Political Science and Institution Building: Oxford in Comparative Perspective*

Robert E. Goodin

Political scientists are supposed to know quite a lot about institutions and how to build them. Let us turn that knowledge on ourselves, asking what is required to institutionalize an academic discipline. What does it take to build and sustain a tight-knit department of scholars working collectively to advance, and not merely impart, knowledge about their discipline? Answering that might, in turn, provide insights into why Oxford found that so hard in the case of political science.

If in the end the exercise produces nothing more than fancy pigeonholes for things that people have known all along (or say they have), just remember: pigeonholes matter. They are the generalizable stuff of science. They are what allow us to apply insights garnered in one place to others that are relevantly similar. They are what save us from having to treat every case and place as utterly sui generis. No generalizations are perfect. But eschewing generalization, where generalization is possible, is far worse.

CHARACTERIZING INSTITUTIONS

‘Institutions,’ in Samuel Huntington’s term, ‘are stable, valued recurring patterns of behavior.’ Mark that definition well. Institutions are not buildings (although when we ‘institutionalize’ someone we lock him up in a building). Nor are institutions organizations. Both buildings (physical co-location) and organizations (departmentalization) may help promote and sustain the patterns of behaviour that define an institution. But it is the behaviours that institution builders are striving to promote and sustain.

The stable, valued, recurring behaviours to which Huntington refers occur not merely within institutions but also, importantly, because of them.

* I am grateful for discussions at the Lee Lecture in March 2012, and with Jean Blondel, Christopher Hood, Des King, Tony King, Duncan Snidal, John Vickers, Jeremy Waldron, and Stephen Whitefield.

1 S. P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 12.


3 D. Soskice, R. H. B. Institutions, Journal of


5 R. E. Goodin, ‘The Oxford Handbook of P. similarly T. Parsons, Pr... vol. 12, 536-47.
Institutionalization is 'the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability'. Once institutionalized, behaviour is rendered more stable and predictable. Such stability and predictability are precisely what we value about institutionalized patterns of behaviour.

Think of the role of institutions in economics, reducing uncertainties and the costs of transactions by, in effect, taking some transactions off the table. Or think of the role of constitutions in politics, laying down rules of the game that are harder to change than are ordinary laws. Were they otherwise, they would not provide the secure, stable legal environment that we seek through them.

Why would anyone want his behaviour to be constrained in these ways? The answer is simple. Institutions are enabling, for precisely the same reason that they are constraining. If anyone might do absolutely anything at any given time, then no one can confidently pursue any project that in any important way depends upon the inputs of others. Among people whose behaviour is institutionally constrained, mutually productive interactions become more feasible. As Thomas Schelling says, no one wants to be sued—but living under laws that allow those breaching them to be sued is what makes it possible for them to enter into contracts at all.

With academic disciplines, as with institutions more generally, the point of accepting the constraints is to enable you to do something you could not otherwise do (anyway, not nearly so effectively). A discipline imposes order, it creates a common code, it focuses attention on common problems, and it sets standards for what count as good solutions to them. It orchestrates collaboration among people who have been rendered, by the discipline of the discipline, sufficiently similar to work together productively—yet still sufficiently different each to have something uniquely to contribute.

Academic departments are the local embodiments of the discipline that they represent. When I talk about what political science has to tell us about how to institutionalize political science itself, I will be talking about institution building at both levels. I will be asking what it takes to build a strong department at the local level—and one that is itself institutionalized, by being strongly connected to discipline as a whole. That is to say, I will be asking what it


takes to build a department devoted to advancing, rather than merely imparting, knowledge about the subject to which it is devoted.

Institution building

The prime function of institutions politically, Huntington tells us, is to 'give new meaning to the common purpose and create new linkages between the particular interests of individuals and groups'.

Institutionalization imposes coherence and imparts a sense of common purpose. [D]evelop[ing] an esprit and style that become distinctive marks is the prime task in building an institution. So how do we do that?

Institutional differentiation

The first step is surely to differentiate sharply your institution from other surrounding, competing institutions. A. M. M. once shrewdly remarked that the sine qua non of a new state was having a flag and a national airline all its own. Similarly with an academic discipline: for it to thrive in a place, it ought ideally have a department all its own. Of course there can be 'invisible departments', or 'departments within departments', with much the same effect. But for cultivating a sense of common purpose, there is nothing like having a department all your own, connected to a wider discipline outside your own university, and sharply differentiated from other departments and disciplines.

It is a mark of the maturity of a discipline that universities create departments devoted to that discipline and it alone. Political science achieved this status earlier in some places than others. In the US it happened early in the twentieth century; in Continental Europe politics teaching and research were subsumed within law faculties until much later (and in some places still are). In the UK departments of Politics began proliferating in the middle of the twentieth century. But again, in Oxford it happened much later. Although Politics and International Relations is now a separate department, it was a sub-faculty until not so very long ago. Although the department offers degrees entirely its own at Master's level, it still has no undergraduate degree all its own. In terms of institutional differentiation.

There is another way to do with introduced just after History or Philosophy. Politics were created historians, de facto as to entitle his Century. But both degrees as their high.

Brian Barry is rig.
DING

Huntington tells us, is to ‘give new linkages between the
Institutionalization imposes on us.’ ‘Develop[ing] an esprit de prime task in building an
at奇怪的不是当时就有的东西，而是与之相关的。

at奇怪的不是当时就有的东西，而是与之相关的。

own. In terms of the organizational chart and degree structure, then, institutional differentiation has been slow in coming.

There is another important aspect of institutional differentiation at work. That has to do with staffing. When the Modern Greats/PPE degree was first introduced just after the First World War, teaching of it fell to fellows in History or Philosophy. That pattern persisted even when dedicated posts in Politics were created, with appointments often going to people who were historians, de facto or de iure. One Gladstone Professor, Max Beloff, went so far as to entitle his intellectual autobiography An Historian in the Twentieth Century. But both of the next occupants of that chair also held history degrees as their highest qualifications.

Brian Barry is right, I think, to find it significant that, at the founding of the Political Studies Association, ‘the successful amendment striking “political science” and replacing it with “political studies”’ was moved by an [Oxford] historian.

Shortly thereafter, speaking from Oxford’s Gladstone chair, Kenneth Wheare expressed the view that ‘political science is no more than recent or current political and constitutional history’.

Now, as Finer is quoted as having told a scandalized meeting of his colleagues during his stint in the chair, ‘history and politics were different subjects’, and he should know because (as he went on to say pointedly) ‘he had taught both’. The failure to differentiate politics sharply from history, as an academic subject, is another failure of institutional differentiation that undermined the building of a distinct department devoted to politics in Oxford—and has done so, well into the final years of the last century.

Still more problematic, in a way, is the failure to differentiate politics from journalism, masquerading as contemporary history. In a previous generation, Ernest Barker (who had taught modern history at Oxford before taking up the

9 J. Hayward, ‘British Approaches to Politics: The Dawn of a Self-deprecating Discipline’, in J. Hayward, B. Barry, and A. Brown (eds), The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the British Academy, 1999), 1–36 at 1; and B. Barry, ‘The Study of Politics as a Vocation’, ibid., 425–67 at 433. When the degree was restructured in the 1930s, colleges responded with dedicated appointments in Economics as well as Philosophy, but ‘for Politics, Colleges tried to make do with their philosophy and history tutors’ still: D. N. Chester, ‘Political Studies: Recollection and Comments’, Political Studies, 23 (1975), 151–64 at 156.


11 P. Pulzer’s doctorate is in History; Samuel Finer took honours in both PPE (1937) and Modern History (1938).


Crowding out and historical lock-in

Political scientists and others talk much of ‘path dependence’. Previous decisions set the parameters for future decisions.\textsuperscript{16}

Staffing is of course one important source of historical lock-in. But firmly though staffing decisions might lock you in, that is only for thirty years or so. Placeholders eventually die or retire, and opportunities arise to replace them with others of a different sort. There is another historical lock-in that might be more serious and long-lasting. That concerns the syllabus or, more precisely, the examination papers.

A department with a strong disciplinary orientation will try to tailor its members’ teaching to their research interests. That can never be done completely; there are always service courses to be taught, of a more introductory sort. Still, in departments that attach high priority to their members contributing to the discipline themselves rather than merely reporting the work of others, synergies between research and teaching are always sought and often found. More often than not, people teach what they research, after some fashion or another.

At Oxford things are different, the consequence of another historical lock-in. As Alan Ryan’s chapter notes, pre-modern Oxford was primarily a place of undergraduate instruction, and mechanisms for assessing and teaching undergraduates were firmly in place long before there was any real expectation that tutors should contribute to knowledge as well as impart it. At other newer universities, teachers are substantially free to design their own courses and write their own examinations. At Oxford, you are constrained by the ‘straitjacket of a prescribed syllabus’.\textsuperscript{17} Examination papers are set centrally, and everyone has to teach to them. Not only do all tutors teach to the same papers; they typically also have to teach across a wide range of papers, well beyond their own active research.

that he 'learned such lessons of red the tastes that have con-
ne Manchester Guardian. It but a dreadful description of quired for a Chair of Political

al lock-in

dependence'. Previous deci-
historical lock-in. But firmly
is only for thirty years or so.
unities arise to replace them storical lock-in that might be:
ysyllabus or, more precisely,
ination will try to tailor its hat can never be done con-
ig, of a more introductory y to their members contribu-
re reporting the work of are always sought and often it they research, after some
:e of another historical lock-
ford was primarily a place of sseeing and teaching under-
as any real expectation that s impart it. At other newer
sign their own courses and e constrained by the 'strait-
rpers are set centrally, and ors teach to the same papers; ange of papers, well beyond their own active research interests. The tutorial pressure thus tends to encourage dilettantism, rather than concentration on topics for sustained research. In characteristically purplie prose, Brian Barry refers to the 'tutorial system' as 'the institutionalization of the amateur ethos'.

There is one other aspect of crowding out that is central to the story: the colleges. Institution builders know all too well the dangers of divided loyalties. Even where institutions are not 'total' (in Goffman's sense of all-encompassing, examples being prisons and armies), they are nonetheless 'greedy'. Strong, successful institutions brook no divided loyalties, at least within the particular sphere of life that they claim as their own. It is for just that reason that states have historically been allergic to dual citizenship. And it is for just that reason that Aaron Wildavsky's first rule for creating a good school of public policy was no joint appointments: 'make direct, 100 per cent-time appointments in the school'.

Anyone striving to institutionalize an academic discipline in Oxford has to cope with the fact that the undergraduate colleges were already well established, commanding the loyalty and affection of members and making heavy demands on their time and attention. Indeed, given the wide range of other functions that they also serve, those self-governing communities are not just greedy institutions but sometimes border on total institutions.

Nor is it just a matter of any new disciplinary organization having to compete with the college for people's time, attention, and loyalty. Like the monastic institutions from which they evolved, Oxford undergraduate colleges can serve as places of sanctuary for people who come under unwelcome (but not unwarranted) pressure from the department to comply with wider disciplinary norms. Although things differ at the two postgraduate social science colleges, St Antony's and Nuffield, between them those account for only a quarter of Oxford's Politics and International Relations staff.

18 'This problem of amateurishness was exacerbated in Oxford by the norm maintained by the undergraduate colleges (now much attenuated by the growth of swap arrangements) according to which the Fellow in a subject was expected to teach all the compulsory papers and a large proportion of the optional ones to the college's undergraduates' (Barry, 'The Study of Politics as a Vocation', 433).
19 Barry, 'The Study of Politics as a Vocation', 433.
24 Under 27 per cent: <www.politics.ox.ac.uk/index.php/people/academic-staff.html>, last accessed 3 September 2013.
Institutions have tonal properties as well as organizational aspects. These are perhaps best captured by the concept of 'organizational culture'.

Every successful institution needs a discrete mission. To command the loyalty that is required for an institution to succeed, there had better be ready answers—which had better be pretty much the same, across all members of the institution—to the question, 'What at root are we all about?' That is required to engender the sense of shared purpose that Huntington finds so central to political institutionalization.25

That everyone involved sees themselves as engaged in broadly the same enterprise is a necessary but not sufficient cultural condition of successful institutionalization. A sense of mutual trust is required, as well as a sense of shared purpose. As one scholar of the military remarks, 'Comrades must trust one another's ability to resist the innumerable temptations that threaten the group's solidarity; otherwise, in trying social situations, the desire to fend for oneself becomes overwhelming'.26 That is just as true in academic wars as in shooting ones.

In a strong academic department, colleagues will actually be interested in and supportive of what each other is doing. Mutual affection is nice but not strictly necessary; mutual respect is enough. You must be able to trust the competence and the values of your colleagues, if the department is to work well as an institution. Inculcating that sort of trust is one of the prime aims of an institution builder.27

Cooperation requires trust; trust involves predictability; and predictability requires regularized and institutionalized patterns of behaviour.28 Huntington goes on to observe:

'The absence of trust in the culture of the society provides formidable obstacles to the creation of public institutions. Those societies deficient in stable and effective government are also deficient in mutual trust among their citizens, in

26 D. Rapoport, quoted in Huntington, Political Order, 23.
27 The advice Wildavsky gives to would-be deans also applies well to those who would build strong institutions at the departmental level: 'Correcting errors when things go bad is easier if you help school members when things are good. Administration and staff usually meet when one needs something from the other... It is desirable, therefore, for administrators to ask members how things are going and to offer assistance, outside of a specific need to ask for or grant a favor. The idea that somebody out there cares, that administration is there to help as well as to harass, is best reinforced when nothing evident is at stake' (Art and Craft of Policy Analysis, 417).
28 Huntington, Political Order, 24.
national and public loyalties, and in organization skills and capacity. Their public cultures are . . . marked by suspicion, jealousy, and latent or actual hostility . . .

Once again, what is true of political institutions is equally true of academic ones. Cultures of mutual trust and of mutual recrimination are both self-sustaining. Experience is an imperfect teacher, good at reinforcing, bad at innovating. If you have trusted someone in the past and found that trust warranted, you will have more reason for trusting in future. Conversely, if you have distrusted in the past and found your distrust warranted, you will be all the more reluctant to trust in the future. In a tit-for-tat world of 'strong reciprocators', which behavioural economists tell us is the world that we inhabit, getting off on the right foot is everything.

The remarkable department that Bill Mackenzie built at Manchester, referred to in several other chapters in this volume, is a good example of a virtuous cycle of this sort. As his biographer in the Dictionary of National Biography reports, 'A special feature of the Manchester faculty of economic and social studies [in Mackenzie's day] was the high degree of mutual respect between the senior professors, such as Ely Devons, W. Arthur Lewis, Michael Polanyi and Max Gluckman.'

Oxford may well be an example of the opposite, at least from some of the stories one hears. My examples come from my home subdiscipline of political theory, because those are the stories I happen to hear. But I suspect they may generalize.

There has been, as one commentator puts it, something of a tradition for political theorists to 'articulate their opinions of one another and of each other's work . . . with a courteous smile through clenched teeth'. Thus, for example, Isaiah Berlin 'frequently described John Plamenatz, who succeeded him [in the Chichele chair], as "Montenegro's greatest political thinker" . . .'. Berlin himself, I am reliably informed, propped a placard advertising the Austin motorcar on the mantle in his study, in order (he said) 'to remind him of the sharks out there' (namely, J. L. Austin, whose withering remarks in his Saturday morning Philosophy reading group were legendary). H. L. A. Hart apparently

---

29 Huntington, Political Order, 28.
33 Wekl, 'The Professoriate of Political Thought in England since 1914', 151. Bhikhu Parekh similarly listed, as the first distinguishing features of political philosophy of the 1950s and 1960s, that 'they were decades of prima donnas or gurus. Hardly any of the major figures engaged in a critical dialogue with others or even referred to them'; 'Political Theory: Traditions in Political Philosophy', R. E. Goodin and H.-D. Klingemann (eds), A New Handbook of Political Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 503–18.
34 Wekl, 'The Professoriate of Political Thought in England since 1914', 151.
lived in crippling intellectual terror of his colleagues, judging from his authorized biography. None of that is the stuff of which a mutually supportive institutional culture is made. Such an intellectual climate has consequences not only for how one engages one's colleagues but also for the sorts of thing one chooses to study. In a world of snide intellectual sharpshooters, foxholes provide the best refuge. In such an environment, it is only sensible to avoid exposing yourself. So cultivate norms against having serious conversations with colleagues about your work (they might catch you out). Choose a research topic that no one else is interested in (so no one can catch you out). Take shelter in the relative safety of single-country comparativism (fewer others can catch you out). All of those practices are still strikingly common in Oxford, perhaps for self-protective reasons deriving from the institutional culture.

**Institutional leadership and transitions**

Institutions are supposed to be relatively enduring. To institutionalize something is to set it in stone. In order to give rise to 'stable, recurring patterns of behaviour', institutions must themselves be relatively stable and enduring.

That in turn entails something about leadership, leadership transitions, and succession planning. Strong institutions are more likely to be led by cadres of people with similar values and priorities, rather than by a single individual. As Huntington observes politically, so too academically: "The simplest political system is that which depends on one individual. [But i]t is also least stable. Tyrannies, Aristotle pointed out, are virtually all "quite short-lived.""

Second, strong institutions need a succession plan and a mechanism for smooth leadership transition. They are robust against changes in personnel. They are made so in part by cultivating a cadre of possible leaders who share similar institutional values and priorities, and hence who are institutionally virtually interchangeable for one another. Institutions are made robust against changes in personnel, also, by self-consciously cultivating successor

---

36 'Safety in singularity', Jack Hayward puts it in his chapter in this volume. That is not to deny that 'getting your facts straight' about each of the countries you are comparing is not important, nor is it to deny that that is highly specialized labour in the first instance: V. Bogdanor, 'Comparative Politics', in J. Hayward et al. (eds), *British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 147–80 at 178. But that is just a matter of collecting and cleaning data, which until you do something more with it is just data awaiting analysis. As Barry rightly replies, genuine comparison require that those single-country studies either be embedded in some 'collective multi-national project' or else at least 'deploy concepts and ideas that have already [been] developed for comparative use' ('The Study of Politics as a Vocation', 446).
37 Huntington, *Political Order*, 18, referring to Aristotle's *Politics*.
38 C. Hood, 'Twelve Volume 'Volumes of Influence' conference: irony is that he did it too well; in: of Mackenzie's coterie went on to some of their finest professors of as is widely known, but also Manchester and was plucked by on Mackenzie's recommendation.
39 Wokler, 'The Professoriate
40 Huntington, *Political Orde*
generations. The formula for building a great academic department is, when hiring, for each generation to strive to hire people younger and better than itself.

It is a matter, not only of picking horses, but also of backing them. Once you have identified and hired promising youngsters, protect and cultivate them as the research stars you hope they will become. Instead of dumping all your unwanted teaching and administration on them, shelter them for as long as possible from those ultimately inevitable facts of academic life. In that way, by the time they assume the burdens of leadership, they will have become sufficiently captivated by their research to lead in the right direction. That was certainly Mackenzie's strategy at Manchester.

Elsewhere in Britain all of this was largely missing. Observers comment on an 'absence of clear identities, shared convictions or dynastic continuities'. Nowhere has that been more true than at Oxford, where great politics researchers pop up from time to time, shine brightly for a time, and then fade leaving no intellectual heirs behind.

PRAETORIAN POLITICS

Those are all things that need to be done, and not to be done, to build strong departments. The lessons that scholars of comparative politics such as Huntington draw at the level of the state carry over well to the level of the academic department.

So too do their findings about what life is like without strong institutions. Huntington coin's the phrase 'praetorian politics' to characterize a situation in which institutionalization is low and participation is high. Quoting Macaulay, he characterizes that situation as akin to 'all sail and no anchor'.

The presence or absence of strong institutions is what makes all the difference. The absence of effective political institutions in a praetorian society means that power is fragmented: it comes in many forms and in small quantities. Authority over the system as a whole is transitory, and the weakness of political institutions

---

38 C. Hood, 'Twelve Volumes, Varying Influence: W. J. M. Mackenzie'. Paper presented at 'Volumes of Influence' conference, University of York, 1–3 September 2003, 20, fn 12. The great irony is that he did it too well: instead of building a cadre that stayed on to run Manchester, most of Mackenzie's coterie went on to provide many of the new universities and some of the old with some of their finest professors of politics. They included not only Samuel Finer and Richard Rose as is widely known, but also Jean Blondel, who had briefly passed through Mackenzie's Manchester and was plucked by the founding Essex Vice Chancellor from what is now Keele on Mackenzie's recommendation.

39 Wokler, 'The Professoriate of Political Thought in England since 1914', 152.

40 Huntington, Political Order, 87.
means that authority and office are easily acquired and easily lost. Consequently, no incentive exists for a leader or group to make significant concessions in the search for authority.\(^{41}\)

In a system with strong institutions, in contrast,

The institutions impose political socialization as the price of political participation. In a praetorian society groups become mobilized into politics without becoming socialized by politics. The distinguishing characteristic of a highly institutionalized polity, in contrast, is the price it places on power. [There,] the price of authority involves limitations on the resources that may be employed in politics, the procedures through which power may be acquired, and the attitudes that power wielders may hold.\(^{42}\)

Again, as in real-world politics, so too in academic politics. If there is no strong sense of departmental identity, no strong sense of shared values and purposes, then it really is all down just to a zero-sum struggle for resources. There simply is nothing to invest in the long term for.

But it is perhaps at university level where praetorian politics manifests itself most vividly. David Marquand has commented:

Collegiality and commensality have been of Oxford's essence since medieval times, and they still are. The originally German, but now virtually universal model of the university as a 'departmentally segmented and hierarchically controlled monolith' has always been alien to it, and attempts to force or lure it into a Germanic mould have always been broken on the stubborn independence of [what Halsey calls] the 'elitist democracy of the dons'.\(^{43}\)

The most recent event to which Marquand presumably refers is the 2006 uprising in Convocation against the then Vice Chancellor John Hood's governance reforms. A leader of the successful opposition wrote in the Guardian after the crucial meeting, 'I swear I saw the vice-chancellor start to sweat' and 'the registrar seemed near to tears'.\(^{44}\) Whatever the merits or demerits of those particular reforms, such periodic uprisings really do seem to fit Huntington's model of praetorian politics, in which 'apathy and indignation succeed each other; the twin children of the absence of authoritative political symbols and institutions'.\(^{45}\)

---

\(^{41}\) Huntington, \textit{Political Order}, 196.

\(^{42}\) Huntington, \textit{Political Order}, 83.


\(^{45}\) Huntington, \textit{Political Order}, 88.
Most of what I have been saying pertains to Oxford in general, and it should apply equally to Politics or to any other discipline. Clearly in some disciplines Oxford departments have succeeded in providing a coherent, collective sense of shared purpose to their members. So let me close by asking, 'What's so special about Politics?'

Two things, I shall suggest. The first is a failure to get sufficient critical distance from your research subjects—in Hayward's famous phrase, a failure for 'political zoologists [to] become separated from the denizens of the political zoo'. The second is a 'just so' story that Politics dons tell themselves—a story that perverts 'pluralism' to serve a rationale for scholars of the same subject not actually engaging with one another. Let me elaborate each briefly, in turn.

As regards 'critical distance from your research subjects', there are three problems, which are interconnected. The first concerns what is thought to count as 'knowledge' about politics. The view that used to be endemic across Britain, and which has more exponents remaining in Oxford than most other places, holds that knowledge about politics must ideally be first-hand. Ideally, it comes from yourself having experience in government. At the very least, it comes from talking to those who have experience of that. You get clear intimations of that not only from Oxford luminaries such as Bryce, Wheare, and Beloff but even, at times, from the likes of Laski and Mackenzie.

---

46 Hayward, 'British Approaches to Politics', 2, speaks of 'a time when the academic study of politics had not been divorced from its practice and it was considered an advantage to have had personal experience if one was to describe, analyze and propose improvements in the way politics was actually conducted'.

47 The tendency to conflate the academic study of politics with the practice of it still, in many influential corners of the British profession, is revealed in the very title of the Oxford Handbook of British Politics, ed. Gamble et al. Using the same term to refer both to the subject under study and to the study of it carries clear implications about how it is supposed that the subject should be studied.

48 The best way to get a genuine and exact first-hand knowledge of the data is to mix in practical politics' (quoted in Hayward, 'British Approaches to Politics', 8).

49 Max Beloff's Dictionary of National Biography entry for 'Wheare' makes the point for both: 'His own writings combined ... above all, an awareness of how people actually behave in the political and administrative context—and an awareness solidly based on his own practical experience in getting things done at many levels' (Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 58, 405–7 at 406). In an earlier piece Beloff had asked rhetorically 'Is it really possible to write about politics effectively or to teach it properly without some experience of the political world?' (The Politics of Oxford 'Politics', Political Studies, 23 (1975): 7–9 at 16. In fairness, however, it ought to be said that Wheare had himself cautioned against confusing 'the functions of the political scientist and the political practitioner' ('The Teaching of Political Science', 72).

50 'Full contact with practical affairs is one of the best ways of understanding the academic problems of politics' (quoted in Hayward, 'British Approaches to Politics', 14).

51 'I cannot avoid the awkward conclusion that to study government one must participate in government', writes W. J. M. Mackenzie, Explorations in Government (London: Macmillan, 1975), 107.
of engagement in the US and their academic work.

In the US, academics ter years their political party is in years their party is out of p Hoover or the Kennedy Sch ics. 57 Politically connected 'constantly on call'. That p get any critical distance wh when you are constantly ca called upon) to enter into might be useful for them.

So that is my first answ the generic features of Oxford inhibit institutionalization ement more badly in the case study of politics there is the too closely with the objects cists simply suffer no such t

PLURAL

A second explanation is the seemingly apt defence for 1 defence is 'pluralism', which know to be a 'good thing'.

By pluralism is meant th there is more than one valid reform editor of Political St

There are many styles in po his own is essential to our a respect as in others.59

57 For example, Joseph Nye, s Government, served as Deputy S Assistant Secretary of Defense unc
58 As Mackenzie, Explorations unawares the attitudes of the very
59 F. F. Ridley, 'If the Devil Ri Opposition, 15 (1980), 471–85 at 4
Green in their chapters in this book (in the end of the book, a number of the authors had some valuable insights) were regarded as valuable. When one looks at the last quarter of the book, one notices an acute awareness of the thorough theoretical lens. No test would ever accept an insight, an often accompany it, about the particular problem of the British political system, that is, the Westminster model. Senior politicians and political scientists of the British model have been influential in the development of political science. The adoption of Mackenzie, who was through the world of the "great and small" and the speculative nature of the question, is a fault. Yet it is, perhaps, a fault on the issue of politics. He goes on to urge our students' zeal and prepare the example of Mackenzie, who was through the world of the "great and small". Commissions and advisory bodies on the independence constitutional issues and national guano he later cites when it was created in 1965 and "GLC" (Hood, "Twelve Volumes, of engagement in the US and UK and the different ways that those impact on their academic work.

In the US, academics tend to be "in and out" of government. During the years their political party is in power, they occupy posts in government; during years their party is out of power, they sit in the Brookings Institution or the Hoover or the Kennedy School, and behave (more or less) as proper academics. Politically connected British academics have historically been more "constantly on call". That pattern entails "grave risks". And it is very hard to get any critical distance when your research subjects never leave you alone, when you are constantly called upon (or constantly expecting any day to be called upon) to enter into their mindset to craft some piece of advice that might be useful for them.

So that is my first answer to the question of "why political science is special"—why the generic features of Oxford academic arrangements that I identify seem to inhibit institutionalization of a proper, discipline-oriented research department more badly in the case of politics than in the case of other subjects. In the study of politics there is the risk, which all too often is realized, of identifying too closely with the objects of your study. Molecular biologists or astrophysicists simply suffer no such temptations.

PLURALISM WITHOUT A POINT

A second explanation is the ready availability, within the discipline itself, of a seemingly apt defence for not imposing the discipline of a discipline. That defence is "pluralism", which every properly trained political scientist should know to be a "good thing".

By pluralism is meant the opposite of monism. It involves the claim that there is more than one valid way to study political phenomena. As the last pre-reform editor of Political Studies once put it,

"There are many styles in political science. The freedom of the scholar to choose his own is essential to our academic tradition: pluralism is a 'good thing' in this respect as in others."

57 For example, Joseph Nye, sometime Academic Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, served as Deputy Secretary to the Undersecretary of State under Carter and Assistant Secretary of Defense under Clinton.

58 As Mackenzie, Explorations in Government, 107, delicately puts it, "one may take on unwares the attitudes of the very pleasant people with whom one is working" so incessantly.

You hear this same sort of thing from Bernard Crick’s *In Defence of Politics*. You hear it in Adam Roberts’s valedictory lecture, upon vacating Oxford’s Montague Burton Chair of International Relations and assuming the Presidency of the British Academy. The *Oxford Handbook of British Politics* contains a rousing defence of the distinctively pluralist approach to the study of politics in Britain, and the ‘eclectic, tolerant and diverse community of scholarship’ that that fosters.

Now, being a properly trained political scientist I am not about to dissent from the proposition that pluralism, together with the academic freedom that gives rise to it, is a good thing.

But pause for a moment to reflect upon why Robert Dahl and I think pluralism is a good thing. It paves the way for competition and opposition. And why do John Stuart Mill and I like freedom of speech? Because in the competition of ideas, the truth will out.

It is precisely that competition that is missed out by the ‘pluralism defence’ as deployed by students of politics in Britain in general and Oxford most especially. When they talk about ‘tolerant eclecticism’, that sounds good. But if the ‘live and let live’ programme is so strong as to amount to creating what Almond bemoans as ‘separate tables’, with people at the different tables not interacting, then that defeats the whole point of pluralism—academically, just as it would politically.

---

60 Crick claims there is a distinctively British conception of politics itself, which he characterizes as the ‘conciliation of differing interests’, as ‘a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence’. The desirability of this view is, for Crick, self-evident: ‘conciliation is better than violence’ and ‘diversity is better than unity’. *In Defence of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 21, 32, 141, 160.

61 Celebrating what he regards as the characteristically British ‘pluralist approach both to the actual conduct of international relations and to the academic subject’, Roberts wrote: ‘It is a pluralism that accepts the relevance of many different approaches to international relations: not just the proper emphasis on power and interest that is found in realist theories, but also approaches that stress the significance of ideas and norms, the impact of domestic political and economic structures on international politics, the roles of transnational movements and international organizations, and the existence of new challenges. It is a pluralism of theories, a pluralism of political systems, a pluralism of different cultures and mindsets, a pluralism of methods of analysis and a pluralism of academic disciplines.’ Roberts ends by echoing Mill’s comment in his *Autobiography* that ‘Goethe’s device, “many-sidedness”, was one which I would most willingly … have taken for mine’: ‘International Relations after the Cold War’, *International Affairs*, 84 (2008), 335–50 at 335–6.

62 Pp. 6, 3. In their preface the editors collectively refer, clearly approvingly, to ‘the generally more pluralistic approach to theories and methods that has formed a defining feature of British political studies since its emergence as a distinct profession during the middle of the twentieth century’ (p. vi).


66 As one ex-chairperson of the Harvard overtook Yale in the point-stopped hiring its own PhDs and

67 As Barry rightly emphasizes, ‘fragmentation’: ‘specialization’ and ‘marking out the relations between for a number of different maps put terra incognita’ (The Study of Pol
Crick's *In Defence of Politics,* puts the academic freedom that Robert Dahl and I think is important to competition and opposition. Why? Because the out by the 'pluralism defence' in general and Oxford most. that sounds good. But is to amount to creating what on the different tables not pluralism—academically, just

of politics itself, which he characterizes as divided societies without Bildung: 'conciliation is better than Politics' (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994) 'pluralist approach both to the mic subject', Roberts wrote: 'It is a dance to international relations: not found in realist theories, but also the impact of domestic political issues of transnational movements and ages. It is a pluralism of theories, a tutes and mindsets, a pluralism of ex'. Roberts ends by echoing Mill's 'sidesness', was one which I would not think as after the Cold War', *International Literature* apprivingly, to 'the generally formed a defining feature of British during the middle of the twentieth century', *Social Science, PS: Political Science & Politics* is of course the whole point of (hanks: Hans Daalder, 'The Netherlands', *Political Oppositions in Western Europe,* 18-236.}

In a somewhat different context, Ralf Dahrendorf draws a distinction between 'passive' and 'active pluralism'. The passive form that he bemoans is as I have just described: a system of 'separate but equal', a clearly delineated toleration of differences. Dahrendorf compares that unfavourably to a model of 'active tolerance', which Dahrendorf describes as involving 'an attitude of acceptance and engagement with respect to a plurality of cultures'.

The latter is most definitely the sort of pluralism that should be sought, when building academic institutions. Mono-culturalism academically is a disaster. That is why strong departments have a firm rule against hiring their own PhDs, at least until after they have been elsewhere for a time. To put it only a little too crudely: they know nothing you haven't taught them; you have nothing to learn from them; and there is simply no point in collaborating with clones. When building an academic institution, it is absolutely essential to bring interestingly different people into it. But what is equally essential is that you then actually intellectually engage with and learn from them—and they from one another.

Likewise with 'interdisciplinarity'. Much good can come from people rooted in different disciplines coming together and constructively engaging with one another on some topic of mutual concern. But again, it is essential that those people actually be deeply rooted in their own discipline, in order for them to have something distinctive to contribute. (Getting together a group of people each of whom is the same mish-mash of 'all disciplines and none' is pointless.) And again, an interdisciplinary team is genuinely productive only if its members actually engage with one another, rather than carving up the problem into disciplinary chunks each of which one disciplinary subgroup will address all on its own.

That, then, is the second reason 'why politics is special'. One of the core teachings of the discipline is all too easily perverted into a 'non-aggression pact', allowing scholars of differing persuasions and specializations simply to

---

65 R. Dahrendorf, 'Doubts about Pluralism', in E. Ben-Rafael and Y. Sternber (eds), *Comparing Modernities: Pluralism versus Hegemony* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 223-8 at 225, 226. N. Polsky's description of an ideal editor is equally apt for an ideal institution builder. Both 'must... have a well-developed curiosity about what is going on in other parts of the discipline [besides their own], a sense of where the emerging interests are, a sensitivity to cliques and schools of thought, and something more hospitable than tolerance toward work in modes and traditions different from their own': 'Editorial Comment: Help Wanted', *American Political Science Review,* 69 (1975), 199-201 at 200.

66 As one ex-chairperson of the Harvard department put it, in personal correspondence, Harvard overtook Yale in the professional rankings at the point in the 1980s when Harvard stopped hiring its own PhDs and Yale started hiring its own.

67 As Barry rightly emphasizes, 'specialization' within a discipline does not necessarily imply 'fragmentation'; 'specialization goes with all those in the discipline having a common map marking out the relations between the different areas, whereas in a fragmented discipline there are a number of different maps putting a different locality at the centre and surrounding it with *terra incognita*' (The Study of Politics as a Vocation', 447).
go their own separate ways without seriously engaging with one another.\textsuperscript{68} Pluralism is good, but only when it is a pluralism of engagement. A pluralism of non-engagement is a pure travesty.

CONCLUSION

Thus, building strong institutions is important, in academics as well as in politics. There are some things that make that harder and some that make it easier—and the latter have historically tended to predominate in Oxford, when it came to institutionalizing a department of politics that is internally robust and externally tightly connected to the wider discipline.

What can be done? In academic institutions, like most others, staffing is what really matters. First and foremost, anyone trying to build an institution must seize control of appointments. In the meanwhile, you simply have to ‘work with what you’ve got’. There are already in Oxford clusters of dedicated research scholars properly socialized into wider disciplinary norms; bring them together, and create a seminar where the department-in-waiting can be melded.

Above all, take an interest in one another’s work. This academic business is supposed to be fun. It is supposed to be interesting. That is why we are all in it, rather than merchant banks or barristers’ chambers. There is no need for pulling punches. Part of what it is to take the discipline seriously is to engage deeply, and critically, with one another’s work. But the point of critical engagement is not to score points. The point is instead to improve their analysis, to show one another where they might have gone wrong and help them get it right.

\textsuperscript{68} One-country comparativism might be another form of non-aggression pact: ‘I won’t venture a view about your country, or your interpretation of going-on there, if you don’t about mine.’
Forging a Discipline

A Critical Assessment of Oxford's Development of the Study of Politics and International Relations in Comparative Perspective

EDITED BY
CHRISTOPHER HOOD,
DESMOND KING, AND
GILLIAN PEELE

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS