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## **Anthony King 1934-2017**

### **Albert Weale**

With the death of Anthony King, a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Fellow of the British Academy, Political Science has lost one of its foremost analysts of government and politics of the last six decades.

Born in Toronto in 1934, Tony, as he was called by those that knew him, was brought up in an archetypically progressive household. His father was an art teacher and artist, his mother a librarian. Among others, they counted C. B. Macpherson as a regular visitor to their home. After gaining a BA in History and Economics at Queen's University Ontario, Tony moved to Oxford in 1956 as a Rhodes Scholar, reading PPE in the same year as Brian Barry. He went on to complete an Oxford DPhil on the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century. He then taught at Magdalen College Oxford before he was recruited to the University of Essex in 1966 by Jean Blondel, the founding Professor of the Department of Government. He remained at Essex for the rest of his career, continuing to teach students into his eighties.

Tony was a brilliant writer and speaker. He was also a highly innovative political scientist. He started his research co-authoring the 1964 and 1966 election studies with David Butler, but his professional interests and achievements were remarkably wide. Just a brief sample of his work reveals the scope of his achievements and the extent of his innovativeness. His three-part article 'Ideas, Institutions and the Policies of Governments' published in 1973 in the *British Journal of Political Science*, in which he suggested that variations in public policy across countries reflected not so much differences in institutions as differences in ideas and ideology, anticipated by decades the so called 'ideational turn' in Political Science. His 1976 *Legislative Studies Quarterly* article 'Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations', the leading article in the first issue and still taken by modern day students of parliaments as a starting-point for analysis, dissected the various ways in which parliamentary groups provided a check on government, distinguishing intra-party, opposition party, cross-party or non-party modes. His 1981 article 'The Rise of the Career Politician in Britain – and Its Consequences', also published in the *British Journal of Political Science*, has been enormously influential, and formed part of a more general strand of work on the motivations and incentive structures facing politicians, well-illustrated in *Running Scared* (The Free Press, 1997), where he

explained, as the sub-title nicely has it, why America's politicians campaign too much and govern too little.

Together with his long-term close friend and colleague, Ivor Crewe, Tony published *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford University Press, 1995), the definitive work on the subject, awarded the 1995 W.J.M. Mackenzie Prize by the UK's Political Studies Association (shared appropriately enough, given their biographies, with Brian Barry's *Justice as Impartiality* published in the same year). Later Crewe and King collaborated on *The Blunders of Our Governments* (Oneworld, 2013), a book using concepts from Political Science but written deliberately to reach a wider non-professional audience. Throughout his writing, it is never hard to detect Tony's typically vigorous prose style, a style that always put vivid metaphors to good effect.

Tony's intellectual agenda thus included work on elections and referendums, political ideas and public policy, executive-legislative relations, political leadership, party systems, and constitutions. Amid this diversity, it is tempting to ask whether there were common intellectual threads in his work or whether the writing consisted of heterogeneous observations fixed by brilliance of phrase. One answer to this question is to be found in the unity of method that Tony displayed across his work, a method that combined the historian's interest in the specific individual and the political scientist's concern for the general type. This method was well-illustrated in the first chapter of *Running Scared*, where Tony surveyed the security or vulnerability in office of three individual politicians: a UK Conservative MP, a German Social Democrat parliamentarian and a Democratic Representative from Maryland. The comparison was intended to illustrate the contrasting ways in which three types of elected representatives interacted with their electorate, their parties and their legislative responsibilities in their respective countries. The concrete is made to exemplify the general.

Given his methodological approach, much of Tony's work would nowadays be characterized as case-orientated qualitative analysis. For example, discussing the power of the prime minister in *The British Constitution*, Tony went through all the prime ministers between Attlee and Blair assessing how far each of them could be judged dominant in relation to their cabinets, 'dominant' being defined by four explicit criteria. In place of bland generalizations, the reader is provided with an empirical analysis of individuals and their role-types according to an explicit scheme of classification. In 'Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations', Tony identified the set of logically possible relations between government and parliament, eliminating some on empirical grounds and showing how the remainder map onto parliamentary systems in the UK, France and Germany. The notation that he developed to present this scheme shows him defining the problem in Boolean terms in a way that was later to be formalized by Charles Ragin.

The interest in how the specific individual combines with the general type led to a second abiding theme of Tony's work, namely politicians and the ways in which they define their roles and perform their tasks. Tony was a voracious reader of political biographies and memoirs, reading put to good effect in his 2002 *British Journal of Political Science* article 'The Outsider as Political Leader: The Case of Margaret Thatcher'. There he distinguished the social outsider from the psychological outsider and from the tactical outsider, seeing Margaret Thatcher as an example of all three types, using her social and psychological outsider status to tactical advantage.

A third abiding theme, and in his later work the over-arching theme, was the importance of understanding the art of government. Tony understood mass politics – how could such an accomplished student of elections not do so – but he thought about mass politics as the context in which the art of government was practised. It was not just the rise of the career politician that mattered for Tony, it was also the consequences of that rise for the conduct of public policy. *The Blunders of Our Governments* noted the failure of UK governments to engage in the military art of 'backwards planning', which involves specifying where you intend to go to and then working backwards to identify all the necessary steps on the way to getting there. An unfinished paper at the time of his death was on ministerial turn-over in British government, which also noted the consequences of such turn-over for all too frequent alterations of public policy. In short, Tony sought to identify the conditions for what Weber called the ethic of responsibility in the conduct of government and politics.

Tony reflected all of these concerns in what might be termed his Political Science Atlanticism. Over his career he played an important role in mediating the concepts of US Political Science to students of politics in the UK as well as interpreting developments in British politics to US readers. In 1975, reviewing books he described as the 'splendidly old-fashioned art form' of political biography - including Henry Pelling on Churchill and Kenneth Morgan on Lloyd George - Tony suggested that what was missing from each was a concern for the general themes that US political scientists, including his close friend Richard Neustadt, had pursued: how leading politicians were perceived by those with whom they interacted, how they went about their work and what were their underlying psychological dynamics. In a one-man transatlantic reciprocal trade, Tony also provided for US readers up-to-date interpretations of developments in British politics. As well as individual articles and papers, he edited four series of *Britain at the Polls*, published by Chatham House, in which he gathered first-rate teams providing offering analyses of the four elections between 1992 and 2005.

His most significant interpretation of British politics was his 2007 Oxford University Press book, *The British Constitution*. The UK has a notoriously flexible constitution, but no one reading this book, with its masterful account of the transformations of constitutional and political practice since the

middle of the twentieth century, could under-estimate the significance of this flexibility. Tony set the origins of constitutional change against the background of the admiration which many US political scientists in the middle of the twentieth century held for Great Britain's system of government. This golden age was summed up in Harry Eckstein's assessment that the distinctive characteristic of British government was its inherent capacity for effective action, a capacity unique by comparison with other contemporary democratic systems. Against this background of contemporary understanding, Tony went on to describe the transformation of the British polity, largely under the pressures of relative economic decline and loss of imperial presence, in multiple dimensions: its relations with Europe, the rise of the judiciary, the demise of local government, the devolution of power to the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, the managerial transformation of the civil service, the use of referendums and partial reform of the House of Lords. Anyone who has lived through those changes will appreciate Tony's superbly detailed accounts of how they occurred. But, just as important, is the analysis that Tony offered of the consequences of these changes. He saw their cumulative but unintended effects as leading to a set of unresolved problems: the long-term financing of the devolved parliaments; the appropriate representation of Scotland and Wales at Westminster; the constitutional status of the House of Lords; the question of whether a distinction should be drawn between constitutional and non-constitutional acts of parliament; and whether there should be an agreed convention on when national referendums ought to be held.

A similar concern for analysing the art of government is to be found in Tony's two books on US politics and government, *Running Scared* and *The Founding Fathers v. the People*, the latter published by Harvard University Press in 2012. In the first book Tony identified the conditions under which US politicians practise their craft, conditions which in combination make it difficult for elected officials to focus on issues of government rather than re-election. This combination includes frequent general elections, plus primaries, plus lack of party cover, plus the need to raise large amounts in campaign funds, plus an unusually high degree of electoral exposure compared to other countries. Towards the end of the book he noted that many mainstream reforms proposed for the US political system, like term limits or popular recall and national referendums, and aimed at promoting greater democracy, would actually enhance the bias against the capacity of representatives to govern. He traced this mainstream preference back to a belief in a theory of what he called 'agency democracy' as contrasted with a theory of 'division of labour' democracy. A similar distinction of political theories forms the central theme of *The Founding Fathers v. the People*, where Tony identified 'two nostalgias' of American democracy, one harking back to the founding fathers' idea of constitutional government and the other invoking the principles of popular democracy. Notably in both works Tony cited from John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* to the effect that the task of elected politicians was to exercise judgement and determine what was in both their constituents' best interests and the nation's best interests.

Tony's Atlanticism was expressed in a different form in the many personal friendships he enjoyed with US political scientists. *The Founding Fathers v. the People* was dedicated to the memory of his first mentors in the field of American politics: Richard E. Neustadt, Nelson W. Polsby, Austin Ranney and Donald E. Stokes. However, he always enjoyed meeting and talking to US scholars, and remained excited by new ideas coming out of those conversations. To read the acknowledgements in his published work is to read a roll-call of the best and the brightest in the profession. He was a regular attendee of the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, using his visits to catch up with old friends and to make new ones, in a way that combined ferocious organization and convivial eating and drinking.

Tony was one of the most observant people I have ever known, and much of his analytical ability as a political scientist rested on his capacity as he once put it 'to approach well-known facts from new angles and, on occasion, to draw attention to facts that should be well-known but apparently are not'. There was one occasion, I vividly remember, that impressed upon me the combination of his powers of observation with his understanding of the history of transatlantic relations. In the part of Essex where we both lived, there were a number of former airfields used by the US Air Force during the Second World War. One day when we were travelling together, Tony suggested that we stop at one of the memorials to the pilots who had flown sorties from these fields. As we were looking at the memorial, Tony asked me if I had noted the ages of those who had been killed in battle. I had not. They were all in their early twenties.

Just as Tony was concerned for responsibility in politics, so he took his own professional responsibilities seriously. Together with Brian Barry, he was the joint founder of the *British Journal of Political Science* and more than once acted as an editor. Even when not an editor, he remained active in the work of the journal, as an editorial board member and referee. In his various roles, he insisted that referees were advisors, not judges. He would often give the example of what is now a highly cited paper by an eminent US political scientist, where the unanimous recommendation of the referees had been 'reject'. Tony, than an editor, thought otherwise, wrote a letter to the author explaining his reasons for not accepting the referees' recommendation and setting out some suggested changes before the paper could be published. Apparently the letter did the rounds in the author's department eliciting a mixture of amazement, amusement and admiration.

Tony was also active in journalism and broadcasting. On a number of election nights in the UK he acted as the leading expert on the TV broadcasts. For some time he wrote a regular column on opinion polls for the *Daily Telegraph*, and he frequently supplied comment pieces for other newspapers. Though he remained a Canadian by nationality, he took on some major roles in British

public service, being a member of both the Nolan (later Neill) Committee on Standards in Public Life, and on the Wakeham Commission on reform of the House of Lords.

Amid all this, Tony never neglected his teaching responsibilities. Over a number of years, he and I taught and convened a first-year course on democratic ideas and institutions. Tony's lectures were brilliant, well-crafted, amusing and wore their learning lightly. He insisted that he and I meet regularly each week with the class tutors to go over issues of teaching and marking, and he actively second marked essays before they were returned to the students. In addition, he also gathered together the most accomplished students in a special voluntary seminar that he ran for a number of years. Whenever I think of teaching quality, I think of his commitment to excellence in instruction.

The last occasion on which I saw Tony was a few days before he went into hospital for the operation, the after-effects of which were to be the cause of his death. I wanted to hear his opinion of how one should think of executive discretion in the light of democratic principles. He, more than anyone I knew, had thought seriously about executive behaviour in the modern state. When we talked, he was his usual self: intellectually curious, willing to explore new ideas and probing on conceptual and empirical detail. We parted agreeing that there must be some middle ground between a strict rules-bound form of government and a Schmittian decisionism. I like to think that had those conversations gone on, we might have been able to define what that middle ground was.

Tony and his wife, Jan, were wonderful hosts, frequently inviting people to their house in the Essex countryside for meals and entertainment. Both were fond of music, often going to concerts in London, and running a small group that would listen to CDs of the same work in different performances, and then discussing their relative merits. To hear Tony give his appreciation of an improvised cadenza in a Beethoven piano concerto or the viola playing in the slow movement of a Haydn quartet was a pleasure in itself - just as it was a pleasure to go with him on architectural tours of cities, walks in the country or wine-enhanced lunches in a restaurant he had discovered. With his death Political Science will miss a towering figure of the last six decades. His friends will miss his wit, his insight, his vigour and, above all, the warmth of his sympathetic personality. He was, quite simply, exceptional.

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