

2

Richard Bellamy

Professor of Political Science

University College London, UK

Why were you initially drawn to political philosophy?

The Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico famously dated his philosophical vocation to when he was dropped on his head as a baby. I can recall no such single moment of enlightenment. I came to political philosophy via an interest in contemporary politics informed by the history of ideas. Though I now mainly employ the idiom of Anglo-American analytical political and legal philosophy to tackle current issues, arriving at this point has been rather a long journey and my approach still bears the marks of my historical origins. So, I think it is justified in this context to tell the somewhat lengthy tale of how I was drawn to political philosophy as it is predominantly understood today.

Politics and philosophy were not taught in schools in the UK in the 1970s, and I do not remember my teachers being particularly political or philosophical. But I had some truly outstanding English and History teachers and these subjects enthused me most. That said, I was always interested in more theoretical approaches to them than we ever got in class. So, largely inspired by my eldest brother, who was reading philosophy at the University of York, I began to tentatively explore a somewhat mixed bag of thinkers. As I recall, Nietzsche and Sartre figured strongly – neither of whom I can claim to read much these days – but I also remember delving into Hume and Wittgenstein. What I do not recall reading was any political philosophy, which was – and I suspect still is – very much a poor relation in British philosophy departments. Certainly, for my brother logic and metaphysics formed the core of the discipline. Perhaps for that reason I never really considered doing philosophy myself because I was already fairly politically minded. My family was quite political and intellectually engaged,

with my father and other brother doing their bit in local politics. This familial background fed into my school work and stimulated an interest in the role ideas, particularly political ideas, played in literature and history. In different ways, George Steiner and Raymond Williams both had a big influence here and probably led me to go up to Cambridge to read English. Before the end of my first term, though, I had switched to History.

When I arrived in Cambridge I not heard of the ‘history of political thought’, let alone the ‘Cambridge School’. In fact, I cannot remember any one using the latter term during my undergraduate career. However, one of the great things about Cambridge at that time was that lectures were more open events for lecturers to intrigue and entertain students, than formal parts of the teaching programme. One really went for the show. I soon found myself attending far more lectures in philosophy and history than in English, though I did sufficiently enjoy those by the notoriously obscure poet Jeremy Prynne to go to them two years running – thereby discovering that although identical in every respect, including dramatic pauses, they also elicited identically rapt responses from the audience. Had politics existed at Cambridge, I would no doubt have sampled that too – but ‘social and political sciences’ was then just a committee rather than a department, offering a mixture of history, psychology, sociology and economics courses that could be combined to form Part 2 of a degree programme but not Part 1. I found the philosophy lectures stimulating, but I was also a bit daunted by them and it was clear moral and political philosophy had a rather lowly status at Cambridge. The historians of political thought were a different matter. Quentin Skinner – a famously effective lecturer – was then based at Princeton, so sadly I did not hear him, though in my second year I did participate in an amazing pre-exam ‘class’ he ran for some 200 students in which he coordinated a remarkably intimate and spontaneous seeming – yet in reality extraordinarily well coordinated – discussion of the set texts. But I soon became an assiduous follower of Richard Tuck, Duncan Forbes and Roy Porter—all, in their very different ways, also extremely stimulating lecturers. They showed me how it was possible to philosophise about politics while seeing ideas as firmly grounded in and engaged with a given political and intellectual context. As I’ll note in answer to question 3 below on the relation of political philosophy to political action, I regard the way this kind of historical approach takes that relationship seriously by seeing ideas as political acts

as one of its great strengths.

Having changed to history, I ended up taking every intellectual history paper then available, with Duncan Forbes and Roy Porter more or less supervising me for all of them. Both dedicated scholars of the Enlightenment, Duncan was a somewhat urbane, rational Scot, whereas Roy seemed like a figure out of Henry Fielding who drank sherry by the tankard and somewhat disconcertingly expected you to do so too. Roy supervised my undergraduate dissertation, which almost a decade later became my first publication in a refereed journal—a study of William Godwin and the Romantic Poets published as ‘William Godwin and the Development of the “New Man of Feeling”’, *History of Political Thought*, VI, (1985) pp. 411–32. As the topic indicates, my route to political philosophy was still very much entrenched in English and History. Most attention on this topic had centred on Godwin’s influence on the romantic poets. I switched focus to look at their influence on him – especially in the writings post-*Political Justice*, including his novels – a change I related to difficulties with his earlier utilitarianism. I also took Roy’s special subject on the development of Geology as a discipline in the eighteenth century. Originally, I planned to carry forward these interests and do a PhD with him on the links between the scientific and political ideas of Joseph Priestley. Had I done so, I might well have pursued a career as an intellectual historian. However, just after my finals Roy moved to the Wellcome Institute in London to embark on his series of studies into the history of medicine. As a result, I turned to my other Cambridge mentor, Duncan Forbes, as a potential doctoral supervisor.

Though best known as a path breaking scholar of the Scottish Enlightenment, a field that his teaching as much as his writings did much to create, for students of my generation his renown rested mainly on his quite remarkable series of lectures on Hegel. True to the spirit of the time, the vast bulk of these were devoted not to the set book, *The Philosophy of Right*, but to a text that was not part of the syllabus – *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. As well as the Hume to Marx history of political thought paper, Duncan also supervised me for a rather odd paper called ‘Historians and Historical Thought: From Bossuet to Burkhardt’. This paper had been devised by the seventeenth century scholar, Brian Wormald. A Catholic convert, his thesis – delivered in his rooms in Peterhouse to the six or so students brave or mad enough to have opted for this somewhat unusual course – was that things had pretty much

been downhill from Bossuet onwards, though Wormald himself was tormented by spiritual doubts arising from God's will not being as clearly discernable in the way of the world as he might have wished. Fortunately, no such angst bedevilled Forbes's reading of these texts. Rather, the paper kindled an interest in the philosophy of history and of the relationship of political thinking and acting to different understandings of its past. Vico seemed a key figure in this context and I now suggested to Duncan that I might write my PhD on him. He proposed thinking more generally about Vico and the Scottish and Neapolitan Enlightenments, a potential set of influences he had alluded to in an early article of the 1950s, and gave me a few names of famous Italian scholars I might go and visit. Like many of his generation, Duncan had not written a PhD himself and took a somewhat cavalier attitude to supervising one, and after what was our sole meeting to discuss the dissertation shook my hand and with his inimitable chuckle said 'see you in three years with your *magnum opus*'. Six months and an intensive Italian course later, I set off by train to Turin and Naples having written to the academics on Duncan's list.

Though I did eventually write articles on both the Neapolitan and Scottish Enlightenments partly based on my research at this time, and also produced an edition of Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments* for Cambridge University Press, I soon discovered that this material did not really connect with the philosophical question that most engaged me—namely how was our present thought and action shaped by a confrontation with past thought and actions. However, that issue was very much at the heart of the twentieth century Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, whose work I became acquainted with as a result of reading his studies of Vico and the Neapolitan Enlightenment. I now decided to change topic and write my dissertation on him. While, Duncan's Hegel lectures and teaching had in many ways inspired the topic, this also seemed a convenient occasion to get a slightly more proactive supervisor. Fortunately, Quentin Skinner had just returned to Cambridge to the Chair of Political Science. I had now read his methodological essays and thought there was some commonality of themes with my thesis topic, and luckily for me he agreed to take me on. Meanwhile, I had decided that it would be helpful to have an Italian base and had successfully applied to the European University Institute in Florence, which then allowed students to be registered for their degree at another university. The upshot of that experience was that I came into contact for the first time

with political scientists and so began my academic political education. As part of my work on Croce I also started to read Pareto and Mosca and I now became interested in the historical origins of current understandings of political behaviour—a topic that I was later to develop.

My eventual PhD was somewhat eccentric in many ways, being as much a study of the influence of Croce's politics on his philosophy of history as an exploration of the relationship of political thought to its past. Along the way, though, I had become thoroughly educated in the social and political philosophy as well as the politics of his times—a resource I was to draw on in what is often seen as my major book *Liberalism and Modern Society: An Historical Argument* (Polity and Penn State University Press, 1992). What I still lacked was any systematic grounding in contemporary political philosophy. That only came when I went as a post-doctoral research fellow to Nuffield College, Oxford. 'Social being determines consciousness', and in that context I soon found myself taking a crash course in Hart, Berlin, Rawls, and their heirs, attending the famous set piece discussions between Dworkin, Sen, Parfitt and later Cohen, and engaging in conversations with the extraordinarily rich seam of political and legal philosophers in Oxford at that time, which included along with these four not only David Miller, Joseph Raz, John Finnis, John Gray, Steven Lukes, Michael Freedman, Alan Ryan, Mark Philip, and Nicola Lacey but also, then as doctoral students, Leslie Green, Chandran Kukathas, Adam Swift, Andrew Williams and Keith Dowding—the last two having the room next to mine in Nuffield. I guess I inaugurated my career as a contemporary political theorist with the very first paper to the now renowned Nuffield Political Theory seminar that I started in my rooms in 1984. It was 'Sex, Sin and Liberalism', exploring the issue of pornography and freedom of speech and rehashing the Hart-Devlin debate. However, I was at that stage still more a historian of political thought than a political theorist, and in fact at the end of my Nuffield fellowship returned to Cambridge as a colleague of Richard Tuck's at Jesus College, Cambridge, where I became a college lecturer in modern European history. The shift in focus really only came when I replaced Jeremy Waldron in the Edinburgh politics department in 1987, and became responsible for teaching the contemporary political philosophy paper and participated in the highly stimulating jurisprudence reading group organised by Neil MacCormick in Law.

A final transformation, turning me towards being a theorist of

politics, in the sense of addressing the normative qualities and role of political activity and its organisation rather than more general issues of justice, was brought about when I took up the Chair in Politics at the University of East Anglia in 1992. There I had the wonderful experience of teaching the Philosophy, Politics and Economics programme alongside Martin Hollis and Bob Sugden. Martin was very much the team leader of this enterprise and had conceived the course as a dialogue between the three disciplines in which we were all supposed to defend our own turf. As a result, I was forced to think about what, if anything, was so special about political decision-making *per se*. That preoccupation led me to explore the resources of republicanism, particularly the neo-Roman version favoured by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit, and to criticise the liberal retreat from politics in my *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise* (Routledge, 1999). This concern has deepened since. Though I benefited tremendously from co-teaching with two eminent political philosophers and co-contributors to this volume, Andrew Mason and Andrew Williams, when I went to Reading in 1996, the centre of my attention turned increasingly to looking empirically as well as normatively at the virtues of actually existing democratic systems. A move to Britain's pre-eminent political science department at the University of Essex as Professor of Government further stimulated that investigation, culminating in my *Political Constitutionalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Often in collaboration with others, notably Dario Castiglione, I have also pursued this topic in numerous studies of democracy, constitutionalism and citizenship within the EU, the likely subject of my next book.

What do you consider your own most important contribution(s) to political philosophy, and why?

My most important contributions have probably been my three main books to date. Despite their apparently different topics and approaches, they are linked by the common theme of exploring the underpinnings and character of liberal democracy. My first two books, *Modern Italian Social Theory: Ideology and Politics from Pareto to the Present*, (Polity and Stanford University Press, 1987) and *Liberalism and Modern Society* were attempts to mix history and political theory. As I remarked in the preface to the first, my aim was to reach 'Oxford destinations by the Cambridge road', and the second had as its subtitle 'an historical argument'.

In other words, in each case I was using history to make a philosophical point. However, though widely reviewed in philosophy as well as politics and history journals, they have been looked on mainly as interesting works of scholarship rather than as contributions to political philosophy in their own right.

The underlying theoretical issue in *Modern Italian Social Theory* was the origins and character of the modern liberal democratic state. With the partial exception of Croce, all the Italian theorists I looked at – both the positivists and the idealists – regarded politics as epiphenomenal. It reflected either certain universal psychological dispositions of human beings, as Pareto believed, or a given social and economic stage of development, as in different ways Mosca and Gramsci thought, or was the product of a given cultural consciousness, as Gentile and, in part, Croce, argued. As a result, none of these thinkers saw any independent virtue in liberal democracy. Thus, for Pareto it was simply a method for manipulating human passions, for Gramsci a historical stage to be superseded and so on. Though they were right to stress the socio-economic and cultural preconditions of liberal democracy, they had little or no appreciation of its possessing any normative value. Indeed, they were all somewhat dismissive of politics, regarding it as a transitional phenomenon occasioned by certain psychological failings, an absence of cultural unity, the conflicts attending a disorganised system of social and economic production, or some mixture of these.

The book attempted to show how many prevailing notions about how liberal democratic states work – not least dominant views of their failings – might have somewhat uncomfortable historical origins, resting on largely unarticulated assumptions inherited from the past that would hardly stand up to scrutiny today. For example, current views about the nature and shortcomings of mass democracy rest to a remarkable degree on arguments first articulated by Pareto and Mosca that reflect the failings of the system in turn of the century Italy, on the one hand, and the bogus social psychology of the time, on the other. In the concluding chapter, I also attempted to develop an argument for democracy as justified by the shortcomings of any social theory to fully ground its claims in ways that pre-empted all disagreement. In many ways, that sketched my agenda for much of my later work.

Similar themes run through *Liberalism and Modern Society*. The debate between liberals and communitarians was raging during the period it was written (roughly from 1987-92). A prominent

version of this *quarrel* turned on whether liberal principles could be seen as ‘neutral’ or were rather components of a given account of community in which they served to foster a particular kind of human agency. My ‘historical argument’ was that an ‘ethical liberal’ tradition had existed that viewed liberalism largely in such communitarian terms. This conception of liberalism had formed the dominant strand in both Britain and France in the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, where favourable social circumstances had made liberalism appear as the underlying ethos of well-functioning, modern industrial economies. The discussion of the ‘social question’ at the turn of the century, and the attempt to give a liberal reading to socialist demands, was particularly revealing in this respect. By contrast, Italy and Germany offered far less propitious contexts for the development of liberal institutions and ideas. Here, as my earlier book on the Italians had shown, the social and cultural underpinnings of liberalism came to the fore as liberal thinkers grappled with the issue of how they might be brought into being. I defended Croce and particularly Max Weber as the most self-conscious and sophisticated proponents of what, slightly infelicitously, I called the ‘economic liberal’ tradition.

I now think a better term would have been ‘realist’ liberalism. Weber’s (and, to a degree, Croce’s) liberalism are realist in two distinct ways. First, they were concerned with liberal reality rather than simply the liberal ideal. As a result, they appreciated liberal practices had many, largely contingent, historical origins that were hard to replicate. Weber also saw that there were features of contemporary societies that were either inimical or challenges to ethical liberalism, even where it had become strongly established—not least their complexity and growing differentiation, on the one side, and the growth of corporate and bureaucratic power, on the other. Second, these thinkers had a realist, almost Machiavellian, view of democratic politics. Not only did it possess its own distinctive logic, and so needed to be separated from ethics and seen as more than a means to certain ethical ends, but also this feature meant it could play a role in mediating between competing ethics and rationalities. I have always rather regretted not writing a historical chapter on the development of liberalism in the United States which would have grounded the main analytical liberal theories in certain preoccupations of the American tradition and politics. Instead, I moved straight to a discussion of contemporary ‘neutralist’ liberalism, arguing that it was but a more abstract version of

ethical liberalism. However, *pace* contemporary communitarians, I argued the ethical liberal world had always been an idealisation and had definitely passed. Far more appropriate for today's conditions was a Weberian 'disenchanted' and realist democratic liberalism.

Critics tended to praise the history and be bemused by, pass over, or be openly hostile to the final argument—not seeing that the one was the basis for the other. As a result, I decided to take a more direct approach and argued straightforwardly for a democratic liberalism in my next book *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise*. In developing this case, I drew inspiration not just from Weber but also the neo-Roman republican theory of non domination discovered by Quentin Skinner and developed by Philip Pettit. Its focus on power, with arbitrary rule the cause of domination, served my purpose well. I found a Weberian echo in Pettit's insistence that modern societies contains multiple sources of potentially dominating sources of power that extended far beyond the organs of the state. However, I added a concern, also drawn from Weber, with pluralism and the difficulty of reconciling competing values and conceptions of good, inevitable in a diverse and differentiated society. In seeing democratic politics as a means for confronting both issues, I argued for the liberal qualities of political compromise as echoing the republican injunction 'to hear the other side'.

The book had three parts—first, a critique of contemporary liberalism's flight from politics as it sought to go 'beyond', somehow circumscribe, or simply skirt around conflict and disagreement; second, a defence of a republican inspired democratic liberalism, and the role of compromise within it; and third, an attempt to apply these insights to the analysis of certain concrete policies that revealed the weaknesses of the various liberal strategies and the strengths of my proposed alternative. I suspect few readers felt moved to engage with all three, with the last part being largely ignored because of its applied and mainly British focus. I regard that as unfortunate because part of the case against liberalism was that it rested on unfounded empirical assumptions that the case studies served to illuminate. Meanwhile, though the argument for compromise has attracted both negative and positive attention, it has usually been detached from its normative basis in a republican account of non-domination. My latest book, *Political Constitutionalism*, which is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press at the time of writing, attempts to address both

these issues by offering a republican defence of the constitutionality of actually existing democracy that criticises explicitly the normative and empirical shortcomings of legal constitutionalism of a liberal hue - this time using examples from the USA as much as the UK.

I have also applied this argument in a number of detailed studies of the EU, criticising in the process the arguments of David Held concerning Global Democracy and Habermas's views of the potential for a European constitutional patriotism. Instead, I have argued that we should see the EU as a variation on the republican model of 'mixed government'. Its key attribute lies in sharing power between different *demoi* rather than seeking to create a common *demos* or unite around common principles of social justice. Rather, the real achievement of the EU lies in its forcing a degree of mutual accommodation and 'hearing the other side' between the Member States.

What is the proper role of political philosophy in relation to real, political action? Can there ever be a fruitful relation between political philosophy and political practice?

My own work has been increasingly concerned with informing and evaluating contemporary political systems and public policies—particularly in relation to the EU. However, I suspect my view of the relations between political theory and political practice is rather different to many contemporary political philosophers. As the recent concern with relating ideal theory to the real world suggests, the commonest approach among analytical philosophers has been with devising principles that reflect certain ideal criteria. Of course, these idealisations often begin validly enough as abstractions that reflect criteria implicitly employed to justify many current practices yet that are incompletely thought through. The aim is to draw out their consequences and judge social reality by the values people claim should animate it. However, the passage from abstraction to idealisation is easy to make and involves certain fatal distortions. Particular attachments that have force in the real world get sidelined or simply assumed away, the constraints on autonomous agency afflicting most people get passed over, the limitations on practical reasoning when predicting the effects of most policies are ignored, as are the difficulties of getting agreement on what should be done and how, themselves products of imperfections in our powers of moral and political reasoning.

As a result, political philosophy can sometimes seem not so much abstract as abstracted, an irrelevance that makes unwarranted empirical assumptions as to how things are or could be.

How then does my own approach differ? I think there are three respects. First, in not taking the process of abstraction so far that it turns into idealisation. As I noted above, I think one of the key lessons of the so-called Cambridge School's historical approach lay in its seeing how political discourse operates as political action. On this account, ideas serve not simply to legitimate actions undertaken for other, self-interested reasons, but to define what interests are and the range of possibilities open for their pursuit. Much of what goes on in political philosophy is the manipulation and reworking of dominant discourses. Yet it is rarely portrayed or fully conceived in these terms. Instead, philosophers have a tendency to argue as if they were dealing in universal truths rather than battling within and against the limitations of present political thinking. Ironically, though the search for truth *sub specie aeternitatis* can be more a condemnation to an eternal present than an escape from the restrictions of current thinking. The relationship of political philosophy to its past is instructive in this respect. A prime target of the Cambridge school was the way many philosophers saw the history of ideas as a grand dialogue about certain basic questions of the human condition, in which error was slowly weeded out and progressively better insights achieved. Of course, as Croce famously put it, 'all history is contemporary history'. Today it is almost impossible not to read Plato through Rawls, say, and much other later political thought besides. In doing so, though, we are no longer reading Plato as Plato, to the degree that is possible at all. However, to attempt to do so is not, as is sometimes charged, mere antiquarianism. It forces a reflection on the present and so extends the range of current political thinking by leading us to see how different past ways of thinking and acting have been. Sometimes, as I noted above, it is to be made aware of how ideas we take for granted actually rest on theories we find strange and possibly untenable or abhorrent. In the process, we too can come to think and act differently by being brought to challenge dominant discourses. In essence, that is what Skinner achieved in bringing to light the republican view of non-domination, unearthing a whole new way of thinking about liberty and its consequences for political organisation.

Second, political philosophers rightly seek to formulate principles of justice that can guide policies in given areas—from affirma-

tive action and surrogate motherhood, to global justice and child poverty. Yet in so doing, they must guard against the temptation to suggest that politics must be designed purely to deliver their favoured principles and policies. This instrumental approach to democracy is all too common. It produces an unwarranted faith in counter-majoritarian mechanisms, notably constitutional judicial review – naturally by the ‘right’ sort of judge, guided by the ‘right’ sort of bill of rights and the ‘correct’ interpretation of them – and a naive faith in the probity and talents of experts of all kinds. For a start, such attempts to act as philosopher kings, however well motivated, are dominating. They fail to treat fellow citizens as equals in unjustified ways. Philosophers have no epistemological warrant for their rival ontological claims, nor can they or others fully predict the consequences of their proposals. Democratic processes are required to provide collective decisions with legitimacy and to ensure accountability. It allows citizens to choose on an equal basis between policy proposals and to contest them when they fail. Turning democracy simply into a means to achieve favoured ends, to be rejected or curtailed where it fails to deliver, is to misunderstand the normative role it plays in preventing arbitrary rule, overcoming disagreement and reconciling citizens to common projects.

More generally, how decisions are made is as important an issue as who gets what, where and when. Political philosophers have given too much attention to identifying what seem to them desirable frameworks or outcomes, too little to the procedures whereby decisions are made and the dispositions of those making them. If the best outcome proves disputable or hard to identify, all that can be hoped for is that those who take decisions do so as responsibly as possible – aware of their limitations – and can be encouraged to rectify their mistakes when they appear. The appropriate processes and attitudes are likely to vary according to the public role an individual plays – citizens act differently to politicians, scientists to bureaucrats or generals, and so on. And such public virtues may diverge tremendously from those suitable in the private sphere, so that private virtue can become public vice.

Third, political philosophy needs to be much more informed by social science. To a degree many are aware of the more theoretical branches of economics, but political philosophers tend to take little or no interest in political science. If many political scientists tend to be blissfully unaware of the normative and theoretical

assumptions that pervade their work, then political philosophers can be charged for ignoring the often contentious empirical assumptions that underlie theirs. However, if empirical studies of politics that eschew normative theories are blind and lack a sense of where they ought to be headed, political philosophies that are formulated in ignorance of the way political and legal institutions and policies actually work prove empirically empty and so unable to make their ideals engage with reality.

So to sum up, I think we can relate political philosophy to political action only if political philosophers are sensitive to the languages of politics and self-conscious about the ways their arguments abstract from yet engage with past and present discourses, seeking at the same time to avoid empty idealisations; approach their own proposals with due humility and see politics as having intrinsic merits of its own rather than as a mere means to implement those ends they find desirable; and engage with empirical work in the social sciences so that their theories are informed by knowledge about how social, economic and political processes work.

What do you consider the most neglected topics and/or contributions in late 20th century political philosophy, or in related philosophical disciplines (ethics, philosophy of law, metaethics etc.)?

Though there are signs of change, I think political philosophers have tended to ignore theorists and theories of politics, law and society relative to theorists and theories of justice. So the basic courses have tended to ignore Machiavelli and the political writings of Hume, say, rarely teach Durkheim and Weber, and certainly not their political writings, include Dworkin but not Hart and so on. Likewise, philosophers tend to teach courses on professional and public ethics for non-philosophers—business studies and public management students on the whole, rather than seeing these topics as part of a political philosophy programme. The result, as I said above, is a curious disengagement with actual political processes, while offering ever more grandiose schemes for improving the world that bear little or no relation to what is ever likely to happen.

What are the most important unsolved questions in political philosophy and/or related disciplines and what are the prospects for progress?

I find this question almost unintelligible. I do not think there are unsolved political questions in the sense, say, that there are unsolved mathematical ones. The history of the discipline is the asking of different questions and the proffering of different answers, with this questioning and answering shaping and being shaped by the evolution of politics and society—much of which is entirely open and unpredictable. So, it's clear that philosophers will continue to offer variations on the questions and answers that are preoccupy us at present, while moving into new areas we cannot as yet imagine. I certainly have indicated what I hope they will do—re-engage with their past, with social science, and with politics in all its dimensions. How far events force such moves is another matter. However, I suspect the growing turmoil in the Middle East is liable to do so. Here we have issues that cannot be simply seen as matters of 'social justice' and where the need to engage a different tradition of political thinking should make us more reflective about our own. How far that happens may turn out to be of more than academic or disciplinary interest.

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Allen Buchanan

James B. Duke Distinguished Professor of
Philosophy and Public Policy Studies

Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

Why I was drawn to Political Philosophy

I entered graduate school in 1971, with little or no interest in Political Philosophy, intending to study the highly technical Philosophy of Language. A combination of factors eventually led me to redirect my attention toward Moral and Political Philosophy. I had grown up in the American South during a period in which it was literally an Apartheid society, still characterized by institutionalized racism and violence toward Blacks. As I began to become more critical toward that environment, my appreciation of the importance of social and political institutions began to grow. The cultural and political turmoil of the 1960s stimulated me to begin to be deeply suspicious of the belief structure and system of values into which I had been socialized. I came to the disturbing conclusion that the basic institutions of my society – family, church, school, and government – were deeply implicated in social injustice and helped to perpetuate it by producing prejudiced, unreflective individuals. Some of the grosser injustices of my society began to become visible to me; and I was deeply disturbed that until then they had been invisible to me—and continued to be invisible to most of the people I knew.

I concluded that I had to extricate myself from this noxious environment at the earliest opportunity. I was able to do so, at the age of 18, by entering Columbia University in New York City on an academic scholarship. My undergraduate studies there from 1966 to 1970 exposed me not only to the great social and political thinkers of the Western tradition, but also gave me the opportunity to study non-Western civilizations and literatures by taking courses with professors in Columbia's renowned Oriental Studies