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## THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF NEEDS

This ambitious and lively book argues for a rehabilitation of the concept of 'human needs' as central to politics and political theory. Contemporary political philosophy has focused on issues of justice and welfare to the exclusion of the important issues of political participation, democratic sovereignty and the satisfaction of human needs, and this has had a deleterious effect on political practice. Lawrence Hamilton develops a compelling positive conception of human needs: the evaluation of needs must be located within a more general analysis of institutions, but can in turn help to justify forms of coercive authority that are directed toward the transformation of political and social institutions and practices. His argument is animated throughout by provocative and original discussions of topics such as autonomy, recognition, rights, civil society, liberalism and democracy, and will interest a wide range of readers in political and social philosophy, political theory, law, development and policy.

Lawrence A. Hamilton is Mellon Research Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge and Senior Lecturer in the Political Science Programme, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa. He has published a number of journal articles.

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LAWRENCE A. HAMILTON

*Clare Hall, Cambridge  
University of Natal, Durban, South Africa*



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You invent luxury  
I invent humiliation  
You invent love  
    I invent solitude  
You invent the law  
And I invent obedience  
You invent God  
And I invent faith  
You invent work  
And I invent hands  
You invent weight  
And I invent a back  
You invent another life  
And I invent resignation  
You invent sin  
And I **remain** in Hell  
So help me God  
    – Tom Zé and  
    Odair Cabesa de Poeta

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## *Preface*

This book is about human needs and politics. These are vast, complex areas of human action, interaction, conflict and value, and the reader may wonder why I chose to tackle both topics and not one or the other. The reason is simple. Quite early on I realised that both needs and politics have to be understood in their unexpurgated historical, causal, cognitive and normative contexts, and an understanding of one involves an understanding of the other. I do not profess to have got very far in either task, or in my related task of developing proposals for the evaluation of needs and institutions. That is for the reader to judge. However, the fact that I take this view about how to understand needs and politics explains why I cover two big topics in one relatively small book, and why I hope this contribution to political philosophy may also be of use to moral and legal philosophers, political scientists, economists, sociologists and policy-makers.

What I know about politics and political philosophy in general is, amongst other things, the fruit of many conversations and arguments with a number of people. It gives me great pleasure to single out and thank a few of them. One person in particular has pride of place: Raymond Geuss, my teacher and friend. Raymond was my original thesis supervisor, and I would like to thank him for his constant intellectual inspiration, guidance and discussion, and for his ability simultaneously to encourage freedom over ideas while demanding strict control over delivery. I am deeply grateful to Lisa Brown for many years of creative stimulation, and for providing invaluable criticism of my work at every stage of its development. She found things to discuss and correct on every page of a number of 'final' drafts. I am indebted to Amartya Sen, John Dunn, Stephanie Blankenburg, Ze'ev Emmerich and Geoffrey Hawthorn, all of whom provided searching criticism and patient guidance in reading and commenting on earlier draft chapters and sections. I thank two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press and my original thesis examiners, Andrew Gamble and David Runciman, for their careful reading of the manuscript and for crucial suggestions. I owe

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## Preface

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I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust and the Cambridge Political Economy Society Trust for funding my doctoral research. I am particularly indebted to Clare Hall, Cambridge, for electing me as their Mellon Research Fellow, thereby providing me with financial support and an excellent environment to continue my research. I am very grateful to Cambridge University Press, and in particular Hilary Gaskin, for making the arduous task of transforming a manuscript into a book seem simple.

The final section of the second chapter is an abridged and modified version of my article, 'A Theory of True Interests in the Work of Amartya Sen', *Government and Opposition*, 34. 4 (1999). The first three sections of the third chapter are an extended and developed version of my article, "Civil Society": Critique and Alternative', in *Global Civil Society and Its Limits*, edited by S. Halperin and G. Laxer (London: Palgrave, 2003).

I would like to thank Tom Zé for permission to reprint several lines of the song lyrics from his track 'Ui ! (Você Inventá)'. I have been aided in my translation by the translation found in *The Best of Tom Zé* (Milwaukee, WI: Luaka Bop, Inc., 1990).