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**PLURALISM AND THE PARADOX OF THE STATE**

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of discussing pluralism and state theory is that whilst pluralism developed as a critique of the state it rarely, if ever, explicitly discusses the nature of the state. Pluralism is difficult to define in relation to a conception of the state because, by its very nature, it is pluralistic, rejecting monastic definitions and conceptions of politics or the state. Indeed, there is no clear and definitive body of literature that sets out a pluralist theory of the state or of politics. For Jordan (1990) there is, unlike for Marxism or elitism, no pluralist cannon or consistent pluralist theory. Underpinning pluralism is a paradox. In principle pluralists see the state as a malign organization that concentrates power and needs pluralistic forms of social organization to limit and constrain the threat of absolute power. Yet, whilst seeing the state as a threat to civil society, pluralists fail to problematise the state and in failing to do so tend to treat it as a benign, or at least neutral, set of institutional arrangements either reflecting varying interests, as in the democratic pluralist tradition, or as a fragmented institution, in the more recent debates around network governance. On one side the state is a ‘monopoly of legitimate violence’ (Weber 1946) and therefore needs to be constrained because otherwise it is a threat to a free and open society. On the other hand the state is an arena in which democratic politics operates: the state is the guarantor of pluralism that reflects the demands of various interests in society. This paradox is never reconciled because it is a consequence the way pluralism has develop; not as a consistent school of theory but as a collection of a whole range of different theories, approaches and methods.

Pluralism has long been characterized as providing a simplistic understanding of power by focusing on group interactions in the context of what is portrayed as a relatively benign state or government that mediates between conflicting interests in order to make decisions in the broad national interest. Certainly a range of Marxist approaches from Lenin (1917) through to Miliband (1969) and Jessop (1978) have highlighted the way in which notions of pluralistic democracy are ideological mechanisms for justifying the political interest of capital in the context of a bourgeois state. It is certainly the case that much of US pluralism, which became highly influential in the postwar era, took a relatively benign view particularly of the US political process where writers such as Dahl (1973) and Truman (1951) were keen to emphasize the differentiated nature of politics and the ways in which a range of groups could draw of different resources in order to influence political outcomes

In the words of Galbraith (1952), liberal democratic systems operate through a range of countervailing powers that prevent the dominance of a single interest. The result of these constraints is the major distinguishing feature of pluralism: the dispersal of power in modern industrial society. The very complexity and interdependence of society, combined with a political system open to many interests, leads to pluralism. Furthermore, although resources are not shared equally, those who lack one resource, like money, often have an alternative resource; for example, votes. For the pluralist there is a wide dispersal of power between various leaders, constraints on leadership from non-elites and competing elites and uncertainty about who benefits from a policy. Consequently, there is no single elite making and benefiting from all decision. For pluralists liberal democracy provides a frame for a complex and multidimensional polity that allows for many voices to influence outcomes.

In order to understand the pluralist conception of the state it is necessary to see how pluralists define groups and their role in generation of political interests. This chapter will highlight how pluralist group theory has changed from its initial development in the nineteenth century and how this has been reflected in pluralist conceptions of government. The chapter will suggest that few of the writers who focus on government and the state in pluralist forms explicitly think of themselves as pluralists. They implicitly accept many of the pluralist assumptions about politics and the state and in doing so they often disempower state institutions in their analysis. The chapter will begin by highlighting that despite the complex and diverse nature of pluralism, there are some shared themes at provide a core to a range of different pluralist approaches.

2. THE CORE OF PLURALISM

Pluralism, or more accurately pluralists, have drifted between analytical, normative and prescriptive approaches and, as we will, see pluralism in many ways became integrated into legitimizing and defending western democratic systems. What unites pluralism is a rejection of monistic approaches to knowledge or politics and a belief that groups have interests that need to be respected and represented. It rejects elite and Marxist approaches which see power and resources concentrated within the state. The key theme is that: ‘The social order of many contemporary state seems marked by vertical cleavages that separate the society into structurally distinct compartments on a cultural, social and/or racial basis’ (Leon and Leons 1977: 5). Whilst it is difficult to define a single pluralist theory and the term pluralism or pluralist is applied to many different theories and theorists, it is still the case that there are a broad set of ideas or understandings that link different pluralist approaches. There is, within the broad field of pluralist thinking some common principles in relation to the state, power, and groups.

*2.1The State*

There are two competing conceptions of the state with pluralism. The original 19th and early 20th century pluralists saw the state as malign force and were strongly opposed to any mechanisms that concentrated or monopolised power within governmental institutions. For early English pluralists, groups were a mechanism for limiting the growing power of the developing modern state as it was going through a process of nationalising local associations into the nascent welfare state. There was a strong anarchical streak within early pluralisms thata saw groups and guilds as self-organising mechanisms for limiting state power and linking decision making to communities. The fundamental issue for pluralist, contra Hobbes, is that sovereignty does not reside with the state but the state should reflect the range of interests in society. Nevertheless, even the early pluralists who were wary of the state were not strongly critical. Laborde (2000: 177) illustrates how for English pluralism the distinction between state and civil society is one of the fundamental principles of pluralism but points out that: ‘such a distinction was hardly couched in antagonistic terms. The state was seen as an unproblematic instrumental requirement and the border between public and private was confused in pluralist writings’.

Classical American pluralism developed an even more benign view of the state. Rather than the groups being a counterweight to the state, the state was the mechanism for realising group interests. Classical American pluralists accepted the constitutional position: government is an open and democratic process concerned with the public interest. In the case of the US system of government there was a fragmented political process, a constrained executive and representation which ensured that many interests could influence political outcomes. Indeed, much pluralist writing on policy making is concerned with outlining the mechanisms of the policy process seeing it a process built on establishing rational knowledge and aggregating interests rather than focussed on power. As Dunleavy and O’Leary (1987) suggest pluralism saw that state as either a vector carrying interests to government or a ring within which various interests could battle it out. The assumption is that in some way the state is neutral. However, many pluralists would suggest that they were trying to develop more realistic and empirically verifiable models of policy making which recognise the imperfections, complexity and incremental nature of the policy process (Lindblom 1959, 1965). Pluralists do not reject the idea that at least at the policy sector level, policy making is susceptible to capture by particular interests (notable examples being health and agriculture) but they suggest that alternative power centres such as the media, legislators and campaign groups can challenge the dominance of particular interests over a long period. This conception of group politics builds on a market analogy. Should one group develop a monopoly of power, other groups will enter the market to undercut and challenge the predominance. The point Dahl (1973) makes with his notion of polyarchy is that whilst democratic political systems may be imperfect, different interests have voice and are able to influence political outcomes.

*2.2 Groups*

A principle feature of all pluralist thought is the focus on groups rather than individuals. Individual identity exists through groups and groups are the main constitutive element of society. In the words of Bentley (1908: 208) said that ‘When the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated’. For the early English pluralist groups were seen as ‘persons’ with agency (Nicols 1974: 5). Groups play a key role in pluralist thought. First, groups, rather than individuals, are the basis of identity. This is a key principle of the early pluralist who saw groups as a fundamental basis of social organisation, through to the American pluralists who saw in particular pressure groups as central to politics. Anthropological pluralists saw societies as being made up of range of different values groups; a view developed by multiculturalists later on. Consequently, Kuper (1969) highlights the contrast between the consensus model of society as proposed by American pluralists which sees groups bound by cross-cutting values and a balance of power and conflict model which sees societies being made up of divisions and inherent conflicts. Second, the role of groups is to act as a limit on the state or in some approaches to an alternative to the state – a conception that is picked up to some degree by the work of Putnam on social capital (as discussed later) or even in ideas around the big society in the UK. There is a strong tradition within pluralism going back to the nineteenth century of the idea of free association and the idea that self-organised groups or communities could be responsible for the delivery of public goods and ensuring a more democratic policy process by seeing decisions reflecting the wishes of local communities.

*2.3 Power*

Many twentieth century pluralists were seen as having a limited and naive view of power. The point made by critics such as Lukes (1974) is that pluralists adopt a behaviouralist position and see power as something that is direct and observable; by seeing who succeeds in winning resources it is possible to see who has power. For pluralists, power works through visible forces and not unseen structures or elites. For Dahl (1956), power is defined when, ‘A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not In the decision-making process power exists when A gets B to choose policy X when B would have chosen policy Y’. This view of power determines the pluralist methodology: actual behaviour is observed or reconstructed from documents, witnesses and so on. Consequently, it is possible to determine empirically whether or not the same group realises two or more issue areas.

For Hewitt (1974) by observing the way political decisions are made and the particular outcomes it is apparent that different interests succeed in different policy areas. Nevertheless, some pluralist approaches are more sophisticated in their analysis of power than some of the caricatures allow. For instance, even the classical American pluralist recognised the institutionalised relations existed with groups which prevented access for some groups (Truman 1951) and Kelso (1978) highlighted what he called corporate pluralism where certain interest captured government. Both Dahl (1961) and Truman (1951) suggested that business had privileges with business having a ‘favored position in the conventional myth pattern’ and, like Lindblom (1977), he recognizes that: The favored position of ‘business’ groups is furthered by the existence of an economic system under which businessmen’s confidence and expectations of profit are of crucial importance to the health of the economy.’

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLURALISM

The origins and development of pluralism can be found in the reaction both to the monastic approaches of Hobbesian political thought and the individualism of liberalism. Hobbes saw a strong sovereign as a mechanism for order in a society of conflicting interests. Liberals such as Locke and Mill saw a Hobbesian state as a threat to the rights of individuals and tried to define the legitimate limits of the state. The early pluralist wanted to avoid the development of an over powerful state but also save communities or society from what they saw as the potential impact of market individualism. Hence the early English pluralists developed a socialist and collectivist approach. In Britain the development of pluralism in the early twentieth century reflected concerns about an increasingly strong state and was built of the notion of a strong civil society – through voluntary organizations and trade unions – delivering public goods. However, the period between 1914 and 1945 effectively destroyed the liberal state form that existed in Britain. The British state nationalized the pluralistic delivery of public goods so that the services delivered by the voluntary sector, private business and local government were taken over by the central government (for example supplies of gas or the creation of the NHS). In addition, the primacy of parliamentary sovereignty and the Haldane conception of the civil service – which saw decisions being made within a symbiotic relationship between ministers and officials – meant that power was monopolized within a closed and elitist state. Whilst Middlemas (1979) emphasizes a corporate bias in the British state – the role of groups was always mediated through a sovereign core executive and was highly limited in the influence on policy. Whilst pluralist conceptions existed within British political discourse, particularly in the high Toryism of people like Quentin Hogg and Harold Macmillan, the reality of British government was an increasingly centralized, sovereign state. The British state is based on the notion of indirect, individual representation, a decision-making elite isolated from civil society and unresponsive to group interests, combined with an indivisible notion of internal and external sovereignty. The epitome of anti-pluralism was the Thatcherite conception of state with its suspicion of groups and intermediate institutions and emphasizing the direct relationship between a sovereign government and the individual (Smith 2015). As a consequence of these developments, pluralism had little purchase in Britain and the work of Cole, Figgis and Laski effectively disappeared from both political and academic debate until the 1980s. In the United States the state form was not so suffocating of pluralist thought. There, despite the very considerable expansion of state activity during the New Deal in the 1930s, the state was never sought or developed the capabilities to draw all areas of activity into its domain. A comprehensive welfare state failed to develop, local and state government retained considerable autonomy, the private sector remained strong – there was no attempted beyond specific sectors in planning or nationalization – and the central state was institutionally fragmented as a consequence of the separation of power entrenched within the constitution. Consequently, there was sufficient plurality in the political system to ensure that pluralism continued to reflect some elements of the reality of American politics. The period between the First World War and the end of the 1960s saw pluralism becoming the dominant conception of the American state.

 In the post-war period pluralism (what some call interest group pluralism) became the dominant paradigm in US political science and had a considerable impact on the analysis of politics in the rest of the world (It was even used to study the Soviet Union (see Solomon 1983). It developed as both an empirical and normative political theory; a mechanism for understanding US politics and a framework of what politics should be. There is an assumption in the literature on pluralism of a break between the pluralism of the early twentieth century theorists and the post-war empirical political pluralism. In fact, many of its concerns and conceptions of post-war pluralism are indebted to the more radical pluralism of the early twentieth century. And through the founder of modern American pluralism, Arthur Bentley, there is a direct link to John Dewey (Ratner and Altman 1964). From Bentley, modern pluralists have adapted the classical pluralist emphasis on the role of groups in politics and the need to contain the power and competence of the state. The themes of Bentley’s work were developed by David Truman (1951) and empirically in the analysis by the work of Dahl, Lindblom and ‘the Yale school’ (see Merelman 2003). As pluralist theory developed, however, it transformed from a normative theory – this is how things should be – to an empirical theory – analysing how power is distributed. It then became, in the words of Merelman (2003: 18), a legitimizing discourse: ‘That is, they support the claims American political leaders typically make to justify their power’. Pluralist theorist in post-war America confused normative claims with empirical reality. Pluralists desired a state limited by multiple power centres and the influence of groups and this was their perception of politics in post-war America. Consequently, the US pluralist theory of the state was actually a model of how they believed American politics operated and, in a manner similar to the way in which the works of Walter Bagehot and Sir Ivor Jennings legitimized executive sovereignty in Britain, the pluralists legitimized the US political system. As writers such as CW Mills recognised it became part of the cold war armoury in the sense that pluralist reinforced the idea that US political system was morally superior to other forms of government and gave representation to the range of interest in US society.

4. CRITICS OF PLURALISM

The positioning of pluralism as legitimizing the democratic nature of Western regimes coincided with it becoming the dominant paradigm in political science. However, the irony was that the moment of its apotheosis was the moment when significant theoretical and empirical criticism were being raised about the concept of pluralism. As Merelman (2003) points out: whilst the ink was still drying on Dahl’s claim (1963: 24) that, ‘The theory and practice of American pluralism tend to assume that the existence of multiple centers of power, none of which is wholly sovereign will help (may indeed be necessary) to tame power, to secure the consent of all, and to settle conflicts peacefully’, blacks in the South were being killed for demanding their political and civil rights. The point where the Yale school thought pluralism was firmly established in the US was the point when its limitations were becoming apparent. During the 1960s and 1970s pluralism was subject to both an empirical and academic critique. Empirically, many of the assumptions concerning pluralism were challenged by the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movements of the 1960s. The civil rights movement illustrated that a group with a forceful grievance was excluded from the political process. Despite the apparent pluralism of the American system, there were considerable barriers to political participation. Robert Putnam’s response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the riots that followed, captures the pluralist impasse: ‘What that glow in the sky on that evening of the Martin Luther King assassination conveyed was a sense that there was something happening in American politics that was not encompassed by the conceptual framework that we were all working with’ (Merelman 2003: 211–12). In many ways the Vietnam War was a greater challenge to pluralism. It undermined any claim that American politics was based on consensus. The anti-war protest refuted the idea of a shared sense of US politics and society-wide agreement over the form of the political system. The collapse of the consensus fed into a number of academic critiques of pluralism. First, rather than there being a consensus, what pluralism was presenting was a Cold War inspired view of the American system. The picture of a perfect functioning democracy, differentiating power and open to all interests was hiding a process of manipulation, exclusion and elite dominance. This was Merelman’s legitimizing discourse, intent on demonstrating the superiority of the American system. Second, the Vietnam War and civil rights movement, and the more radical women’s and gay movements that followed, undermined the notion there was a general acceptance of values in society (see Lockwood 1964). Indeed, the period since the 1960s has seen a considerable bifurcation of beliefs in the US between say those who support notion of gay marriage and the fundamentalist Christian Right. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) and Lukes (1974) highlighted the way in which notion of consensus can be manipulated in the political process. Moreover elitist and Marxist scholars like CW Mill (1956), Domhoff (1956), and Miliband (1969) empirically demonstrated the concentration of power and the ways in which outcomes favoured elites in the government policy. Pluralism was based on observable power not the way hidden structures and ideas shape the political agenda (Polsby 1963: 4; Polsby 1960: 477). The work of Lukes highlighted the structural mechanisms that meant that consensus often covered forms of coercion. As Merelman (2003: 99) boldly states, a combination of social change and theoretical critique meant that: ‘By the early 1970s, pluralism had been dethroned at Yale’.

5. THE REINVIGORATION OF PLURALISM

Pluralist theorists did respond to the events of the 1960s and the 1970s and there was some considerable rethinking of its key propositions. The reformulation took different forms in the United States and in Britain. In the United States there was the development of a distinct notion of neo-pluralism which grew out of some critiques of American democracy in the work of Lowi (1969) and McConnell (1953, 1966) and the rethinking of the nature of pluralism in the work of Dahl and Lindblom. Neo-pluralism continues the pluralist concern with the role of groups in the policy process but accepted that particular groups, especially business, will often come to dominate within policy areas and are at a clear advantage compared to groups like consumers (Dunleavy and O’Leary 1987; Kelso 1978). McConnell (1967) saw business as exercising great power in the US polity and, for Lowi (1969), interest groups did not result in pluralism but in structures of privilege that excluded the public from policy-making arenas. Lindblom was firmly in the Yale school of pluralists but recognized that business enjoyed extra resources in the political sphere. First, government is dependent on economic growth for its own success and therefore it is likely to meet business demands for favourable tax and economic policies. As a consequence business is in ‘a privileged position in government’. Second, in a market system many decisions that have a major impact on the lives of people are taken without any democratic control (Lindblom 1977: 175). Businesses can close factories or pollute environments without any accountability. He saw business as not just having power through its lobbying ability but having structural power. Lindblom’s volte-face placed him closer to Marxists such as Claus Offe (1984) and David Coates (1980) than with the classical pluralists of post-war America (see McLennan 1989 on convergence). However, unlike Marxists, Lindblom maintained the pluralist focus on groups and paid little attention to the nature of the state. He continued to see the state as fragmented institution but then argued that business has a privileged position in that fragmented state. The state was not inherently capitalist but business was in an inherently strong position within a capitalist system. Lindblom (1982) recognized the many flaws in the conventional pluralist conception of the state and argued for the mainstream to at least consider the hypothesis of radical and Marxist conceptions of the state. For instance, Lindblom examined the notion of socialization, which in US social science was used in a benign sense of transmitting social values and rules, and asked whether the Marxist notion that it is a form of indoctrination allowing the advantaged to retain control should at least be tested (1982: 19–20). In what is a strong critique of pluralism Lindblom (1982: 19) argued:

We fall into a bad habit of simply taking for granted that people in society will think alike, as though agreement was a natural phenomena that requires no explanation. Even natural phenomena require explanation...Agreement on political fundamentals cries for an explanation.

Lindblom questioned the fundamental pluralist notion that consensus is necessarily an indication of political contentment. He concluded by calling for conventional theory to bring in the radical thought ‘from the cold’ (Lindblom 1982: 20). Neo-pluralists escape from the pluralist position as seeing policy making as a priori pluralistic and the Marxist position as seeing it as a priori dominated by a ruling class (see Marsh Chapter 12 for further discussion).

 In the UK notions of pluralism were revived through the concept of policy networks and policy communities, particularly in the work of Richardson and Jordan (1979). They focussed on using empirical rich case studies to highlight the complexity of the policy process and implicitly critique the generalised assumptions of Marxist and elitist approaches. Richardson and Jordan used empirical analysis of British politics to emphasise the complex and fragmented nature of policy making in the UK. They again emphasised the role of groups in policy making and highlighted the consultative and consensual nature of the policy process. For Richardson and Jordan there was a strong imperative in the British political system for government to consult with groups and more particularly for different groups to be represented in different policy areas, thus ensuring no single group dominated. (see Richardson and Jordan 1979; Jordan and Richardson 1987a; Jordan and Richardson 1987b; Jordan 1981). Their work drew explicitly on the work of American political scientists in the pluralist tradition such as Bentley. They argued ‘the interplay of interest groups is the dominating feature of the policy process in Western Europe’ (Richardson and Jordan 1979: 3) and that the adoption of policies is ‘the reflection of the strength of particular groups at any one time’ (Richardson and Jordan 1979: 6). Both of these were hyperbolic claims considering the strength of state traditions in many West European countries, including Britain. However, Richardson and Jordan did try to develop the pluralist tradition by drawing on the work of later American group theorists, such as Heclo (1978), Ripley and Franklin (1980) and Gais, Peterson and Walker (1984), who saw the political system as fragmented into distinct policy domains. Within some of these domains it was possible that there were barriers to entry and that particular groups dominated. Richardson and Jordan maintained most of the presumptions of the pluralist position. First, they saw groups as crucial to the policy process and in fact saw state–group relations as undermining the parliamentary system. Second, they maintained that power was dispersed and fragmented across a range of policy areas with no single interest dominating across a range of policy communities. Third, they presented the dominant policy style in Britain (if there can be such a thing) as one of negotiations. They suggested that civil servants were driven by the imperative of consensus to consult widely and to take account of the views of different groups. Policy-making was characterized by co-operation and consensus (Jordan and Richardson 1982). Fourth, they believed that access to policy-making was relatively open with most reasonable groups being able to gain access to the consultation lists of Whitehall departments. Richardson and Jordan’s framework was undermined by the fact that the Thatcher government was anything but consensual in terms of most pressure groups (Smith 2016) and by their failure to recognize that many groups were excluded from the policy domains that they saw as relatively open. They made three fundamental errors. One was the common error of pluralists: to mistake, as Marsh (2002) argues, plurality for pluralism. The existence of many groups and policy domains does not mean that power is dispersed and that access is open. Second, they assumed that the existence of groups on consultation lists and involved in discussion with officials meant they had influence. Third, they saw networks as essentially agency-based, in other words dependent on personal relationships, and, so like other pluralists, they ignored the structural basis of power.

6. DEVELOPMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PLURALISM

Despite almost a century of empirical and theoretical critiques of pluralism, the pluralist tradition remains strong. It has reinvigorated itself over the past decade in a range of fields, each drawing on different parts of the pluralist tradition. Pluralism’s strength derives from its normative appeal and the fact that much of it accords with our intuitive sense of liberal democracy. In addition, the critics of pluralism, in particular Marxism and elitism, have in the case of the former been discredited, or the latter have either not developed or become incorporated into different elements of pluralist thought (see Chapters 2 and 3). There are four main ways that pluralism has developed in contemporary political science. Notions of governance have developed out of post-war American pluralism. Interests in social capital and civil society have drawn on themes highlighted by the early American pluralists. Similarly notions of associational democracy and radical democracy have explicitly borrowed from the early English pluralists and the anarchist strands found in French pluralism (Laborde 2000). Finally, the development of multiculturalism can be linked back to what Nichols (1974) calls the plural society literature. We will now examine each of these developments.

*6.1 Governance*

Governance, developing out of the policy network approach, is a term used to describe the making of public policy and the delivery of public goods in modern states following the rise of the new right, the development of new public management, public sector reform and globalization. For the theorists of governance, it is a way of understanding the state and its relationship with civil society in the context of an increasingly complex society. However, much of what comes within the framework of governance could be derived from mainstream American pluralism. The term governance, like pluralism, covers a wide spectrum of views and a range of different sub-disciplines within political science. The fundamental premise of the governance position is that the central state is no longer the dominant force in determining public policy. For some, such as Rosenau (1990), we now live in a centreless society. There is not a single centre of government but, like Dahl’s polycentrism, many that include a variety of actors. Consequently, the policy process is highly fragmented. The key point from this perspective is that in a world with multiple interests, it is more realistic to see the policy process as one that is complex and multi-centred As (Cairney, Heikkila and Wood 2019: 2) suggest:

Many theories embrace the notion of complex, polycentric or multi-level governance. They recognise that a focus on a single central government, consisting of a core group of actors making policy in a series of linear stages, provides a misleading description of the policy process. Instead, policymaking occurs through multiple, overlapping and interacting centres of decision-making containing many policymakers and influencers. An image of kaleidoscopic activity should replace the misleading image of a single circle associated with the policy cycle.

What is interesting about this approach is that it effectively reproduces a pluralist conception of policy making by recognising the complex, fragmented and multi-centred idea of the policy process. In the context of an increasingly complex world, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a single authority to control the policy process.

 Like the work of classic US pluralists such as Lindblom, Governance is presented as reflecting a ‘realistic’ view of policy making. In doing so it makes some of the same errors of traditional pluralism. There is a failure to problematize the state, there is a lack of recognition of asymmetries of power and an assumption that complexity equals plurality. In addition, like the policy network approach, focuses on the multiple actors that can be involved in policy areas and the ways in which membership of networks is functionally differentiated. However, it fails to pay sufficient attention to the groups that are excluded from the policy process. In many ways, increased complexity highlights the difficulties of democratic representation as citizens find it difficult to negotiate the complex processes involved in policy making. It is also worth noting that many radical/Marxist approaches to the state seem to accept some of governance approaches conceptualisation of the state. No longer is the state a simple instrument of a class or of capital but a ‘multidimensional institution’ which has to deal with a range of interests and conflicts over multiple sites (Glasberg, Willis and Shannon 2018: 137 and see Jessop 2007), with policy outcomes reflecting power conflicts between groups rather than the dominance of a single interest. Davies (2011) provides a Marxist influenced critique of governance pointing out that notions of governance are linked to neo-liberal approaches to governing and the reality is that governance processes continue to be in the shadow of hierarchy (Jessop 2007) and so are effectively an alternative means for reproducing government control that favours business interests. In addition, the notion of depoliticisation demonstrates how the fragmentation of decision making into quasi-governmental organisations is a mechanism for excluding citizens from political debates rather than pluralising decision-making (Fawcett et al 2017). For example, the creation of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence as a body that licenses drug use is a way of limiting public debate about the use of certain drugs through making decisions technocratic (Wood 2015).

*6.2 Civil society and social capital*

One of the themes of early pluralists in both the United States and Britain is that a strong civil society, community organization and citizen activism are important both as bulwarks against the state and as mechanisms for delivering public goods. The early American pluralists, Dewey and Follet, emphasized that individual identity did not exist outside of groups and that group identity was essential both to protect individual freedom and to limit the power of the state. For Follet (1918) the group was the building block of a healthy and democratic polity. In a sense groups provided an alternative mode of collective organization to the state and also, then, a mechanism for delivering public goods and political interaction. Follet believed that groups were a mechanism for self-government. For authoritarian and social democratic thinkers the resolution to collective action problems lies in the state. For pluralists the dependence on the state for collective provision of goods results in an overbearing state and the loss of individual liberty. Consequently, many pluralists looked to the community or the group for collective provision. This is precisely the sort of argument that Putnam is making in his work on social capital. Putnam sees the decline in membership of local associations of whatever type as a major cause of social and economic ills in the United States and elsewhere. For Putnam membership of associations builds trust and this social capital is essential for economic development: ‘Social capital is coming to be seen as a crucial ingredient in economic development around the world’ (Putnam 1993: 37). Putnam, like the early English and American pluralists, sees membership of associations as essential for both personal and community development. For Putnam, the strengthening of civil society is a necessary mechanism for restoring democracy and economic development throughout the world. Putnam is a graduate of Yale and locates himself firmly within the tradition of American pluralism (Merelman 2003: 196). He makes errors similar to those of traditional and American pluralism. The poor of the inner cities are not poor because of structured inequality, but because of their failure to build social capital (see DeFilippis 2001). Putnam examines Tuscany and Sicily and suggests that Sicily’s lack of economic development and democracy is because of the absence of social capital not because of patterns of land ownership or it position on the periphery of Europe. He is insistent on the causal relation being one of lack of social capital leading to the absence of economic development rather than the other way around. Like other pluralists he sees a simple, voluntarist solution to deep-seated structural problems and ignores the constraints that may exist on group organization. What this perspective leads to is a limited role for the state. The state has to develop social linkages rather develop large-scale welfare and economic programmes to tackle social inequality and economic development.

 *6.3 Radical democracy and associationalism*

Modernized notions of pluralism, which have resonance with social capital, are the concepts of radical democracy and associationalism. Ironically whilst pluralism appears foundationalist in its epistemology and positivist in its methodology, pluralist concerns can be discerned in postmodernist writings. Like pluralists, postmodernists reject monism and in particular the Marxist belief in a single truth and explanation. Postmodernists and radical democrats pick up on many of the traditional concerns of democracy. According to McClure (1992: 15), [they] have been articulated in crucial opposition to unitary, monolithic or totalizing conceptions of the political domain, particularly in so far as these presume some singularly sovereign or unique agency overseeing or determining political processes and/or social relations This leads to a pluralist conception of knowledge. No organization can have a monopoly of knowledge. Wainwright (1993) highlights knowledge as socially constructed; it is impossible for a single person, group or party to know everything. Ideally knowledge should be demystified into a range of social movements. Thus central to radical democrats, like Putnam, is a strong belief in the richness of civil society and the importance of social movements as a mechanism for controlling and circumventing the monopolizing tendencies of the state. Like traditional pluralists radical democrats see social movements as crucial elements in society. Civil society is complex and pluralist, with individuals belonging to an array of social groups. These groups do not have a preordained existence or identity but develop as a consequence of struggle and social interaction (McClure 1992: 115). Radical democrats offer their pluralism as a critique, rather than legitimization, of liberal democracy and in their extreme relativism take a very different epistemology to classical pluralism. Nevertheless, some of the criticisms of traditional pluralism can also be made of radical democracy. Like most of the forms of pluralism discussed in this chapter they fail to develop a convincing theory of the state. State power is almost bracketed off into a separate sphere from the world of social movements and self organization. Where radical democrats do conceptualize the relationship between the state and civil society, they tend to offer an almost benign notion of the state (see Dryzek 1996). Consequently, they do not offer effective strategies for overcoming state power. Like traditional pluralists and Putnam, hope for political transformation is vested in social groups. However, the relativism of postmodernists means that they can make no moral claims regarding the status of various groups and thus cannot deal with groups that do not subscribe to the goals of radical democracy. Their approach is to politicize the whole of society (which is very different to traditional pluralism). The problem then arises of how the interests of minorities are protected if the state is weak and political interests are highly salient?

*6.4 Multiculturalism and the plural society*

Multiculturalism attempts to deal with some of the problems radical pluralism raise in a more grounded and normative approach. Multiculturalism can be rooted in pluralist thought because it is based on the idea that no single set or norms or values should dominate a society and that the role of the state should be about reconciling different interests rather than ensuring the dominance of a particular group. It can be traced back to the notions of the plural society which develop as a way of analyzing colonial societies where different groups were forced together. Consequently, within a colonial system there could be a number of ethnic groups living side by side with little interaction and each maintaining their traditional patterns of social life, norms and values (see Nichols 1974). However, unlike notions of multiculturalism which is seen as normatively good, plural societies were held together merely by the existence of a shared economic system and force. Multiculturalism has become one of the central debates in political theory. Whilst in many ways it differs from the sorts of pressure group pluralism we have discussed earlier in the chapter, and unlike the notion of a plural society, it does not see a multicultural society as being based on force but as being normatively good. It reflects some of the themes that reoccur in plural society. First, multiculturalism is based on the notion of group identities. What is important for multiculturalists is group rights. Second, multiculturalists are opposed to the notion that a single Pluralism particular the majority group) can dominate other groups. The basis of multiculturalism is the equal treatment of groups and so the role of the state is to balance conflicting group interests. There is a presumption amongst some multiculturalists such as Walzer (2001: 51) that the state ‘stands above all the various ethnic and nationalist groups in the country’ (Kymlicka 2001: 16). Walzer in particular, like the mainstream American pluralists, takes a benign view of the US state seeing it as ‘neutral among the various thick cultures sustained by different groups of immigrants’ (Walzer 2001: 151). However, the multiculturalist debate has been moved on to examine how the state should develop a positive role in developing and protecting the rights of minority groups. This view is based again on a benign view that the state is the force able, and possibly willing, to protect the rights of minorities. Of course, whilst in some liberal states, policy will make rhetorical concessions to minority rights, the impact on groups in terms of employment, housing and education may be limited. Other liberal states, such as France, are still concerned with protecting the rights of majorities from a multiculturalist frame. Multiculturalists also draw on the pluralist tradition of seeing rights as group based rather than individually based. It may be a good thing to protect the rights of Muslims to sustain their culture and religion in Britain. However, there may be some Muslim women who want to have their rights protected as individuals rather than as Muslims. Why should our rights be linked to groups that are essentially arbitrary? This, of course, is the dilemma of multiculturalism: how do group rights impact on individual rights and is there a tension between the two?

7. PLURALISM IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD

Many of the classic and recent pluralist approaches see liberal democracy as providing a framework for the representation of diverse views and argue for political equality being a constraint on the unequal distribution of wealth. It is relatively easy to point to examples of identity politics, for instance, having considerable impact on the rights of a range of excluded groups and a shift to a much stronger rights based approach that sees different groups having their interests protected or even enshrined in legislation. However, at the same time the 21st century has seen growing economic inequality that has had a significant impact on both the distribution of power and public goods (Dorling 2019). As Machin (2013) highlights the super rich provide a direct challenge to the notion of political equality as the scale of inequality distorts the processes of democratic representation. It is estimated that the richest 1 per cent controls 44 per cent of the world’s wealth (Credit Suisse 2019). In the United States the early 21st century has seen a return to the level of inequality of the early 20th century. This inequality has direct and indirect impacts on power. Directly, the superrich have very close relationships with the political elite and provide a considerable amount of the funding of political parties and individual politicians. In addition, corporate lobbyists spend considerable amounts of money attempting to influence government policy (Culpepper 2010). The last twenty years has seen the rich benefit disproportionately from fiscal policy (Blyth 2013) and with the poorest sections of society paying for the 2008 financial crash through austerity policies (Mendoza 2015). The indirect consequence of rising inequality are dramatic with the poorest sectors of society seeing worst outcome in terms of education, life chances and in particular health (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Dorling 2019). The Covid-19 crisis clearly illustrates the impact of inequality with the poorest suffering most both in terms of the economic impact and health outcomes. Inequality has managed to prevent the political system operating in the interest of the less well off; a point recognised by the growth of populism in the US and Europe. Pluralists failed to see how economic inequalities shaped political outcomes. At the same time there have been attempts to defend pluralism against the populist surge (Galston 2017)

CONCLUSION

Pluralism is a remarkable theory because despite the many criticism of the approach – and not a small number of empirical refutations – it continues to have influence on how politics is conceived and studied. In a sense this is a consequence of it not being a single, coherent theory but more an approach that focusses on the role of groups in the policy process and it rejection of monotheistic ways of thinking. Pluralism has been effective in helping the development of more realistic and complex models of policy making. However, it has been able to do this by insufficiently attending to the nature of state and economic power. What nearly all pluralist fail to recognize in any systematic way is the asymmetries of power as a consequence of the concentrations of economic power and the social concentration of economic power embedded in inequality. Pluralists undoubtedly complexify our understanding of policy processes by highlighting the complex and fragmented nature of policy making and the fact that policy outcomes are often the result of compromise as governments and policy makers attempt to build coalitions of support. However, they assume that there are many different forms of power that can limit and contradict economic power. From a pluralist perspective, political systems, decision making and successful policy outcome rely on some degree of wider social cooperation and therefore the imposition of policies without consent is problematic. However, pluralists fail to confront the ways in which outcomes tend to favour particular groups (Marsh 2002). Yet the period since 2008 has seen a realization that both the economic power of business and the political power of the wealthy affects political outcomes in ways that make access to the political system difficult for the ordinary citizen. The consequence of the 2008 financial crisis was that governments across Europe imposed austerity as a mechanism for reinforcing the banking system.

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Further Readings.

For an account of the origins of pluralist thinking on the state see Laborde (2000). The best account of classical American pluralism is Dahl’s (1961) *Who Governs?* Merelman (2003) provides an excellent account of the demise of pluralism and Lindblom (1983) is the classic mea culpa reflecting on how pluralism failed. It is also worth reading Lukes (1974) for a brief but thorough critique of the pluralist view of power. Cairney, Heikkila and Wood (2019) provide a strong account of modern pluralism in the form of governance and Davies (2010) provides a critique of the pluralist underpinnings of Governace approaches. For a recent defence of pluralism see Galston (2017).