapable either of predicting or of explaining the end of the Cold War despite its focus on the balance of power within the international system.
- State-centric
- Displays a very limited and impoverished conception of state agency.
- Relies on a series of implausible assumptions about the unity and rationality of the state.

**Seminal works**
- Robert Gilpin’s *War and Change in World Politics* (1981)
- Charles Kindleberger’s *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (1973)
- Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979)

Revise their perception of both their interests and, in the process, their identity – who they are and what they stand for. A favoured example concerns the issue of security itself. States act in response to perceived security threats, not to the (material) volume of armoury which a state might (potentially) direct against them. As Alexander Wendt notes, ‘500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the US than five North Korean nuclear weapons, because the British are friends of the US and the North Koreans are not, and amity and enmity is a function of shared understandings’ (1995: 73). The neo-neo-synthesis has little or no way of dealing with this, appealing, as it does, to a notion of material interests as objective, uncontested and transparent. For constructivists, by contrast, crucial to understanding the conduct of states...
are the shared or inter-subjective understandings they fashion. In the end, then, if anarchy is indeed the condition of the international system it is important to acknowledge that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ (Wendt 1992).

If the challenge posed by constructivism to the mainstream is considerable, despite attempts by Wendt and others to convince realists in particular that they have little to fear from taking constructivism seriously (1999, 2000), then that posed by postmodernism is altogether more fundamental (Table 1.8). Indeed, arguably it calls into question the whole enterprise of international relations, as it does political analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.6</th>
<th>Neo-liberalism</th>
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| **Aim/contribution** | • To counter the state-centrism of realism and neo-realism and to reinsert economic dynamics into international relations  
• To explore the possibilities for cooperation within the international system  
• To explore the implications of a more flexible and positive view of human nature |
| **Key assumptions** | • Individuals and states, though rational, have the capacity to solve problems through collective action  
• International cooperation for mutual advantage is both desirable and possible  
• Actors other than states – multi-national corporations, religious and nationalist movements – play a central role in international events  
• States cannot be conceptualised as unified actors but are themselves multi-centric and subject to a variety of competing domestic and international pressures  
• Power, within the international system, is diffuse and fluid  
• Liberal democratic states do not wage war upon one another (the doctrine of the democratic peace)  
• Military force is by no means the only, or the most effective, instrument of foreign policy  
• States seek absolute rather than relative gains |
| **Key themes** | • An advanced international division of labour within the world economy encourages relations of interdependence and cooperation between nations which are mutually advantageous  
• The condition of complex interdependence which characterises the international system renders national economies ever more sensitive and vulnerable to events in other countries |

cont. opposite
### Table 1.6  Continued

- This entails a significant loss of state capacity and autonomy
- There is a complex relationship between domestic and international politics with no clear or consistent hierarchy
- International institutions and organisations, though in some sense themselves the product of state action, may come to assume an independent identity and display agency in their own right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concepts</th>
<th>Interdependence/complex interdependence</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Absolute (as opposed to relative) gains</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>International regimes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silences and limitations</th>
<th>Like realism, it lacks clarity about the conditions under which we should expect cooperation and those under which we should expect conflict</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For realists and neo-realists, liberals adopt a naïve and utopian conception of both human nature and the possibilities for international cooperation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tends to exaggerate the role of international institutions, the extent of globalisation and the limited capacity of the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tends to legitimate the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The empirical evidence does not seem to confirm the democratic peace thesis – democratic states can be quite belligerent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seminal works</th>
<th>Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye’s <em>Power and Interdependence</em> (1977)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph S. Nye’s <em>Understanding International Conflicts</em> (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James N. Rosenau’s <em>Turbulence in World Politics</em> (1990)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and social science more generally. While it might have some sympathy for the idea that the interests of states are constructions rather than objective properties, postmodernism, quite simply, rejects all of the above. Though it has given rise to a series of substantive contributions to international relations scholarship (see, for instance, Ashley 1987; Campbell 1992; Walker 1993; C. Weber 1995), its principal contribution is to challenge the stated and, above all, unstated assumptions of conventional international relations theory (realist, idealist or constructivist). It problematises and ultimately rejects the notion of a neutral or
dispassionate science of international relations, pointing, like constructivism, to the role of theory in the constitution of the objects of its analytical attentions. Yet it takes this line of argument far further, charting the complicity of international relations theory in the reproduction of existing power relations and in the production – invariably in the name of progress, liberty or emancipation – of new power relations while emphasising what it would see as the inherently partisan and political subject-positions from which such theory is written. It suggests, in short, that though students of world politics are loath to admit it, all theories are conceived and formulated to reflect a particular vantage-point or

<table>
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<th>Table 1.7  Constructivism</th>
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| **Aim/contribution** | • To open up a ‘middle way’ (Adler) between rationalism (neo-realism and neo-liberalism) and postmodernism  
• To explore the implications of acknowledging that political realities are socially constructed and of according ideas an independent role in the analysis of international relations  
• To explore the implications of replacing rationalism’s logic of instrumental rationality with a more sociological conception of agency  
• To explore the implications of treating interests and preferences as social constructions rather than as objectively given |
| **Key assumptions** | • Our beliefs play a crucial role in the construction of our reality  
• The social and political world is not a given but an inherently intersubjective domain – a product of social construction  
• There is no objective social or political reality independent of our understanding of it – there is no social realm independent of human activity  
• Ideational factors should be accorded as significant a role in international relations as material factors  
• For most constructivists, positivism cannot be reconciled with an emphasis upon the significance of intersubjective understanding |
| **Key themes** | • ‘Anarchy is what states make of it’ (Wendt) – the structure of the international system does not dictate state behaviour; it is the interaction and intersubjective understandings of states which gives rise to the condition of anarchy |

cont. opposite
subject-position in a world characterised by near infinite profusion of potential subject-positions. Consequently, all theories, despite any pretensions they may make to universality, neutrality or scientific status, are partial and partisan. They are, as a consequence, either complicit in the reproduction of the status quo and the power relations it serves to institutionalise or calls for the transformation of the existing state of affairs couched in the name of a progress. The latter can only serve to replace one system of domination and oppression with another.

Table 1.7  Continued

- Assesses the transformative impact of novel social constructions (such as the European Union) on the state system
- Emphasises the impact of national norms on international politics and international norms on national politics
- Emphasises the importance of discursive construction and naming in the identification and response, say, to security ‘threats’ – threats are perceptions and it is perceptions rather than realities that are responded to

Key concepts
- Social construction
- Intersubjectivity
- Identity

Silences and limitations
- Unified more by what they distance themselves from than by what they share
- For rationalists, much of what they claim theoretically, though plausible, remains either untestable to untested
- May be seeking to reconcile the irreconcilable – the choice between rationalism and postmodernism may be starker than constructivists assume
- Despite its ostensible aim to define and inhabit a middle ground between rationalism and postmodernism, many of its proponents seem to gravitate towards one or other pole
- Despite its theoretical appeal its promise is, as yet, largely unrealised

Seminal works
- Nicholas Onuf’s *A World of Our Making* (1989)
- Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999)
Postmodernism raises a series of crucial and troubling issues which deserve a sustained and systematic discussion. This will be the principal concern of Chapter 7. Suffice it for now to note that if the postmodernist challenge cannot be rebuffed it has very serious implications for the conduct of political analysis and the claims we might legitimately make in its name. It is conventional, both in international relations and political science, to dismiss such issues and to suggest that until such time as postmodernism has something ‘better’ to put in its place, its critique of the mainstream does not deserve to be taken seriously. Though certainly convenient, given the implications of the issues the postmodernist challenge raises, this is wholly inadequate and, in fact, profoundly

Table 1.8 **Postmodernism**

| Aim/contribution | • To cast doubt on modernist assumptions about the ability to generate objective knowledge of the social and political world  
|                  | • To draw attention to the conceptual prisms in and through which supposedly dispassionate and neutral theories are formulated  
|                  | • To expose the silences, implicit assumptions and universal pretensions of such theories and to reveal the power relations in whose reproduction they are complicit  
|                  | • To explore the implications of an international relations which does not rely on universal claims, privileged access to knowledge or the possibility of liberation or emancipation from power |
| Key assumptions  | • There is no neutral vantage-point from which the world can be described and analysed objectively  
|                  | • All knowledge is partial, partisan and power-serving  
|                  | • Knowledge claims are never neutral with respect to power relations which are, as a consequence, ubiquitous and diffuse  
|                  | • There are no facts about the social and political world, only interpretations advanced from a particular vantage-point  
|                  | • The social and political world is characterised not by sameness and identity but by difference, diversity and ‘otherness’ |
| Key themes       | • The identification and exploration of the way power operates in the discourses and practices of world politics  
|                  | • The celebration of difference, diversity and plurality |

*cont. opposite*
• A challenge to the notion of history as ‘progress’
• The attempt to establish universal conditions for human emancipation can only serve, in practice, to replace one set of relations of domination with another – there is no escape from tyranny
• The universal pretensions of general theories and emancipatory projects (metanarratives) is mythical
• Power relations often function through the construction, in language, of hierarchical distinctions of identity/difference, sameness/otherness

Key concepts
• (Incredulity towards) ‘metanarratives’
• Deconstruction
• Difference/otherness

Silences and limitations
• Tendency towards nihilism, fatalism and passivity – an abstention from judgement
• Is not postmodernism’s normative respect for ‘difference’ in the end self-defeating – precluding the taking of action to protect that difference?
• Are its implications not profoundly conservative – deconstruction without the possibility of the reconstruction of an alternative?
• Internal contradictions – is not postmodernism itself the metanarrative to end all metanarratives and hence a contradiction in terms?
• Tends towards pure descriptive narrative as opposed to political analysis

Seminal works
• David Campbell’s *Writing Security* (1992)
• R. J. Walker’s *Inside/Outside* (1993)
• Cynthia Weber’s *Simulating Sovereignty* (1995)

irresponsible. Moreover, if the postmodernists are right then there is nothing ‘better’ to put in place of the mainstream, for the enterprise itself is profoundly flawed. Though this is a view that I will ultimately reject, it is one that needs to be examined very closely.

**Analytical strategies in contemporary political science and international relations**

As the above paragraphs serve to demonstrate, there are certain resemblances between many of the perspectives which have come to charac-
terise the mainstream in political science and their counterparts in international relations. Nonetheless, the degree of dialogue between the two sub-disciplines has been somewhat limited. As I have sought already to suggest, rational choice theory, realism, neo-realism and neo-liberalism are all, essentially, rationalist. Moreover, constructivism in international relations theory and the new institutionalism in political science would seem to perform very similar roles within their respective sub-disciplines, valuing similar things and drawing attention to the role of institutions and ideas in the understanding of complex political change. Finally, behaviouralism, though rather more influential within political science than international relations, might be applied – and, indeed, has been applied – to world politics (see, for instance, Deutsch 1953, 1963; Guertzkow 1950; Kaplan 1957; Singer 1968). There are certainly perspectives, such as liberal intergovernmentalism and rational choice institutionalism, which are more difficult to position and seem to inhabit hybrid-locations between rationalism and institutionalism, but this merely reveals the limits of any fixed analytical schema. Within those limits, however, it is plausible to suggest the existence of three distinctive analytical traditions in political analysis which span international relations and political science: rationalism, behaviouralism and constructivism/new institutionalism. In what follows, and in keeping with my desire to resist as far as is possible the artificial and polarising distinction between international relations and political science, I will refer not to the sub-discipline-specific perspectives outlined in the preceding section but to the three distinctive analytical strategies on which they rest.

In the remaining sections of this chapter my aim is to introduce the key themes of the volume by examining the stance adopted with respect to a series of key analytical issues by these three analytical paradigms. Their distinctive features are summarised, albeit in a rather stylised fashion, in Table 1.9.

Yet my aim is not to present a commentary on each paradigm in turn. Rather, I introduce the distinctiveness and diversity of analytical strategies adopted in political science and international relations by considering some of the principal analytical issues and choices which divide them. Three issues in particular will prove particularly significant in the chapters which follow. They are: (1) the parsimony versus complexity trade-off; (2) the role of theory within political analysis; and (3) the relationship between political conduct and the context within which it occurs and acquires significance (the thorny perennial of structure and agency). Each warrants a brief introduction at this point.
The parsimony versus complexity trade-off

Though rarely discussed in any sustained or systematic manner (for an important exception see Sober 1988), the choice – perhaps better seen as a trade-off – between parsimony and complexity is central to the selection of analytical strategies in political science and international relations. Yet, as King, Keohane and Verba observe, ‘the word has been used in so many ways in casual conversation and scholarly writings that the principle has become obscured’ (1994: 20).

Before proceeding further, then, it is important that we are clear about what the term implies. Here it is instructive to differentiate clearly
between two rather different logics of political inquiry – the *inductive* and the *deductive*. As we shall see, the trade-off between parsimony and complexity has rather different implications for inductive and deductive approaches to political analysis.

**Deductive and inductive logics in political analysis**

*Inductive* approaches to political analysis take as their starting point the (supposedly) neutral and dispassionate assessment of empirical evidence. They begin, in short, with specific observations from which they seek to generate (though inductive generalisation and inference) more general or even universal theoretical propositions (Hempel 1966: 11; Wolfe 1924: 450). As Norman Blaikie suggests, induction ‘corresponds to a popular conception of the activities of scientists [as] persons who make careful observations, conduct experiments, rigorously analyse the data obtained, and hence produce new discoveries or theories’ (1993: 133). Theory, in such a strategy, logically follows observation and generalisation and is little more than the statement of generalisable ‘covering laws’ consistent with an existing set of empirical observations (Hempel 1994). This inductive logic is depicted schematically in Figure 1.3.

Induction in the social sciences is associated with *empiricism*, the privileging of evidence and observation over theory, reason or intuition. It proceeds from relatively direct, simple and specific observations (‘in 1992 corporation X left country A for country B with a lower rate of corporate taxation’ or ‘this swan is white’) to more general, even universal, covering laws (‘in an era of globalisation capital will leave high-taxation regimes for low-taxation regimes’ or ‘all swans are white’).

*Deductive* approaches to political analysis are essentially a mirror image of such a strategy (see Figure 1.3). Rather than commencing with, and thereby privileging, observation they seek to derive (or deduce) testable propositions or hypotheses from pre-established facts or initial theoretical assumptions. The predictive hypotheses thereby formulated are subsequently exposed to rigorous empirical scrutiny; the hypothesis either confirmed or rejected. The logic is, in Karl Popper’s memorable terms, one of ‘conjecture and refutation’ (1969).

A good example of such a deductive logic is that exhibited in Anthony Downs’ influential *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957); see also Black (1958); Hotelling (1929). Downs starts with a series of simplifying theoretical assumptions which establish the parameters of the model (that parties in democratic polities are analogous to firms in a profit-seeking economy, that both voters and political parties are rational in pursuit of their preferences, that opposition parties seek only election, governments re-election and that parties have complete information as to the distribution of preferences of the electorate, to name but a few).
Through a process of logical theoretical deduction, Downs generates the prediction (or hypothesis), that in a first-past-the-post, two-party electoral system in which voters’ preferences are normally distributed, the political parties will gravitate towards the preferences of the median voter. In other words, opposition and government will converge on the political centre-ground. Such a prediction was seemingly confirmed by the bipartisan centrism of the US Democrats and Republicans of the time and, indeed, has been resuscitated to account for similarly bipartisan convergence in countries such as Australia, Britain, Ireland and New Zealand in recent years (for a critical assessment of this literature see Hay 1999e: Ch. 3).4

Having established the distinctiveness of inductive and deductive rationales in political research, we can now return to the trade-off between parsimony and complexity.

**Parsimony, complexity and induction**

In inductive approaches to social and political analysis the aim, essentially, is to fit a theoretical model to a set of empirical data. Here parsimony is most simply understood as getting value for one’s variables. A parsimonious explanation or model is one which includes as few variables as possible yet which explains (or offers the potential to explain)
as much as possible (see also Jeffreys 1961: 47; Zellner 1984). In some sense, a better explanation (certainly a more complete one) is one which includes more variables. But here we run the risk of sacrificing a simple and elegant account for a complex and sophisticated yet cumbersome and inelegant alternative. In more technical (in fact, classically behaviouralist) terms, we run the risk of ‘saturating’ our model with additional variables each of which account for progressively less of the overall ‘variance’. The casualty in such a strategy is the analytical and explanatory precision of a more parsimonious account.

This makes parsimony sound like a very attractive proposition and something to aspire to in one’s theoretical models. Who, after all, could possibly prefer a cumbersome and inelegant account saturated with variables of only marginal (if any) significance when presented with a simple, neat and elegant alternative in which each variable’s contribution to the causal chain is clear and unambiguous? Yet this is to present a somewhat distorted view. An example might serve to indicate why. Say we are interested in formulating a general theory of electoral success and failure in advanced liberal democratic polities. Impressed by the allure of parsimony, we might be tempted to suggest that the key factor predisposing political parties to electoral success at a given election is their success at the previous election. This is a highly parsimonious model, yet one which is wholly inadequate. While it might well be the case that incumbent administrations are marginally more likely to be re-elected than they are to be expelled from office at any given election, a model of democratic electoral competition incapable of predicting anything other than the perpetuation of a one-party state is at best somewhat anomalous. Clearly parsimony can be taken too far. Our overly simplistic model might be rendered more complex and sophisticated (in other words, less parsimonious) by the incorporation of a series of additional variables – the length of the incumbent administration’s tenure in office, the perceived relative economic competence of the principal parties, and so forth. The question is, of course, how far to go. At what point are the merits of greater complexity more than outweighed by the loss of parsimony their incorporation in the model would entail?

In seeking to draw causal inferences from the observed pattern of correlations between a given set of variables, this is precisely the sort of choice behaviouralist political scientists face on a routine basis. For them, by and large, parsimony is a good thing; a plausible parsimonious explanation is to be preferred to a similarly plausible yet more involved alternative. In the end, however, the choice of how many variables to incorporate – in other words, where precisely to position one’s model on the parsimony–complexity axis – is a subjective judgement, though one influenced significantly by the data under consideration. Some rela-
tionships (and the data sets in and through which behaviouralists investigate such relationships) avail themselves of more parsimonious explanatory models than others.

Parsimony, complexity and the nature of political reality

It is at this point that the discussion of parsimony, to the extent that it occurs at all, usually terminates (see, for instance Miller 1995: 172; Ragin 1994: 214; Ragin, Berg-Schlosser and de Meur 1996: 760–2). Yet it is here, I would suggest, that it should really begin. For if we acknowledge that the extent to which parsimony might be deemed desirable depends upon the object of our analytical attentions, then we can usefully ask under what conditions the world avails itself of parsimonious explanation.

This brings us to a crucial point and one of relevance not only to inductive logics of political inquiry. As King, Keohane and Verba perceptively note, for parsimony to be adopted as a guiding principle of good political analysis implies ‘a judgement, or even assumption, about the nature of the world: it is assumed to be simple’. Moreover, as they go on to suggest, ‘the principle of choosing theories that imply a simple world is a rule that clearly applies in situations where there is a high degree of certainty that the world is indeed simple’. Consequently, ‘we should never insist on parsimony as a general principle of designing theories, but it is useful in those situations where we have some knowledge of the simplicity of the world we are studying’ (1994: 20, emphasis mine). This interesting and important passage contains a subtle and highly significant slippage: the progressive blurring (in the emphasised passages) of judgements, assumptions and knowledge of the simplicity of the world we inhabit. What are merely judgements or assertions in the first sentence have acquired the status of knowledge by the second. This raises a series of key questions. Do we have to make (presumably subjective and untestable) assumptions about the degree of simplicity or complexity of the world in which we find ourselves, or can we acquire (objective) knowledge of such things? What does it mean to have ‘knowledge of the simplicity of the world we are studying’? How would we ever test such a proposition? No clear answers are provided to such disarming questions. However, what is clear is that, in the absence of unambiguous means to assess the degree of complexity of the world we inhabit, the choice between parsimonious and more complex models of political reality appears altogether more arbitrary and subjective than King, Keohane and Verba seem to imply. Here it is instructive to note that, among political scientists, it tends to be behaviouralists who make some of the simplest assumptions about the world in which they find
themselves. It is perhaps not then surprising that they consistently prize parsimony.

This brings us for the first time to a recurrent theme of this volume. Generally untestable assumptions about the nature of the social and political world affect, fundamentally, the manner in which political analysis is conducted and the status of the knowledge claims we feel we may legitimately make as political analysts.

**Parsimony, complexity and deduction**

The force of this remark becomes clear if we move from *inductive* logics of political analysis (such as characterise behaviouralism) in which the theoretical generalisations are inferred from the evidence to *deductive* logics (such as characterise rational choice theory and neo-realism) in which testable theoretical hypotheses are derived from initial theoretical assumptions. Here parsimony has rather different implications and is generally taken to refer to the theoretical assumptions upon which the process of theoretical deduction is premised. Opinions and styles of political analysis vary. Certain traditions in political science and international relations – notably rational choice theory and neo-realism – prize themselves on the parsimony of their theoretical assumptions. Others, notably new institutionalism in political science and constructivism in international relations theory, might be seen as reactions to what they perceive to be the dangers of *overly* parsimonious theoretical assumptions (for a particularly lucid explanation, see P. Pierson 2000). They prize themselves not on the parsimony but the realism of their analytical premises.

A brief consideration of Downs’ *An Economic Theory of Democracy* is again instructive. Downs is a rational choice theorist whose model of bipartisan convergence rests, essentially, on the theoretical assumptions out of which it is constructed. Those assumptions are undoubtedly parsimonious, but frankly implausible. Voters are not simply self-serving egoists motivated only by economic self-interest, parties are not blessed with perfect information of the distribution of voter preferences, nor are they motivated solely by the pursuit of office at any cost. Interestingly, Downs himself is prepared to concede the point, clearly stating from the outset that his assumptions are chosen not for their accuracy or sophistication but for their simplicity. As he remarks, ‘theoretical models should be tested primarily for the accuracy of their predictions rather than for the reality of their assumptions’ (1957: 21). Though refreshingly sanguine, this might seem like a somewhat strange concession to make. After all, what confidence can we have in a theory based on premises whose implausibility is freely acknowledged by its most prominent exponents? Yet, there is another way of looking at this. For were
Downs to render more complex the theoretical assumptions on which the model is based, it would almost certainly preclude the sort of modelling in which he engages. If there is utility in Downs’ *An Economic Theory of Democracy* – probably the single most influential work of political science in the post-war period (Goodin and Klingemann 1996: 32) – then it is largely despite, not because of, the parsimony of its assumptions. Nonetheless, it would have been unthinkable in the absence of such simplifying assumptions.

For increasing numbers of political scientists and international relations theorists, however, this is no excuse. For new institutionalists and constructivists in particular, theoretical assumptions must certainly be plausible and, arguably, as accurate as possible. If, in a complex and interdependent world, this makes political analysis difficult and the sort of mathematical modelling beloved of rational choice theorists and some neo-realists impossible, then so be it. For them, parsimony is a dubious virtue indeed – a synonym for the irrelevance that invariably accompanies high theoretical abstraction. It is, in short, an excuse for indulgent exercises in the production of models with little or no genuine reference to the real world.

What this suggests is that parsimony, at least in deductive approaches to political analysis, is achieved at some price in terms of the realism of theoretical assumptions (a point acknowledged by many rationalists, see Hinich and Munger 1997: 4). This clearly matters. For, notwithstanding the suggestion that it is only the predictive accuracy of analytical models that really counts, the extent to which one can legitimately claim to have explained political outcomes in terms of such models surely depends on the use of credible assumptions.

Yet if parsimony should not be regarded as an unambiguous good, we should perhaps be equally wary of viewing it as an unequivocal evil. For no less problematic is the refusal, often associated with postmodernism, to make theoretical assumptions at all (on the grounds that assumptions distort the complexity of reality). Equally debilitating is the attempt, characteristic of some institutionalists and constructivists, to render our analytical assumptions so complex and sophisticated as to preclude any generalisation between cases. Pure description, at one end of the spectrum, explains nothing yet is true to the complexity of reality. At the other end of the spectrum, abstract theoretical reflection and modelling based on simplifying assumptions (as in rational choice theory) offers the potential to explain much. But it does so only by virtue of the violence it inflicts on the nuance and complexity of the reality it purports to explain. Abstraction and simplification makes prediction possible; but the greater the degree of abstraction and simplification the less useful that prediction is likely to prove. There is, in short a trade-off: parsimony and predictive capacity (the power of explanation) on the one
hand versus accuracy of assumptions (or, in the case of pure description, the absence of assumptions) and the ability to reflect the complexity and indeterminacy of political processes on the other.

The trade-off is captured schematically in Figure 1.4. It provides a particularly useful way of highlighting the range and diversity of rationales underpinning strategies of political analysis.

At the parsimonious end of the spectrum, rationalist perspectives value the predictive capacity that comes with the choice of simplifying theoretical assumptions. Some way towards the opposite end of the spectrum we find the new institutionalists and constructivists who insist on more precisely specified and contextually specific assumptions, scaling down their ambitions for the construction of generalisable and predictive theory as a consequence. Finally, and still further along this axis, we find postmodernists, happy to sacrifice any such lingering (modernist) ambitions. As we shall see in Chapter 7, these authors argue that all theoretical abstractions and generalisations necessarily distort, and thereby do violence to, the distinctiveness of each and every context. Such contexts, they suggest, deserve to be respected for what they are and analysed in their own terms rather than those imposed upon them by political analysts writing, invariably, from altogether different vantage-
points. Postmodernists thus shun generalisation, theoretical abstraction and prediction, preferring instead analyses conducted in terms familiar to the participants in the political behaviour being considered. For them, parsimony is little more than a signal of the universalising, totalising and colonising pretensions of mainstream political science.

The role for and nature of theory in political analysis

This brings us fairly directly to the nature of and role for theory in political science and international relations. It is tempting to assume that theory serves but one purpose in political analysis, a purpose that is essentially the same regardless of the analytical tradition within which that purpose is to be realised. Yet as the above discussion already serves to indicate, this is far from being the case. For positivists, keen to model the analysis of the political upon the natural sciences, a theory is not a theory unless it is capable of generating testable (preferably falsifiable) hypotheses (King, Keohane and Verba 1994: 100–5; Nagel 1961). While this perhaps remains the dominant understanding of theory within political analysis, such a restrictive conception is sectarian in dismissing (as atheoretical) those whose philosophical worldview tells them that the political world is so complex and indeterminate that it is not amenable to prediction. It is yet another instance of the imposition of a universal standard which happens to conform to one (of many) strands of political analysis. What it fails to appreciate is that the role for and nature of theory in political analysis is itself variable, reflective of different assumptions about the nature of the political reality being investigated, the extent of the knowledge we can hope to acquire of it, and the strategies appropriate to its analysis. It also fails to acknowledge the theoretical content of precisely such assumptions.

As the previous sections have already made clear, a variety of competing tendencies can be identified in contemporary political science and international relations, pulling in different directions. Three in particular have proved influential in setting the terms of contemporary controversy within the discipline. Each has a rather different conception of the role of theory.

Rationalism and formal theory

First, and perhaps still the dominant strand at least in US political science and international relations, is rationalism. This broad school of thought encompasses both rational choice theory in political science and neo-
realism in international relations theory. As we have seen, rationalists, often in the face of mounting criticism from neo-institutionalists and constructivists, continue to value parsimony, predictive power and the scientific assuredness both make possible.

Rationalists are positivists, committed not only to a unity of method between the natural and social sciences (naturalism), but to the idea that the natural sciences provide a model of good practice to which the social sciences should aspire. In short, they seek to model political analysis upon the natural sciences. However, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, there is more than one way to do this. Rationalists, rather like theoretical physicists, tend to privilege deduction over induction, proceeding on the basis of extremely pared-down and parsimonious theoretical assumptions (invariably relating to the narrow instrumental rationality of political actors or states cast in the image of unified political actors) to derive testable propositions. As in neo-classical economics, on whose assumptions rationalism tends to draw, the preferred mode of analysis is (mathematical) modelling (on rationalism’s debt to neo-classical economics see Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Moe 1984; Tullock 1976). This certainly gives the impression of analytical rigour, as a quick glance at the pages of algebraic notation in any issue of the *American Political Science Review* or *International Studies Quarterly* will surely testify. Whether, in the end, pages of algebraic notation tell us anything that words cannot better convey, is an interesting – and understandably contentious – issue. Whatever one’s view, it is important to acknowledge that despite methodological and computational innovations, such modelling entails a significant simplification of the complexity of political life. It is manifestly impossible, computational advances notwithstanding, to render mathematically anything even vaguely approximating the rich complexity of social and political interaction. However impressive and seemingly complex the maths, then, rationalism must assume a world far more simple and predictable than our experiences would suggest.

Paul Pierson makes the point with characteristic clarity:

Since the rise of behaviouralism, many political scientists have had lofty aspirations about developing a science of politics, rooted in parsimony and generalisation and capable of great predictive power. Despite modest achievements over four decades, these aspirations remain. Setbacks are shrugged off with calls for more time or more sustained application of the proper methods, but the inability to generate powerful generalisations that facilitate prediction remains a puzzle. (2000: 266; see also Crick 1962)
In seeking to account for this troubling disparity between ambition and realisation, political scientists have been looking in the wrong place. Rather than focusing quizzically on their various attempts to put positivism into practice in political analysis, they would have been better advised to come to terms with the inherent complexity of political reality. The problem, as Pierson explains, ‘lies in the character of the political world itself’ (2000: 266). In short, ‘reality’ does not avail itself of the sort of parsimony on which rationalism is premised.

As the above discussion indicates, the role of theory for rationalists is the simplification of an external reality as a condition of the generation of predictive hypotheses. These are, at least in principle, capable of falsification. That having been said, the emphasis in rational choice theory and more formal variants of neo-realism tends to be on the deduction and derivation from initial assumptions of stylised models of political behaviour, rather than on the testing of the formal models thereby generated. As Melvin J. Hinich and Michael C. Munger explain in an influential text, ‘formal theories help social scientists explore “what if?” questions by deducing the implications of a set of premises . . . the particular “what if” implications derived from abstract theory may have little to do with the world of directly observable phenomena’ (1997: 1, 4).

This is an important statement, for it suggests something of a tension, characteristic of much rational choice theory, between the practice of rationalism on the one hand and the positivism its exponents invariably espouse on the other. The tension becomes somewhat clearer if we compare the above extract with the following passage, a little later in the same volume:

the external application, or ‘testing’, of formal theory is by analogy: the theory is tested by measuring relationships among observable phenomena, in the hope that the observable phenomena are ‘like’ the relationships the model focuses on. (1997: 5, emphasis in the original)

Well, which is it to be? Are rationalism’s assumptions genuinely chosen for interest’s sake as means to the end of conducting hypothetical thought experiments (along the lines, ‘what if the world were like this?’). Or are they intended to provide approximations, however rough, of an external reality against which they might be evaluated? In the former case, the plausibility or implausibility of the assumptions is of no great consequence. For the purpose of the process of theoretical deduction is, presumably, to reveal the consequences of a world (unlike our own) in which the hypothesized assumptions were true. While this might make rationalism sound like a rather fanciful and indulgent pursuit, the value
of such hypothetical reasoning should not be so easily dismissed. The positing of ‘what if’ questions can be extremely useful, having the potential to provide, for instance, timely and powerful warnings about the likely consequences of existing political trajectories. If it appears as though political parties increasingly appeal to the electorate in much the same way as corporations appeal to consumers, then it might be useful to model formally the consequences, say, within a two-party, first-past-the-post electoral system, of such a dynamic. The point, of course, would not be to seek to explain the conduct of the parties exhibiting such a logic, but rather to point to the positive and/or negative consequences of such a dynamic in the hope that it might either be encouraged or resisted. Such reflection might also draw attention to the conditions under which political parties come to exhibit this particular ‘rationality’.9

Similarly, were we concerned about the seemingly growing power of capital with respect to the state under conditions of regional and/or global economic integration, we might usefully construct a formal model of an open and global economy in which capital is freely mobile. Though hypothetical, this might allow us to examine the potential implications of further doses of capital liberalisation. Again, the assumptions would be chosen not for their correspondence to the existing state of affairs but as a means of exploring potential futures. The purpose would be not so much to produce predictive hypotheses so much as conditional predictions. As in the case of the free mobility of capital, these might take the form of precautionary political warnings of the potential consequences of the untempered unfolding of existing dynamics, made at a point at which such logics might still be checked.

Sadly, however, little work in the rationalist tradition adopts this kind of rationale. Instead, speculative and implausible (‘what if’) assumptions are used as the basis from which to construct formal models of the polity or economy. Such models are then presented, and frequently accepted by policy-makers, as accurate representations of the systems they purport to reflect. The hypothetical nature of the initial assumptions is now forgotten, as open economy macroeconomic models are used to derive optimal taxation regimes (Tanzi and Schuknecht 1997; Tanzi and Zee 1997), as central banks are given independence on the basis of, frankly, fanciful assumptions about the ‘rational expectations’ of market actors (Lucas 1973; Kydland and Prescott 1977; Sargent 1986; Sargent and Wallace 1975), and as public bureaucracies are retrenched or marketised on the basis of equally implausible assumptions about the narrow self-interest of public bureaucrats (Buchanen 1977; Niskanen 1971, 1975; Tullock 1965).10 While these remain the principal contributions of rationalism to the social sciences, its full potential has yet to be realised.
Behaviouralism and inductive theory

The basic principle of behaviouralism is succinctly captured by Steve Smith in the following maxim: ‘let the facts, with some help and a receptive audience, speak for themselves’ (1995: 7). If rationalism places its emphasis upon the elucidation and deduction from initial theoretical assumptions of hypotheses that are, in principle, testable, then behaviouralism adopts an altogether different logic, proceeding from observation through inductive generalisation to theory. Where rationalism places its emphasis upon the process of logical theoretical deduction, giving little or no sustained attention to the means by which theoretical propositions might be tested empirically, behaviouralism tends to take for granted the means by which theoretical propositions might be inferred from empirical evidence, while focusing considerable attention on the means by which reliable empirical evidence might be gathered in the first place. In short, what rationalism treats as intuitive and unproblematic – namely, the gathering of empirical evidence – behaviouralism problematises; what behaviouralism treats as intuitive and unproblematic – namely, the relationship between theory, inference and deduction – rationalism problematises. Accordingly, while behaviouralists tend to rely upon a simple logic of induction that many rationalists would regard as deeply suspect in its attempt to draw generalisable conclusions from specific observations, rationalists tend to rely upon a similarly simplistic, intuitive and often anecdotal appeal to empirical evidence which many behaviouralists would certainly see as no less problematic.

Shunning theory, certainly as a guide to the investigation of political reality, behaviouralism proceeds from the empirical evidence itself. The (acknowledged) role for theory in pure behaviouralism is, then, strictly limited. Empirical observations, though potentially capable of adjudicating between contending theoretical accounts, are, or at least should be, conducted in a matter that is entirely neutral with respect to such theories. Indeed, ideally, the analysts should be oblivious to all contending theoretical approaches at the point of observation. For the genuinely dispassionate assessment of empirical evidence relies upon, as it implies, the absence of a priori assumptions. Thus, as Martin Hollis and Steve Smith suggest,

For behaviouralists, the path to theory started with what was observable, and strict behaviouralists held that there should be no non-observable elements in the theory at all. The guiding light in the search for theory was the methods of the natural sciences (usually equated with physics), construed in strictly observational terms. The social sciences were conceived as a realm of enquiry to which the transfer of these methods was essentially unproblematic. Embarrassment at the
lack of results was brushed off by pointing out that the social sciences were new, and therefore could not be expected to achieve the theoretical power of the natural sciences straight away. (1990: 29b)

Two points might here be made. First, the analogy with physics, as we have already seen, is a poor one, with many theoretical physicists adopting a largely formal and deductive approach considerably at odds with behaviouralism’s empiricism. If anything, it is the rather more empirical natural sciences, such as biology or genetics, that classic behaviouralism resembles. That having been said, an older tradition of experimental physics, epitomised by Newtonian mechanics, did exhibit a more inductive approach. Yet this perhaps only serves to draw attention to a second and more general point: the rather dated nature of pure behaviouralism. That the above extract is expressed in the past tense is by no means accidental. That was then, this is now. However influential it might have been in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the USA, few pure behaviouralists remain today. Indeed, it is surely testimony to the severity of the critique that behaviouralism endured in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s that those adopting an essentially inductive approach to political analysis today now invariably refer to themselves not even as ‘neo-behaviouralists’ but as ‘post-behaviouralists’ (see, for instance, Easton 1997; Sanders 1995: 64, 74–5). Nonetheless, as David Easton has recently remarked, contemporary political science is characterised by an increasing neo/post-behavioural content (1997). The same might also be said of international relations (for an excellent review see Vasquez 1996).


1. Social and political reality can be said to exist ‘out there’ and is directly accessible to scientific inquiry unencumbered by pre-existing beliefs
2. Political behaviour exhibits discoverable regularities and uniformities, such as might be captured in general ‘covering’ laws
3. The validity of any such covering laws can be established only by testing them by reference to the relevant political behaviour – all theoretical propositions must be testable
4. The means for acquiring and interpreting data poses a series of methodological challenges and cannot be taken for granted
5. Accuracy and precision in the recording of empirical evidence entails measurement and quantification
6. Ethical judgements and theoretical assumptions must not be allowed to inform, distort, or otherwise interfere with the systematic collation and recording of empirical evidence.

7. Data collection, interpretation and explanation logically proceed, and should not be influenced by, concerns relating to the utilisation of the knowledge thereby acquired.

Many of these assumptions (especially 5–7) have been softened considerably since the high point of the ‘behavioural revolution’ in the 1960s. Indeed, most self-proclaimed post-behaviouralists would openly acknowledge the following qualifications:

8. Key variables may be difficult or impossible to quantify or gauge precisely.

9. Normative agendas and theoretical assumptions inevitably play a part in influencing the choice of data to be analysed.

10. In an age of restricted research funding the anticipated utility and application of research findings can and should inform the choice of research strategy (Easton 1997: 15–20; Sanders 1995: 64–8).

As a consequence, today’s heirs to the behaviouralist inheritance would tend to see the quantitative methods with which they are principally associated not as a necessary condition of a science of the political so much as a potentially useful set of analytical techniques, among others, in the service of such a science. They are thus far more prepared than once they were to accept an academic division of labour within political analysis, rejecting, in so doing, the totalising vision of an integrated behavioural social science in favour of methodological pluralism.

Nonetheless, the basic behaviouralist rationale, as encapsulated in assumptions 1–4 above, remains essentially intact. Post-behaviouralists thus still retain a highly distinctive conception of theory in political analysis and one which is not so very different from that of their behaviouralist forebears. As much as possible, theory should not be allowed to interfere with or, worst still, inform empirical observation (as in constructivism and the new institutionalism). Rather, it is best seen as following naturally from empirical observation. Theory, for behaviouralists, is in a sense little more than a language for registering statistical correlations between observed variables – a repository, in short, of empirical generalisations. Theory provides a set of abstracted re-descriptions (couched in the form of empirically testable hypotheses) of the patterns exhibited in observed political data. As David Sanders usefully suggests, it acts as something of a short-hand, ‘distancing the analyst from the potentially overwhelming detail of what can be directly
observed, so that abstract deductions can be made about the connections between different phenomena’ (1995: 74).

In this way, as James C. Charlesworth notes, behaviourists are at once modest and immodest . . . [T]hey do not pretend to know the origin and destiny of man [sic], but conclude that the only way to understand him is to observe him and record what he does in the courtroom, in the legislative hall, in the hustings. If enough records are kept we can predict after a while (on an actuarial basis) what he will do in the presence of recognised stimuli. Thus we can objectively and inductively discover what and where and how and when, although not why. (1967: 3, emphasis in the original)

This is an important point and brings us to the limitations of behaviourism, about which we will have more to say presently and in later chapters. Those limitations tend to derive from the fundamental (metatheoretical) assumptions which make behaviourism possible, and which behaviourists tend not to acknowledge as theoretical (or metatheoretical) assumptions in the first place. Arguably this already problematises their central conviction that the analysis and interpretation of empirical evidence should be conducted in a theoretical vacuum. As soon as one acknowledges, as many post-behaviouralists now would, that to presume a world in which appearance and reality are one and the same (assumption 1) or in which social relations exhibit discoverable regularities and uniformities over time (assumption 2) is itself to make (untestable) theoretical assumptions, behaviourism’s pristine empiricism is quickly tarnished.

While the first of these assumptions is, in the end, a matter of belief (either reality presents itself to us as really it is, or it does not), the second is arguably more of a matter of convenience. For while human behaviour does, undoubtedly, exhibit regularities over time, such regularities are far from universal, varying both historically and culturally. Few would now accept that what might be inferred inductively about political behaviour, say, from an analysis of voting behaviour in Britain before the passing of the 1832 Reform Act would have much to say about voting behaviour in the Czech Republic today. What allows behaviourists to draw predictive inferences from the empirical evidence they analyse is the convenient assumption that any regularities thereby observed will continue to hold in the future – or, indeed, in other cultural contexts or institutional domains. Under certain conditions, that may well be an appropriate assumption to make, but it effectively silences behaviourism’s contribution to the analysis of political change.

Less fundamental, perhaps, but arguably no less significant in matters of substantive political analysis, is behaviourism’s ‘tendency to empha-
sise what can be easily measured rather than what might be theoretically important’ (Sanders 1995: 65). We have already encountered a similar limitation of rationalism – namely the tendency to emphasise that which might easily be incorporated within a formal model, at the expense of that which might be more causally significant. Largely as a consequence of these mutually reinforcing tendencies in rationalism and behaviouralism a series of crucial issues, such as the role of ideas in processes of political causation (discussed in Chapter 6), have remained systematically unexplored. As a consequence, behaviouralists (and, indeed, rationalists) invariably overlook the significance of subjective and/or cultural factors in political processes. Often, as Walter Berns has persuasively argued, the most significant aspects of political ‘reality’ are invisible to the analyst only concerned to describe and catalogue or, worst still, to model an unfolding sequence of events. As he suggests in a revealing example, racial segregation

is only seen by the observer because he [sic] can see the injustice of the practice . . . Through the ‘eye of the mind’ we are enabled to see the injustice and hence the political; with the eye alone we would see only men of dark skin sitting in the balconies of theatres marked ‘coloured’, or not sitting at Woolworth lunch counters. Out of the millions of so-called factual events that pass within the range of our vision, we could not single out these events except as they are seen by the eye of a mind that is not blinded by prejudice or a fallacious theoretical commitment. It is this commitment that accounts for political science books devoid of political content. (Cited in Sibley 1967: 55)

No less troubling, as Sanders again notes, is behaviouralism’s ‘tendency to concentrate on readily observed phenomena – such as voting – rather than the more subtle, and perhaps deeper, structural forces that promote stability and change in social and political systems’ (1995: 66). Ironically, this leaves behaviouralists incapable of accounting for precisely the stability and regularity of the political world which they assume and on which their appeal to induction rests. The combination of such limiting factors serves perhaps to indicate why rationalism and behaviouralism have so frequently provided the point of departure for alternative approaches to political analysis. It is to two of these, the new institutionalism and constructivism, that we now turn.

New institutionalism, constructivism and theory as a heuristic device

While rationalism is relatively easily characterised in terms of its deductive and formal theory and behaviouralism in terms of its empiricist
appeal to the logic of induction, the new institutionalism in political science and constructivism in international relations are rather more disparate schools of thought. In terms of their understanding of the nature of and role for theory they are characterised more by what they reject than what they embrace (Christiansen, Jørgensen and Wiener 2001: 4; Hall and Taylor 1996: 936; Hay and Wincott 1998; Peters 1999: 15–7; W. R. Scott 1995: 26). As such, they are united, more than anything else, by their opposition to behaviouralism and, if in a rather more uneven and somewhat lesser extent, rationalism.11 While it is probably something of an exaggeration, then, there is surely some substance to Grant Jordan’s suggestion that the new institutionalism has attracted the attention it has largely because the label signalled ‘a disposition to oppose the political science mainstream’ (1990: 482).12 With a similar caveat the same might also be said of constructivism’s opposition to the so-called ‘neo-neo-synthesis’ in international relations theory (Baldwin 1993; Kegley 1995; Lamy 2001; S. Smith 2001; Wæver 1996).

What is clear, however, is that proponents of the new institutionalism and constructivism are united in their resistance to purely deductive and purely inductive logics in political analysis. At the same time, both are broad churches in such matters, with so-called rational choice institutionalists and ‘thin’ constructivists like Wendt himself close to one end of the spectrum and historical and sociological institutionalists and more radical constructivists close to the other (for a perhaps overly stylised depiction see Figure 1.5).

When compared with more formal and purist variants of rationalism, rational choice institutionalism certainly tends to be more cautious in its specification of initial assumptions, seeking to capture theoretically something of the detail of the specific institutional contexts within which actors’ ‘rationality’ is exercised.13 This often precludes the sort of formal modelling otherwise characteristic of rationalism while encouraging a rather closer appeal to the empirical evidence. Thus, though by no means inductive in approach, rational choice institutionalism exhibits a qualified deductive logic. Similarly, though from the other end of spectrum, while historical and sociological institutionalists and radical constructivists tend to shun what they regard as the overly theoreticist abstraction of purely deductive models in favour of richer descriptive narratives (see, for instance Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 12), such narratives are invariably informed by abstract theoretical reflections and are thus far from purely inductive (see, especially, Skocpol 1979: 33–40, 1994: 322–3; cf. Burawoy 1989; Kiser and Hechter 1991).

Accordingly, historical institutionalists and constructivists in particular tend to view theory in rather different terms to behaviouralists and rationalists. Yes, theory is about simplifying a complex external reality,
but not as a means of modelling it, nor of drawing predictive inferences on the basis of observed regularities. Rather, theory is a guide to empirical exploration, a means of reflecting more or less abstractly upon complex processes of institutional evolution and transformation in order to highlight key periods or phases of change which warrant closer empirical scrutiny. Theory sensitises the analyst to the causal processes being elucidated, selecting from the rich complexity of events the underlying mechanisms and processes of change.

In this way, institutionalist and constructivist political analysis proceeds by way of a dialogue between theory and evidence as the analyst, often painstakingly, pieces together a rich and theoretically informed historical narrative. In preference to the more abstract and generic explanations offered by rationalists and behaviouralists, such historical narratives seeks to preserve and capture the complexity and specificity of the process of change under consideration, examining the interplay of actors, ideas and institutions and establishing the conditions of existence of the mechanisms of evolution and transformation described. Institutionalists and constructivists thus resolutely refuse to foreclose or prejudge discussion of the temporality of change by fitting to it a more general covering law or model. Instead they pay particularly close attention to the specificity of sequence and timing in the precise context under consideration (see, for instance, Campbell and Pedersen 2001b, 2001c; Hay 2001b; P. Pierson 2000; Skowronek 1993, 1995).
The emphasis of such work tends to be upon the identification and tracing of causal processes over time and the theoretical elucidation of such processes – on *process-tracing* and *process-elucidation* (Katzenstein 1978; Krasner 1984; Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 21–2). In contrast to behaviourism and rationalism, then, these contending approaches tend to value the accuracy and specificity of assumptions in a world of acknowledged complexity. They are also quick to emphasise the limitations of political analysis as a *predictive* science of the political (domestic, comparative or international), pointing to the inherent complexity and contingency (or open-endedness) of processes of change in which human subjects are involved. For them, the intrinsically unpredictable character of human behaviour renders a predictive science of the political impossible. Institutionalists and constructivists thus tend to target and problematise the simplifying assumptions employed in rationalism and behaviourism which have made such a predictive science *appear* possible (see Table 1.10). Accordingly, they come to focus, theoretically and more substantively, on those areas of political analysis and inquiry closed off by such attempts to preserve a pristine and predictive science of the political.

Where behaviourists simply assume a political universe characterised by the regularities which might render possible a predictive (albeit probabilistic) science of the political, institutionalists and constructivists prefer (ironically, perhaps) a more empirical approach which refuses to foreclose the issue theoretically. Thus, rather than take regularity as a given, they explore the conditions of existence of both regularities and of irregularities in political behaviour. As such they treat the issue of change and temporality (discussed further in Chapter 4) as an open empirical matter rather than one to be resolved on the basis of analytical convenience. Similarly, where rationalists assume the rationality of political actors blessed with perfect information in the pursuit of egoistic self-interest alone, institutionalists and constructivists adopt a more flexible and, again, empirical approach, acknowledging the open-ended nature of the process of strategic deliberation and the role of ideas is shaping the range of strategic options considered by actors. As Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo explain,

By taking the goals, strategies and preferences as something to be explained, historical institutionalists show that, unless something is known about the context, broad assumptions about ‘self-interested behaviour’ are empty . . . [H]istorical institutionalists would not have trouble with the . . . idea that political actors are acting strategically to achieve their ends. But clearly it is not very useful simply to leave it at that. We need a historically based analysis to tell us what they
are trying to maximise and why they emphasise certain goals over others. (1992: 9)

Again, where both behaviouralists and rationalists assume that political systems are, like those examined in the natural sciences, closed and predictable, institutionalists and constructivists make no such assumption, acknowledging the contingency injected into political systems by political actors themselves. For them the limitations of a predictive science of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.10 Beyond rationalism and behaviouralism</th>
<th>Parsimonious assumptions of rationalism and behaviouralism</th>
<th>New institutionalism and constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regularity</strong></td>
<td>Political world characterised by regularities</td>
<td>The question of regularity/irregularity is empirical and context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationality</strong></td>
<td>Rationality is universal – time and context-invariant</td>
<td>Rationality is culture-, context- and time-dependent; the relationship between rationality and exhibited behaviour is empirical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closure/openness of political systems</strong></td>
<td>Political systems are closed and predictable</td>
<td>Political systems are open and contingent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causal role for ideas in political analysis?</strong></td>
<td>Materialism: ideas have no independent causal efficacy</td>
<td>Ideas (knowledge, norms, convictions) influence political behaviour; they are irreducible to material factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elucidation of the mechanisms and temporality of institutional and behavioural change

Elucidation of the process of strategic deliberation

Analysis of the evolution and transformation of social and political systems

Elucidation of the mechanisms and temporality of ideational change and the role of ideas in institutional change
politics reside not so much in the limitations of political scientists and scholars of international relations, but in the inherently contingent and indeterminant nature of our subject matter. In the search for a predictive science of politics we are bound to be disappointed because there is no predictive science of the political to be had.

**Context and conduct: dealing with the ‘problem’ of agency**

This brings us fairly directly to a quite fundamental issue which lies at the heart of this volume and which is explored at some length in the following chapters. It is what might here be termed the ‘problem’ of human agency. Arguably what renders the social sciences qualitatively different from the physical sciences is that the former must deal with conscious and reflective subjects, capable of acting differently under the same stimuli, whereas the units which comprise the latter can be assumed inanimate, unreflexive and hence entirely predictable in response to external stimuli. Agency injects an inherent indeterminacy and contingency into human affairs for which there is simply no analogy in the physical sciences (see also Bernstein *et al.* 2000).

In itself, there is probably nothing terribly contentious about this claim. Yet it has important implications, particularly for those keen to model the science of the political upon the natural sciences. For, if actors’ behaviour is not given by the context in which they find themselves (in the same way that a particle’s kinetic energy is given by the gravitational field within which it is situated) – indeed, if actors may refashion the context in which they find themselves and hence any regularities it may previously have given rise to – then what hope is there for a predictive science of the political? It is for precisely this reason that agency does indeed pose a ‘problem’ for aspiring political *scientists*.

The central contention of what is to follow, and a logical correlate of the above argument, is simply stated. If one is prepared to acknowledge that human agency does inject an inherent indeterminacy and contingency into all social systems, then this poses a fundamental and largely insurmountable problem for a predictive science of the political modelled upon the natural sciences.14 If agency, and the indeterminacy that its acknowledgement implies, poses a fundamental problem for positivists (committed not only to a unity of method between the natural and social sciences but to the idea that the natural sciences provide that method), then it is interesting to note that it is a problem handled very differently by behaviouralists and rationalists. Consider each in turn.
Behaviouralism: aggregation as a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of agency

In so far as behaviouralism deals with the problem of agency at all, it does so in the same way as whole animal biology (which also has to cope with, certainly, animate and, arguably, reflexive subjects). It does so by (statistical) aggregation. The logic here is relatively simple. While the behaviour of any single individual (fruit fly, gazelle or human) is likely to prove unpredictable, even in response to a common stimulus, analysis of a population of individuals will invariably throw up patterns of behaviour which can be detailed, described and catalogued. Thus, for instance, while the preferences of voters will vary from one to another, the distribution of voter preferences may well exhibit a consistent pattern which might be exposed to empirical analysis. Strictly speaking, then, for behaviouralists it is such exhibited regularities in the behaviour of political populations rather than political behaviour itself that forms the subject matter of political analysis. If one assumes, as behaviouralists invariably do, that such exhibited regularities are generalisable beyond the immediate context and time-frame within which they were observed, a probabilistic and predictive science of political behaviour is possible, after a fashion. The logic of such probabilistic prediction runs something like this:

1. Empirical observations in a particular context over a particular time-frame (or, more likely, at a particular instant) reveal a series of (statistically significant) correlations between the observed variables
2. Let us assume that such correlations are indeed generalisable beyond the context in which, and the time period over which, they were generated
3. On the basis of this assumption, we can infer that in another context over another period in time the same relationship between these variables will pertain
4. If the relationship holds, then we can predict the following . . .

What is clear from the above is that this is a science of the political in which there is no recognition of the role of agents as anything other than the carriers of behaviours which aggregate to form a particular pattern. It is, moreover, a mode of political analysis which, in its concern to map the relationship between variables often sampled at the same moment in time, finds it very difficult to differentiate between mere correlation and genuine causation (C. Marsh 1982: Chs 2, 4; Miller 1995: 168–79). Finally, while this type of probabilistic predictive inference may be valid under conditions of social and political stability, it is almost wholly incapable of dealing with periods of social and political upheaval and trans-
formation. For in these, arguably the most interesting periods of political time, the assumption of regularity on which its inductive logic is premised is shattered, as agents depart from the ‘rules’ which had previously governed their behaviour and ‘make history’ (cf. Callinicos 1989).

Rationalism: taking the choice out of rational choice

If behaviouralism is characterised by the attempt to by-pass the question of agency through statistical aggregation, then rationalism responds to the challenge of agency in a very different and rather more direct fashion. As I shall argue at greater length and in more detail in the Chapter 3, rationalism is characteristically ingenious in its attempts to negotiate the indeterminacy that would otherwise be injected into its stylised modelling of rational choice by agency.

In this respect, above all, rational choice theory is not all that it might first appear. What, after all, could be better placed to deal with the ‘problem’ of agency than a perspective which emphasises the rationality exhibited by (presumably) conscious and reflective actors in the process of making choices? Is it any wonder that an author of the stature of David Easton should describe rational choice theory as the predominant post-behavioural response to ‘behaviouralism’s neglect of the actor’ (1997: 20)? In one sense, he is right to do so, for rationalism probably does owe its ascendancy in those quarters of the discipline in which it is ascendant to its perceived ability to offer a solution to the problem of agency that behaviouralism left unresolved. Yet that solution, as I will argue, is almost entirely illusory and it is here that Easton surely gets it wrong.¹⁵ The rational actor model, he suggests,

gained sway because it inadvertently fit into the voluntarist tendencies of the countercultural sentiments of the time . . . The image of the individual was subtly changed by rational modelling. He or she was not just a subject reacting to external circumstances but was proactive – choosing, selecting, rejecting in terms of his or her own preferences or utility-maximising behaviour. The focus shifted decisively from the structure or constraints surrounding behaviour . . . to the actor and his or her strategies of choice in pursuit of individual volitions. (1997: 21–2)

The extent to which voluntarism (the view that individuals are essentially masters of their own destiny) chimed with the ‘countercultural sentiments of the time’ need not concern us here. The point is that, all appearances to the contrary and such sentiments notwithstanding, rationalism is in fact about as far from voluntarism as one can get. For,
within any rationalist model, we know one thing above all: that the actor will behave rationally, maximising his or her personal utility. Moreover, we know that there is, by definition, only one optimal course of action by which the actor’s personal utility might be maximised. It follows, logically, that a rational actor in a given context will always choose precisely the same course of action. So much for voluntarism. What this implies is that the agent’s ‘choice’ (in fact the absence of choice) is rendered entirely predictable given the context. Accordingly, for rationalist models, context determines conduct, structure determines agency. While actors are free to choose, they will always choose the optimal strategy; consequently, their behaviour is entirely predictable. This is most clearly seen in neo- or structural realism (Waltz 1979), in which the rational conduct of states is considered derivable from the anarchic character of the international system.

It is in this way that rationalism deals with the problem of the contingency otherwise injected into social systems by agency. It does so simply by denying that agents exercise any meaningful choice at the moment of strategic deliberation. They have, if you like, a nominal choice between rationality and irrationality but, as rational actors, always opt for the former. This is an extremely ingenious and convenient, if perhaps rather disingenuous, solution to the problem of agency and one which does salvage a (natural) science of the political. Yet it does so only on the basis of denying the inherent indeterminacy of individual choice. It relies, in short and in the name of parsimony once again, on a convenient assumption that we know to be false: that individuals in a given context will always choose the same (rational) option. In so doing it translates what would otherwise be a moment of contingency and indeterminism (at least from the political analyst’s point of view) into one of complete and absolute determinism.

**Dealing with structure and agency: post-positivism**

Behaviouralism and rationalism go to considerable pains to avoid having to acknowledge what, to the uninitiated, might appear entirely obvious: the ability of actors to transform both the environment and the laws governing the environment in which they find themselves. This may seem, at best, somewhat bizarre, at worst, wilfully perverse. However, as I have sought to demonstrate, for positivists in particular, there is much at stake in these issues. If they concede, or are forced to concede, the capacity of actors to influence the course of social and political change and hence the contingency of social and political systems, then they may also have to abandon any pretensions for a science of the political capable of generating testable (i.e. predictive) hypotheses. The best
that might be hoped for is a more retrospective science of the political, capable of adjudicating between contending accounts of events that have already occurred. The limits of such a political science are wonderfully encapsulated in Jack Hayward’s disarming aphorism, ‘political scientists have the capacity to offer some hindsight, a little insight and almost no foresight’ (1999: 34). This may indeed be all that we can legitimately aspire to as political analysts, a view now silently endorsed by many; but it is far less than rationalists and behaviouralists have traditionally projected for the discipline.

For self-professed post-positivists, however, it is not agency per se that poses the problem, but the relationship between structure and agency, conduct and context. For behaviouralists and rationalists, of course, the relationship between structure and agency is quite simple. As I have argued, behaviouralists are interested principally in the (structural) regularities exhibited in political behaviour; and for rationalists, agency is essentially reducible to the (structural) context in which it is exercised. For institutionalists, constructivists, critical theorists and other avowed post-positivists, however, things are more complex and involved. Indeed, arguably the central controversy of contemporary political analysis concerns the dynamic relationship between conduct and context, agents and structure. It is to a detailed examination of that relationship that we turn in Chapter 3.

**The structure of the book**

My aim in this chapter has been to introduce the theoretical perspectives which tend to characterise the mainstream within political science and international relations, pointing to the analytical choices, trade-offs and strategies on which they are premised.

In Chapter 2, we turn to two of the most frequently asked questions of political analysis – should political analysis be scientific? and what does it mean to claim that it should? – and two of the most infrequently asked questions – should political analysis be political? and what is the nature of the ‘political’ that forms the subject matter of political analysis? These questions, as we shall see, lie at the heart of the contemporary controversies that divide those engaged in the analysis of the political. It is important to deal with these issues first since we can say little about the techniques and strategies of political analysis and the claims that one might make for them, without first giving due attention to the nature of the ‘political’ and to the implications of according ‘scientific’ status to its analysis. My aim is to demonstrate the essentially
contested nature both of the boundaries of ‘politics’ and the ‘political’ on the one hand, and the nature of ‘scientific’ enquiry on the other.

In Chapter 3 we turn to another crucial question that has consistently plagued political analysis and divided political analysts: that of the relationship between political actors and political institutions, between political conduct and political context, between structure and agency. Questions of structure and agency, however implicit, are implicated in all attempts to fashion notions of social and political causality. Accordingly, we can benefit greatly from seeking to render explicit the conceptions of structure and agency that we necessarily appeal to, thereby interrogating the notions of causality we formulate. The argument of this chapter also proceeds in two parts.

In the first, I demonstrate the pathologies of both structuralism (the tendency to reduce social and political outcomes to the operation of institutional or structural beyond the control of actors) and intentionalist (the tendency to account for observable effects in purely agential terms), before considering, in the second, a series of recent attempts to move beyond the unhelpful and polarising dualism of structure and agency. I demonstrate how such perspectives might, and indeed have been, used to inform discussions of social and political causality and complex institutional change.

This theme is developed further in Chapter 4. Despite Régis Debray’s enticing comment that ‘time is to politics what space is to geometry’ (1973: 103), contemporary political analysis exhibits considerable difficulties in accounting for continuity and discontinuity and in reflecting theoretically the uneven temporality of political change. I argue that there are two principle reasons for this. First, the complexity and uneven temporality of political change can only be grasped if structuralist and intentionalist tendencies are first rejected and a more complex view of the relationship between structure and agency is set in their place. Second, positivist tendencies within political science prize predictive capacity, parsimony and the simplifying assumptions that this entails. The result has been to privilege simple, general and ‘elegant’ theoretical models that cannot deal adequately with complex political dynamics. For the simplifying assumptions upon which they draw, and by which their parsimony is achieved, tend to involve an understanding of context as static and unchanging. In the attempt to move beyond these limitations, I examine those contemporary developments in political analysis (associated, in particular, with the new institutionalism) that offer the potential for a more adequate understanding of political change, continuity and discontinuity.

In Chapter 5 I turn my attention to the highly contested concept of
power, focusing on the Anglo-American discussion of the concept arising out of classical pluralism in the post-war period and the contrasting discussion of the term in continental Europe which follows the work of Michel Foucault. That political analysts remain divided by the common language of power is perhaps testimony to the centrality of the concept to political inquiry. For power is probably the most universal and fundamental concept of political analysis. It has been, and continues to be, the subject of extended and heated debate. I review the highly influential ‘faces of power’ controversy, examining the extent to which its various protagonists succeed in transcending the residues of behaviouralism that they inherit from classic pluralism. I advance a definition of power as ‘context-shaping’ and demonstrate how this helps us to disentangle the notions of power, responsibility and culpability that the faces of power debate conflates. In so doing, I suggest that we differentiate clearly between analytical questions concerning the identification of power within social and political contexts, and normative questions concerning the critique of the distribution and exercise of power thus identified.

In the final section of the chapter, I consider the challenge posed to orthodox accounts of power and to mainstream conceptions of political analysis more generally by the work of Michel Foucault. I examine critically his conception of power as ubiquitous and as manifest in a constant succession of ‘power–knowledge regimes’. His argument, if accepted, has important implications for the practice of political inquiry, especially that which would claim to inform an emancipatory politics of resistance to relations of power and domination. Foucault’s disarming and provocative perspective rejects the notion of a neutral vantage-point from which the relative merits of different power–knowledge regimes might be adjudicated, paving the way in so doing to the postmodernist position considered in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 6, attention switches from a concern with structure, agency and power to a consideration of the increasingly controversial question of the relationship between the material realm and the realm of ideas. In recent years this has emerged as an issue of crucial significance and much controversy in debates on the appropriate analytical techniques and strategies of political analysis. Like the question of structure and agency, however, there has been a certain tendency for political analysts to choose between one of two rather polarised positions on this question. These might be referred to as materialism and idealism. Materialists refuse to accord much significance to the role of ideas, insisting that notions of causality must be couched in material (normally institutional, political or economic) terms. Idealists, by contrast, argue that in so far as one can posit a notion of reality, that reality is itself the product of ‘discursive con-
struction’. Quite simply, there is no external or pre-discursive reality outside of our constructions and imaginings of it.

If we are to move beyond this stark opposition, constructivism and the new institutionalism have much to offer. Drawing on both perspectives, I argue that political actors inhabit complex and densely structured institutional environments that favour or privilege certain strategies over others. Yet such actors do not appropriate these contexts directly, blessed with a perfect knowledge of the contours of the terrain. Rather their ability and capacity to act strategically is mediated and filtered through perceptions (and indeed mis-perceptions) of the context they inhabit. These may either facilitate or militate against their ability to realise their intentions through strategic action. This basic schema allows a sophisticated analysis of institutional change over time that is sensitive both to the uneven temporality of political change (referred to in Chapter 4) and to the independent role of ideas in the mediation of political dynamics.

In Chapter 7 the focus turns eventually to the rather shadowy notion of postmodernism. My aim is to demonstrate that postmodernism represents perhaps the greatest single challenge to the strategies and techniques of political analysis (classical and contemporary, positivist and interpretivist alike). I present a guide to its key theorists and to its key claims – its incredulity towards ‘metanarratives’, its epistemological scepticism, its disavowal of critical theory, and its tendency towards relativism. I argue that despite its obvious and increasing appeal, postmodernism is but one way of answering the key questions dealt with in this volume that currently trouble and divide political analysts. Although it may provide an important corrective to the characteristic tendency of political analysts to assume a privileged vantage-point from which to accord their insights a scientific status, the relativism and political fatalism with which it is so often associated are not warranted. Political analysis after postmodernism is still possible.

In the Conclusion, I aim to draw together the disparate strands of the argument presented in the proceeding chapters, in presenting one interpretation of what political analysis after postmodernism might look like. Contemporary political analysis, it is argued, can no longer afford to privilege the political in explanations of political phenomenon; must be sensitive to the perils of structuralism and intentionalism, materialism and idealism; must give far greater consideration to the uneven temporality of political change and the importance of political ideas therein; and must take seriously the challenge presented by postmodernist critics, above all by acknowledging the value-laden and normative content of many of its assumptions. These ideas are illustrated with respect to a particularly significant, contentious and potent example: that of global-
isation. I conclude then by demonstrating how the ideas discussed in previous chapters can be brought to bear on the question of the limits of the political (and of political autonomy in particular) in an era of much-vaunted globalisation.
Ackelsberg, M. A. 71
Adam, B. 165
adaptation 156, 157, 158
Adler, E. 24, 60, 101, 113, 198
Adorno, T. 139
agency 50, 52, 94–6, 97, 100–1, 127, 131, 133, 140–1, 165–6, 253
Aglietta, M. 161, 269
Alesina, A. 130
Alexander, J. C. 101, 116
Alker, H. 199
Allan, P. 234
Allen, W. 72
Almond, G. A. 59
Alt, J. E. 210
Althusser, L. 109, 115–16, 266
anarchy 20, 24, 25
Anderson, P. 116
anthropology 230, 239–45
anti-Semitism 97–100
appearance and reality, separation of 62, 76, 122
appropriateness, logic of 14, 105, 106
Archer, M. 77, 101–2, 116, 117, 122–4, 127, 268
architecture 218, 220–1
Arendt, H. 66
Asad, T. 240, 241
Ashenden, S. 170
Ashley, R. 23, 60, 199, 217, 231, 233
Axelrod, R. 269
Bachrach, P. 170, 174–8, 184, 186
Badie, B. 137
Bairoch, P. 253
balance of power 21
Baldwin, D. 13, 17, 46, 198
Balibar, E. 116
Ball, T. 168
Baratz, M. S. 170, 174–8, 184, 186
Barnes, T. J. 232, 233
Barnet, R. J. 103
Barnett, M. 198
Barrow, C. W. 174, 267
Barthes, R. 224
Baudrillard, J. 245, 246
Bauhaus 220
Baumgartner, F. R. 161
Baylis, J. 14
Beardsworth, R. 234
Beck, U. 264
behavioural revolution 10, 43, 105
Benhabib, S. 66
Bennington, G. 233, 234
Benthall, J. 241
Bentham, J. 189, 190
Benton, T. 76, 181, 264
Berger, P. L. 199, 201
Berggren, W. A. 160
Berg-Schlosser, D. 33
Berlusconi, S. 236, 238
Berman, S. 196, 197, 214, 238
Berns, W. 45
Bernstein, R. J. 234
Bernstein, S. 50
Berry, B. J. L. 155
Best, S. 193, 219, 246, 272
Bhaskar, R. 67, 68, 77, 85–6, 102, 116, 117, 122, 126, 127, 200, 268
Binmore, K. 269
Birn, R. B. 98
Birnbaum, N. 137
Black, D. 30
Blakie, N. 30, 61, 62, 63, 76
Blair, T. 167, 204
Block, F. 161
Blyth, M. M. 197, 208, 214, 215, 238
Bohman, J. 76, 244, 245, 272
Bomberg, E. 266
Booth, K. 59, 234
Bourdieu, P. 73, 102, 116, 265
Bowker, M. 234
Boyer, R. 161, 269
Brinton, C. 151
Brinton, M. C. 105
Brown, C. 249–50
Brown, D. S. 220
Brown, R. 234
Brown, W. 72
Buchanen, J. 9, 38, 40
Bull, H. 271
Burawoy, M. 46
Burke, E. 139
Burke, P. 140, 152
Busch, A. 252
Buzan, B. 102

Callinicos, A. 52
Campbell, D. 23, 26, 60, 198, 217, 233, 238
Campbell, J. L. 47, 197, 208, 214
Carlsnaes, W. 101, 198
Carmines, E. G. 80
Carr, E. H. 16, 17, 19
Carrier, J. G. 149
Cartesianism 76–7, 78
Cavanagh, J. 103
Cerny, P. G. 101, 137
Chalmers, A. 76–7, 264, 265
change, political 119, 135–67, 194
Charlesworth, J. C. 44, 261–2
Checkel, J. 197
child care 130, 209
chloro-fluoro-carbons (CFCs) 164–5
Christiansen, T. 46, 208, 262
chronocentrism see presentism
Classen, C. 241
Clegg, S. R. 181, 182
Clifford, J. 243, 244
Clinton, B. 167
Coates, D. 5
Cohen, J. 65
Cold War, end of 21, 198, 234
collective action problems 9, 13, 22
Collier, A. 122
Collier, D. 161
Collier, R. B. 161
Collins, R. 158
comparative static analysis 144, 145–6
complete information, assumption of see perfect information
complexity 32, 33–7, 47, 48, 55, 156–7
Comte, A. 140, 156, 158, 270
Connolly, W. E. 181, 195
Connor, S. 219, 220, 221, 222
conservative political theory 139
constructivism 6, 14–16, 19–22, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36, 38, 45–50, 57, 59, 60, 93, 106, 195, 197–204, 206, 207, 208, 216, 238
philosophical 199, 200–4
‘thick’ 195, 199, 206, 208
‘thin’ 195, 199–200, 206, 208
context and conduct 50–4, 89–134, 194
contingency 53, 159–60, 201, 211, 251, 259–60
Converse, P. 196
Cooke, W. N. 202, 262
coopération 22, 23
Corvi, R. 83
Couvalis, G. 76, 264, 265
Craib, I. 76, 264
Crick, B. 38, 42, 66
crime 95
critical junctures 161
critical realism 59, 117, 122–6, 127, 142, 206, 208
critical theory 67, 138–9, 170–1, 182–4, 188, 192, 239, 245–6, 249–50, 251–60
Crystal, K. A. 210
Cuiller, J. 233, 234
Dahl, R. A. 13, 42, 168, 169, 170, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177–8, 184, 186
Dahlhaus, C. 219
Dallmayr, F. R. 270
Daly, G. 272
Daly, M. 72
Damiens 188–90, 191, 192
Darwin, C. 140, 156, 158
Davies, J. C. 152, 153
de Bresson, C. 159
de Certeau. M. 189
de Fontenelle, B. 77–8
de Meur, G. 33
de Tocqueville, A. 152
de Vaus, D. 79
Débray, R. 55, 161–2
decomposition 27, 88, 192, 205, 207, 217, 226, 230–4, 244
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>deduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delanty, G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Derian, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derrida, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descartes, R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dessler, D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutsch, K. W.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devetek, R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Stefano, C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diachronic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiMaggio, P. J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discursive selectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Docker, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doty, R. L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double hermeneutic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douzinas, C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowding, K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downs, A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryzek, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubin, S. C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunleavy, P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durkheim, E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duverger, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagleton, T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easton, D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards, L. P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldredge, N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elite theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, B. E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elshtain, J. B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elster, J. 269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empiricism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environmental degradation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epistemological scepticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epistemology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson, R. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esping-Andersen, G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnomethodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans, P. B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans-Pritchard, E. E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>core principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evolutionary economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evolutionary game theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabian, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘faces of power’ controversy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>false consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>false particularisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falsification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanon, F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fascism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faucher, L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fay, B.</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Feldstein–Horioka puzzle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feuer, L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feyerabend, P. K.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finegold, K.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finkelstein, N. G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finlayson, G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foley, R.</td>
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<tr>
<td>fordism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster, H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster, H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foucault, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foucault–Habermas debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free-rider problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedman, M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fuller, S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddis, J. L.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gambetta, D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garfinkel, H.</td>
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<td>Garrett, G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geertz, C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>George, J.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geras, N.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giacometti, A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giddens, A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gilpin, R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>globalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goffman, E.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

Golan, D. 201
Goldhagen, D. J. 97–100
Goldmann, K. 217, 234
Goldstein, J. 197, 198, 208
Goldstone, J. A. 151
Gough, I. 259
Gough, K. 240
Gould, S. J. 160
Gourévitch, P. 162
Gramsci, A. 179, 214
Gray, J. 4
Green, D. P. 59
Grofman, B. 69
Gropius, W. 220
Guertzkow, H. 28
Gurr, T. R. 13, 152, 153–4
Haas, E. 271
Habermas, J. 65, 170, 181, 188, 192, 193, 246
Hacking, I. 199, 201, 204
Hagen, E. 130
Hall, P. A. 46, 60, 105, 106, 107, 142, 149, 161, 162, 166, 197, 211, 215, 238, 262
Hallpike, C. R. 157
Hannan, M. T. 15
Hardin, G. 10
Harré, R. 77, 201
Harvey, D. 136
Hassan, I. 219, 222–3
Hayward, J. 42, 54, 199
Hechter, M. 46
Heclo, H. 197
Hegel, W. F. 154
hegemonic stability theory 21
Held, D. 73–4, 135, 253
Helleiner, E. 255
Hempel, C. G. 30
Henderson, D. 210
Herzfeld, M. 230, 239, 240, 241, 243
Heywood, A. 74, 169
Hindess, B. 175, 182, 270
Hinich, M. J. 35, 39, 138
Hirschmann, N. J. 59, 66, 72, 264
Hirst, P. 116, 135, 157, 252–3, 258
historical institutionalism 46, 47, 48–9, 67, 106, 142, 149–50, 161, 163, 206
historical materialism 117, 147–8, 154, 206
historical political analysis 139–43, 146, 149
Hitler, A. 97, 100–1
Hobden, S. 102
Hobsbawm, E. 269
Hodgson, G. 149, 159
Hoffman, S. 19
Hollis, M. 14, 41–2, 59, 76, 78, 79, 83–4, 103, 113, 230
Holocaust 98–100
Holt, P. 139
Honneth, A. 191–2, 270
Hopkins, D. 224
Hopkins, T. 102
Hotelling, H. 30
Howarth, D. 205, 207, 234
Howes, D. 241
Huckfeldt, R. 80
Huizer, G. 240, 241
Hunter, F. 172, 174
Huntingdon, S. 151
Hyland, J. L. 173, 175, 181, 182
idealism 16–18, 23, 56, 195, 199, 200, 205–7, 213
ideational factors 24, 56–7, 163, 166–7, 194–215, 237–9, 257–9
identity 25, 189
Ikenberry, J. 161
indeterminacy, problem of 104, 111, 141
induction 30–3, 46–7, 78–80, 81–3, 84, 149, 152
logic of 11, 12, 41, 46
Inglis, F. 243
institutionalism see old institutionalism; new institutionalism
institutions, as structures 105
instrumentalism 173–4
intentionalism 55, 57, 101–2, 109–12, 113, 115, 116, 119, 120, 135–6, 163
interdependence 5, 22, 23, 136, 256
interdisciplinarity 4–7, 66, 256–7
interest groups 10
interests
material 172, 177, 179, 181–2, 184–5, 186, 196, 206, 208
perceptions of 177–82, 184–5, 186, 195, 196
international relations, mainstream 13–27, 28, 54, 207, 216
international relations, relation to political science 5
inter-paradigm debate, in international relations theory 19
interpretivist approaches 142, 205, 206
intersubjectivity 22, 25, 106, 200
Irwin, A. 264
Isaac, J. C. 181, 270
Izenour, S. 220
Jackson, R. 14, 217
Jacobsen, K. 197
Jameson, F. 220
Jaszi, P. 201
Jay, M. 241
J-curves 153
Jeffreys, H. 32
Jencks, C. 220, 221
Jennings, J. 229
Jenson, J. 96, 130
Jessop, B. 126, 128–30, 149, 161, 162, 209, 267, 268, 269
Jones, B. D. 161
Jones, C. 102
Jones, J. P. 264
Jordan, A. G. 266
Jørgensen, K. E. 46, 208, 262
Kaplan, M. A. 28
Katzenstein, P. J. 48
Kegley, C. 19, 46
Kellner, D. 126, 219, 246, 272
Kelly, M. 170
Kemp-Welch, T. 229
Kenny, M. 101
Keohane, R. O. 1, 13, 14, 23, 29, 33, 37, 69, 80, 197, 198, 199, 208, 234
Kerr, P. 149, 158–9, 160, 161, 163
Keynes, J. M. 86, 87
Keynesianism 106–7, 150, 162
Kimmel, M. S. 151
Kincaid, H. 76, 84, 264
Kindleberger, C. 21
King, A. 124, 125
King, D. S. 166, 210
King, G. 1, 13, 29, 33, 37, 80
Kiser, E. 46
Kitschelt, H. 162, 202
Klaus, J. 130
Kleinknecht, A. 253
Knight, J. 12
Kondratieff ‘long waves’ 155
Koons, J. 222
Krasner, S. D. 48, 149, 161, 199
Kratochvíl, F. 25, 59, 60, 199
Kuhn, T. S. 191
Kukla, A. 76, 199, 201, 247, 264
Kuper, A. 240
Kurzer, P. 202
Kuznets cycles 155
Kydland, F. E. 40
labour market reform 130
Laclau, E. 205
Laffer curve 210–13
Laffer, A. 210
Lakatos, I. 83, 265
Lamy, S. L. 19, 46
Lapid, Y. 59
Larrain, J. 246, 248, 250
Lasswell, H. 66, 168, 172
Lau, R. R. 264
Lawson, H. 234
Layder, D. 121
Le Corbusier 220
learning 131, 133, 210–11, 213
Leftwich, A. 59, 66, 72, 73–4
Levi, P. 100
Levins, R. 160
Lévi-Strauss, C. 240
Lewontin, R. 160
liberal intergovernmentalism 28
liberalism 15, 25
Lindblom, C. 172
Little, R. 102
Longstreth, F. 15, 59
Lovibond, S. 249
Lucas, R. E. 40
Luckmann, T. 199, 201
Lukes, S. 178–87, 188, 192, 214
Lunn, E. 224
Lynd, M. 172
Lynd, R. 172
Lyotard, J.-F. 228, 230, 243, 246, 247–8

MacKinnon, C. 72

Mackenzie, W. J. M. 269

Madden, E. H. 77

Magritte, R. 223

Maki, U. 62

Mann, M. 155

March, J. G. 15, 59, 105, 106, 262

Marcus, G. E. 243

Marcuse, H. 188, 192

Marsh, C. 51

Marsh, D. 59, 69, 103, 158–9, 160, 161, 199, 207, 211, 234, 256, 263

Marx, K. 86, 87, 90, 117–18, 119–20, 139, 140

Marxism 67, 82, 115–16, 151, 154, 160, 206

Masters, R. D. 269

materialism 56, 195, 206, 207–8

May, T. 76, 79, 264

McAnulla, S. 115, 124

McCarthy, E. D. 264

McGuigan, J. 218, 221

McNamara, K. 197, 239

McNay, L. 191, 270

McVeigh, S. 248

Merelman, R. M. 176

metanarratives 27, 57, 227, 235, 240, 243, 246–50

methodological bracketing 120, 121, 126

methodology 63–5, 227, 230–4

Mies van der Rohe, L. 220

Miliband, R. 116

Miller, D. 149

Miller, W. E. 33, 51

Mills, C. W. 172

Mitchell, T. 264

modernism 218, 219–20, 228

as aesthetic sensibility 218, 219–20, 221–5

as philosophical realism 224, 228

modernity 147, 150, 235–7, 240

Modood, T. 238

Moe, T. M. 38

Molotch, H. 267

monetarism 150, 162

Montaigne, M. de 243

Moodie, G. 73

Moravcsik, A. 14, 69

Morgenthau, H. 19, 66, 69

morphogenetic approach 122, 124–6

Mouffe, C. 205

Munger, M. C. 35, 39, 138

Nagel, E. 37

nation-state, crisis of 135

Natter, W. 264

natural sciences, as model for political analysis 42, 50, 65

natural selection 158

naturalism 38, 67, 68, 75, 76, 80, 81, 85–6, 104, 138, 139, 141, 252

Nee, V. 105

Nelson, A. 199

Nelson, R. R. 159

neo-classical economics 8, 9, 18, 38, 149, 209, 238

neo-liberalism, as policy paradigm 70, 162, 166

neo-liberalism, in international relations theory 13, 16, 17–18, 20, 22–23, 24, 60

neo-Marxism 149, 151, 160, 161

neo-neo-synthesis 19, 21, 46

neo-realism 13, 16, 17–18, 20–21, 24, 34, 35, 37–8, 60, 67, 102, 199, 200, 206, 209, 238

neo-statism 59, 161


structuralist tendencies of 105–7

Nicholson, M. 14

Nicolson, P. P. 265

Nield, K. 116

Niskanen, W. A. 9, 40

Noble, D. S. 202, 262

Noble, T. 157, 269

normalisation 106–7, 192

normative political analysis 137–9, 152

Norris, C. 232, 233, 234

North, D. C. 12, 15, 208, 262

Nye, J. S. 23

O’Brien, M. 126, 268

O’Brien, R. 103

O’Connor, M. 264

O’Leary, B. 172, 174

Offe, C. 161

Ohmae, K. 103

old institutionalism 11
Olsen, J. P. 15, 59, 105, 106, 262
Olsen, M. 9
Onuf, N. 25, 60, 198
Osborne, P. 144
others 88, 226, 228, 230, 231, 233, 234, 239, 242, 244, 245, 249
Outhwaite, W. 122
Owen, D. 170
ozone depletion 164–5

Palfry, T. R. 264
Panopticon 189–90, 191
parsimony 29, 31–2, 38, 39, 49, 53, 197, 210
parsimony v. complexity trade-off 28, 29–37, 163, 197
Parsons, T. 158, 270
Pateman, C. 71, 72
Pateto, V. 154
path dependence 11, 14, 15
patriarchy 72, 73, 250
Payne, M. 264
Pedersen, O. K. 47, 197
Penna, S. 126, 268
Pepper, D. 10
perfect information, assumption of 196, 209, 210, 211, 213, 257–8
Peters, B. G. 11, 43, 142
Peterson, J. 266
Peterson, S. A. 156, 161
Pettee, G. S. 151
Pettiford, L. 14
Pfender, R. 204
physics, as model for political science 42, 75, 85–6
Picasso, P. 219
Pierson, C. 4
Pierson, P. 12, 15, 34, 38, 39, 47, 105, 130, 142, 149, 161
policy paradigms 211, 214, 215, 238
political science mainstream 7–13, 27–8, 37, 46, 54, 67, 71–2, 207, 216, 218
political, definition 2–5, 54–5, 59, 60, 66–75, 168–9, 175, 256
Polsby, N. 173, 174, 176, 180
Popper, K. 30, 81–5, 92
Posen, A. 262
positivism 37, 39, 50, 53, 55, 67, 68, 75, 76, 80–5, 96, 87–8, 92, 199, 207
post-behaviouralism 11, 42–4, 47, 197
post-disciplinarity 256–7
post-feminism 67
post-fordism 147, 148, 150
post-Marxism 67
postmodernism 6, 14, 22–5, 26–7, 36–7, 56, 57, 60, 142, 192, 199, 205, 206, 216–50, 251
‘ontology of difference’ 218, 227, 231
as aesthetic sensibility 218–19, 220–5
as intellectual sensibility 218, 225–34
deconstructivist methodology 218, 227, 230–4; see also
deconstruction definition 218–19, 225–7
epistemological scepticism 218, 226, 227, 229–30, 231
postmodernity 147, 150
post-positivism 53–4, 59
post-structuralism 88, 205, 231
Powell, J. 219
Powell, W. W. 105, 106
power 3, 22, 24, 26, 56, 73–5, 168–93, 239, 256
and agenda-setting 174–8, 179, 180, 195
and culpability 186–7
and decision-making 171–4, 179, 180
and preference-shaping 178–82, 184, 195
and responsibility 186–7
as conduct-shaping 186
as context-shaping 185–6
as critical concept 182–4, 185, 187
definition 168–9, 170, 172–3, 180, 184–7
ubiquity of 170, 171, 187–93
‘power-knowledge regimes’ 56, 188, 190, 191, 192, 235–6
predestination 92–3, 108
prediction 12, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 48, 49–50, 51, 53, 94, 103–4, 195–6, 197, 198, 258, 260
preference-accommodation 167
preference-shaping 166–7, 178–82, 184, 194
Prescott, E. C. 40
presentism 112
probability 51
progress 189, 192, 235, 236–7, 240, 246, 250
Przeworski, A. 130
psephology 67
public administration 11
public choice theory 8
punctuated equilibrium 156, 160, 161–3
punctuated evolution 161–3
Quine, W. V. O. 84
Ragin, C. C. 33
rational choice institutionalism 6, 13, 28, 46, 47, 67
rational choice theory 2, 7, 8–10, 11, 12, 17, 33, 35, 37, 52, 59, 67, 78, 103–4, 107, 132, 137, 209, 238
structuralism of 103–4, 105
rationalism 2, 25, 28, 36, 37–40, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52–3, 77–8, 196, 216, 238
Ratzan, S. C. 264
Razin, A. 202
Reagan, R. 166, 167, 210, 211–13
Reaganism 166
realism, in international relations theory 13, 16–19, 20, 23, 67, 199, 206, 238
realism, ontological 77, 91, 92, 122, 199, 205, 224
see also critical realism
Reddy, C. 130
Redlawsk, D. P. 264
Reform Act (1832) 139
regulation theory 147–8, 151
relative deprivation thesis 152–4
relativism 88, 199, 216, 226, 229–30, 234, 243
rent-seeking 9
revolution 139, 147, 151–5, 160–1, 166
Rhodes, R. A. W. 11
Ringmar, E. 199
Rogers, J. 65
Rosamond, B. 237, 239, 259
Rose, M. A. 221, 232
Rose, R. 112
Rosen, M. 179
Rosenau, J. N. 23
Rostow, W. W. 137, 158, 270
Rueschemeyer, D. 14, 59, 106
Ruggie, J. 60, 198
Rule, J. B. 65
Rutherford, M. 149
Sadka, E. 202
Sahlins, M. 158, 270
Salman Rushdie affair 229, 230
Sanders, D. 42, 43–4, 45, 80, 138
Sargent, T. J. 40
Sartre, J.-P. 117
Sayer, A. 77, 122, 142, 194, 199, 205, 218, 229–30, 231, 245, 270–1, 272
Scharpf, F. 162, 202
Schattsshneider, E. E. 175
Schatzki, T. R. 264
Schoenberg, A. 219
Schröder, G. 204
Schröder, P. 198
Schuknecht, L. 40, 202
science, of politics 38, 50, 51, 53–5, 59, 60, 64, 65, 66–9, 71, 75–88, 94, 104, 135, 138, 139–40, 142, 168–9, 194, 207, 210, 252
Scott, D. 240
Scott, W. R. 11, 46
security 21
Seed, J. 116
Service, E. 158, 270
Shandley, R. R. 98
Shanley, M. L. 71
Shapiro, I. 91–2, 200
Shapiro, L. 59
Shaw, M. 155
Sibley, M. Q. 45
Sikkink, K. 197, 205
Simon, H. 196
Singer, J. D. 28
Skocpol, T. 12, 14, 46, 59, 106, 152, 161, 174
Skowronek, S. 47, 161
Smelser, N. J. 158, 270
Smith, M. J. 101, 266
Smith, S. 7, 14, 16, 19, 41–2, 46, 59, 60, 116, 198, 199, 230, 234, 236
Sober, E. 29
social constructivism see constructivism, philosophical
social democracy 4, 110–11, 259
sociological institutionalism 13, 46
Sombart, W. 240
Somit, A. 156, 161
Sontag, S. 219
Soper, K. 272
Sørensen, G. 14, 217
Spencer, H. 140, 156, 157, 158, 269
state 12, 18, 22, 23, 71–2, 162–3, 173–4, 189
as rational actor 17, 20–1
Steans, J. 14
Steinmo, S. 15, 46, 48–9, 59, 106, 142, 149, 161, 262
Stern, F. 98
Stocking, G. W. 243
Stoker, G. 59, 64–5, 138, 234, 264
Stones, R. 126, 272
strategic-relational approach 117, 126–34, 142, 209–10, 212
strategic selectivity 127–31, 209, 212
strategy 127–30, 131–2, 194, 209, 212, 214
structural realism 13, 53, 102
see also neo-realism
structuralism 55, 57, 101, 102–9, 113, 115, 116, 119, 120, 135–6, 163, 199, 216
structuring theory 92, 93, 117, 118–21, 123–4, 126
structure 94–100, 106, 119, 121, 127, 164–5
Suganami, H. 101
Swank, D. 130, 202, 262
symbolic interactionism 119
synchronic analysis 144–5
Synnot, A. 241
system 121
systems theory 102, 104
Sztompka, P. 116, 119, 140, 156, 157
Tanzi, V. 40, 202
tax competition 114–15, 202–4, 210
Taylor, M. J. 269
Taylor, P. J. 103
Taylor, R. C. R. 46, 60, 106, 142, 262
Teple, G. 103, 202
teleology 108–9, 235
temporality 124, 136–7, 144–5, 146, 147, 148, 150–63, 165
ter Wengel, J. 253
Thatcher, M. 166, 167
Thatcherism 166
Theakston, K. 266
Thelen, K. 15, 46, 48–9, 59, 106, 142, 149, 161, 262
testory, role in political analysis 28, 29, 30, 37–50
Thomas, M. I. 139
Thomas, R. P. 208
Thompson, E. P. 115–16, 266
Thompson, G. 135, 252–3, 258
Thrift, N. 126
Tickner, A. 60, 198
Tiger, L. 269
Tilly, C. 139, 140, 141, 142, 152, 154, 155
Tilly, L. 152
Tilly, R. 152
‘time–space compression’ 136
Tobin, J. 210
Tolbert, P. 13
Tönnies, F. 140, 158, 270
‘tragedy of the commons’ 10
Trouillot, M.-R. 232, 240, 241
Truman, D. 172
Tsebelis, G. 103–4, 262
Tullock, G. 9, 38, 40
Tuma, N. B. 13
Tyler, S. A. 243
unintended consequences 133, 186, 211, 213
Van Couvering, J. A. 160
Vasquez, J. A. 42, 69, 229, 234, 235, 237, 238
Venturi, R. 220, 221
Verba, S. 1, 13, 29, 33, 37, 80
verification 78, 80, 83–4
voluntarism 52–3, 102, 208
see also intentionalism
Von Beyme, K. 7
Waever, O. 7, 14, 19, 46
Walker, R. B. J. 23, 27, 60, 198, 199, 217, 231, 233
Wallace, N. 40
Wallerstein, I. 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wallerstein, M.</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltz, K.</td>
<td>21, 53, 69, 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanniski, J.</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward, H.</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrington, R.</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson, M.</td>
<td>204, 237, 253, 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, C.</td>
<td>23, 27, 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, M.</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welfare retrenchment</td>
<td>114–15, 204, 259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendt, A.</td>
<td>16, 21, 22, 24, 25, 46, 59, 60, 69, 89, 91–2, 101, 102, 197, 198, 199–200, 201, 238, 239, 268, 271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wickham-Jones, M.</td>
<td>4, 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiener, A.</td>
<td>46, 208, 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wight, C.</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, M.</td>
<td>76, 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmott, R.</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wincott, D.</td>
<td>103, 106, 204, 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter, S. G.</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witt, U.</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfe, A. B.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfinger, R. E.</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodmansee, M.</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woods, N.</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolgar, S.</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, F. Lloyd</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, I. M.</td>
<td>71, 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zalewski, M.</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zee, H. H.</td>
<td>40, 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zellner, A.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zevin, R.</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zucker, L.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>