From Ideologies to Public Philosophies

An Introduction to Political Theory

Paul Schumaker

with

Will Delehanty

Dwight Kiel

Thomas Heilke

Blackwell
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Preface

This book is an introduction – albeit an ambitious one – to political theory. It seeks to give students (and citizens generally) a framework and a wide array of concepts for thinking seriously about politics. It invites you to enter into conversations with others in search of public philosophies that can guide the political communities to which you belong and that can add to the breadth, depth, and validity of your own political beliefs, values, and principles.

This book emerged out of my desire to enhance the learning, enthusiasm, and involvement of students who are encountering political theory in a serious manner for the first time. One common approach to introducing students to political theory is to jump into the great works of Plato, Hobbes, Marx, Rawls, and many other seminal thinkers. I got my feet wet about 40 years ago with such an approach, and I have used it many times in teaching political theory. The downside is that students invest a lot of time trying to comprehend these theorists, and they often see "the canon," or great works in the history of political thought, as too dated and abstract to be of much use in helping them generate a set of political ideas that can guide their political lives and the politics of the communities in which they reside.

A second common approach is to assign a textbook covering major ideologies. About 15 years ago, I tried this approach, but was soon disenchanted with the quality of the available texts, so I co-authored one of my own, *Great Ideas/Grand Schemes: Political Ideologies in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (*GIGS*, as my students affectionately called it). I think *GIGS* was successful at providing students with a fairly comprehensive, clear, and deep understanding of various ideologies. However, this approach also had a downside. Students tended to be preoccupied with the question, "Which ideology best captures my ideas?" Students too often used *GIGS* to find defenses for the political ideas that they had been socialized to accept, rather than use the book as a vehicle for finding ideas that challenged old ways of thinking and for carefully evaluating the worth of both familiar and unfamiliar ideas.

This book provides an alternative approach. It is organized to encourage students to think deeply about the most basic political questions, sometimes called the perennial questions or the great issues of politics. With which political communities should we identify? Who should be granted citizenship in these communities? What should be the rights and obligations of citizens? What should be the roles of economic markets, cultural values, voluntary organizations, and governments in structuring our communities? Who should rule? In what areas of personal, social, and economic life should governments be authorized to use their coercive powers? How should social goods, like education and wealth, be distributed? How much and what kind of change is needed? Political theory also addresses some even larger philosophical issues that are often the basis of our political thinking. Ontological questions address assumptions about ultimate reality. Questions of human nature deal with basic characteristics and motivations of men and women. Questions of society deal with the origins and characteristics of social life. Epistemological questions deal with how we can attain reliable knowledge of politics – if such knowledge is even possible. This book provides students with a wide array of answers to these questions in a way that encourages them to ask which answers they should embrace both as individuals and as members of various communities. It is intended to force students to see their current beliefs in relationship to alternative answers, encouraging their thoughtful evaluation of competing ideas.

Political ideologies and quasi-ideologies provide a wide range of thinking on the perennial questions. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce eight major ideologies that have been most influential in American and world politics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, paying attention to how these ideologies arose historically and what their central ideas have been. In these chapters, classical liberalism is distinguished from contemporary liberalism, and traditional conservatism is distinguished from contemporary conservatism. Despite their affinities as "far left" ideologies, anarchism, Marxism, and communism are distinguished from each other. Despite their similarities as totalitarian "far right" ideologies, the differences between fascism and Nazism are also considered. Such distinctions help provide historical perspectives on how ideologies have evolved, and they allow us to broaden the range of answers to the perennial questions.

But it is important to move beyond the most familiar ideologies of the past. Chapter 4 introduces a wide variety of radical and extremist voices that seek to be heard in contemporary politics, perspectives that are called quasi-ideologies because they are less comprehensive than ideologies. For organizational purposes, these many voices are classified into four categories: the radical right, the radical left, the extreme right, and the extreme left. Such a classification scheme is described and defended in chapter 4, and subsequent chapters show the utility of that scheme by applying it to widen alternative perspectives on the perennial political questions.

The stage is thus set for considering the great issues of politics. Each of the next 11 chapters (5 through 15) focuses on a set of questions dealing with a basic topic. The views of each ideology and various quasi-ideologies on each set of questions are presented. Such presentations can be regarded as the opening statements of various

participants in political conversations seeking to come to consensus on the perennial questions, even while stressing their differences.

This format furthers two objectives. First, deeper, cumulative understandings of each ideology and quasi-ideology are attained as students proceed from the basic introductions in chapters 2–4, through the philosophical foundations of these perspectives, and then into more in-depth presentation of their basic political principles. As the semester goes on, students gain a deeper internal understanding of the various perspectives, enabling them to see politics from many vantage points. Second, students have the resources needed to engage in informed discussions of the perennial questions. I assign students to be spokespersons for particular perspectives, requiring them to assume viewpoints often far from those with which they are most familiar and comfortable, asking them to bring an internalized understanding of their assigned perspective to group conversations, and ensuring that all views will be taken into account during these conversations. (Students are, of course, assigned different ideological perspectives throughout the semester.) I ask them to seek as much agreement as possible during their conversations, to clarify the major conflicting ideas, to think about the reasons why they disagree, and to evaluate their different answers.

In the conclusions of these chapters, I suggest that there is some agreement on the perennial questions, if only among most ideologies and quasi-ideologies and if only on some basic and general matters. In settling political disputes, mediators typically begin by searching for those most basic matters on which they can get the conflicting parties to agree. The agreements that I propose in the conclusions are called the underlying consensus of pluralism. Taken together, the consensual agreements on the various perennial questions comprise pluralist public philosophy, which is proposed here as the most basic philosophy guiding politics in the United States and many other countries today. While it is one purpose of this book to provide a fairly comprehensive account of pluralism, it can initially be understood as a public philosophy that affirms the legitimacy of many interests, identities, and ideas that often compete with one another and emphasizes democratic procedures for reconciling differences, if only tentatively and temporarily. (Thus, pluralist public philosophy should not be confused with a much more focused orthodox pluralist theory that rose to prominence in political science at the beginning of its behavioral revolution almost a half century ago and that has given pluralism a negative connotation among many political theorists and political scientists.)

The consensus within pluralist public philosophy is proposed with the tentativeness that is a central feature of pluralism. Perhaps the suggested underlying consensus on each perennial question is too optimistic, rejected not only by extremists but also by some outlooks that are generally friends of pluralism. Or perhaps the suggested underlying consensus is too timid, as the friends of pluralism can actually have more substantial agreements than those proposed here. Conversations among spokespersons for various ideologies – including those that are normally regarded as affirming pluralism and those that are normally regarded as questioning and rejecting it – are useful tests of the adequacy of pluralist public philosophy as depicted here.

Even if there is widespread consensus on pluralist public philosophy, more specific public philosophies are also needed. Pluralism is too general to provide much guidance on the specific issues that arise within political communities, and thus more specific perspectives may be helpful to orient individuals to political life and to provide more specific guidance to how various political communities should be governed. Students can profitably discuss the more specific contested ideas of various ideologies and quasi-ideologies to try to construct public philosophies that should govern the various political communities to which they belong.

The search for such public philosophies might begin with two very basic orientations. First, searching through the available ideological alternatives and selecting among them may not yield the most suitable public philosophy for an individual or a political community. Indeed, it seems unlikely that the specific public philosophies to guide us are lying around waiting to be discovered. Comprehensive public philosophies that we can embrace may need to be constructed by carefully evaluating the alternative philosophical foundations of public philosophies, choosing among competing political principles addressing the perennial political issues, and integrating them into a coherent set of principles. Second, different public philosophies may be best suited for different political communities. The best public philosophy for a city may be different from that for a nation, which may be different from that for the global community. And different public philosophies may be most suitable for different cities and nations. This text does not endorse any specific public philosophy, but rather seeks to provide helpful resources for their construction by those individuals who seek to become deeper political thinkers and by political communities seeking the benefits of a public philosophy.

While this book is structured thematically rather than historically, I have adopted some strategies for giving readers basic information on the origins and evolution of ideas. First, the introductions to the various ideologies in chapters 2, 3, and 4 pay considerable attention to the historical contexts that gave rise to the ideologies. Second, the perennial issues are discussed by presenting the ideological responses to them in a basically chronological manner. However, there is no single historical sequence to ideologies, and so I sometimes change the order of presentations so as to provide the clearest flow of ideas. A third device used to aid in understanding the history of political ideas is to indicate the lifespan of non-living contributors to an ideology, whenever he or she is first introduced.

The fairly extensive endnotes are intended to clarify issues that may occur to thoughtful and informed readers and to provide some sense of the related work being done by political theorists on the ideas sketched in the text. The bibliography at the end of the book provides complete citations to the authors and abbreviated titles presented in the text and footnotes. (I have used the convention of citing authors' first and last names with the first reference to a specific work, but only last names for subsequent references to that work.)

There are many people whom I would like to acknowledge for their direct and indirect contributions to this book, but I fear that any effort to list everyone would

only offend those who were inadvertently omitted. Beyond the many great, good, fair, and poor political thinkers whose ideas are cited below, I am indebted to many former teachers and mentors who developed my interests in the issues pursued here, hundreds of students who provided suggestions on earlier drafts of the text, numerous colleagues who advised me on particular issues, fellow panelists and reviewers who provided feedback on parts or all of this text, and friends and family who listened and commented on ideas presented here.

While this text is distinct from *GIGS*, I want to acknowledge the contributions of my co-authors in that enterprise – Dwight Kiel and Thomas Heilke. I have occasionally drawn on materials in that earlier text, and so their contributions to *GIGS* remain interwoven into the present text. While their primary interests have changed, they have read and commented extensively on the current manuscript. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of Will Delehanty, who has served as my teaching assistant during the semesters when this text was developed and tested. He both provided valuable feedback on the text and facilitated many conversations in discussion sections – conversations that generally produced both consensual support for the pluralist public philosophy proposed here and civil disagreements about the best principles that should guide the resolution of the issues that all political communities confront.

But my greatest debt is to my wife, who inspired and has greatly supported my undertaking of this project. This book is dedicated to her.

Paul Schumaker
Lawrence, Kansas

Chapter 1

Constructing Our Public Philosophies

The overall quality of life in our political communities is often undermined because our governments are overly responsive to the requirements of economic growth in a capitalist economy, to the interests of the powers-that-be, and to the shifting moods of an ill-informed and prejudicial public. As an antidote to such debilitating forces on our political life, the residents and rulers of political communities are often urged to deliberate on the political principles that should guide their governance, and then develop structures and processes and enact and deliver policies and programs consistent with these principles.[1]

The main purpose of this book is to provide resources enabling thoughtful discussions about such principles – about the public philosophies that should guide how we live together in political communities.

Public Philosophies and Political Ideologies

Public philosophies, like political ideologies, provide fairly comprehensive and coherent sets of core ideas about politics. Both provide beliefs about how political communities are governed, ideals about the goals that should be sought by political communities, and principles providing broad guidelines for achieving these goals. While the term "political ideology" is more familiar – it is widely used to designate many competing sets of political beliefs and values such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, and so forth – it has very contested meanings and implications. For example, political scientists usually maintain that people who hold an ideology have much more developed, complex, and coherent political ideas than the vast majority of citizens who are ideologically innocent.[2] In contrast, many other social theorists think of ideologies in derogatory terms – as providing biased ideas furthering particular interests, as oversimplifying and distorting reality, and as promoting rigid, utopian, and extreme thinking.[3] While the term "public philosophy" may suggest an abstract and academic preoccupation with mere theorizing about the good society and good government

– with little relevance to political reality – this book seeks to convince you that such philosophies address issues of great practical significance, that they can avoid the pitfalls of ideologies, and that ordinary people can enter into important conversations with one another in search of both a general public philosophy that can guide the politics of all communities and more specific public philosophies that can guide the politics of the various particular communities to which they belong.

To generate a public philosophy, community members must address a variety of important issues – the perennial political and philosophical questions presented in the next section.[4] Different ideologies provide a wide range of perspectives on these questions and thus are important resources for conversations in search of public philosophies. By comparing and analyzing the answers to the perennial questions of competing ideologies, it is possible to locate their agreements and disagreements. Thoughtful comparative analyses of the ideas of alternative ideologies are the building blocks of public philosophies.

This book proposes that conversations among contemporary liberals, contemporary conservatives, and some other older and emerging ideologies can generate consensus on some ideas. This consensus comprises the most general public philosophy of advanced societies. All adherents to *pluralist* public philosophy understand (among other things) that modern societies are composed of people having different biological and social characteristics, different religious beliefs and moral principles, and different interests, that individuals have rights to express and pursue these differences, and that governments should thus foster mutual toleration.

Conversations involving spokespersons for different ideologies nevertheless produce more disagreement than agreement. Communists, fascists, and various religious fundamentalisms illustrate ideologies that reject many tenets of pluralist public philosophy. Communitarians, libertarians, and greens usually agree with most tenets of pluralism, but they would like to extend or reform pluralism in various ways – for example, by insisting that pluralist societies give greater attention to the moral development and political obligations of citizens, to the property rights of individuals, or to achieving a sustainable natural environment. Even those ideologies that are most committed to pluralism – contemporary liberalism and contemporary conservatism – seem to share few ideas beyond a thin and abstract consensus on the perennial questions. Indeed, today's liberals and conservatives so emphasize their differences and forget their commonalities that they are often characterized as contributing to the unnecessary polarization of pluralist societies.

In brief, thoughtful deliberations among spokespersons for various ideologies can result in many benefits for political communities. They can result in consensus on at least some basic and general principles that can guide all pluralist societies. They can produce additional agreement on more specific principles that can guide particular communities. They can provide forums for considering modifications and even radical reforms of prevailing public philosophies. They can result in better understandings and amicable reconciliation of ideological differences within pluralist politics. They can identify the ideas of certain ideologies that endanger pluralist societies. These are among the primary tasks of political theory.

Political Theory

The subject matter of political theory is vast, because it seeks general understandings of all things political. Like the term ideology, the meaning of politics is widely contested.

Politics

Some see politics as involving human conflict. In David Easton's famous formulation, politics involves "the authoritative allocation of values" among people seeking larger shares of scarce social goods.[5] Others see politics as involving human cooperation. According to another eminent political scientist, Karl Deutsch (1912–92), politics "deals inescapably with the collective self control of human beings – their joint power over their own fate."[6] To include and emphasize both human conflict and cooperation, politics can be understood as involving the production and distribution of social goods (things that most people value but can attain only through relationships with others, such as protection from enemies and diseases, safe and attractive environments, transportation and communication systems, various products and services, education, occupational opportunities, power, and money). Community members often initially disagree about the collective actions appropriate for producing and distributing social goods and resolve their disagreements in various ways. They may resort to war, violence, or coercion; some people may overpower others, forcing the weak to abide by the ideas of the strong. They may employ propaganda; some people may manipulate information in ways that achieve widespread compliance with their goals through a "false" consensus that others would reject if they had fuller information and unrestricted access to competing ideas. They may agree to employ certain procedures for resolving disagreements; they could flip a coin, put issues to a vote, take issues to court, or use any other procedure they believe is a legitimate method of resolving their disagreements. Or they can try to resolve their disagreements by coming to agreement; they might engage in collaborative efforts to work through their conflicts, to find common ground, and to arrive at understandings that are widely regarded as acceptable.

Such a conception of politics is useful because it recognizes the conflicts we all experience in community life, because it recognizes diverse ways of handling conflict, and because it recognizes that politics is a feature of all communities. Politics occurs in families, churches, schools, and other associations in civil society, as well as in various states.

The perennial questions of politics

Figure 1 provides a schematic diagram containing eleven broad categories of very general concerns that are central to politics and thus to developing public philosophies. The seven categories at the top of the figure deal with the beliefs, values, and principles that most directly bear on political life.

Political Principles

Communities

Citizens

Structures

Rulers

Authority

Justice

Change

Philosophical Bases

Ontology   Humans   Society   Epistemology

Key

☐ Pluralism's underlying consensus

▨ Competing issues resolved by normal pluralist procedures

▨ Ideas requiring radical changes within pluralism
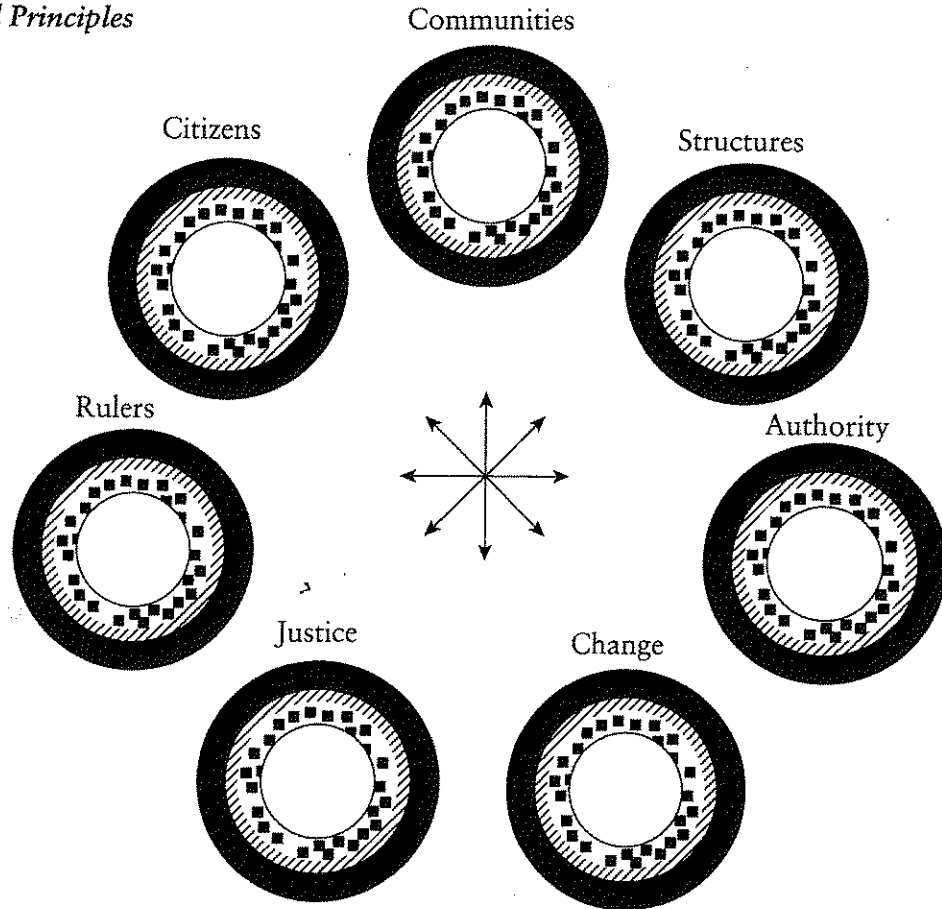
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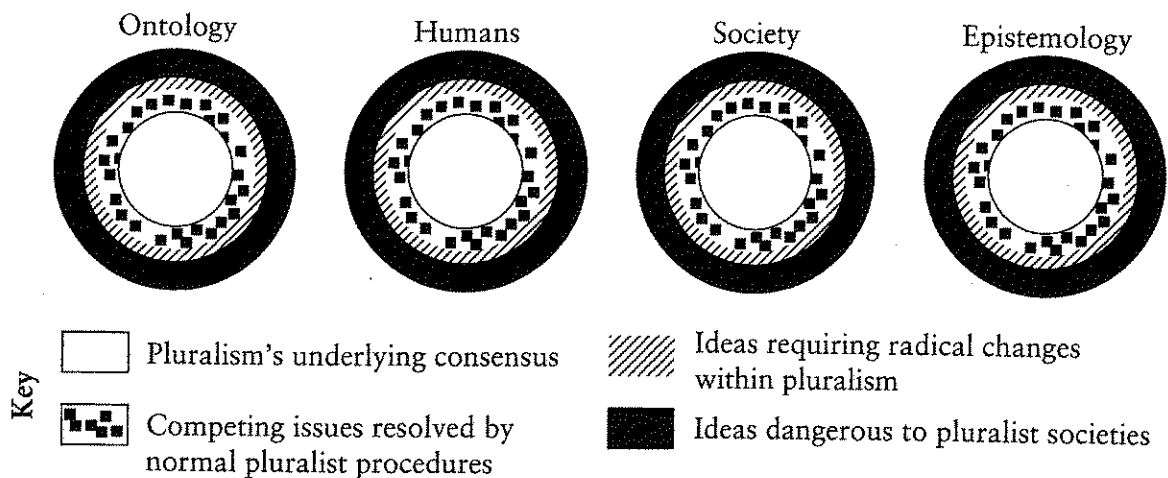
Figure 1   A framework for describing and analyzing public philosophies

Communities   People reside in, identify with, and have obligations to many political communities or *polities*: territorially defined states having governments that make laws and develop programs affecting the production and distribution of social goods. Such polities include: the global community; various civilizations defined by the ethnicities, religions, and cultures of people; regional political systems like the European

Union; nations; provinces, metropolitan areas, cities, and towns within nations having decentralized political systems; school districts and other specialized associations for the delivery of specific public goods; and local neighborhoods.[7] With which of these kinds of communities do people most strongly identify? With which of these kinds of communities should they identify?

Citizens Political communities are composed of residents and citizens. Who can become residents and citizens of various communities? Can there be legitimate differences in the status of residents (e.g., full citizens, partial citizens, mere residents)? What benefits are provided to citizens, and should such benefits be extended and guaranteed as rights or should they be reduced? What duties must citizens perform, and should citizen obligations be strengthened or diminished?

Structures Many institutions and processes structure polities by giving meaning and purposes to people's lives, and by producing, distributing, and controlling social goods. Such institutions include governments (or various sorts), corporations and other business organizations, labor unions and other associations of workers, religious institutions, schools, voluntary and charitable organizations, and families. Such processes include market transactions and governmental regulations. Cultures (broadly accepted norms and values within political communities) are non-institutional structures that affect social life in important ways. Should our lives be highly structured, or should such structures – or at least certain structures – be dismantled or at least diminished? Which of these structures are the most important? What is the existing balance of power among these structures? Should this balance be modified?

Rulers Elected representatives, appointed office-holders (bureaucrats), owners and managers of economic organizations, producers and disseminators of ideas and information, leaders of community groups, active participants on community issues, and ordinary citizens are among the kinds of people in a community who exercise political power. Who really rules and who should rule? What is the distribution of power within a community, and should power be distributed differently? What are the mechanisms for limiting the power of rulers and the occasions for holding rulers accountable?

Authority Matters of economic behavior, social interaction, environmental protection, religious worship, cultural values, and personal lifestyles are among the many facets of community life that are potentially subject to governmental authority. For what purposes should government authority be exercised? What constraints on individual freedom can governmental authorities legitimately impose? In what areas should government authority be expanded or contracted?

Justice People normally adhere to cultural norms and governmental laws. What principles of justice should be reflected in such norms and laws? People should treat each other in a just manner, and social goods should be distributed fairly. What principles

of justice should guide the distribution of social goods? What distributive procedures and outcomes are just?

Change   Political change can be resisted, or it could be sought in small and large doses, and through peaceful and violent means. How much and what kind of change is desirable? What tactics used by agents of change are legitimate? To what extent and under what conditions is repression of those who seek change legitimate?

Beyond these seven categories, figure 1 directs attention to four kinds of philosophical assumptions – to ideas that are broader than political principles and often foundational to them. These assumptions tend to be unarticulated in political discussions and are often poorly understood by political actors, but that does not diminish the extent to which they are firmly held and the basis of people's political beliefs, values, and principles. Philosophical assumptions are hard to contest, because there exists no agreed-upon method for validating or falsifying them, but that does not diminish our need to think rigorously about their merits and limitations. They concern:

Ontology.   People hold different conceptions of ultimate reality. Ontological assumptions deal with the most basic source(s) of the world we experience. Are there supernatural beings or a Supreme Being (Yahweh, God, or Allah) that created the natural world? Are there transcendental beings (such as God or Platonic forms) that provide absolute standards specifying what is good and evil in the natural world and human conduct? Or is ultimate reality simply the most basic materials and forces in the natural world? Ontological assumptions also deal with ultimate ends. Is what will become of the world determined by divine or supernatural causes? By material and natural causes? Or are ultimate ends undetermined, subject to human ideas, will, and power?

Human nature.   People hold different beliefs about the essence of humans. Are humans fundamentally equal and, if so, in what ways and on what basis? In what ways are humans unequal? What constitutes the good life for individuals? What are basic (and desirable) human motivations and purposes? Are humans autonomous and rational in choosing their own ends, or are their conceptions of the good life and their motivations socially and politically influenced?

Nature of society.   People have different notions about the origins of social life and different images of society. What are the basic characteristics of a good society? To what extent should societies be homogeneous, and in what ways are they heterogeneous? What are the fundamental bases of conflict within societies?

Epistemology.   People have different conceptions of what we can know politically and how we can know it. To what extent can we have certain knowledge or tentative knowledge about politics? Or must we accept complete uncertainty about fundamental political questions? How can we achieve political knowledge?

To answer these questions and to develop public philosophies, we must become political theorists. Political theory seeks to understand how humans live and should live in community with others. It encompasses all the conflicting ideas of the great (and less great) thinkers about how our various communities are governed and how they should be governed. Because everyone has such ideas, everyone is, to some degree, a political theorist. But at least two qualities are found in the ideas of serious political thinkers or theorists.

First, the ideas of theorists are expressed in terms of *abstract concepts* and *generalizations*. Non-theorists often focus on concrete and specific cases. For example, they might express the notion that Smith is an important person in the community and describe the ways he attained and used his control over others. Such descriptions can be fascinating and illuminating, because of the particular nuances and unique features of community relations that are revealed by the case of Smith. Political theorists, however, deal with concepts that encompass many cases and generalize across cases and about differences among cases. For example, political theorists may regard as a key political concept – which they denote as power – the differences among people in their capacity to affect the production and distribution of social goods. After observing power relations in various communities, theorists might regard gender as an important concept in understanding power and propose as generalizations such ideas as "the powers-that-be tend to be men," or "the greater power of men than women in communities is due to the different socialization experiences of boys and girls in childhood," or "communities are best governed when power is distributed equally between men and women." Theorists believe such generalizations make comprehensible the basic patterns of human life that underlie concrete cases.

Some theorists are most interested in producing generalizations about political reality, about how political communities are actually structured and function. Such *empirical* theorists provide descriptions about most cases, explanations for variations among cases, and predictions about future cases.[8] Other theorists are interested in producing generalizations about how political communities ought to be structured and function. Such *normative* theorists envision ideal – or at least better – political communities, evaluate how well specific cases correspond to their ideals, and prescribe ways of achieving desirable outcomes in most cases. The idealizations, evaluations, and prescriptions of normative theorists always involve value judgments. Feminist theorists, for example, would likely regard male dominance over women as morally and politically unacceptable.

Second, compared to most people, political theorists are more deeply concerned about the basis and *validity* of their ideas. Theorists usually present their descriptions, explanations, predictions, idealizations, evaluations, prescriptions, and other such ideas with a measure of tentativeness and humility.[9] They often suppose that the questions they address about politics have true answers in the eyes of God or from some ideal, all-knowing, unbiased, or transcendent perspective. But recognizing their humanity, they acknowledge the limits of their knowledge and the potential biases in their perceptions and analyses. Theorists ask about the underlying assumptions that must be accepted to support their ideas, and reflect on the usefulness and validity

of these assumptions. According to the Austrian-born British philosopher Karl Popper (1902–94), empirical theorists check the validity of their descriptions and explanations by employing scientific methods that seek to falsify hypotheses by analyzing observable evidence concerning their ideas; such methods filter out various biases to thinking and allow others to examine the procedures used to test their ideas. According to French philosopher Simone Weil (1909–43), normative theorists check the validity of their idealizations, evaluations, and prescriptions by regularly employing as methods of investigation a search for the contrary to their ideas and they inquire into the validity of these opposing views. In short, both empirical and normative theorists look for counter-evidence and counter-arguments to their ideas, revising their conclusions as required. Being reflective about the validity of ideas, theorists conduct an open-ended and tentative search for what is true in political life and what is good in political life.[10]

While it is conventional to stress the different goals and methods of empirical and normative theorists, the distinction between them is perhaps overdrawn. Political scientists emphasize the development of empirical theory, but they often make normative claims. Political philosophers emphasize the development of normative theory, but they often make use of empirical generalizations. Moreover, public philosophies contain both empirical and normative ideas, and the development of public philosophies that merit our allegiance requires the tools of both political science and political philosophy.[11] Political ideologies provide a host of interesting and plausible ideas for possible inclusion in public philosophies, but skepticism about the validity of their ideas is always in order. Some ideologies may distort political reality to camouflage how existing practices benefit particular class interests at the expense of the public good. Other ideologies may be based on paranoia. Still other ideologies may invite people to make unreasonable sacrifices in the present for utopian future goals. Political science and political philosophy provide approaches for evaluating the claims of contending political ideologies.

Political science

As a scholarly discipline, political science aspires to impartial analysis of political beliefs; it provides methods for guarding against the influence of various biases in determining the validity of our descriptions and explanations of the workings of actual political communities. Nevertheless, the capacity of scientific methods to overcome ideological biases about how the political world functions has often been questioned. For example, our ideological orientations are alleged to shape the questions we ask about the empirical world, the hypotheses we form about it, and the observations we make about it. Such allegations suggest that we cannot transcend ideology in forming political beliefs, because ideologies are particular and narrow sets of lenses that channel and distort our perceptions and thoughts about the empirical world, making inter-subjective agreement impossible.

Ideologies undoubtedly do shape the questions we ask about how the political world actually works. For example, Marxism is an ideology that claims that democratic

governments are merely "the executive committee of the capitalist class," leading Marxists to raise questions about the distribution of power in communities that are formally democratic. Who really rules? Who really has predominant power in American cities and other political communities that are claimed to be democratic? If ideologies prompt scientific investigations of such important questions, that may be an asset rather than a liability.

Ideologies may also influence the hypotheses that one chooses to investigate. In response to the question of who really rules, liberals normally suppose that elected representatives are the most powerful actors in a democratic society, but Marxists argue that various business interests – members of the capitalist class – have extensive power over such officials,[12] while contemporary conservatives suggest that a "New Class" of intellectuals and bureaucrats may be the real rulers. Thus, ideological predispositions often result in the formulation of not only one hypothesis regarding an important topic, but of alternative or rival hypotheses. At least in principle, these rival hypotheses can be tested scientifically, resulting in more precise and valid descriptions and explanations about such matters as the actual distribution of power within communities.

Ideological preconceptions may, however, affect the evidence that people marshal on behalf of their hypotheses and theories. For example, it is claimed that those Marxists who believe that capitalists really rule in liberal democratic communities employ research methods that reinforce the perception of capitalist dominance, but fail to distinguish adequately between that perception and the actual and very significant limits on capitalist power.[13] Meanwhile, Marxists claim that liberals, who believe that elected representatives rule, use methods that are unable to capture the hidden control that capitalists exercise over representatives.[14] Such arguments about the biases of the methods used to collect evidence in support of rival hypotheses about the distribution of power have led some observers to conclude that there is little likelihood of attaining objective answers to "who rules?" because the field of study is hopelessly muddied by ideological preconceptions and biases.[15]

Despite such difficulties, *the scientific method* is designed to overcome ideological biases. While ideological positions may influence the evidence that is brought to bear on such hypotheses, science has developed many procedures – such as insisting on the replication of findings – to winnow out questionable empirical claims and to increase our confidence in the validity of scientific findings. When ideologically derived beliefs are subjected to scientific examination, the controversy that usually ensues about the adequacy of the methods employed often leads to the development of more complicated – and ultimately more adequate – answers to such questions as "who rules?"

Scientific analysis of "who rules?" has resulted in more adequate understandings of the concept of power. Rather than simply conceptualizing and measuring political power in terms of who holds office in governmental institutions, persons from different ideological perspectives now acknowledge that power has several, more subtle, faces or dimensions. There is a first face of power that appears when some people are able to get other people to defer to their preferences when policy decisions are made.

There is a second face of power that appears when some people are able to establish and control the agenda of issues that come before a community, providing a context in which the first face of power can be effective. And there is a third face of power that appears when some people are able to shape the preferences of other people so that those whose preferences have been shaped will use their power to help secure the goals of those who shaped their preferences.[16] Perhaps liberals developed the concept of the first face of power – and methods for analyzing the first face – because they anticipated these methods would reveal that elected officials have more such power than capitalists. And perhaps neo-Marxists developed the concepts of the second and third faces of power because they anticipated that analyses would reveal that capitalists usually set the agenda to which elected officials respond and that the ideological dominance of capitalist values shape the preferences that elected officials (and even the working class) pursue in the policy-making process. While ideological motivations perhaps gave rise to the conceptualizations of these different dimensions of power, both liberals and neo-Marxists now acknowledge that power is multidimensional, involving at least these three separate facets.[17] Additionally, the ideological debate over who rules has led to a scientific consensus that neither elected representatives nor capitalists rule entirely, but rather that the distribution of power varies across communities and even within communities, depending on the kinds of issues that are being addressed. Business interests do predominate in some communities that are formally democratic, but interests that oppose business predominate in other communities. Indeed, scientific investigations suggest that business interests are particularly likely to predominate under specific conditions such as when communities employ institutions that de-politicize government (for example, by having nonpartisan elections for office).[18] Such investigations also indicate that business interests are likely to predominate on economic development issues, but have much less influence on issues concerned with the provision and allocation of governmental services such as libraries, recreation facilities, and trash removal.[19]

In summary, scientific analyses of ideologically motivated debates over such questions as "who rules?" show the inadequacy of the simple answers provided by various ideological perspectives. While some persons – commonly referred to as ideologues – bring unshakeable ideological beliefs to such debates, and while they resist more complex scientific advances on these topics, ideological blinders have not prevented the development of more sophisticated and accurate understandings of power and other key political concepts. The example of community power studies suggests that more adequate political knowledge can be attained by asking the questions about political reality posed in our framework depicted in figure 1, by entertaining as rival hypotheses the contrasting beliefs held by those from different ideological perspectives, and by analyzing these hypotheses using normal scientific methods. This is not to claim that such scientific investigations will be free of ideological biases and thus result in objective or true generalizations. Instead, the claim of political science is that the examination of the rival hypotheses provided by different ideologies through the most adequate scientific methods available leads to progressively better descriptions and explanations of political reality.

Political philosophy

Scientific methods are of little help in overcoming partiality when we are analyzing idealizations, evaluations, and prescriptions, because such methods are intended to detect biased beliefs about reality rather than biased ideals about what is good in life. According to ancient philosophers like Socrates (470–399 BCE) and Plato (427–346 BCE), the best method for informing our political ideals is the dialectical method, and this method still has its defenders.[20]

Most simply, *the dialectical method* involves submitting one's political principles to the critical inspection of others. When the dialectical method is employed, the goal is not simply to win a debate against those having opposing views; instead, the goal is to attain better knowledge, even if this entails modifying one's initial position. Plato's *Republic* illustrates the application of the dialectical method to the question, "What is justice?" Conventional Athenian ideas, the Sophistic views of Thrasymachus, and Socrates' conception of justice are presented and subjected to critical examination by others. Despite Plato's standing as a great thinker, contemporary philosophers may regard his dialogue as an unsatisfactory attempt to discover unbiased principles of justice. Absent from his discussion are various contemporary conceptions of justice. And, although there is an appearance of critical analysis of the various positions presented by his interlocutors, Socrates' own views seem to be rather meekly accepted. Thus, employing the dialectical method in a contemporary attempt to resolve the issue of "What is justice?" might be a much more demanding enterprise than that presented by Plato.

What is involved in moving beyond holding ideologically derived ideals of justice (or of other big issues regarding communities, citizenship, structure, rulers, authority, and change) to choosing justice ideals on the basis of philosophical inquiry employing the dialectical method? According to David Ricci, this method involves engaging in "a great conversation":

> What this requires, in effect, is a great conversation, larger than any small conversations that members of particular social groups, such as professions, or learned disciplines, are accustomed to conducting among themselves. The goal of this large-scale dialogue is, in fact, for various groups to express diverse aesthetic, moral, and scientific opinions and somehow thrash them out on common grounds, in intelligible terms, so that a slowly moving consensus on truth and decency can be worked out and maintained over the generations, to serve as a framework of social cement binding members of the community to one another and enabling them to live good lives together. Withal, it is an intellectual enterprise intent on examining a great many facts by comparing them to canons of right and wrong, good and evil, sin and virtue, rights and obligations.[21]

Such a conversation would attempt to discover the public philosophy that we would choose to govern our politics generally. It might also seek to discover those public philosophies we would choose to govern each of our political communities. Because of the differences among political communities – for example, in their purposes and in the values of their citizens – we should expect consensus on a general public

philosophy to be minimal, and we should expect different communities to choose somewhat different public philosophies.[22] Because public philosophies must address many questions, it would be most manageable to have a series of conversations, each aimed at answering for various types of communities a particular perennial question, such as who should rule or how should social goods be distributed? To conduct such conversations, we can imagine representatives of various ideological perspectives assembling with the intention of somehow achieving consensual answers to a perennial question. We would expect proponents of each ideology to express clearly their principles on the issue. We would expect proponents to explain, as fully as possible, the philosophical bases for their principles and to show their implications for the overall structure and governance of community life. We would expect proponents to explain how these principles would solve (or reduce) various social, economic, and political problems, achieve (or approach) various political goals, and reflect various moral concerns. Each of these arguments would, of course, be subjected to the critical scrutiny of persons from all other ideological perspectives gathered at the assembly, leading to extensive discussions about the adequacy of each argument.

As Ricci suggests, such conversations would be *great* in terms of the importance of the issues being discussed and in terms of the diversity of views under consideration. They would also be of great – perhaps interminable – duration. Given the magnitude of the perennial political questions, we should not expect any oral discussions to quickly resolve such questions and produce consensus. Indeed, while oral discussions can be valuable, it is important to recognize that the great conversation is also a metaphor for the kind of analyses that characterize contemporary political philosophy. To conduct such conversations or to engage in the dialectical method, people need not actually assemble in one place or present their arguments orally. Indeed, because of the complexity of this task, precision is surely enhanced by writing down one's arguments in a manner that clarifies ambiguous terms and lines of argumentation, and that allows one's audience ample opportunities to reflect upon and analyze these arguments. In short, the great conversation occurs through books and articles where people present and defend their ideas, where others respond to perceived shortcomings, and where authors then rework their claims.[23]

To this point, our discussion of the analytical framework presented in figure 1 has focused on how political science and political philosophy can be used to address the perennial issues. We have thus far ignored the concentric circles associated with each of these issues. It is now time to turn our attention to these circles, which are intended to convey what we can hope to achieve by engaging in theoretical reflections. As already suggested, our first objective – depicted by the innermost circles – is to attain as much consensus as possible on the perennial issues – if not a universal and eternal consensus, at least one within the kinds of pluralist political communities that we presently have. Our second objective – depicted by the next innermost rings – is to identify the perennial issues that continue to be the source of disagreement within pluralist societies and that are frequently discussed and debated in the ordinary politics of such societies. The third objective – depicted by the next to outermost rings – is to identify those ideas that *radicals* introduce in order to bring about what they

regard as fundamental improvements to pluralist politics. Our fourth and final objective – depicted by the outermost rings – is to identify those ideas held by *extremists* – ideas that normally seem misguided, at least to those committed to pluralist politics. The remainder of this chapter discusses these objectives.

Searching for an Underlying Consensus Within Pluralism

Our framework directs attention to the centrality of pluralism in contemporary political thought. Like politics, pluralism is a contested term in political theory. For many political scientists, pluralism is understood as a largely empirical theory of politics, based upon questionable understandings of American politics. During the behavioral revolution in political science during the middle of the twentieth century, this orthodox pluralism emerged as a (perhaps *the*) mainstream political theory. According to orthodox pluralists, American politics could be described as embracing such normative goals as tolerating a wide variety of interests, organizing various interests into political groups, and having a wide dispersion of power among competing groups. Most importantly, orthodox pluralists claimed American political communities had institutions and processes that enabled the realization of these goals, and thus approached achieving democracy and justice.[24] However, for several decades this orthodox theory has been criticized as a narrow conception of pluralism because it focused too strongly on the distribution of power and ignored other normative concerns of political communities composed of citizens having diverse interests and moral and political principles. It was also criticized for failing to see that pluralism was an evolving political theory, having historical roots that preceded the ideas of orthodox pluralism and having the capacity to absorb many modifications in both its normative concepts and empirical generalizations.[25] A variety of neo-pluralisms emerged that focused on troubling deficiencies in current political arrangements, such things as the lack of adequate opportunities for many citizens to convert their concerns into political issues, the inadequate representation of various groups at crucial stages of decision-making, and the systemic biases and inequalities in treatment of people in the policies and programs of pluralist regimes.[26] The varieties of pluralism that have emerged indicate that it is a theory of politics that is in constant evolution. Updating pluralism as a normative, empirical, evaluative, and prescriptive theory is one concern of this book.

As conceived here and by other neo-pluralists, pluralism (broadly understood) is a public philosophy having wide allegiance among academics, governmental leaders, political participants, and ordinary citizens – especially in the United States and other Western nations, but increasingly among non-Westerners as well. Although political communities incorporating the ideas of pluralist philosophy have many shortcomings, pluralism is thought to provide a modicum of peace and prosperity. Although pluralism contains no recipe for producing heaven on earth, pluralism is thought to avoid the most hellish politics that too often afflicts human life. While some political communities are not governed by pluralist ideas and ideals, they are thought to lack

the social, economic, and cultural conditions needed for pluralist politics. Pluralism is a great, but only partially realized, political achievement of many modern societies.

Figure 1 shows that at the core of each category is a limited set of ideas that are essential to pluralist public philosophy; these comprise a basic underlying consensus among all people committed to pluralism. Scholars have often insisted on the existence of a certain consensus within the United States and other pluralist societies. Historians like Richard Hofstadter and Louis Hartz have claimed that there is a broad consensus that has guided American political development, involving an emphasis on individualism, equal opportunity, democratic rights, and other such liberal values.[27] Drawing on public opinion polls, political scientists like Herbert McClosky and John Zaller have claimed that there is widespread support in the United States for the basic institutions of capitalism and democracy.[28] Cross-national surveys, such as those conducted by Ronald Inglehart and his associates, also indicate that most citizens in many developed countries support political reform over maintenance of the status quo or revolutionary change, as well as other orientations that seem consistent with a pluralist public philosophy.[29] Political philosophers have also suggested the existence of a consensus within pluralism. For example, George Klosko claims that pluralist societies have achieved consensus on procedural justice – the principles and procedures for resolving disputes fairly.[30]

Perhaps the most important theoretical contribution in this regard is that of John Rawls (1921–2002), who proposed in *Political Liberalism* that the primary characteristic of a pluralist society is that it is made up of people who hold a wide variety of "comprehensive moral doctrines." Precisely because various religions, ideologies, ethics, and lifestyles are embraced within pluralist societies, their citizens require a *political* agreement to tolerate each other and abide by minimal widely held principles enabling their peaceful coexistence in a stable political community. Pluralist societies require an "overlapping political consensus" that will curtail endless battles for political dominance. This consensus must include a basic agreement that victors in battles for power cannot impose their particular morality on others; whoever governs must respect the moral autonomy and basic rights of all citizens. Rawls does not specify the contents of this consensus in detail, but he does claim:

> Its breadth goes beyond political principles instituting democratic procedures to include principles covering the basic structure as a whole; hence its principles also establish certain substantive rights such as liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, as well as fair equal opportunity and principles covering certain essential needs.[31]

This book seeks to discern whether a broader consensus within pluralism is possible than that yet specified by these historians, political scientists, and philosophers. By considering the answers that various ideologies give to the perennial political issues, we can discover areas of agreement, as well as disagreement, among them. As suggested above, it seems unlikely that there will be universal consensus among all ideologies on the perennial questions, but there will be some agreement on each perennial question among those ideologies that are *friends of pluralism*. Bernard Crick included conservatives, liberals, and (democratic) socialists among such friends,

but – as we will see – these ideologies have various strands and newer ideological perspectives have come into prominence.[32] By considering how a wide range of ideological perspectives answer the perennial issues of politics, we will argue that there is much more consensus within pluralism than is often acknowledged.

Just as we do not expect to find any universal consensus, any agreements that we find among the friends of pluralism should not be regarded as eternal or absolute. Some analysts doubt that there will ever be significant changes in a pluralist consensus endorsing capitalism and democracy, and thus proclaim that debate about the big issues of politics is over, that we are at "the end of ideology," or "the end of history."[33] Pluralists, however, do not insist on an enduring underlying consensus, and instead suppose that the pluralist consensus will evolve over time, as new problems, goals, and understandings come to the attention of people in pluralist societies. Pluralism does not require that all people within pluralist societies agree on this consensus; dissent is honored within the pluralist consensus, and this means that only *most* people in existing pluralist communities have allegiance to some core ideas.[34] While chapters 5–15 will conclude by specifying the underlying consensus among pluralists in each issue area, these conclusions are asserted with the tentativeness that is a central feature of pluralism.

To anticipate a key conclusion from chapter 8 dealing with epistemological questions, we will conclude that pluralists reject the idea of certainty concerning political knowledge and instead seek socially constructed tentative understandings.[35] Pluralists agree that moral and political knowledge arises from social agreements that find their way into constitutions, laws, and international agreements and treaties. While these agreements may be imperfect expressions of "truth" (of what is absolutely best for political societies), they provide a tentative consensus on right and wrong conduct that can only be revised by parties to the agreements in light of new conditions and understandings. This assumption is so critical that it defines the essential common outlook of the friends of pluralism. It is important to recognize at the onset, however, that tentativeness is not the same thing as skepticism. Pluralists are confident that pluralist societies and philosophies are better than non-pluralist ones.[36] Pluralists reject extreme skepticism because such skepticism leads to embracing the idea that politics is nothing but the application of pure power. Skeptics become cynics when they see domestic politics as having no basis in shared understandings and hence as purely a struggle for power among various interests. Skeptics also become cynics when they see global politics as nothing but a struggle for power among various countries, each in pursuit of its national interests. If those countries with superior power are unrestrained by the negotiated understandings that are the bases of international law and organizations, their applications of power will be interpreted as oppressive and dangerous by others in the global community.

Ideas Beyond the Underlying Consensus of Pluralism

Pluralists are committed to the abstract ideas within the pluralist underlying consensus. Pluralists are also committed to many political values – especially security,

freedom, morality, solidarity, prosperity, equality, and democracy – and they recognize obligations to exhibit such political virtues as tolerance, civility, and reciprocity. However, such commitments and obligations are insufficient to enable people to take principled stands on most contemporary issues. To be able to locate one's political identity within pluralism, take stands on current issues, and move from being a passive pluralist spectator to an engaged and passionate activist, people need a more specific public philosophy than pluralism; they need a perspective such as a political ideology that provides an initial place to stand without being so rigid as to preclude understanding alternative ideas or negotiating differences. While the general and abstract public philosophy of pluralism affirms many political values, specific outlooks bring to the pluralist process clearer priorities among values. While pluralism contains very general principles for structuring political life and for reconciling and ordering competing values, specific outlooks contain more substantive principles. In short, we need widespread allegiance to pluralism, a public philosophy writ large. But people can also have – and indeed can be encouraged to embrace – secondary commitments to more specific public philosophies that are "friends of pluralism."

Figure 1, in the concentric circles just beyond the core underlying consensus, depicts the competing beliefs, values, and principles of the friends of pluralism. During most of the twentieth century, conservatism, liberalism, and (democratic) socialism have been regarded as the leading friends of pluralism, but perhaps distinct strands within these ideologies (such as social conservatism and neoliberalism) and new ideologies (such as environmentalism and feminism) have emerged in recent years, and such outlooks may also agree with many tenets of the underlying consensus of pluralism. Nevertheless, such friends of pluralism bring different principles to ordinary issues that must be resolved through pluralist politics. Great political conversations should attempt to identify the competing principles that are contested in ordinary pluralist politics and they should assess their merit. Achieving agreement on the best (and worst) of these competing principles is made difficult because their proponents often represent competing interests, have alternative underlying philosophical assumptions, and seek different values – or give the core values of pluralism different priorities and interpretations.

Consider the basic issue of property rights. Those on the right side of the pluralist spectrum believe that property rights should be relatively free from governmental control and taxation, while those on the left side of that spectrum believe that property rights should often be regulated and taxed for broader public purposes. Obviously, those with the most property will normally assert their extensive property rights and those with the least property will normally assert the need for limiting property rights. However, suppose that we could somehow get participants in the great conversation to overlook their interests and resolve their differences in an unbiased fashion.

At this point, participants might invoke different philosophical assumptions in defense of their contrasting principles. For example, defenders of property rights might argue that such rights arise because society is a collection of specific individuals, that social production reflects the contributions of specific individuals, that different individuals make unequal contributions, that these contributions reflect resources (such

as labor, inventiveness, and energy) owned by individuals, and that individual owners of these resources therefore have a right to the fruits of their contributions. But critics of extensive property rights might argue that society is a collectivity that surpasses any specific individuals comprising it, that social production reflects contributions from many resources (such as the public infrastructure) within the broader community, that these contributions reflect social and historical investments as well as individual labor, that such investments are publicly owned, and that the public thus has claims on property that has been socially produced. Moreover, even if some people contributed less to social production than others, their lesser contributions often arise from unjustified natural and social inequalities that require compensation. The merits of such different assumptions need to be discussed in order to have any hope of resolving the disagreement among the friends of pluralism over property rights. Thus, great conversations must identify the competing principles that are at stake on the ordinary issues that arise in pluralist politics, they must identify the different underlying assumptions behind these principles, and they must try to assess the merits of these assumptions.

Even if agreement on the underlying assumptions were achieved, however, agreement on the best principles may still be allusive. Some people will say that the underlying assumptions that are the basis of political principles are less important than the implications or consequences of adopting one set of principles over its competitors. For example, defenders of property rights might say that (even if their underlying assumptions are inadequate), property rights must be affirmed because they are essential to the overall prosperity of the political community. But those who would limit property rights might say that (even if their philosophical assumptions are inadequate) property rights must be limited to provide equal treatment to all people within the community. Pluralists would admit that many values – including achieving prosperity and equal treatment – should be furthered in the resolution of ordinary issues in pluralist politics. To guide conversations on the consequences of adopting alternative principles to resolve such issues, it would help if there were agreement on which values – such as democracy, security, morality, freedom, social solidarity, as well as prosperity and equality – are most important. But pluralists recognize at least three problems that thwart consensus in determining what principles have the most valued impacts.

First, the many values that may be affected by our choice of principles are at least partially conflicting, and there exists no common standard for choosing among competing values. For example, the values of overall prosperity and equality among individuals are conflicting and incommensurable.[37] My overall judgment may be that overall prosperity (for the community as a whole) is more important than equality, but your judgment may be that equality is more important than aggregate prosperity, and though we might both be able to mount impressive arguments for our judgments, there is no single objective criterion for determining whose arguments are best.[38] Thus, we are unable objectively to rank-order competing values.

Second, the very meanings of fundamental pluralist values are contestable. Ronald Dworkin's comments about the difficulty of agreeing on the meaning of equality illustrate this problem:

We might say that individuals have a right to equal concern and respect in the design and administration of the political institutions that govern them. This is a highly abstract right. Someone might argue, for example, that it is satisfied by political arrangements that provide equal opportunity for office and position on the basis of merit. Someone else might argue, to the contrary, that it is satisfied only by a system that guarantees absolute equality of income and status, without regard to merit.[39]

Similarly, prosperity can be conceived as private prosperity (the total income that all individuals in a community have available to spend on their personal needs and wants) and as public prosperity (the quantity and quality of public goods and services that are available to everyone in the community). Extensive property rights might enhance equal opportunity and private prosperity. Restrictive property rights might enhance equal conditions and public prosperity. If there are different conceptions of equality and prosperity (as well as other pluralist values), which conception ought to be used in evaluating alternative principles?

The third problem that can thwart consensus on the consequences of alternative principles is the difficulty of reaching firm conclusions about relationships between principles and pursued values. Contemporary liberals and contemporary conservatives may both agree on the importance of freedom and they might even agree that freedom occurs when individuals have real choices about how to live their lives, but they could still disagree about the role of governmental programs in achieving or undermining such individual choices. In contemporary pluralist politics, liberals often support more governmental programs extending schooling and health benefits to all citizens, because they say that people need more education and better health to pursue their chosen life plans. Conservatives often support fewer governmental programs in these areas because they stress the importance of individuals choosing among (public and private) schools and among various health providers, rather than having single public providers of such programs. The complexity of the link between extensive or limited government programs and individual choice complicates judgments about whether liberal or conservative principles best further individual freedom.

Despite the difficulties that confront pluralists who seek to evaluate the competing principles that various ideologies bring to politics, conversations on these matters can introduce much greater understanding of those who think differently and thus can enable the friends of pluralism to reconcile their differences with as much mutual toleration, civility, and reciprocity as possible. Reconciliation among the friends of pluralism is facilitated when people avoid dogmatism, absolutism, and rigidity in their ideological beliefs. To avoid dogmatism, pluralists must be willing to subject their beliefs about social, economic, and political reality to empirical testing and falsification and to rational critiques concerning limitations of and alternatives to these beliefs. To avoid absolutism, pluralists must recognize the existence and worth of many values, some of which conflict with one another. Because efforts to achieve certain values usually come at some cost of other things that are valued, pluralists must often limit their pursuit of specific values. To avoid rigidity, pluralists normally recognize that the principles that they hold sometimes conflict with other legitimate

principles held by themselves or by others whom they respect. Principles are broad prescriptions about the best course of action that are based on beliefs and values. But the courses of action to which principles apply are always specific cases, and pluralists recognize that a particular principle may prescribe a course of action that leads to inadequate handling of particular cases. For example, those on the left of the pluralist spectrum normally hold progressive tax principles. They believe taxes that are borne most heavily by those with the most income and wealth are necessary to generate revenue for necessary public goods and are desirable because they produce a more equal distribution of social goods within society. But in a particular community, a particular progressive tax proposal may threaten the overall economic prosperity of the community, generate rancorous social conflict, encourage dishonest behavior (cheating) by citizens, be cumbersome to administer, and involve other negative features that outweigh being true to principles. Principles are important for providing initial predispositions and stances on specific issues, but pluralists listen attentively to concerns that undermine the application of their principles in particular cases, and they do not become slaves to rigid principles.

However, proponents of some ideologies hold their ideas with greater certainty or rigidity than is typical among most pluralists. The ideas of radical pluralists are depicted as falling within the third ring of political ideas answering the perennial political issues in figure 1. Radical pluralists do not reject the underlying consensus of pluralism, but they have firm beliefs about fundamental deficiencies within pluralism. They identify what they regard as the root causes of problems within pluralism that prevent pluralist politics from achieving important social goals. Radical pluralists do not want to subvert pluralist politics, but they want to transform pluralism in ways that they regard as superior to existing pluralist politics. Some radical pluralists are strong egalitarians who believe that the pluralist norm of equal treatment involves much more equal distributions of social goods than currently exists in pluralist societies. Some radical pluralists are strong libertarians who believe that pluralist norms of liberty are too often compromised by the regulations of pluralist governments. Some radical pluralists are strong moralists who, while recognizing that the state should remain neutral among competing comprehensive moral doctrines, nevertheless insist that the governmental silence on moral issues promotes moral decay on matters that concern people who have a variety of moral outlooks. In addition to identifying areas of consensus and conflict among pluralist ideologies, our conclusions in chapters 5–15 will indicate those ideas of radical pluralists that might transform and improve pluralism. Because pluralism is an evolving public philosophy, radical ideas should not be automatically discredited as being dysfunctional for pluralism.

In the outermost layer of circles in figure 1 are the ideas of perspectives that reject and may endanger pluralism. Right-wing extremists normally seek to replace pluralist democracy with authoritarian regimes that would be oppressive to at least some groups in a pluralist society. Left-wing extremists are normally so cynical about pluralism that they invite people to drop allegiance to pluralist principles and to give up the battle to improve pluralism through sustained political action, or they are so

utopian that they have little chance of being persuasive to most people or of being successful if ever attempted. Dealing with the ideas of extremists provides many challenges for pluralists.

Conclusions

Political theory addresses the perennial political and philosophical questions seeking to discover better understandings about how political communities are and should be structured. Absolute truth about these questions has eluded political scientists and philosophers,[40] but some consensus about these questions – at least at a highly abstract level – may be possible among those committed to pluralist politics. However, pluralists will disagree about more specific answers to political issues. Conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and other pluralist ideologies may all help people who need more specific guidance to political issues than the broad consensus within pluralism can provide. But pluralism needs to be defended against those who would undermine the useful political ideals that it upholds. As an alternative to public philosophies that seek to legitimate monistic regimes that are structured and governed according to a fixed authoritarian public philosophy, pluralist theory and philosophy assume that no one has a monopoly on truth in the realms of morality and politics.

In the realm of morality, pluralism can be contrasted with perfectionism – an alternative ethical approach that claims humans should live a good or ethical life, that contains substantive versions of a good life, and that holds society and the state responsible for helping people achieve that good life.[41] Ethical pluralists agree that humans should live an ethical life, but question the existence of an objectively specified good life and right ethical choices. They thus deny that the state should use its coercive power to enforce a particular moral doctrine. Ethical pluralists recognize that different ethical traditions are evident throughout the world and within subcultures of most countries; these different ethical traditions provide alternative assessments of practical moral questions and often imply alternative modes of reasoning to defend their judgments.

In the realm of politics, pluralism is defined in contrast to monism – an alternative political approach that insists that there is one best way of structuring the interrelationships among people, so that people can live good and virtuous lives and treat other people justly. Political pluralists question the existence of an objectively specified good society and just government. They recognize that various groups of people have different political beliefs and interests and thus disagree on how to govern their interpersonal (collective or social) lives. Pluralists maintain that such disagreements are best resolved peacefully through democratic processes. All citizens – often in association with others who share their interests and ideals – should have full opportunity to bring concerns or issues to the attention of the public and political officials. If these issues are viewed (and often specified by prior fundamental agreements embodied in constitutions) as being within the purview of government, they are deliberated employing public reasons in full, open, and fair hearings. Disagreements lead to negotiations,

bargaining, and compromises, and are resolved by democratic voting processes having procedures that have been subject to prior (often constitutional) agreements. Pluralism thus involves achieving negotiated understandings among people with (initially) different ideas and interests.

Pluralism is thus a normative theory of politics, but the norms that it most clearly affirms are highly abstract and often process-oriented or procedural. The substantive ends or end-state ideals of pluralism are not well defined, because the ends sought by pluralist politics depend on the values that participants bring to pluralist processes and on the goals that they ultimately affirm through their deliberations. Democracy provides fair procedures for deliberation and decision-making and is thus the primary procedural value of pluralism, though the friends of pluralism have different conceptions of the requirements of democracy. Justice is the primary substantive goal of pluralists, but the friends of pluralism give different degrees of emphasis to various principles of justice that are reflected in the laws, policies, and programs of pluralist governments.