Methods in Analytical Political Theory

This is the first book to explain how to use key methods in analytical political theory. The methods discussed include contractualism, reflective equilibrium, positive political theory, thought experiments and ideological analysis. Many discussions of political theory methods describe and justify these methods with little or no discussion of their application, emphasizing ‘what is’ and ‘why do’ over ‘how to’. This book covers all three. Each chapter explains what kinds of problems in political theory might require researchers to use a particular method, the basic principles behind the method being proposed, and an analysis of how to apply it, including concrete principles of good practice. The book thus summarizes methodological ideas, grouped in one place and made accessible to students, and it makes innovative contributions to research methods in analytical political theory.
Methods in Analytical Political Theory

Edited By

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Preface

I had the idea for this book in late 2008. The central concept has stayed the same – a ‘how-to’ book with practical advice in bold type. But much else has changed. I owe a great deal to early guidance from my former colleagues at the Manchester Centre for Political Theory (MANCEPT), especially Alan Hamlin, Jon Quong and Hillel Steiner. My Cambridge University Press editor, John Haslam, and my anonymous reviewers had invaluable advice about content and scope: they made this book far better.

I have greatly enjoyed working with my contributors. I wanted every chapter to give clear, concrete advice grounded in examples of good or bad practice. It was a pleasure to see this take shape and I hope our readers will benefit.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Nat Blau, who passed away in 2010 after a long and productive life. He was a doctor, researcher and teacher. He would have approved of a book that seeks to be helpful, practical and well exemplified.

My father had a strong sense of our intellectual limits: for example, he sometimes said that ‘if a theory explains all the facts, the theory must be wrong, because some of the facts are wrong.’ This book is written not in the expectation that our arguments and tips are right, but in the hope that enough of them are right that we can advance the debate – and that readers’ challenges to our arguments and tips will do so further.

This is the first book of its kind. It must not be the last.