1 THE PROBLEM STATED AND A REVIEW OF POLITICALLY APPLIED PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

INTRODUCTION

The major popular image of world politics is that it consists of the relationships and interactions of nation-states. There may indeed be other major actors – class, multinational corporations or transnational bodies – but on the stage of world political action, the roles of these actors appear complementary, subservient, out of the limelight. It may indeed, for example, be class forces in the form of covert centre-periphery relations which determine a developing state’s internal economic policy and external foreign policy – but the form in which these effects and decisions appear is that of the nation-state.

Implicit in this image of nation-states being the major international actors is a further more subtle image. This more subtle image is based in the political norm – and if not the norm, then certainly the assumption – that state power rests in a popularly legitimised authority. There may be no formal or recognisable form of democratic participation, but nevertheless the state, it is thought, should be one with the people who are its nation. International politics, then, is not simply the relations between state structures, but is also the relations between the nations. In international politics, people, government and state fuse into one image.

Thus one popularly says, ‘Zimbabwe’s attitude to South Africa . . . France declared war on England . . . The relations between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia . . . ’ The implication of these statements is that total peoples have a joint attitude. Certainly such statements can be made, but their academic integrity and intellectual credibility are severely strained. This is not due to differing political notions concerning the nature of ‘legitimate’ popular or democratic participation. This strain is due to the lack of theory which in a methodologically coherent way explicates the relationship between a mass national population and its state. In much political analysis this is not a crucial issue, as the focus is
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upon political competition and the resolution of that competition within the domestic framework. It is, however, crucial in terms of political integration and nation-building. It is also crucial in terms of international relations – inter-nation relations as opposed to inter-state relations – as without such a methodology the mass national population lacks any coherent theoretical status in terms of its state’s foreign policy decision-making. This echoes, of course, the profound issue in political and social philosophy concerning the relationship of citizens to state.

The specific purpose of this research, then, is to examine the possibility of a psychological theory – identification theory – giving the mass national population of a state just such a theoretically coherent status.

This recognition that the mass national population lacks any theoretical status – that the Emperor of the nation-state wears no clothes – became apparent in International Relations theory only as recently as the 1960s when the behavioural or ‘scientific’ upheaval took place.¹ This upheaval, which saw the introduction of a more rigorous methodology derived from the physical as well as the social sciences, involved an attack on the epistemological bases of the classical, or historically based, school in International Relations. Although this school appeared to repel the attack,² its students nevertheless took on board the need for the appearance, at least, of a certain intellectual rigour resonant with a respect for the methodology of modern social theory; historical analysis had not only to be scrupulous in its selection of facts, but had also to be more self-aware of the explanatory modes it utilised. The behavioural approach had, in fact, enjoyed a relative victory and in the new atmosphere much of the careless conceptual language of the historical approach disappeared.

In particular, the language of anthropomorphism in which nation-states as apparently coherent personalities acted and reacted on the international stage – ‘Nicaragua decided . . . Japan declared . . .’ along with notions such as ‘national honour’, ‘national prestige’ and ‘national character’ – was shown up as having little if any explanatory power and certainly no methodologically coherent internal logic. This lack of logic can be made clear if one posits four crucial questions that require satisfactory answers before it is possible to give the mass national citizenry a methodologically coherent status. These questions are:

1. Is it possible to know the attitudes of individual citizens?
2. Even if one does know these attitudes, is it possible to predicate that these attitudes will dictate action?
3. Is it possible to aggregate or generalise from an individual
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Citizen’s attitude in a way that explicates the attitude of the total citizenry? Can there be an explicit theoretical link between individual attitudes and mass national attitudes?

4 Is there a method for explicating the relationship between these mass attitudes and actual foreign policy decisions?

Although the first question, concerning individual attitudes, could be answered and, in fact, received much empirical attention in the United States, particularly under the study of public opinion, the other three questions were, and remain, unresolved.

Thus, one of the results of the introduction of a more scientific approach to the study of International Relations was that the mass of a state’s people – the nation indeed – became disengaged from any analysis of inter-state behaviour, as the discipline became self-aware of the fact that it did not have the theoretical tools to handle the issue. The movements, communications and transactions of the national population were, in fact, excluded from mainstream power political analysis.

A certain irony can be perceived here, for in an ‘era of the masses’ – or, at least, professed popular democracy (and is there any state which, in its public statements, eschews this?) – an analysis of inter-state behaviour that does not include the mass national population as a major variable is obviously lacking holistic perspective. The problem which this book addresses, then, is how to find a theoretically coherent method for understanding the mass national population and its relationship to the state, state foreign policy and international relations.

At the same time that the International Relations academy was disengaging the mass population from its theories, another field of the social sciences was involved in an attempt to do precisely the opposite. The post-war, post-colonial independence of so many African and Asian states produced a new problematic for students of comparative politics. This problematic was concerned with the difficulties that these states were confronting in terms of modernisation, both economically and politically.

Politically, the major structural problem was that of building or creating political integration, that of evoking the mass of the new citizens’ loyalty towards the new state, of nation-building. This was particularly a problem due to tribal, ethnic or religious cleavages – or to the vast difference in life-style between metropolitan elites and rural masses.

The academic study of modernisation floundered in several ways, but mainly due to a eurocentric attitude which projected the historical western process of progress as a universal to be applied to all developing states. Moreover, nation-building as a particular area of study was
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beset by its own lack of a consistent theory which could explain the mass citizenry’s transfer of sentiment and loyalty to the new state. This lack of consistent theory reflected the parallel problem in International Relations of being unable to give clear theoretical status to the mass national people in relation to international politics; namely, how is one to understand the way in which the mass citizenry is linked together and linked to the state? Is it possible to explain how these millions of individuals are joined together to act as one force?

In practical terms, this lack of an organising methodology for the mass citizenry is not simply a ‘nice’ theoretical problem, but is concerned with quite crucial political realities. It is concerned with those essential factors which, at one end of the spectrum, evoke and create social harmony and political integration; and which at the other end of the spectrum promote revolution, secession, civil war and international war. It is the masses of people who are the citizens to be integrated and built into the nation; it is these same masses who in waves of hundreds of thousands are prepared to die in physical conflict. Further, without a coherent theory which explicates the links between the mass citizenry and their polity, there is no possibility of clarity in the analysis of, or prescription of, policies that seek political integration or mass public involvement in foreign policy.

It is the purpose of this research to approach this problematic from the perspective of social psychology. This seems wholly appropriate as the core of the problem is concerned with human sentiment, human attitude and human loyalty. This is not to deny or to marginalise socio-economic or political factors. It is only to recognise that whatever the configuration of socio-economic and political realities, and no matter how powerful and determining they may appear, there always remains the psychological dimension of the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state. I suggest that it is this lack of clarity concerning the nature of this psychological relationship between citizens en masse – the nation – and the state which is the precise source of the lack of any coherent theoretical status for the mass national population. Identification theory, which is concerned precisely with the deep psychological relationship between an individual and his/her social environment – the internalisation of ‘social attitudes’ – provides the possibility of an analytical tool which clarifies the attitude and the motivation of both the individual and the mass citizenry in relation to their state and their state’s international relations.

This chapter now proceeds with a survey of the application thus far of psychological theory to political analysis. It also discusses sociologi-
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cal theory which possesses inherent psychological assumptions. From a political theorist’s perspective, this survey may be too detailed; from a social psychologist’s perspective, it may be too restricted and cavalier. Some survey, however, is required for it gives the background and ‘launch pad’ from which identification theory, the backbone of this research, can be applied.

HUMAN NATURE AND POLITICAL THEORY

In a certain sense, it can be said that all political theory is to a degree unavoidably informed by an attitude or idea about human nature and human psychology. Any political theory, whether purely analytical or part of a policy science, is necessarily coloured by the view that its author takes of human nature and of human psychology; for example, at a most basic level, does the author think that human nature is essentially nice – or nasty? A particular idea of human nature obviously works towards defining the way in which human behaviour in general, and political behaviour in particular, will be perceived and understood. This is particularly so in classical political theory in which the political analysis is only a part of a far greater endeavour to uncover the whole nature and purpose of the individual-in-society and to prescribe for the ‘good life’. In fact, as Gabriel Almond noted, ‘Classical political theory is more a political sociology and psychology and a normative political theory than it is a theory of the political process.’

There are several essays and texts which rehearse the various assumptions about human nature made by the classical political theorists. It is difficult, however, to produce a coherent taxonomy into which these assumptions can be sensibly and economically bundled. The most frequent mode of division in this literature is that between those theorists whose view of human nature is cynical or realistic (nasty), and those whose view is more benign (nice). Thus, for example, men act aggressively en masse because they are essentially aggressive and are cooperating simply for self-preservation; or humans integrate peacefully because they are essentially cooperative. Hobbes and Machiavelli, for example, are obvious members of the group which views human nature as nasty and brutish.10 Equally obvious, Marx or Rousseau belong to that group in which human nature is understood as being essentially good, but misled and thwarted by social constraints. Bridging the two groups, perhaps, are those, such as Plato or Hegel, who take a more metaphysical view of human psychology and purpose. These kinds of division, of course,
blur substantially as philosophers adopt different attitudes and approaches to different issues.

In his essay ‘Towards a Theory of Human Nature’, John Chapman proposes a three-fold arrangement of the different assumptions about human nature:11 (1) behaviourism or plasticity; (2) instinctivism; and (3) developmentalism. The behaviourist understands human beings to be essentially plastic and passive recipients of cultural and social conditions, and into this group Chapman provisionally places Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume and James Mill – also Hegel and Marx. In the second group, the instinctivists or nativists – those who believe the human creature has certain innate instinctive drives – Chapman places Plato and Nietzsche. And into the third group, the developmentalists who understand humans to be bundles of potentialities thwarted or fostered by their institutions and beliefs, he places Rousseau, Aristotle and Plato. Again, of course, the divisions are self-evidently extremely fluid and Chapman safely concludes that each theory of human nature has ‘formulated some aspect of the truth about nature and our dynamics’ and that ‘there is no necessary mutual antagonism between the theories’.12

The major problem, of course, with all blanket assumptions about human nature and political behaviour is that the assumptions can only be applied to appropriate situations. That man is naturally brutish is only relevant to situations in which he is behaving brutishly, but not to those in which he is behaving cooperatively. Equally, he is only, for instance, plastic and subject to political systems when he is not behaving deviantly. Explanations of political behaviour that rely on general assumptions concerning human nature are based only on evidence that fits the bill. They are, therefore, methodologically flawed by being purely tautological. There is a great difference between the statement, ‘Men behave aggressively because human nature is aggressive’, and the statement, ‘Men behave aggressively because there is an aspect of human nature which tends towards aggression.’ The first statement ducks the necessity for a clear analysis of human nature and of the external determining factors; the latter is open to intellectual enquiry.

To a degree, there has been no necessity for classical political theorists – or contemporary ones – to be too bothered with an exact analysis of mass loyalty and mass mobilisation. What is certain is that people do display mass loyalty and mass mobilisation. The main question asked has been, ‘Why should I obey the state?’ Brian Redhead, amusingly but insightfully, summarised the answers put forward by political philosophers:
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Why should I obey the state?
‘Because if I don’t they will cut my head off.’ [Pragmatic]
‘Because it is God’s will.’ [Theological]
‘Because the state and I have done a deal.’ [Contractual]
‘Because the state is the actuality of the ethical idea.’ [Metaphysical]

The research of this book is not concerned with those types of answer at those levels of analysis, but seeks an answer at a distinct psychological level of analysis. Indeed, until the twentieth century there was no clearly defined psychological level of analysis with discrete methods. To pursue this investigation using the methodology of modern psychology is not to be casual about the profound discussions that have taken place in philosophical political discourse concerning these issues. It is merely to travel using an alternate mode of enquiry.

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The turn of the century saw the introduction of a more carefully theoretical and observed approach to psychology with the emergence of the two major schools, the psychoanalytic and the behaviourist. In political theory itself, this emerging scientific psychology was reflected in Graham Wallas’s influential book, Human Nature in Politics, which called on political theorists to overcome ‘the tendency to exaggerate the intellectuality of mankind’ and to seek to understand the different ‘impulses and instincts’ which governed man’s behaviour, particularly, of course, his political behaviour.

In fact, the two major schools of psychology, the psychoanalytic and the behaviourist, led, as William Stone has pointed out, to two general approaches to political analysis. The psychoanalytic mode has been used in an attempt to explain political action and the behaviourist in an attempt to explain attitude.

The psychoanalytic approach

Freud himself took the lead in attempting to use psychoanalysis as a tool for political explanation in his works, ‘Thoughts for the Time on War and Death’, Civilisation and its Discontents, and ‘Why War?’ In fact, the most substantial portion of the psychological investigation into international conflict has been undertaken by psychoanalytical writers discussing the motivation that leads individuals and masses into war. The psychoanalytic approach is
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two-fold, one level concerned with inherent instinct and the other level concerned with the psychic mechanism of displacement. First, it proposes that there is an inherent instinct in human beings that is destructive and moves towards self-destruction. Freud described this instinct as the opposite to the principle of Eros and called it Thanos and the Death Wish;20 it is illustrated, for example, in the pleasure that a child gains from knocking down a construction. Second, it is proposed that individuals displace emotions, frustrations and aggressions which are essentially part of their private emotional lives away from their personal relationships and project them into political life. Projection is ‘an attempt to convert an inner (psychic) stimulus into an outer (reality) stimulus, an inner enemy into an outer enemy’.21 Alix Strachey gives a graphic and entertaining illustration of this psychoanalytic approach to international political life, which is worth quoting in length:

the state . . . enables its members to gratify many of their more specific instincts and attitudes – usually infantile ones – which have been repressed and inhibited in private life . . . Mr Briggs, in insisting on his country’s holding on to its colonies, is no doubt obtaining a (psychologically, if not socially) sublimated gratification of his early anal-retentive instincts; Signor Cappello, in egging his country on to territorial conquests, is obeying the dictates of his own displaced instinct of acquisition; and Frau Schultz, in so strongly resenting any insult offered to her country, is perhaps seeking to combat her sense of inferiority due to her castration complex; and so on. The secret agent who spies for his country when he would not spy for himself is gratifying his ancient voyeurism in a legitimate way and without offence to his super-ego; and the politician who tells lies and spreads false propaganda to bolster up his own country, or undermine another, is not only prolonging his past belief in his and his parents’ greatness, but is at the same time exercising and enjoying his first-found ability to take them in. Even the ruin which such behaviour sometimes brings upon a nation may not merely gratify concealed masochistic trends in many of its people once it has happened; it may in some measure have been brought about by those very trends.22

The explanation, then, of mass mobilisation for international aggression is that it is essentially mass pathological behaviour, the international scene being merely the opportunity to express it. It says nothing, however, about the triggers or circumstances, about leadership, or about the many times that humans do not react aggressively. Moreover, it does nothing to explain the sustained aggression of war which may endure, sometimes for decades. It is also unhelpful with
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regard to political integration and the mass cooperation needed for organised mobilisation. In fact, with regard to mass mobilisation behind an aggressive foreign policy, it suggests an immense coincidence of psychoanalytic conditions in which all the participants desire to displace on to an external enemy their internal infantile conflicts – but there is no methodologically coherent explanation of how this coincidence might occur or is triggered. Freud did, however, offer a more coherent preliminary explanation of group integration in an analysis which suggests that psychologically integrated groups share a common symbolic parental figure; this is an aspect of identification theory which is analysed in full in the next chapter.

The psychoanalytic method has also been used as a useful theoretical tool for analysing leadership behaviour and motivation, both generally and specifically in the form of psycho-biographies of political leaders. The most well-known proponent of the psychological analysis of leadership is Harold Lasswell and its most well-known victim, Woodrow Wilson – although one might add that any analysis of Hitler which does not include some form of psychoanalytic approach is obviously severely lacking. These approaches were not, however, generalised to apply to mass attitudes or action.

The behaviourist approach

The early behaviourist movement had an approach to national mass political behaviour which was based in an anthropomorphisation of the nation-state. A national people was understood as being a single psychic being demonstrating all the psychological attitudes and traits of a coherent individual. This early behaviourism had as its theoretical base a crude neo-Darwinism which understood nations as being the repository of a pool of genes which gave rise to particular national characteristics. Although this approach has been thoroughly discredited as being self-evidently illogical – an infant displays the culture of wherever it is brought up whatever the infant’s origin – it is a notion which still pervades popular and tabloid consciousness. This notion once had academic credibility; it is worth quoting in length from a study which was published by Princeton University Press in the 1920s and is the father still to certain more general and misguided notions.

The Nordics are . . . rulers, organisers and aristocrats . . . individualistic, self-reliant and jealous of their personal freedom . . . As a result they are usually Protestant . . . The Alpine race is always and everywhere a race of peasants . . . The Alpine is the perfect slave, the
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ideal serf . . . The unstable temperament and the lack of coordinating and reasoning power so often found among the Irish . . . We have no separate intelligence distributions for the Jews . . . Our army sample of immigrants from Russia is at least one half Jewish . . . Our figures, then, would rather tend to disprove the popular belief that the Jew is intelligent . . . He has the head, form, stature and colour of his Slavic neighbours. He is an Alpine slave.26

This unpleasant mixture of a behaviourist approach to intelligence measurement, a Darwinian approach to racial genetics and a Hegelian approach to the nation, although methodologically ruled out of court on all counts,27 is nevertheless interesting for what it has to say about the mass national people and international relations theory. It is interesting because it does at least provide a coherent psychological theory of international politics, providing one accepts that nations can be understood as anthropomorphic beings. Psychologically, the individual and the nation-state are linked — either genetically or mystically. Nation-states, therefore, are coherent individualistic personalities which react to and act towards each other as individualistic personalities. This notion solves all the theoretical problems of integration and mobilisation. The psychological link between individual and nation-state is absolute, being based either in genes or in spiritual diktat. Anyway, given the lack of any other theories of international politics that can be popularly understood, it is not surprising that this kind of simplistic theory retains its appeal as a popular explanatory tool, especially in times of international crisis.

In mainstream social and political theory, however, the behaviourist approach — apart from that crude anthropomorphism — set a standard of scientific observation and method for the analysis of human behaviour. This was observation and analysis which was not to be obscured either by general assumptions about human nature or by attempts to generalise from the distinctly unscientific psychoanalysis; the work was purely to observe and then analyse with methodological coherence patterns of behaviour — hence the term ‘behaviouralism’.28 According to Richard Jensen, its major exponents had by ‘September 1924 revolutionised political science by converting virtually every leader of the profession (in the United States) to the behavioural persuasion’.29 However, despite this wide acceptance of the behavioural method, the behavioural approach has by no means enjoyed the operational success that it originally promised. It has not provided clear political analysis. The reason for this can be exemplified by the most well-known political work of the school, B.F. Skinner's