

1 Some Historical and Philosophical Considerations

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WHEN PEOPLE COME TOGETHER

Life is a social encounter and when people come together as individuals, families, or groups, it soon becomes apparent that everyone has a different idea about how matters should be organized. Some will argue that everyone should do what is best for the majority while others simply want what is best for themselves or those close to them. Others may be less guided by relationships and instead seek the most efficient, systematic, and fair approach to decision-making. As time goes by, other questions come to the fore. Who has access to resources, how much, and how often? Who has the authority to say what can and cannot be done, and what gives a person the right to dictate to others? These questions reflect the political nature of our existence and such questions arise in the home, office, local neighborhood, or, indeed, between peoples and nations.

Then there is the question of how we should understand the world and our position within it. For thousands of years, human culture has ventured beyond the material and observable aspects of our existence to explore and embrace supernatural concepts in the form of God, gods, demons, or other unseen forces. Indeed, today, the world is ideologically divided between those who claim that there exists a nonphysical life-world beyond our senses and those who maintain that there is no such world. There are also many who are unable to decide. Given these circumstances, and the additional difficulties created by differences in language, history, and culture, there is huge potential for disagreement and division between individuals, groups, nations, and peoples.

We might conclude then that each **polity** has its own way of looking at the world and its own way of doing things. In psychology, the term “polity” is seldom mentioned, but it is important because it refers to people living under a particular regime (Gr. *polítiteiā*). Its root gives us two related Greek words—*politikos*—from which we get *politics*—actions that proceed from a motive to enact policy, and *polītēs*—a citizen of a state. When we consider people grouped together, their motives to organize matters, and issues of belonging, the psychological implications become clear. Because we do not live in a political vacuum, every system—whether capitalistic, democratic, theocratic, or totalitarian—affects, influences, and perhaps even determines, the psychological state of the people. Therefore, if we wish to understand people, we need to take a closer look at the social, economic, and political systems that govern their lives. This analysis reflects one of the broader concerns of political

psychology—“the behavior of individuals within a specific political system” (Huddy, Sears, & Levy, 2013a, p. 3). However, there is also a more general objective within political psychology; that is, to apply “what is known about human psychology to the study of politics” (Huddy et al., 2013a, p. 1).

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology has something to say about both areas of enquiry and featured in this textbook are psychological insights gained from research into topics such as intergroup conflict, prejudice and discrimination, migration, obedience to authority, crowds, militarism, political decision-making, and peace psychology. Indeed, a lot of work in political psychology is social psychology, which broadly speaking, fosters an attempt to understand the social and psychological processes involved in social relations. However, social psychology takes many forms and in this textbook the emphasis is on language, social interaction, the person (not to be confused with personality), identity, and the social construction of reality. What is more, many of the chapters raise questions and challenge “taken for granted” knowledge about psychology, politics, and human nature. Indeed, the material encourages a discussion of **epistemology** and **ontology**.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. It addresses two main questions: *how* can we know the world (by what method?) and *what* can we know about the world (what are the limits and scope of knowledge?). Ontology refers to the assumptions we make about the nature of being (what we are), our existence (what makes us who we are), and reality (what we believe the world/universe to be). Different epistemologies and ontological beliefs will inevitably produce different ways of explaining human behavior and different ways of explaining the political world. Only through a full consideration of these issues (which includes our own assumptions and beliefs), can we produce sound academic analysis. For this specific purpose, there are questions for class discussion at the end of each chapter.

At this point, we might ask two questions: what can social psychology tell us about the social and political world? And can its insights shed light on and provide solutions to human problems? These questions direct our attention to some key issues in the history of humanity, and identity, governance, and conflict are at the forefront. First, let us consider some key developments in the history of humankind that continue to play an important role in contemporary politics: the development of religious identities.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

The history of humanity shows that in the earliest forms of civilization, the worship of an unseen God or gods has been at the heart of culture. The remains of ancient temples located in various parts of the world are testimony to the worship of the many gods that dominated common thinking and practice. Ashtoreth, Baal, Molech, Artemis, Hermes, and Zeus are just a few of the many thousands of gods who had to be appeased. In the twenty-first century, a large number of religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam continue to influence the worldview of billions of people and we might add that Atheism, with its fervent rejection of the existence of God or gods, is the preferred alternative for many. In terms of their influence on world politics, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been particularly significant and all three traditions trace their ancestry back to Abraham who lived around 2000 BCE.¹

INTERSECTING HISTORIES: JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

The history of Abraham and the Jews is contained in *the Torah*—the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—also known as the Pentateuch.² The Genesis account outlines the founding of ancient Israel, identifying Abraham’s son Isaac, and his son Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel—see Genesis 32 v 28) as the progenitors of the nation. Chapters 37–46 of Genesis describe the circumstances under which Jacob (Israel), his 12 sons, and their extended family eventually came to settle in Egypt. In time, this Hebrew speaking family grew into what we might call today “a large ethnic group,” and a new regime in Egypt oppressed them and treated them as slaves. The book of Exodus provides an account of their enslavement and release from captivity in Egypt in 1513 BCE under the leadership of Moses. Once liberated, a **theocracy**

¹ Before Our Common Era.

² Another source is *The Antiquities of the Jews* written by historian Flavius Josephus in the first century CE, translated by William Whiston, and published in 1895 (*Whiston’s Josephus: The excelsior edition*. London: W. P. Nimmo).

emerged—an administration with God as sovereign. Israel accepted a new divine law—the Ten Commandments with some 600 additional laws to govern all aspects of life—as well as a prescribed set of religious practices. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel eventually conquered the land of Canaan to take hold of “the promised land.” The territory of this new nation would, however, be under constant threat for the next 15 centuries from a variety of tribes and nations, including Moab, Edom, Amalek, Midian, Philistia, Persia, Assyria, Babylon, and Rome. By the first century CE,³ the Jewish religious system became known as Judaism, although it was no longer solely based on the *Torah*.

Judaism’s relationship with Christianity is significant. For many centuries, prophets in Israel such as Isaiah, Zechariah, Malachi, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and various writers of the Psalms had provided the means for identifying a Messiah (Shiloh) who would liberate Israel. Although Jesus’ arrival in 29 CE fulfilled prophecy, he was nonetheless rejected by the Jews. The first five books of the New Testament of the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles provide an historical account of this new ‘way’ that was set to replace Judaism. The death of Jesus (the Christ or Messiah as identified by Christians) at the hands of the Romans, and the evangelical nature of this new message, ensured that Christian ideas spread very quickly across the known world. Most significantly for the Jewish nation, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE by the Roman armies under General Titus resulted in the loss of their homeland, and those whose who survived were scattered into exile across the globe. Within a century, Jerusalem was rebuilt by Roman Emperor Hadrian and renamed *Aelia Capitolina*.

By 325 CE, the Council of Nicaea had established that the Christian faith was to be based on the worship of a triune god (a trinity) and this proved to be significant. Some three centuries later between 610 and 632 CE, Islam emerged with a new sacred text (the Qu’ran) and a mandate to worship a *singular* deity; Arab adherents also claimed ancestry to Abraham through his son Ishmael. Eventually, Jerusalem became a center of Islamic culture and, in the centuries that followed, Islam developed under the authority of the Ottoman Empire. However, between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, Jerusalem became a battleground for Christians and Muslims as the Crusaders of Christendom bearing the sign of the cross, (*French: croisade, Latin: crux*) sought to regain the “Holy Land” from the Muslim Turks.

By the nineteenth century, French and British colonial powers had come to dominate the Middle East, and the First World War 1914–1918 brought Britain and its allies into conflict with the Ottoman Empire because it was an ally of

³In our Common Era.

Germany. In November 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour made an official declaration on behalf of the British government that it was their intent to secure Palestine as a permanent homeland for the Jews—a policy that was arguably influenced by Christian Zionism (Lewis, 2010)—the belief that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would be established in Jerusalem through a restored Israel. This declaration, however, contradicted previous assurances from official British sources that independence for the Arab territories would be reward for helping the allies defeat the Turks.⁴ A month later, in December 1917, the British defeated the Turks and took control of Jerusalem. After the League of Nations was formed in 1919, Britain was given a mandate to govern Palestine until 14 May 1948.

During World War II (1939–1945), the Nazi occupation of Europe claimed the lives of six million Jews, and after the war, many of those who had survived sought refuge in Palestine, their historic homeland, the place from which their forebears had been exiled over 18 centuries earlier. Although a new administration in Britain opposed the mass immigration of Jews to Palestine, once the UN mandate expired, the British withdrew, and the political situation became the responsibility of the United Nations. On the day the British left, David Ben-Gurion announced the establishment of the modern State of Israel and conflict between the Israelis and the Arab states ensued.

What significance do these identities and events have for the modern political world? Osama Bin Laden (2001), for example, described the occupation of Palestine by the West since 1917 as “80 years of humiliation” and further claimed that the US has been “occupying the lands of Islam,” that is Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and now Iraq—“plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors and turning its bases in the peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples” (Bin Laden, 1998). According to Bin Laden, Christendom was again manifesting itself as an Anglo-American crusade—part of a joint venture with Israel to regain the Holy Land from Islam—and this was now justification for global *jihad*. Here, we see a view of the ancient past resurfacing in the present.

We also see that historical divisions within Christendom have created identities of political significance. The social and political consequences of the Reformation in the sixteenth century that brought about a division between Roman Catholics and Protestants can still be seen in many parts of the world. Indeed, religious identities and the events that have endorsed and intensified them continue to shape the modern world.

⁴The Hussein–McMahon correspondence—Letters from Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner to Egypt to Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca written in the period from July 1915 to January 1916.

THE ISSUE OF GOVERNANCE

The history of humanity can also be told in terms of its approach to governance. Among the many systems of rule that have been tried, monarchy—the anointing of kings and queens—has been the preferred system throughout history. In the Christian world, a belief in the **divine right of kings** provided the basis for absolute monarchy. Monarchs were deemed appointed by God, and therefore anyone who opposed the monarch opposed God (see Romans 13 v 1, 2). However, after many centuries, this form of rule was challenged by the people; rebellions and revolutions such as the English Civil War (1642–1649), the French Revolution (1789), and the American War of Independence (1776) all paved the way for the development of **democracy**: government for the people by the people.

There were also important cultural developments at this time. From the middle of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century, Europe entered the **Age of the Enlightenment**, which saw a movement away from religious explanation of natural and social phenomena toward more rational or reasoned explanations of the world. These developments along with further constitutional reform eventually led to a separation of “Church and state,” which would allow political authority to function independently—without interference from religious institutions. This arrangement is broadly characteristic of modern democratic states although the precise nature of the relationship between “Church and state” varies within each country.

We might note that the historical developments in Europe provide an important contrast between the politics of the West and the Islamic world. Because the Islamic world has never been subject to the same or similar secularizing influences, there is still broad acceptance of theocracy—a divinely ordained and prescribed political order. Indeed, Islamic religious law provides a comprehensive system for regulating individual, social, and political life, which means that, for many Muslims, political consciousness, and religious identity are inseparable.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the map of Europe had been redrawn by the creation of larger and more powerful states such as Italy in 1870, and Germany in 1871. The Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913 and the First World War 1914–1918 had a profound effect on world politics and cast a long

shadow over human affairs. In 1917, a revolution in Russia established **communism**, a totalitarian political system and ideology to replace the monarchy, and after three long years of trench warfare on the western front, the stalemate between Britain's imperial forces (e.g., India, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and Germany ended when the United States entered the war as an ally to Britain in 1917. The huge resources of the Anglo-American alliance eventually brought about the surrender of Germany and an end to the war in 1918.

The postwar political settlement—the Treaty of Versailles—imposed harsh financial reparations upon Germany and this, combined with the world's financial collapse in 1929, brought unemployment and poverty to millions. Between 1919 and 1933 Germany tried to make democracy work; in 1932, over half the German people had expressed support for the democratic Republic by rejecting the political extremes of the left and the right (the Nazis received 36.8 % of the vote). However, in what were very complex political circumstances (see Shirer, 1960), Hitler wrestled power away from the people and parliament to create a one party state. Within a year of the democratic elections held in 1932, Adolf Hitler was dictator of the new German Reich.

Hitler's desire to expand Germany's territories toward the east resulted in the annexation of the Sudetenland and Austria in 1938. In 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Britain and France declared war on Germany. In December 1941, Japan's attack on the United States brought America into a war with Japan and an alliance with Britain, which meant that US forces were again deployed in Europe to fight against Germany. Earlier in 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and the war in Europe was settled when the Soviet army successfully repelled the German invasion and advanced into Berlin. With the Allied advance in the west, the Germans surrendered in May 1945. In the Far East, two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States brought an end to the war with Japan in August 1945.

After 1945, there were revolutions, counter-revolutions, invasions, and wars in South America, Africa, and the Middle East and new forces for independence emerged. Although victory in Europe and the Far East had secured Britain's imperial interests, there was now a clamor for independence and self-determination among people living under colonial rule. This eventually led to the dismantling of the British Empire; political freedom would now be achieved through "the will of the people." In the decades that followed, many British colonies gained independence and the British colonial system was transformed into a Commonwealth of Nations. European colonialism, which had nurtured a belief in the superiority of European peoples, was to end and democracy and self-determination was to govern future political developments.

At the end of World War II, a new ideological divide between "the free democratic world" and "totalitarian communism" came to the fore. In order to prevent the spread of communism, the United States embarked on wars in

Korea (1950–1953) and Vietnam (1955–1975) and as tensions between the Soviet Union and the West increased, the world entered a Cold War and a nuclear arms race. In 1962, after the United States had placed nuclear missiles in Turkey, the USSR⁵ placed nuclear warheads in Cuba, close to the American mainland. The two superpowers were engaged in a tense confrontation, and given the stockpile of conventional and nuclear warheads on both sides, a full-scale war would have guaranteed mutually assured destruction (MAD). The Soviet authorities relented and the missiles were withdrawn.

THE SOCIAL AND MORAL ORDER

The twentieth century was also dominated by rapid social change. The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century in Britain brought about mechanization (largely through steam power), mass production, and new forms of transportation; for example, rail travel. However, these developments also made wealthy elites more prosperous, which increased social inequality and intensified class divisions. The early twentieth century also saw the rise of the women's movement—the fight for the rights of women to vote in government elections (see Hannam, 2012)—which inspired a feminist ideology that would emerge in the 1960s to challenge patriarchal values and practices.

After two world wars, the newly formed United Nations (1948) reflected on the catastrophic human consequences of Nazism and other totalitarian regimes, and it thus sought to establish human values that would protect individuals from powerful governments. Nazism had required the subordination of the individual to the state or nation and communism required similar state allegiance. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the European Convention on Human Rights, which came into force in 1953, signaled the beginning of a new morality. Very slowly, the world started to embrace the idea of individual human rights.

The postwar period also brought about a shift in sexual mores. In Britain, the availability of the contraceptive pill (1961), and the legalization of abortion (1967) and homosexuality (1967) liberalized sexual attitudes. An emerging popular culture working in tandem with a new consumer culture would promote the “new morality” of a “permissive society” that, over the next 50 years, would change social values in many parts of the world. Since that time, the idea of “individual rights” has filtered down to counter traditional ideas of “what is right.” Cultural commentator, Clifford Longley (2014) identifies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on

⁵Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Human Rights as having moved the culture away from a “sin-based morality” (largely determined by Judeo-Christian teachings)—to a “justice based morality.” The transition would also grant greater personal freedoms in relation to the construction and presentation of the self. Indeed, a new form of moral discourse has since emerged in which people of all persuasions, sexualities, and alignments publicly unite to indict discrimination and injustice as the most serious offense in the new moral hierarchy. Any counterclaim from the “sin-based” repertoire is seen as intolerant. For many people with conservative values, these changes have been confusing and have led to some apparent contradictions in the political sphere; for example, the legalization of gay marriage in the UK by a Conservative Prime Minister.

We also have to remember that the coming and going of generations also contributes to social change. As one generation passes off the scene, their values very often disappear with them and new values assimilated by a new generation are accepted as the norm. In a rapidly changing technological world, a rights-based morality has constructed new ways of thinking, living, and being. The world has also changed in other ways. Modern living is no longer a localized experience. Jet travel, communications, migration, and transnational corporations have transformed the physical and psychological world into a globalized experience, in which time and distance take on new meanings (Bauman, 2000). Indeed, if the enchanted world of God, saints, spirits, angels, or gods acting as agents in the everyday lives of people has largely disappeared (Taylor, 2007), we now live in a psychologized world where scientific understanding of individual human thoughts, motivations, and actions has become an alternative search for self-understanding.

THE SEARCH FOR SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

The emergence of psychology and sociology in the late nineteenth century was a product of Enlightenment thinking—an institutionalized attempt to understand and improve our existence through rational scientific means. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx (1818–1883), Charles Darwin (1809–1882), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) presented new ideas that would influence these new disciplines, and that would change western intellectual thought. Marx had argued for a proletarian revolution that would bring an end to capitalism and social inequality, while Darwin had proposed that evolution through natural selection rather than God was responsible for life on earth; and Freud through his therapeutic encounters, maintained that the presence of internal, inaccessible sexualized sources of conflict within the individual was at the root of all

human behavior. What effect did these ideas have on the political landscape? The history of the twentieth century shows that ideas have the power of material forces. Marx inspired a communist revolution in Russia, while Darwin's work brought about a "secular revolution" that sought to undermine all forms of religious explanation and religious authority. And in the 1960s—as if internalized sexual conflict was emerging from its repressed state within society—Freud's emphasis on sexuality was used in some quarters to justify the sexual revolution.

What is perhaps less well known is that Darwin's evolutionary ideas brought science and politics into an unholy alliance. Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton (1822–1911) used evolutionary arguments to advance the science of **eugenics**, which was intent on finding ways to improve the physical quality of the human population (Fanchner, 1979). Galton originally proposed state-sponsored arranged marriage of the highly intelligent as a strategy to produce better quality offspring (Fanchner, 1985), but by the 1930s, other methods such as the sterilization of criminals and "mental defectives" had become common practice in places such as the United States. Eugenic ideas spread across the world, and what started in nineteenth century Britain as a class-based social engineering project, eventually developed into a racial theory that placed certain social and ethnic groups at the bottom of the evolutionary scale—an argument that was used in Nazi Germany to justify the systematic destruction of the disabled and the genocide of six million Jews (Hothersall, 2004). We might ask ourselves, are there any scientific ideologies operating today (inside or outside of psychology) that make certain groups vulnerable? Indeed, we should be wary about anything that looks like "political ideology dressed up as science," and when reading scientific findings, we would do well to ask: who gains from this perspective? Whose interests are being served? Where is this research taking us? What are the implications? Are there political motivations behind the research? Who is funding it and for what purpose? To understand the political nature of psychology (and science) is perhaps as important as understanding the psychological nature of politics.

PSYCHOLOGY: A NEW WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD

Psychology had proposed a new way of looking at human existence and its content and focus eventually came to mirror the needs of the culture. In the postwar period, subdisciplines within psychology started to form to meet the particular needs of the military and the broader capitalist enterprise (see

Wexler, 1983; also Richards, 2002). These included industrial, consumer, occupational, vocational, and military psychology and the psychology of advertising. There were also developments in economic psychology, ergonomics, sport, and health psychology; and many studies in social psychology, directly or indirectly, set out to explain the Holocaust (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Asch, 1951, 1952; Milgram, 1963; Tajfel, 1974; Zimbardo, 1969). Political psychology was no different; indeed, one of its tenets is that research should be “responsive to and relevant to societal problems” (Hermann, 1986, p. 2). Overall, the approach of political psychology has reflected the traditions and shifting positions in the parent discipline, although its origins may be traced back to different times and events in different countries (see Monroe, 2002; Stone & Schaffner, 1988). From the 1940s to the 1960s, the main focus was on relations between personality and politics, which was largely informed by psychoanalytic psychology, and as social psychologists started to explore attitude theory and change in the 1950s, political psychologists looked at voting patterns and beliefs systems. By the early 1970s, behavioristic approaches had made way for a more cognitive approach to understanding political behavior (Rahn, Sullivan, & Rudolph, 2002).

Given these developments, we might ask: what is the nature of political psychology today? The first *Handbook of Political Psychology* (Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003) acknowledged that *there is no one political psychology*—that everything from social cognition to discourse analysis to Freudian psychodynamics forms part of the fabric of the discipline. Political psychology thus offers a broad collection of approaches with no single set of assumptions. What is more, it is multidisciplinary—drawing upon insights from politics, psychology, social psychology, international relations, sociology, anthropology, economics, philosophy, media, journalism, and history. However, because each discipline has its own conceptual language and methodology, it can make theoretical conversations between disciplines difficult. Nonetheless, the importance of seeking dialog and *listening* to other disciplines cannot be overstated.

In political psychology, it is acknowledged that when studying political behavior, “context can make a difference” (Hermann, 1986, p. 2). We could expand this idea to think about people, not only in different contexts that permit or exclude certain actions, but also people’s behavior in different cultures and across time. What is more, recognizing the context-specific nature of human behavior will help us guard against theoretical imperialism—the tendency to impose theory, concepts, or explanations derived from a politically and economically dominant culture onto other cultures. We therefore need to check that our assumptions, explanations, constructs, classifications, and theories are appropriate to other cultural settings. For example, even the broad linear classifications of liberal-conservative that dominate American politics take on different meanings in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY ON SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Given the broad and eclectic approach of political psychology, we have to accept that different approaches can lead to very different conclusions. Indeed, our own political philosophies can influence our understanding or interpretation of the human condition. To illustrate, let us consider a proposition: *that the type of society we live in determines the type of explanation we give for human behavior*. For example, religious societies (where religious creeds have priority over science) will likely resort to religious beliefs and concepts to explain human behavior, such as “I have been blessed by God”; “Unbelievers behave like this because ...”, and so on. Similarly, in societies where scientific findings take precedence over religious explanation, science will be used to explain human behavior—particularly those behaviors we do not like or understand. For example, we might draw upon genetics or the idea of faulty brain chemistry to explain some forms of criminal behavior. Having science as our principal source of knowledge, we likely believe that *our* approach to knowledge is rational, reasonable, and objective and that, above all, we seek evidence-based arguments. In so doing, we may come to see our own society as *ideologically neutral*. However, on closer inspection we may find that western culture is saturated with ideology that we have never considered before, and that this has implications for the way we explain events and outcomes.

Consider a key political philosophy that is foundational to the politics of the western world: **liberalism**. The liberal mind is thought to be rational and judicious, and it embraces the notion of rights, choice, and autonomy. Principally, the aims of a liberal society are to maximize individual freedoms. American society, for example, was founded on the notion of preserving individual autonomy and liberty (Farr, 1996). We are also aware that we live in a society dominated by **capitalism**, which has three principal characteristics: private ownership, the free market, and profit (see Bowles, 2012).

It is no coincidence that liberalism and capitalism have a common root—a shared subject—*the individual and the freedom of the individual*. Indeed, “Liberals are *formally* committed to individualism” (Vincent, 1992, p. 32), and **individualism** as a political philosophy posits the idea that “the individual is more real than, and prior to society” (p. 32). Critics, however, claim that individualism *as a philosophy on how to live*, that is, a life based on self-interest, self-determination, and self-reliance has arguably led to widespread greed, loss of community, a decline in political and religious participation, crime, fear of crime, disregard for the environment, depression, and suicide. Nonetheless, individualism continues to play a central role in the lives of people in the West. For example, we believe that people should be free to pursue their self-interests and that by so

doing they benefit society and the economy. We also believe that justice is served when individuals are held responsible for their own crimes and misdemeanors, which are usually committed against other individuals or individual property—rather against a religious or state ideology, community, or nation. Individualism also embraces the idea of individual human rights.

LOCATING THE ROOT OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

The question is: if we have been socialized in a society founded on liberalism and individualism in which the freedom of the individual is paramount, how are we likely to see the world? What type of social psychological explanation are we most likely to give when we observe human behavior? Where are we most likely to look for its cause—within the psychology of the individual or within the social and political circumstances? With our beliefs in individualism fully operational, how might we explain poverty, for example? In a highly competitive economic system, it is inevitable that some will do better than others. However, to understand the psychology of social inequality, it would be a very limited analysis simply to look at “the individual” and make assumptions about why someone is doing well—namely, through their hard work and mental application, or not so well, because of a lack of initiative, ambition, or physical, and mental application. *We have to interrogate the nature of the system in which the inequality took place. We have to ask to what extent is the system contributing to the behavior?* That is, the observed inequalities may be properties of systems not individuals.

We often see this issue played out in other contexts on the daily news. For example, identifying the root of behavior either within an individual or within the politics of the culture is brought to public attention every time a mass shooting in the United States takes place. Media commentators and politicians alike often say that something must be done about the “gun culture” in the US. However, because bearing arms in the United States is a constitutional right, the customary response from powerful groups such as the NRA (National Rifle Association) is that there is nothing wrong with guns, the problem lies within people—the individuals who use them. In this analysis, we have an important choice to make. We can either see the political circumstances—in this case, the right to bear arms, as a mere context or environment—or as a factor that significantly shapes or determines behavior.

If it is indeed the case that the social and political system shapes human behavior, we might ask: what processes are involved? It is worth taking some

time to reflect on this. Social philosopher, George Herbert Mead (1934) argued that our sense of self develops in relation to other selves, and that we are born into a social milieu in which other selves have already internalized the values of the culture. In this way, whether we are aware of it or not, the values of the social, economic, and political system impose themselves upon us. We might therefore reflect: to what extent is behavior in the West determined or shaped by the social, economic, and political system? We can perhaps understand how a totalitarian political system can affect the minds and behavior of its citizens, but we may not fully recognize the way that our own system affects us. During the Cold War, commentators in the West had little difficulty pointing to the oppressed look on the faces of people in the communist bloc and attributing their demoralized state to a lack of personal freedom, but there was little reflection on the way that social cohesion and traditional values in the West were being undermined by a new materialism and consumer ideology. Nor were comparable attempts made to explain our personal and social problems in terms of our systemic failings even though we saw *their* behavior as having a systemic cause.

Moreover, the proposition that human behavior is rooted in the social, economic, and political system also allows us to see our own behavior in a new light as we consider alternative explanations of mood, mental distress, violence, crime, discrimination, and terrorism. Individualism promotes the idea that everything we think, say and do emanates from within the individual, and all the while we look to individual personality for answers, we fail to interrogate the social and political circumstances. The starting point for discussion and debate about the origins of human behavior in a truly political psychology has to involve the social, economic, and political system before we can draw any meaningful conclusions about the role of individual personality or cognition. Historians of social psychology have consistently argued that individualism has shaped the development of North American social psychology (Farr, 1996; Graumann, 1986; Greenwood, 2004; Pepitone, 1981) and **methodological individualism**—the idea that explanations of social relations and processes *must begin with an account of individuals* because they are the building blocks of society, has been a fundamental part of this approach (see Allport, 1933).

How does individualism affect the way we approach and understand the social world? Imagine that we were asked to study “the army” and that we were asked to provide a theoretical account of how the army works, which would include some understanding of the way that individual soldiers think. In Britain, we might immediately think in terms of rank, which reflects the class structure of British society. Traditionally, officers are recruited from the middle and upper classes while the lower ranks come from families of ordinary working people—a difference that also reflects different levels of education. In this setting, the concept of “the army” is a mirror image of class relations existing

in the outside world. This very specific understanding not only provides an account of the social dynamics within the institution, but it also accounts for an individual's understanding of status, position, authority, obedience, chain of command, and so forth. In Britain, rank and social class are therefore fundamental to our understanding of "the army."

For those who subscribe to methodological individualism, this analysis is far too sociological; what they require is an analysis of the army in terms of the physical and mental states and experiences of individuals since the army is made up of individuals. An example of this approach is found in the American soldier series carried out after World War II. Stouffer, Suchman, Devinney, Star, and Williams (1949) surveyed over half a million US soldiers stationed worldwide on their personal preferences and attitudes to an array of topics. In this study, a sketch of social reality was inferred from patterns in the data across the samples. This psychological research was "social" insofar that it sought information about the social world, but it was based on an aggregation of individual responses. Indeed, similar methods are adopted today for opinion polling and market research.

However, what this approach fails to access are *the meanings* created by social structure, in this instance, social class, which largely determines how people behave. To apply the "opinion polling" approach to the study of the British Army, would miss these important social and structural elements *that make the army comprehensible to the people in it*. Therefore, the behavior of a British soldier during World War I or World War II, for example, could not be fully explained by simply understanding "what was going on in his head"; there is a whole social and cultural context involving power relations existing in the wider culture that needs to be considered. These very different ways of looking at "the army" produce two very different accounts. The question is: which one more accurately reflects social reality?

SOCIAL COGNITION

A brief review of the most recent *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Huddy, Sears, & Levy, 2013b) reveals that there is a distinct American flavor to political psychology insofar as *the individual is center stage*. Indeed, most social psychological research carried out in political psychology falls within the domain of **social cognition**, which tends to locate the source of behavior within the individual whether in the form of an attitude, stereotype, personality factor, or attribution. Social cognition emerged in the 1960s as an approach to social psychology that was directly influenced by cognitive psychology and particularly information processing theory. It focuses on the role of individual faculties such as attention, perception, judgment, and

memory in the study of social phenomena such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, and intragroup relations (see Forgas, 1981; also Fiske & Taylor, 1984).

However, this approach leaves the social and political context largely ignored, unexplained, and untheorized. For more sociologically minded social psychologists, the explanatory framework is simply too “cognitive” and it is not feasible to explain the complexities of the political world in such terms. To psychologize explanations when there are structural, cultural, or social causes of behavior, is to endorse a process of mystification where the real cause is replaced by a false one (see Cherry, 1995 and her reinterpretation of bystander intervention). The idea that human behavior emanates from within a decontextualized individual overlooks the fact that what we think, believe and do is largely a product of **power relations** and **identity politics** tied up within the social order. Nonetheless, social cognition remains the dominant approach in social psychology.

A SOCIETAL APPROACH TO POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

What then should we conclude from this intellectual divide within social psychology? On the one hand, we cannot ignore or play down the role of social structure, culture, or other societal factors in our analyses but, on the other hand, experience tells us that neither can we ignore the role of the individual. Individuals perceive, make judgments, attribute cause, entertain prejudicial and discriminatory thoughts and—in the case of political elites—make decisions that affect millions of lives. Doise and Staerklé (2002) advocate a societal approach that considers both individual cognitive functioning and societal factors and they argue that a theoretical bridge between the individual and the social is provided by **social representations theory** (SRT) (Moscovici, 1961/1976). SRT focuses on the *organizing principles* that direct people’s thinking, talking, interacting, and understanding—and of particular interest is their use of language and **constructs**. The theory is principally concerned with the way in which lay knowledge (the everyday expressions and understanding of ordinary people) is created in specific social settings. For example, when conflict occurs, all the parties involved have different political positions, cultural beliefs, and histories. We need to be able to explain *how* and *why* such differences are possible and *how* and *why* they have come about. SRT provides the concepts and processes to explain divergent cultural perspectives (see Duveen, 2001).

The existence of two very different approaches to social psychology is an important consideration for anyone wishing to study social and political psychology (see Farr, 1996; Markova, 2012; Moscovici, 1972; Tileagă, 2013). Table 1.1 outlines some of the philosophical assumptions and practical differences between an American and a European approach to social psychology.

Each approach also posits a different model of reality, the most common of which is **perceptual cognitivism**—the idea that reality is “out there” and that all we need to do is perceive, accurately measure, and describe what we have found. This is the standard model adopted in science, and language is assumed to be transparent, passive, or acting as a mirror.

Perceptual cognitivism

Reality → Perception → Discourse

An alternative view is provided by the discursive model, which positions events in the opposite direction. We are born and immersed into a language system with pre-existing historical and conceptual constructs, that is, names, words, expressions, and so on, and these provide reference and give meaning to the world. It is through these linguistic constructs that we observe, discuss, and make sense of our experience.

Discursive psychology

Discourse → Perception → Reality

In this context, **discourse** refers to a way of talking about a particular topic. Although we may think that we can say what we want about a topic, to a large extent, much of the thinking has already been done for us by others who have set the limits for what can and cannot be said or thought. In this respect, *discourses define reality* and the existence of different discourses raises the prospect of different realities—indeed, multiple realities (Burr, 2003).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

At the heart of the discursive approach is **social constructionism**. Social constructionism challenges “taken for granted knowledge,” which includes some of the principal constructs in psychology such as intelligence, personality, and health and illness (see Burr, 2003). For example, most people talk about “personality” as though it has real substance even though no one knows what it is or where it is located. Personality, as a concept, is simply an inference based on our interpretation of the speech and behavior of others. In everyday conversation, we often draw upon existing constructs to conceptualize certain groups or their actions, and when social constructs appear “natural,” obvious, and self-evident, they provide a basis for a shared reality. Everyone assumes that everyone else knows what we are talking about; the construct is seldom challenged

Table 1.1 *Different approaches to social psychology.*

<i>The assumptions of an American approach (Social Cognition)</i>	<i>The assumptions of a European approach</i>
“Human nature is localised within the person” (Allport, 1968, p. 4). Other disciplines start by considering the system in which they live, i.e., sociology anthropology, political science, and economics.	Human nature is determined by social and economic conditions—social and economic forces mold thinking, behavior, identity, and worldview (Marx, 1888).
North American social psychology is located within general psychology—it is a branch of general psychology (Allport, 1968, p. 4).	The main ideas of European social psychology can be traced back to sociology and social philosophy, e.g., the work of Durkheim, and Mead. Social psychology provides a bridge between cultural anthropology and sociology (Moscovici & Markova, 2006).
The individual is the <i>primary reality</i> of the social and political world—the fundamental building block. Individual emotions, memory, and personality are used to account for social action.	The individual cannot be understood in isolation—the individual is in society and society is in the individual (Mead, 1934).
The term “social” has no special relevance—it simply refers to the environment.	The social, cultural, and historic context of people’s actions is central to the analysis—the “social” in social psychology plays a critical role in our understanding.
Society is conceptualized as the accumulation of individuals, i.e., Society=Individual 1 +Individual 2+Individual 3 ... +Individual <i>n</i>. This reductionist and atomistic approach is often used in consumer research and opinion polling.	What goes on <i>between</i> individuals (language and communication) determines the nature of group dynamics and the nature of society.
Individual cognitive processes are universal, i.e., theories apply to all cultures across history.	Cognitive processes cannot be assumed to be universal—they are likely to be subject to cultural and historical influence.
The self (and personality) are coherent, consistent, and measurable.	The self is largely determined by cultural and historic location (people are different in different places and at different times in history). Identity (the preferred term) is subject to forces within the social order—it is fluid and socially constructed (Gergen, 1999).

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

<i>The assumptions of an American approach (Social Cognition)</i>	<i>The assumptions of a European approach</i>
Attitudes reflect the psychological reality of the group.	Attitudes are positions taken up within very specific social circumstances to fulfill a particular function. Attitudes and opinions do not necessarily reflect common psychosocial realities shared by the group (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).
Methods are positivistic —scientific objectivity is assumed—studies are often laboratory based—emphasis is placed on rigorous experimentation. The aim is to uncover laws of behavior—these laws or principles are assumed to be timeless and universal.	Methods are eclectic (qualitative and quantitative)—the aim is to uncover the meaning of social phenomena (<i>verstehen</i>)—findings are an interpretive process— reflexivity is encouraged.
The world is “out there” ready to be studied, measured, and analyzed. Language is simply the means by which we express our understanding of reality.	The world is not simply “out there”; it is constructed through meanings, which are the product of language, culture, and socialization.

and it takes on a life of its own. This inevitably affects how we understand the subject and how we deal with it.

Feminists have argued convincingly for decades that *language constructs reality* and that located within language are the dynamics of power. For example, the exclusive use of the male pronoun “he” in written text, arguably excludes and diminishes all female readers—they are ignored, invisible, dismissed, or, from the writer’s perspective, they simply do not exist. What is more, this positioning is subconsciously transferred to the reader who may internalize the power dynamic without question. Indeed, when we understand the processes by which language, discourse, and social constructs create inequality and disempowerment, their political nature is clear to see.

How does the process work? How do language, discourse, and the manufacture of social constructs determine our sense of social reality? First, we have to recognize that we are born into a world of constructs, and we are encouraged to accept them without question. Second, powerful institutions and people in positions of power largely determine what is “real.” Once politicians or journalists label an event or a type of behavior in a particular way, the mold is set. One example would be “road rage”—angry behavior on the road that can, in some circumstances, result in loss of life. Once the media coined the term, people used the same construct to describe the behavior. However, some years ago, official police

sources in the UK publicly rejected the term “road rage” stating that any intentional violent act that leads to loss of life was murder, whatever the circumstances and wherever it takes place. The implication was that they would not entertain any notion of extenuating circumstances (that it was “a crime of passion”) or any explanation with quasi-psychiatric overtones (I suffer from road rage). This straightforward approach to language and the interpretation of the law cut through any attempt to mystify the situation with a new construct.

Social constructionists further argue that since the social world is the product of social, cultural and linguistic processes, there is no pre-ordained way of being. In other words, if we had been born into a different language, culture, and time in history, we would be a different person. The idea that people have no pre-ordained nature means that they have no essence—they are not made up of a substance that makes them what they are as in the case of salt or sand. To reject **essentialism** is to say that there is no human nature—that beliefs, values, or attitudes are not part of our makeup and that they do not determine behavior. Instead, human nature, beliefs, values, and attitudes are simply convenient linguistic constructs that we have at our disposal to explain the behavior of self and others. This may run contrary to our beliefs that there are good and bad people in the world or that some people are evil, but this essentialist view is one that social constructionism rejects given that we have no access to the inner thoughts and motivations of people (we can only observe behavior and interpret language). We can, however, say that some people *do* things that are either good or evil, which is quite different.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

The main focus of social constructionism is to uncover ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their own social reality. It involves looking at the ways that constructs are created, maintained, institutionalized, and how they eventually become tradition. Bound up in the creation of constructs is the process of **reification**. To reify mean “to make solid,” which refers to a process through which something abstract is turned into something that is assumed to be concrete and real. In psychology, reification is commonplace and the naming of all sorts of physical and psychological deficits is largely determined by social and political processes rather than science.

To illustrate, consider what would happen if we had to earn our living by dancing instead of activities that require literacy or numeracy skills. If we assume the egalitarian position that everyone should be able to dance well, the culture would have to invent *dysdancia* (the inability to dance) to explain any widespread

deficit. *Dysdancia* would then flourish as a concept, and because there would be an opportunity to make money and build careers, a proliferation of publications, courses, and advice with explanations ranging from the biological to the social would emerge. Other possible conditions could include—*dysathletisia* (when a child always comes last in school sports), *dyscanteria* (the inability to sing well enough to be in the school choir), or *dyscalcula de change* (the inability to work out change without a cash register). While these categorizations reflect observable behavior, they are nonetheless *political* constructions that bear little relation to science. Of course, one may investigate them using the scientific method, but the rationale for their construction is political.

What has this got to do with political psychology? We have to recognize that the culture is flooded with political constructions, which are a product of the social, political, and economic system. The behavior is real, it is not imaginary, but the way it is construed is a product of culture. Take for example, “terrorism.” During the French Revolution, the term “terrorism” was coined to describe the actions of the French state. Since then, political elites have used the term to describe the politically motivated violence of people or groups that they neither like, nor agree with. To the public, such violent behavior appears random, irrational, highly dangerous, and threatening and, because the underlying historical, social, and political issues are seldom understood, there is a tendency to use the construct as a form of explanation; that is, people plant bombs because they are terrorists. However, the construct performs an important rhetorical and political function. By describing the violence of others as terrorism, it denigrates, devalues, and dismisses the violence as non-legitimate; it is seen as the work of a barbarous minority. What is more, the use of the term provides no explanation or any detailed information about grievances, arguments, or the objectives of the dissident group. It thus provides a convenient line of demarcation between the non-legitimate politically motivated violence of a minority and the legitimized politically motivated violence of established states (Hewer & Taylor, 2007).

Other words such as “extremist” and “radicalization” have also entered our political vocabulary even though no one ventures to offer a definition when they use these terms. By inference, we conclude that these terms describe people who have views and objectives that are dangerous, alien, and threatening even if we are not sure what they are. In such instances, researchers need to proceed with caution when studying such topics and should avoid reifying constructs and endorsing them through academic research (see Hermann, 1986). In such cases, rather than shedding light on social reality, our research may simply endorse a mainstream construction or worldview.

In this chapter, we have discussed some historical and philosophical considerations that provide a backdrop to the political world and political psychology. Through **empirical** research and sound critical analysis, social psychology can tell us much about the social and political world and, in some instances, it may offer solutions to specific problems. The forthcoming chapters will outline the contribution

of a social psychological approach to political psychology and running more or less throughout the text is a critical stance to knowledge. Unsettling as this may be, it may open our eyes to the political nature of social and political psychology.

SUMMARY

- Religious identities and the historical events associated with them play a significant role in our understanding of modern politics and international relations.
- Individualism in social psychology has influenced political psychology in that it tends to locate the root of human behavior within the individual.
- The idea that living under a particular type of governmental system affects and influences people's thoughts and actions brings psychology and politics together in a common purpose. That is: to understand people, their motivations and needs, and how we might improve matters.
- Social constructionism adopts a critical approach to "taken for granted" knowledge: it interrogates our use of language, discourse, and constructs.

GLOSSARY

Age of the Enlightenment refers to a European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that emphasized reason and individualism. It was influenced by philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Newton, and prominent figures included Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith.

capitalism an economic and political system based on private ownership, profit, and market forces.

constructs are ideas or conceptualizations arising from our interpretation of the social world.

communism is a system of social organization in which all property is owned by the state, and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

democracy is a system of government that requires people to choose their representatives by voting for them in elections.

discourse refers to ways of talking about a topic. It can also be used to describe verbal communication in a more general sense.

divine right of kings is a political and religious doctrine that asserts that a monarch is subject to no authority other than God, deriving the right to rule from God. A monarch is therefore not subject to the will of the people, the aristocracy, or any other authority such as the Church.

empiricism is the philosophical position that valid knowledge is acquired through the senses (in an experimental context this is usually through observation). Data collected as text in qualitative research is also empirical.

epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge—what is legitimate knowledge and how it may be obtained.

essentialism is the view that objects including people are what they are because of their substance or essence, that the substance makes the object what it is.

eugenics is a set of beliefs and scientific practices that aims at improving the physical quality of the human population through selective reproduction.

identity politics refers to political positioning and political struggles based on the identity interests, perspectives, and objectives of social groups. Identity politics may be shaped by race, class, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, culture, language, accent, or dialect.

individualism is the political and moral philosophy that emphasizes the individual. Individualism promotes the pursuit of personal goals and desires; it values independence and self-reliance and asserts that interests of the individual should have precedence over the state. It opposes external interference from society or social institutions or the government. Individualism is often defined in contrast to collectivism.

jihad is an Islamic term that refers to the act of striving, applying oneself, struggling, or persevering. It is often used in political discourse to represent a “holy war” against unbelievers.

liberalism is a political philosophy founded on ideas of liberty and equality. Liberalism emphasizes the freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free markets, civil rights, democratic societies, and gender equality.

methodological individualism is the process through which causal accounts of social phenomena show how they result from the motivations and actions of individuals.

ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence, or reality. Ontology often addresses questions concerning what entities exist or may be said to exist.

polity refers to any political entity or group of people that are collectively united by a common identity. They normally have a capacity to mobilize resources and matters are organized under some form of institutionalized hierarchy.

positivism refers to the philosophical position that only information derived from sensory experience interpreted through reason and logic, can provide the basis for authoritative knowledge. Positivism is based on empiricism.

power relations refers to the operation of power between different parties, for example, individuals, groups, and institutions. Power dynamics are often set and maintained through language, constructs, and discourse.

reductionism is the philosophical position that claims that we can understand the natural world/social objects/people/institutions, and so on by reducing them to their component parts. The counterargument is that full understanding of social phenomena is only achieved by encountering them as a whole and complete entity.

reflexivity requires researchers to examine the filters and lenses through which they see the world. The process requires critical reflection—a self-exploration that seeks an understanding of what they bring to the research and their own position within it. Reflexivity also requires sensitivity to “different voices” that may exist within the data, for example, marginalized groups, the assumptions of organizations, and so on.

reification takes place when an abstract idea is made concrete or “real” through language. This means that ideas, perceptions, perspectives can be organized into constructs that are eventually believed to be real or having substance.

social constructionism or the social construction of reality is a theory of knowledge that examines the development of constructed understandings of the world and the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The main argument is that people create models of the social world and share and reify these models through language.

social representations theory is a theory of communication that focuses on the everyday knowledge and understanding of people (commonsense). The theory posits that shared values, ideas, metaphors, beliefs, and practices in groups and communities provide a basis for a shared reality.

theocracy is a government that recognizes God as sovereign. God’s will for the nation or people is implemented by strict adherence to a divinely authored written code.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- When considering religious identities, what role does the past play in the present?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of democracy? Are there any suitable alternatives? What would be an ideal administration or system of governance?
- What is meant by the term “polity?” How does this concept bring sociology, history, psychology, anthropology, and political science together?
- How might some political ideologies influence the social psychological explanations we offer?
- Provide some examples to show the relationship between language and power relations.