SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN GLOBAL POLITICS

DAVID WEST

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For Paul

We must resolutely reject all discourses that try to convince us that we are powerless. (Alain Touraine, *Beyond Neoliberalism*, p. 116)

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A Political Preface: Social Movements, Global Crisis and the Failure of Institutional Politics

Outline

As its title suggests, this Political Preface sets the topic of social movements in the context of current events and emerging crises. It is prefatory in the sense that its content is not part of the more systematic exposition of subsequent chapters. The nature of politics and social movements is considered in chapter 1 and the rest of the story unfolds from there. The following sketchy remarks are designed instead to throw light on the importance of social movements and extra-institutional politics as a topic that is more than academic. Our understanding of politics both within and beyond existing political institutions influences both how we think and, more importantly, how we act politically. If the following remarks are themselves more political in a certain sense – more controversial and more reflective of a substantive political position – that fact is, to adapt Heinrich Böll's phrase, neither intentional nor accidental but unavoidable.[1]

1 The Crisis of Institutional Politics

In coming decades, the world faces intractable and, in some cases, potentially catastrophic problems. There are longstanding problems such as widespread poverty, untreated disease and insecurity in developing countries, endemic regional conflicts, wars and the growing

[1] Herbert Marcuse added a Political Preface to his *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London, Allen Lane, 1969). I have adapted Heinrich Böll's epigraph to *Die Verlorene Ehre der Katherina Blum* (Munich, DTV, 1976).

dangers of nuclear proliferation. More recently, a series of environmental problems threatens to push the world towards crisis. World population has grown exponentially from around 2 billion at the beginning of the twentieth century and has recently exceeded 7 billion. It is expected to reach (and possibly stabilize at) somewhere between 9 and 10 billion people. At the same time, rising population is accompanied by continuing economic growth in affluent countries and rapidly rising living standards and consumption in a number of developing countries including the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Although much of this economic development is obviously to be welcomed, to the extent that it increases the living standards of previously impoverished people, it still implies a rapidly increasing and ultimately unsustainable ecological burden on the planet.

The most prominent environmental threat is surely global warming, which threatens to transform the world's climate in undesirable and possibly uncontrollable ways. A severe and intensifying impact on non-human species and biodiversity is already occurring. The availability of arable land and fresh water is threatened by population growth and climate change. On most predictions, rising sea levels will inundate low-lying areas of the world, including major cities inhabited by tens of millions of people. Some islands in the Pacific and Indian Oceans are already becoming uninhabitable.[2] If human habitats are significantly degraded by such changes, then large-scale movements of population, which are likely to dwarf existing migration flows, are unavoidable. It is hard to predict how climatic changes and large-scale movements of people across borders will impact on fragile nation-states, but they will surely contribute to instability, insurrection, terrorism and other forms of conflict.[3] Even wealthy liberal democracies are potentially vulnerable under plausible scenarios of resource shortages, 'peak oil' and global financial crisis. It seems that we have entered what has been called, in geological terms, the 'anthropocene age'.[4] This term refers to the fact that for about the past 10,000 years – and for the first time in the four and a half billion years of the Earth's existence – the world's ecology and climate are being determined not only by geological and astronomical events but increasingly by human

[2] See M. L. Parry, O. F. Canziani, J. P. Palutikof, P. J. van der Linden and C. E. Hanson , eds., *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007) and www.ipcc-wg2.gov/publications/Reports/index.html#AR. (All URLs cited were last accessed on 8 April 2013.)

[3] See P. K. Conkin, *The State of the Earth: Environmental Challenges on the Road to 2100* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

[4] The term was coined by ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer and popularized by climate scientist Paul Crutzen: see J. Goodell, *How to Cool the Planet* (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), pp. 15–16.

activities as well. Human impact on the world is the by-product of the growth of human population and the spread of agriculture and then industry. The anthropocene age is characterized by an unprecedented and exponential acceleration of the rate of environmental change. Climatic changes that previously took place over thousands or millions of years are now occurring over centuries and even decades. Ironically, despite the clear human imprint on the anthropocene age, it is unlikely to benefit the human beings who are now exerting such large effects, let alone non-human species and ecosystems.

We might expect that governments would be able to solve these problems, particularly the democratic and liberal governments now established in more developed countries. But in the face of the momentous threats just outlined, current responses from national and global political institutions are clearly inadequate. There is no sign that intractable problems such as poverty, untreated disease, inequality and war will be resolved. In response to global warming, liberal democracies appear unable to adopt policies that might be able to deal with the problem in a timely way, in part because these policies are unpopular with electorates who are focused on short-term and largely material goals. Governments have successfully regulated some forms of pollution and instituted measures such as environmental impact reviews. But they have so far proved unable to make sufficiently radical changes. Developing countries, which are more often governed by authoritarian regimes less directly constrained by popular opinion, place understandable emphasis on achieving rapid economic growth even at the cost of environmental damage. They are unwilling to make material sacrifices before they have even begun to enjoy the benefits of industrial society. However justified this position, with about 6 billion of the world's 7 billion population, developing countries are therefore set to contribute very substantially to global warming. Finally, although there are international forums like the United Nations, which in theory transcend the limited perspective of individual nation-states, these institutions are only dubiously democratic, weak and unable to bring about international consensus. There is currently no single institution with the authority required to enforce just and effective solutions to environmental and other global problems in the common interests of all. As a result, nuclear proliferation continues apace. World poverty and hunger persist. In the case of global warming and despite achievements like the Kyoto Protocol, individual nation-states have so far failed to agree on common action of sufficient scale and urgency. Rich states, which have contributed by far the most to global warming until now, are still waiting for other states to act first, hoping to benefit as 'free-riders' from the sacrifices of others and gain an advantage in the ongoing competition for wealth and power. All the signs are that both national and international efforts to address climate change will be far too little, too late.

The inadequate responses of nation-states are to some extent a symptom of, and are certainly exacerbated by, a widely observed crisis of institutional politics in the developed world.[5] There is widespread dissatisfaction with politics and politicians even in affluent liberal democracies and, associated with that, rising levels of apathy, at least as far as formal politics is concerned. Party membership is in secular decline. Where voting is voluntary, levels of participation are falling. But beyond these easily quantifiable tendencies, there is increasing concern about the *quality* of politics and political participation. A variety of processes is undermining the capacity of institutional politics to achieve collective goods. This 'depoliticization' assumes a variety of forms.[6] Politicians seem increasingly self-interested and pragmatic, focused on electoral success and sometimes personal gain rather than ideological goals or political visions in the national interest. Political parties more and more resemble electoral machines dedicated simply to winning power, devoid of ideals and ideology. Growing cynicism in the electorate corresponds to falling levels of trust and participation. Both tendencies combine to undermine the pursuit of long-term and collective goals as opposed to short-term objectives and the immediate self-interest of citizens. The egalitarian 'democratic moment', which to some extent tamed corporate power and inaugurated social democratic welfare states after the Second World War, seems to have passed.[7] Pursuit of broader egalitarian goals and common interests *beyond* the confines of the nation-state seems even less likely. If we had nothing to rely on but existing political institutions, then our prospects would indeed be bleak.

In what follows, however, I shall suggest that this bleak and pessimistic outlook can be avoided. In fact, such pessimism reflects an incomplete conception of politics, which ignores significant avenues for social and political change through *extra*-institutional forms of politics. Whereas a narrow view of politics confined to institutional forms only serves to reinforce our sense of powerlessness in the face of intractable global problems, the view of politics canvassed in this book focuses on political activities that take place largely outside of these institutional domains, giving rise to new forms of politics, inspiring institutional reforms and sometimes leading to regime change and even revolution. The extra-institutional dimension of politics exists alongside (although it is often ignored by) the regular politics of established institutions.

[5] See, for example, C. Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, Polity Press, 2004); G. J. Mulgan, *Politics in an Antipolitical Age* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, Polity Press, 1994); C. Hay, *Why We Hate Politics* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, Polity Press, 2007).

[6] For a thorough analysis of 'depoliticization' in this sense, see Hay, *Why We Hate Politics*, esp. chs. 2–4.

[7] Cf. Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, esp. ch. 1.

Focusing on this dimension of politics will reveal many alternative futures that are not apparent if we focus only on the likely permutations of institutional politics. Politics and society can change in all kinds of unforeseen ways as a result of the activities of social movements. So problems that seem at present to be insoluble, catastrophes that appear inevitable, may be able to be resolved by political means after all. It is important to note, at the same time, that although recognizing the importance of extra-institutional politics helps to dissipate the pessimistic conviction that global crises and endemic social problems are insoluble, it does not sit happily with a naïve optimism either. Optimism in the face of the current global situation is just as unhelpful as pessimism. Optimism encourages apathy as well: not because nothing can be done but, on the contrary, because nothing *needs* to be done. Both optimism and pessimism are opposed to what can be described as an *activist* perspective on politics, which insists that solutions to global problems are neither impossible nor inevitable. Political problems always depend on the decisions, ingenuity and actions of citizens. Another future certainly *is* possible, but that future is up to us.

In order to understand the extra-institutional dimension of politics, we shall focus in this book on the activities of social movements. Social movements can be defined as enduring patterns of collective activity that take place outside and often in opposition to official political institutions.[8] As we shall see in more detail in future chapters, they take a variety of forms: they can be progressive, radical or conservative, secular or religious, short-lived or longstanding. In their progressive and radical manifestations, they challenge and seek to reform or transform existing institutions. Conservative movements seek to preserve the same institutional order, and reactionary movement may even try to reinstate an order that has already been superseded. Important examples of social movements that have played a decisive role in the formation of current political institutions are the nineteenth- and twentieth-century workers' movements and the several waves of the women's movement. Contemporary green movements respond directly to environmental crisis and have, in a number of countries, given rise to new green parties. In recent decades, social movements have contested the terms of neoliberal globalization. The important point at this stage is that social movements offer a range of possibilities for political action and social change in addition to those offered by the institutional political system.

However, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, this is not, of course, to say that institutional politics is not important or indeed essential. An emphasis on social movements should not be taken to

[8] Cf. J. Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest* (Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1991), p. xiv.

imply that our political institutions cannot be made to work better; on the contrary, that is precisely the goal of many movements. A number of political scientists concerned about the crisis of institutional politics make interesting suggestions for reform. In the face of widespread cynicism and depoliticization, Colin Hay holds out the possibility of a less cynical politics of the common good, which would refrain from attributing a 'narrowly instrumental conception of human nature' to all political actors.[9] Others have proposed more practical (and in some countries already tried) remedies such as proportional representation, citizens' juries and forums, neighbourhood assemblies, 'television town meetings' and extended civic education.[10] What remains critical in the present context, though, is the relationship between democratic institutions, however reformed, and extra-institutional political forces. Describing the relationship between institutional and extra-institutional politics in terms of 'parties' and 'causes', Crouch makes the point that:

> we cannot rest content with working for our political goals solely by doing so *through* a party. We also have to work *on* a party from outside by assisting those causes that will sustain pressure on it. Parties which are not under pressure from causes will stay rooted in the post-democratic world of corporate lobbying; causes which try to act without reference to building strong parties will find themselves dwarfed by the corporate lobbies.[11]

The relationship and tension between movements and institutions is reflected in other proposals for deepening or radicalizing democracy by, for example, extending democratic practices further into the public sphere and civil society, where social movements are most active. John Keane recognizes and welcomes the rise of 'monitory democracy', which 'is defined by the rapid growth of many different kinds of extra-parliamentary, power-scrutinizing mechanism'.[12]

An understanding of extra-institutional social movements acting alongside, with and against the official institutions of politics should, by drawing attention to the many and diverse links between individual political actors and the various levels of institutional politics, allow a more comprehensive account of politics. Individuals act politically

[9] Hay, *Why We Hate Politics*, p. 161.

[10] Cf. B. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 2003), 2nd edn, esp. ch. 10.

[11] Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, pp. 111–12.

[12] J. Keane, 'Monitory Democracy and Media-Saturated Societies', *Griffith Review*, 24, 2009, accessed at https://griffithreview.com/edition-24–participation-society/monitory-democracy-and-media-saturated-societies, and cf. J. Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (New York and London, Simon & Schuster, 2009).

not only by voting in elections, lobbying their elected representatives, joining political parties and so on. They can also be active in a variety of other ways by participating in social movements: as activists or more loosely affiliated supporters; by contributing ideas, help and resources; as members of associated organizations; and, more distantly, by altering their behaviour, attitudes and language in accordance with the movement's ideals. Social movements offer alternative and, in some ways, more immediately accessible avenues of action for individuals. As a result, it also becomes easier to conceive how our own actions and the collective actions of citizens can have significant effects. The connections between individual initiatives and any eventual outcomes may be complex and uncertain, but it is at least possible to think that we can make a difference. To have a more complete understanding of politics, both institutional and extra-institutional, is to understand all the many ways in which we can act upon the world.

The fact that ordinary citizens can make a difference is reinforced by the very unpredictability of extra-institutional politics. Prediction is notoriously difficult in all human affairs. Even when political scientists confine their attention to the institutional domain of politics, it is difficult, if not impossible, to foresee future events: whether in the form of the results of elections or the actions of leaders. This uncertainty is significantly compounded when we turn to social movements. As some of the examples already mentioned make clear, social movements often emerge unexpectedly and sometimes succeed in transforming seemingly well-entrenched regimes. The collapse of the communist states of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after 1989, the fall of Indonesia's Suharto regime in 1998 and the disintegration of a number of Arab dictatorships of North Africa and the Middle East from 2011 are striking examples. In the West, the rapid shifts in attitudes to women, homosexuality and racial minorities from the 1960s offer less dramatic but no less significant ones, demonstrating that the actions of a small group and even a single individual can have dramatic effects. The 2011 rebellion in Tunisia was sparked by the self-immolation of a market trader who had been badly treated by the authorities. The fall of communist Rumania's Ceauşescu regime began with a rowdy outburst at one of his usually staid and stage-managed public appearances.

This perspective on a future that is always open to political intervention is further reinforced by consideration of our past. An examination of earlier extra-institutional movements shows us that the world we know and the political institutions we have inherited are themselves the products of past struggles. Liberal rights and freedoms, democratic institutions and universal citizenship would not exist without the actions of radical social movements in the past. Anti-slavery, working-class and democratic activists helped to extend the rights of citizenship to all men. The first wave of feminism extended those same rights

to women. At the same time, it is important to recognize that those liberal democratic laws and institutions which, with all their imperfections, currently protect our individual rights and freedoms are always vulnerable to future threats and challenges. They are maintained only by the habits, beliefs, values and, above all, the potential actions of citizens. There can be no guarantee, for example, that our current rights and liberties will survive the challenges of global warming and 'peak oil', international terrorism, nuclear proliferation and nation-state rivalries. And the problem is not just that external forces might destroy our liberal democratic institutions: it is rather that we may be tempted to sacrifice our rights and liberties for the sake of security and survival in the face of such external threats. Extra-institutional politics, in other words, is concerned with the preservation of existing institutions as well as with their reform or transformation.

At the heart of the activist conception of politics outlined in this book is thus the recognition that 'we' have in the past made, and can in the future again make, a significant difference to the societies we live in. Who 'we' are, how we can act and what we should do are some of the questions that will be addressed in the following chapters. Some things, of course, may just be beyond our control. We cannot quickly or easily reverse two centuries' accumulation of carbon dioxide; we cannot put coal, gas and oil back into the ground. But beyond such obvious practical constraints are a number of political and potentially solvable challenges. How can we persuade other people to recognize environmental degradation, world poverty and nuclear proliferation as serious problems? How can people who may agree about what needs to be done act together effectively in order to influence the decisions of government? How can we transform our values and patterns of consumption and redirect economic activities to more sustainable goals? Such political challenges are obviously considerable. But there is no doubt that in the past actors just like us have made a difference in similarly challenging circumstances.

2 Plan of the Book

This book focuses on the activities of extra-institutional political actors and social movements. Part I provides a more detailed picture of the nature and importance of extra-institutional politics. Chapter 1 examines the differences between institutional and extra-institutional politics. After a brief look at the conventional understanding of official or institutional politics, we explore in a preliminary way the nature of social movements as extra-institutional actors and their relations to institutional politics. Chapter 2 provides a brief historical overview of the contributions of some social movements to the formation of

our current political institutions. Religious, nationalist and bourgeois movements are associated with the rise of the modern nation-state and capitalism. Working-class activism, the anti-slavery and women's movements for suffrage and moral reform played an essential role in establishing current principles of universal and equal citizenship for all.

Part II considers some of the main features of contemporary extra-institutional movements and their associated ideas, strategies and tactics. In chapter 3 we turn to the recent upsurge in western liberal democracies of what have been called new social movements, which have been highly influential for a number of reasons. In the first place, they first appeared in affluent liberal democracies, which were not thought to be in need of reform. Their surprising emergence encouraged both a revised understanding and revaluation of extra-institutional politics. Chapter 4 examines the ideas of culture and identity, oppression and liberation in the context of some contemporary movements, particularly anti-racist, women's and gay and lesbian movements. Race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality have become key bases of identity and engagement. Chapter 5 turns to the ideas, strategies and tactics associated with environmental and green movements. For the first time these movements have politicized nature, animal welfare and species diversity, contributing related and novel ideas of political action and organization. Chapter 6 considers the renewed focus on material and economic concerns in the alter-globalization movement from the 1990s, which has – in a sometimes perplexing variety of ways – advocated alternatives to corporate or neoliberal globalization. Contradicting some new social movement enthusiasts who claimed that economic issues are no longer significant, the alter-globalization movement practises what can be described as a new politics of exploitation.

Part III examines some theoretical approaches that can usefully be applied to the study of social movements. Chapter 7 examines normative and formal approaches to social movements. The upsurge of social movement activism in western societies has led to a significant normative shift, so that social movement activism is no longer seen as immoral or pathological but rather as an essential and legitimate dimension of politics. Sociologists and political scientists are now able to investigate extra-institutional activism not as an abnormal and dysfunctional outburst of collective behaviour but as a potentially rational mode of collective action. Chapter 8 considers a series of theoretical approaches that seek to explain the substantive goals and characteristics of specific movements. These theories focus less on how social movements function and more on the context in which they emerge and what they aim to achieve in contemporary society. Chapter 9, finally, brings together the overall argument of the book by presenting in outline the limits and potential role of a critical theory of social movements.

Further Reading

For a determinedly non-apocalyptic yet sobering review of looming environmental crises, see Paul K. Conkin, *The State of the Earth: Environmental Challenges on the Road to 2100.* The limitations of institutional politics and the potential role of social movements are explored by Colin Crouch in *Post-Democracy*. An alternative notion of democracy is charted in John Keane's *The Life and Death of Democracy*. More detailed suggestions for readings about particular social movements and the activist conception of politics defended in this book will be provided in subsequent chapters.

Part I

Foundations

1

Introduction: What Are Social Movements?

Outline

The current agenda of formal or institutional politics represents only part of politics. Equally essential to the political domain are issues and agents currently excluded from formal politics. As much as it is about the workings of existing institutions, politics is about the emergence of new issues, new agents and constituencies. The extra-institutional actions of these agents contribute to the reform and sometimes replacement of institutions. By the same token, a narrowly institutional conception of politics ignores potentially important issues and constituencies and obscures potentially oppressive power relations. It leaves us ill-equipped to address through political action intractable local and global problems. By contrast, an emphasis on the extra-institutional politics of social movements leaves the field of politics open to emerging issues, agents and constituencies and thus offers a perspective that encourages broader political awareness and action. In order to understand the nature of extra-institutional politics, we need to start with a clear understanding both of the nature of politics in general and of the narrower domain of institutional politics. Extra-institutional politics is, in the first place, everything political that takes place outside of institutions.

1.1 What is Politics? The Scope of Social Power

Politics is concerned with the actions of politicians and governments, elections and voting, political parties, interest groups, pressure groups and campaigns, parliaments and the making of laws. But, as the topic of this book implies, an exclusively institutional view of politics is

limited in ways that narrow our understanding of politics and restrict our capacity for political action. As we shall see throughout the rest of this chapter, if we focus too much on official or institutional forms of politics, we risk neglecting or ignoring the important contribution of social movements and extra-institutional politics. A related limitation is to confine our view of politics to problems, decisions and processes that are conventionally defined as political or what amounts to the conventional agenda and day-to-day realities of politics. Crucially, this is to ignore the fact that what is counted as political is itself a contentious issue and one routinely contested by social movements. In fact, defining something as political is in a sense the first political act. Establishing new political issues and advancing the interests of excluded social groups typically involve people acting together outside of existing institutional channels or, in other words, extra-institutionally. By the same token, a narrowly institutional view of politics leads us to see many events and developments as things that just happen to us rather than as political problems that we are potentially able to solve. So critical global problems – some of which were briefly explored in the previous chapter – are seen as insoluble. In order to be able to address and solve such problems, on the other hand, we need to adopt a much broader perspective on both the nature of politics and the possibilities of political action.

It will help us to locate this broader perspective if we start from an initially abstract view of the nature of politics and political problems. Although it is obviously only the starting point for an understanding of politics and political action, this abstract view helps us to focus on what is distinctive about political problems and to see why pessimism is not inevitable. We can identify this preliminary perspective by asking ourselves, when we look at the world and its many challenging problems, which of these problems can *in principle* be solved by human actions alone and which cannot. This preliminary definition is deliberately broad. It allows us to exclude as *non*-political only those problems that cannot under any circumstances be solved by human actions. Hurricanes and volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis and a future asteroid impact are natural events that cannot presently be controlled by human actions.[1] Even in the case of natural disasters we can do many things to mitigate the *consequences* of such events, consequences which to that extent belong to the category of political problems. Governments and aid organizations can help those affected by natural disasters to rebuild destroyed buildings, to repair water and

[1] With enough advanced warning and further development of missile technology, it might be possible to divert approaching meteors. The human ability to intervene would in that case require considerable resources, making it clearly a political issue.

electricity supplies, to mend roads and treat contagious diseases. By the same token, it is a failure of politics when governments do not respond adequately to natural disasters, as occurred with the US Federal Government's response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

From the abstract and deliberately broad perspective that we are considering, it becomes apparent that many seemingly 'insoluble' problems are in fact soluble, at least in principle, by political means. Burgeoning human population, regional poverty and growing inequality, increasing environmental degradation of the planet, rising carbon emissions threatening catastrophic climate change – all of these are problems that could be solved by human actions. For these problems, the actions required are well known and do not depend on novel technologies, although technological advances (such as new and more efficient forms of renewable energy, carbon sequestration and food production) would obviously help. In these cases, the fundamental difficulties are essentially political, because their solution depends on the actions of people and governments. A central feature of political problems is their intrinsically collective or social nature: their solution depends on eliciting decisions and co-ordinating the actions of a plurality of people. Problems that can be solved by a single individual, a private couple or a family, such as where to find work, what to eat and where to live, are accordingly not political.[2] The political challenge is to get people to agree on the necessary actions, to persuade people to act and, when people are willing to act, to co-ordinate their actions effectively. These challenges are made more difficult by the fact that different people often have diverse and conflicting interests, values and beliefs, which they are determined to pursue.

The peculiar difficulty of political problems becomes obvious, once we abandon the abstract perspective and regard them, as we are more often inclined to do, from our subjective perspective as individuals. Looking at the world and its problems from that perspective, we are immediately susceptible to feelings of pessimism and powerlessness. How can I, as a single and isolated individual, make any difference, when faced with the indifference or even opposition of so many other people? How can so many people with their diverse interests, beliefs and values ever be persuaded to think, let alone to act, in the ways I would like? Such feelings of powerlessness are likely to increase as an individual's political awareness expands. Information available from newspapers, mass media and the internet makes us aware of the range and depth of intractable local and global problems. The broader our awareness, the less easily we can imagine that our own actions might make a difference. Indeed, it would be worrying if any single

[2] Whether *all* collective and in-principle-soluble problems are in fact political is a more complicated issue that we shall address in what follows.

individual really could make a significant difference to the world on their own. After all, many people have (to others) unattractive or even repugnant views. Some people are selfish, evil or destructive, some are irrational or even insane. Dictators like Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Stalin and Hitler vie as world-historical individuals with social movement leaders such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. Crucially, even supposedly powerful individuals, whether dictators, presidents or social movement leaders, are powerful only because they are able to influence the actions of many other people by virtue of their political office, financial resources, persuasive talents or charisma. Dictators depend on their control of government officials and armies. Social movement leaders must be able to inspire others to act. In other words, leadership depends on 'followership'.[3]

Political action thus typically depends on the collective efforts of many people or what can be called *social power*. Individual problems can be solved through the actions of individuals by their own means, resources and capacities or their individual power. Political problems depend on the deployment of collective or social power: the resources, capacities and actions of many people. This obviously has a positive aspect. Human beings acting together are able to achieve things far beyond the capacities of any single individual, even the most powerful and resourceful. Many individuals acting together are able to generate social power in order to achieve collective goals for their common benefit. This is evidently a fundamental condition of the flourishing of human societies.

Collective action is, however, something that is particularly difficult to achieve, because the conflicting wills and interests of many people must be reconciled. So how do human societies actually achieve social power? As the notion of constitution implies, societies achieve social power by setting up – or constituting – institutions of government. The state's founding constitution serves, in that sense, to constitute the state as a collective agent.[4] Social power depends on some form of authoritative rule or governance, which resolves the problem of co-ordinating the views and actions of many people. In most states, social power thus results from the *power* of government *over* its subjects or citizens. Whether the system is presidential or parliamentary, monarchical or dictatorial, the government is able to control the actions of the rest of society. But, except in the most violent dictatorships, the government's ability to exert control also depends on much more than brute coercive

[3] See J. M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York and London, Harper & Row, 1978), and G. Little, *Political Ensembles: A Psychosocial Approach to Politics and Leadership* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1985).

[4] For an account of the US Constitution in these terms, see H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), ch. 4, esp. section I.