What-Matters in Politics (1)

Some Preliminary Thoughts on How to Think Globally About Politics and Political Thought

TSUTSUMIBAYASHI, Ken

1 Introduction

Most people most of the time believe that there is a real world out there—an objective world or universe containing tangible things (such as stars, planets, mountains, trees, animals, humans, atoms, particles, etc.) that does not owe its existence to human consciousness or observation. And yet, there are strains of philosophy and science (notably idealism and anti-realism) that challenge this assertion.

Most people most of the time also believe that human consciousness exists separately from the material makeup of the world and is not determined or explicable solely by the laws of physics. And yet, not only is there a long-standing tradition that goes against this assumption, but also modern science seems increasingly to be revealing the material constraints on consciousness.

Reality is often not what it seems. And in the final analysis, the existence of many things many people take for granted is not provable beyond any doubt. It may be that everything is a dream—that there is no such thing as a real world with real conscious beings. Or even if there is, humans may just be some imaginary animals in a butterfly's dream.[1)]

We shall probably never find out what the true nature of reality is (assuming that there is such a thing—a noumenal world or thing-in-itself). However, despite this

ultimate ontological as well as epistemological or cognitive uncertainty, it is nonetheless intelligible, I think, to postulate that most people most of the time have a "sense of reality" and a "sense of self." This may be as real as it gets, and despite the subjective nature of it all, it does not mean that everything around us and about us becomes completely accidental, arbitrary, and meaningless.

The sense of reality (not reality itself), as I hope to argue, is substantially affected by what I shall call "what-matters," a shared vectorial notion that relates to the human psychological inclination pointing towards things that matter subjectively from within the sense of self. This is, however, not to say that what-matters has no relation to or is unaffected by "what-is," the true nature of reality. It may or may not, but the point is that we shall never find out since we cannot have direct cognitive access to the latter. All we can perceive is what seems to be what-is.

And yet, this way of thinking does not lead us to some form of extreme relativism wherein the sense of what-is (however subjective it may be) becomes indistinguishable from the surface appearance, hereafter "what-seems." While at the cognitive level it may be that we cannot penetrate beyond the perceived reality (and in that sense there is no difference in ontological status between what-is and what-seems from the human viewpoint), it is significant that we nonetheless make this distinction (however subjective) between what-is and what-seems. This is how in many cases we make sense of the world and life within it, and the fact that we do means that it matters to us that we do.

The aim of this article is to suggest a form of political thinking that centers around the notion of what-matters. As we shall see, what-matters does not simply relate to politics. It can have significance in other realms as well, and I shall briefly discuss how it might become relevant in thinking about philosophy and ethics. But ultimately, I believe this concept will have more profound

1) "Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, fluttering about joyfully just as a butterfly would. He followed his whims exactly as he liked and knew nothing about Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he awoke and there he was, the startled Zhuang Zhou in the flesh. He did not know if Zhou had been dreaming he was a butterfly, or if a butterfly was now dreaming it was Zhou" (*Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*, trans. by Brook Ziporyn, Hackett Publishing Company, 2020, p. 21).

implications for politics and political thinking, especially in the context of today's highly interdependent and technologically advanced but also increasingly fragmented and divisive world.

I begin with a discussion of how what-matters in politics affects the nature of political reality and political thinking, and vice versa. It is hoped that this will serve as a useful starting point from which to compare, assess, and at times converge different intellectual traditions of political thinking. It is ultimately an attempt to identify some important and relatively enduring political principles that can (and under certain conditions, ought to) be shared across nations and cultures in the modern era.

In so doing, it is as well to acknowledge how political reality differs from physical reality, even though (from the standpoint of human beings) both may seem confined to the subjective realm of the sense of reality, viz., representation in the Schopenhauerian sense. To many reflective minds, political reality seems artificial (a product of human volition or convention), whereas physical reality seems natural in that it exists independently of human consciousness. People through volition are able to change the way in which politics is construed or conducted (even regime change), but people are not able to imagine away gravitational force (or so it seems). This difference has led to the relative uncertainty (or impreciseness) of political, social, and human sciences, and the relative certainty and self-confidence (if not self-importance) of natural science. Moreover, there is a long history of attempts to model the former on the latter in an effort to discover equivalent "universal" (or demonstrably certain) laws in the realm of human thought and action; to identify some distinctive features of the former while clinging on to the idea of science (Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Marx, etc.).

Modern scientific inquiries are more often than not driven by the search for certainty (to the extent possible) based on human rationality. And natural science seems to come close to delivering this certainty (at least in some areas of physics), which is sometimes expressed as a search for the true nature of reality, or simply the truth.[2)] Furthermore, because of this relatively high degree of certainty in natural science, it is often possible to suspend doubt about the existence of the physical world and simply focus on discovering the what-is, as distinct from the what-seems—thereby to believe in the objectivity of both the object of inquiry

and the discovered principles. This attitude would seem to have few practical consequences regarding how research is conducted (unless of course the objectivity of reality is itself the subject of scientific inquiry).

This is not the case in politics. Not only is it contentious to assume that there is a substantive what-is in politics, it is often the case that what-seems influences the form and content—hence the reality—of politics. As most people are aware, opinion—whether it reflects the "truth" or not—can impact politics to a significant degree. If enough people believe it at a certain crucial moment, then even a blatant lie (concerning, for example, WMD, fake news, widespread electoral fraud, etc.) has the power to change the course of political events. Given this phenomenon, perhaps it is even possible to argue that opinion forms the basis of political reality (more of which later). At least, it makes political knowledge and political thinking less reliable as a means to understanding political reality (whatever this may entail), and this unreliability is compounded by the circularity of influence between political thought and political reality, defying any semblance of objectivity on both sides. Indeed, the act of seeing politics as an objective reality will itself become a factor in transforming that reality, thereby undermining its objectivity. Moreover, how we think about politics is often influenced by how politics is or appears, and how politics is or appears is often in turn influenced by how we think about politics, thereby making politics intrinsically inseparable from some level of uncertainty and unpredictability owing to this circularity.[3] Hence, the study of politics cannot

2) This is not to say that natural scientists believe it is possible to attain absolute certainty or definitive knowledge of reality. Needless to say, the level of certainty sought, or uncertainty acknowledged, by natural scientists varies across different fields. Some might even argue that uncertainty is inherent in natural science and should be embraced as a positive driver of progress. See for example, Kostas Kampourakis and Kevin McCain, *Uncertainty: How It Makes Science Advance*, Oxford University Press, 2019. Whilst acknowledging these points, however, it seems possible to claim, in broad terms, that the degree and type of certainty sought in natural science are considerably different from those pursued in political and social science.

3) Anthony Giddens's notion of double hermeneutic captures this phenomenon. See Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, second edition, Stanford University Press, 1993.

be an exact science and political phenomena are almost invariably accompanied by unintended consequences.

If we accept the above, it becomes important to devise distinctive methods that are suitable for thinking about and acting upon politics. Indeed, many thinkers and practitioners have aimed to do exactly that in their endeavor to grasp politics as an intelligible, autonomous and to a certain degree controllable realm of human activity—often culminating in theories of legitimacy, justice, prudence, policies, institutions, and good practice relating (though not necessarily exclusively) to secular authority. Needless to say, however, success has been mixed not only due to the nature of politics itself (as mentioned above) but also because politics is susceptible to influences from other realms of human activity such as those involving economic, social, psychological, historical, cultural, aesthetic, religious, and other factors. (And of course, politics itself in turn often exerts influence on these realms.) It is not unusual for seemingly non-political views or activities, or even otherworldly beliefs, to trigger significant political consequences (e.g. religious reformism, utopianism, anarchism, naturalism, etc.). This is no less true in relation to science and the natural world. Not only does the latter constrain what is possible or even thinkable in politics, politics in turn often dictates the terms on which nature is exploited and determines the conditions as well as the limits of scientific research.

Notwithstanding the complexity and mutually affecting nature of such various realms and activities, however, it seems undeniable that they all form a part of a single whole—cosmos or the world in a big sense—in the eye (or the mind) of each human being. This is why it is not uncommon for people to have cosmological outlooks (including worldviews as well as otherworldly beliefs), and this all-encompassing perspective may itself shape the world and the self, not to mention politics and political thought. Furthermore, the more politics is embedded in a cosmological outlook, the more it becomes untenable to treat politics as an independent, autonomous realm.

However, the study of politics in the so-called Western tradition has developed (at least in the modern era) into a relatively autonomous discipline with various competing theories and analyses that focus mainly on this-worldly affairs and values—often with an eye to secular authority, even when dealing

with non-secular issues. This is achieved artificially by separating human activities into categories and trying to identify and to formulate certain styles of reasoning that are seemingly appropriate for each compartmentalized realm. As most modern scholars are aware, however, this itself is a cultural phenomenon distinctive to a certain cultural milieu. And as mentioned above, because the act of theorizing itself is a causal constituent of reality, neither the theory nor the outcome (both of which are mutually affecting) can have an objective existence with universal validity across time and space.

Notwithstanding this particularity, however, this kind of compartmentalization (or specialization) does make sense or seems intelligible when placed in a Western or Westernized context because of the impact of modernity in world history. And it makes sense not just in the West (though this construct is a tenuous one if employed to mean a monolithic entity with clearly defined contours across time and space) but also to a certain degree in the non-Western world owing, despite its diversity, to its integrated character in the global political, legal, economic, and ecological system—an outcome that was initiated by the West's political dominance in the modern era. Unsurprisingly then, the West's influence on the non-West often extends even to how politics is studied and taught in academic institutions.[4)]

However, this is no reason for simply adhering to the status quo or uncritically assuming that there are no alternatives to the existing paradigms. Indeed, the increasing awareness that today's politics both as a discipline and practice is not delivering, that it is failing on its own terms to meet some of the basic expectations of many for a decent human life on this planet (hence the recent pessimism surrounding the efficacy of democracy—despite the seemingly universal approbation of its principle or language for legitimizing authority, at least until recently[5)]), is channeling many students of politics towards seeking new or alternative ways of thinking about it. In this respect, and with an ever-deepening

4) In Japanese higher education institutions, for instance, courses on political theory or thought typically focus on Western political theory or thought, unless prefixes such as "Asian," "Japanese," or "Chinese" are attached.

5) John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy*, second edition, Princeton University Press, 2018.

sense of crisis both at the ideational and practical levels, Western political theory/thought in its existing form is becoming less authoritative.

It is no wonder then that some scholars are searching for a more globally oriented political theory/thought that is less parochial and better suited for the global as well as the local context. Comparative political theory/thought (or global political theory/thought) is one such endeavor, and while it has recently gathered currency in academia, there is as yet no commonly agreed methodology that defines the field.[6)]

This article does not pretend to offer a definitive methodology for a more global and comparative approach to politics and political thinking, but by devising a theoretical perspective based on the notion of what-matters, I hope to contribute to the ongoing debate in this relatively new but important field.

2 The Role of Opinion in Politics

As a preliminary to discussing the notion and function of what-matters, we need first to grasp some of the features that make politics a distinctive realm of human activity. To do this, I shall focus on opinion, fiction, and legitimacy, and their bearing on the political sphere. This section deals with the first: opinion and its role in politics.

6) Andrew March does, however, identify some common features, as well as various distinctive themes, within the field of comparative political theory: "What is meant, first and foremost, by 'comparative' in the present call for a particular subfield is that political theory ought to expand its curricular and research focus beyond the traditional canon, concepts, and concerns of Western political theory to include non-Western perspectives. However, accounts of the purposes, motivations, and justifications for the existence of a distinct subfield called 'comparative political theory' insist that the goal is not merely to globalize the focus of political theorists so that Islamic, Indian, Latin American, African, or East Asian political thought would now appear on the radar screen of professional journals and search committees. The justifications are often more ambitious and tend to coalesce around the following five themes: the *epistemic, global-democratic, critical-transformative, explanatory-interpretative, and the rehabilitative*" ("What Is Comparative Political Theory?," *The Review of Politics*, vol. 71, 2009, pp. 531–565 at p. 538). As for the diversity of approaches to comparative political theory/thought, see Melissa Williams (ed.), *Deparochializing Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

I begin with David Hume's insight that opinion is the source of political authority. As he remarked in his essay published more than three centuries ago entitled "Of the First Principles of Government":

> NOTHING appears more surprising to those, who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find, that, as FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular.[7)]

What is striking here is the assertion that opinion is the source of political authority in all forms of government, be they democratic or autocratic. Since this insight is the foundational premise upon which this article rests—and I shall later argue that opinion is the source of authority in all enduring communities regardless of time and space—let me first explain how and in what sense this can be said to be true.

Hume's claim may seem counter-intuitive or unreal, even grotesque, to many who are on the receiving end of political rule. What evidence is there to

7) David Hume, "Of the First Principles of Government (1741)," in *Political Essays*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 16–19 at p. 16. William Temple also made a similar claim seventy years or so before Hume. William Temple, "An Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government," in *Miscellanea*, Edw. Gellibrand, 1680, pp. 53–54: "Nor can it be in the other case, that when vast numbers of men submit their lives and fortunes absolutely to the Will of one, it should be want of heart, but must be force of custom, or opinion, the true ground and foundation of all Government, and that which subjects Power to Authority. For Power arising from Strength, is always in those that are governed, who are many: But Authority arising from opinion, is in those that Govern, who are few." Hobbes also stated the following: "For the Power of the mighty has no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people" (*Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. by Paul Seaward, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 128).

claim that “force is always on the side of the governed,” and why does it follow that government is founded solely on opinion? People may feel that neither is true, even in a democratic polity equipped with an electoral system for choosing their representatives. To be sure, in such a system, there may be intermittent occasions in which the opinion of the majority (expressed in the form of votes) decides as to whom their representatives will be: an ardent supporter of a particular candidate or a political party may feel empowered when the electoral result conforms with their voting intention. However, for most people this feeling is not likely to last for long since one is sooner or later made to resign to the reality that representatives in charge of running the polity form a distinctive group, and that they often have an interest separate from those who have voted them in.[8] This feeling of distance or alienation is all the more likely to prevail for those whose opinion—whether in the form of votes or demands or voices or cries—fails to translate into seats or policies or even simple acknowledgement.

That said, such a state of affairs is hardly inconsistent with Hume’s view, which after all is an attempt to explain “the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers.”

What then is meant by “force is always on the side of the governed”? In fact, Hume does not expound on this point in the article mentioned above. Instead, he goes on to talk about the three types of opinion: opinion of public interest, opinion of right to power, opinion of right to property. Since this typology is somewhat too restrictive in scope to suit the purposes of my argument—Hume’s argument is founded on some features of socio-economic and historical conditions specific (though not necessarily limited) to his age—I shall expand the category so that it becomes universally applicable. But first—and here too, I elaborate on Hume’s account—let us clarify in what sense it becomes plausible to claim that “force is always on the side of the governed.”

If force is a function of societal strength and wealth, then the kind of activities that allow human collectivity to survive and thrive (e.g. defense, food

8） But as I will argue later, this does not mean that election is meaningless or that it is only meaningful insofar as one ends up on the winning side.

production, industry, commerce, etc.) must be its source. And given that such activities are for the most part carried out by ordinary people, i.e. the governed, it must follow that force ultimately resides with the governed. Without the people, rulers would lack both the means to rule and the object of their rule; whereas a people with the means to subsist and defend itself must at least in theory be able to rule itself. As François Hotman, a sixteenth century Protestant who tried to justify rebellion against the French king once remarked: "For a *People* can subsist without a King, and be governed by its Nobility, or by it Self: But 'tis even impossible to conceive a Thought of a *King* without a *People*."[9] Should the people decide to unite and rebel, or simply stop obeying the rulers, rule by one or the few will simply become untenable.

Returning to Hume's point, however, what is surprising and noteworthy is that despite being the provenance of force, people are in general docile and obedient towards their rulers. And this, Hume explains, is made possible by the effect of opinion. In other words, it is not force *per se* but opinion that forms the basis of "all governments" and of "all authority of the few over the many."[10]

Now let us recall that Hume divided opinion into three types: opinion of public interest, opinion of right to power, and opinion of right to property. Opinion of public interest refers to a kind of acknowledgement or sentiment shared by the people that the government exists to their general advantage. As he states: "When this opinion prevails among the generality of the state, or among those who have the force in their hands, it gives great security to any government."[11] Opinion of right to power pertains to the feeling of attachment or deference people generally display towards a long-established government and its concomitant ruling households. Historical longevity consolidates this opinion: "Antiquity always begets the opinion of right; and whatever disadvantageous sentiments we may entertain of mankind, they are always found to be prodigal both of blood and treasure in the maintenance of public

9) François Hotman, *Franco-Gallia*, 1574 (trans. by Robert Molesworth, *Franco-Gallia: Or, an Account of the Ancient Free State of France, and Most Other Parts of Europe, Before the Loss of Their Liberties*, second edition, Longman, 1738, p. 108).

10) "Of the First Principles of Government (1741)," p. 17.

11) Ibid., p. 16.

justice."[12] As for opinion of right to property, it rests on the Harringtonian notion that the distribution of authority tends to coincide with the distribution of property, though Hume warns against overstating this factor.

All three types of opinion mentioned above may help explain why people behave as they do, despite having force on their side. However, as stated earlier, these are all to some degree context-dependent traits, reflecting the socio-economic and historical conditions of the age in which Hume lived. I therefore wish to focus on a more general feature of opinion so that it becomes possible to claim that opinion is the source of authority in all enduring communities regardless of time and space.

Simply put, opinion in its most basal form is a subjective, psychological inclination (and its expression in the form of judgment or belief or view) attributable to a conscious human individual.[13] And when a number of individuals come to share and manifest a similar psychological inclination or judgement, it becomes an opinion in the collective sense (e.g., group opinion, party opinion, general opinion, public opinion, etc.). Furthermore, when the collective opinion "among

12） Ibid., pp. 16–17.

13） This definition of opinion, which places greater weight on psychological inclination than on the resulting judgment or belief, may not correspond exactly with that of Hume, or anyone else's for that matter. But I propose this definition because it is better suited for explaining how opinion can be the source of authority in all cases. Incidentally, Hume does not provide a definition of opinion in the article mentioned above, but in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he states the following: "An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 67). As mentioned above, Hume often associates opinion with belief. He also sees opinion as related to habit and custom. For example, he maintains that: "All those opinions and notions of things, to which we have been accustom'd from our infancy, take such deep root, that 'tis impossible for us, by all the powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them; and this habit not only approaches in its influence, but even on many occasions prevails over that which arises from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effects" (Ibid., p. 80). For interesting insights into Hume's concept of opinion, see John Christian Laursen, *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients: Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*, Brill, 1992, pp. 144–192.

the generality of the state, or among those who have the force in their hands" assumes a character amenable to political rule, that is to say, when people for whatever reasons feel psychologically obliged to comply with the command of the rulers or to accept the structure of rule, authority comes into being.

What matters here first and foremost is whether or not people have this psychological inclination to obey. If they do, people will most likely obey, and the rulers will attain authority by virtue of the fact that people obey. Of course, it may also matter (especially for the rulers) to know how, why, and when people obey, since knowing this could help devise methods for sustaining or consolidating such opinion, thereby making the governing authority more durable and unassailable. Hume's three types of opinion are based on the observation of such methods and patterns of behavior, and they are in turn the products of experiences and reflections over an extended period of time in a specific locale. Opinion tends to be a product of historical contingency, arising in the first instance from inadvertent human interactions. But once a relatively orderly community comes into being, the rulers tend consciously to search for ways to control opinion and cement their authority. This will also lead to the formation of opinion among the rulers, the kind that informs them on how to sustain the overall structure of societal cohesion and rule.

To reaffirm the bare basics of how opinion relates to authority, it is well to underline the point that what is central or crucial here is the fact that people are psychologically inclined to obey whoever or whatever is in command of the community. This implies, to put it crudely, that the reason for obeying is secondary to the fact that people actually do obey. Of course, it matters for stability that obedience occurs over a long period of time (as long as possible from the rulers' perspective), and this may call for some form of reason or reasoning. However, this can take various forms. On the one hand, people may obey not because they are convinced of the reason why it is reasonable to obey, but simply because they think or feel it is beneficial or proper or normal, even natural, to obey. Alternatively, people may obey simply out of fear of the consequence of disobedience. Whichever the case may be, it is possible that people obey unthinkingly, even unconsciously, without ever entertaining the thought that a rational explanation (or any explanation, for that matter) of obedience is in order.

Custom, tradition, myth, religion, ritual, dance, punishment or prolonged oppression, for instance, can condition people into having a habit of obedience without questioning why.

On the other hand, people may think or feel that an explanation is indeed necessary for obedience. The explanation could take various forms and include everything from theocratic justification of kingship to democratic reasoning, but insofar as some form of justification is called for, it often gives rise to a theory of legitimacy. This notion of legitimacy is fundamentally important for understanding the relationship between opinion and authority in any enduring community, a theme that will be explored below.

For now, let us affirm that if the role of opinion is such as that described above, it becomes possible to maintain, as does Hume, that opinion is the source of political authority in all forms of government. Whether it be democracy or autocracy, the authority of the rulers or the system of rule cannot exist without the psychological inclination to obey on the part of the governed. Moreover, while it seems obvious that opinion plays an important role in democracy, this is no less true in an autocracy, as a simple thought experiment will demonstrate.

Imagine a situation where an autocrat becomes embroiled in a brawl with a group of rank-and-file soldiers. Who is likely to come out on top? An autocrat is obviously no match for the soldiers whose combined forces can overwhelm any individual human being, however imposing in stature. And yet, in terms of authority, there is a huge disparity between the two in favor of the former. Should the autocrat command the soldiers to risk their lives and fight in a dangerous battle, the soldiers will most likely do so. But such a command, seen from a purely physical perspective, is just vibrations in the air or ink on paper. Why then do the soldiers obey the autocrat despite having force on their side? Again, the answer is opinion, a shared psychological inclination (or its expressed belief) on the part of the soldiers to obey. Of course, if the soldiers for one reason or another refuse to obey, the autocrat will immediately lose the authority to command. But this just goes to prove the point that opinion is the source of authority and that this “first principle” (to use Hume’s terminology) applies to all forms of government.[14)]

Having acknowledged the above, let us also recognize that not all opinions

carry equal weight. Again, Hume's remark is suggestive. Immediately after proclaiming that it is "on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular," he goes on to state the following:

> The soldan [Sultan] of EGYPT, or the emperor of ROME, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination: But he must, at least, have led his *mamalukes*, or *praetorian bands*, like men, by their opinion.[15)]

A supreme ruler (Sultan or Roman emperor) will not be able to rule without the obedience of his immediate subordinates (mamalukes or praetorian bands), hence the importance of their opinion. But a supreme ruler can treat "his harmless subjects like brute beasts" and still not lose his authority. This is possible not because people's opinion does not matter—it does, since people must be inclined psychologically to obey their superiors (especially their immediate or local superiors) for a community to remain durably functional—but because a hierarchical structure of authority in an autocratic system allows opinion to be organized in such a way that an autocrat will only need the loyalty and obedience of the immediate subordinates. The rest will follow, as it were. In this system, the opinion of the few weighs far greater than the opinion of the many, at least from the standpoint of the supreme leader.

However, if the system of rule is structured differently, then the opinion of different groups will have different effects and standing. For example, in a representative democracy, where universal suffrage is assured, people by virtue of having the right to vote will inevitably exert considerable influence on politics and the selection of leaders. Given that the opinion of the people under this

14) A.V. Dicey makes a similar point by referring to "Hume's doctrine" that "the opinion of the governed is the real foundation of all government." He explains that even the authority of slave-owners over their slaves is founded on opinion. A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*, second edition, Macmillan, 1962, pp. 2–3.

15) "Of the First Principles of Government (1741)," p. 16.

system is systematically translated and channeled into the structure of authority, the leaders or aspiring leaders are hardly likely to ignore people's opinion. If anything, they will do everything in their powers to attract popular support that would translate into votes and hence authority.

Of course, it does not follow from this that the elected leaders necessarily deliver on their promises or for that matter exercise authority to benefit the people. Moreover, from the people's perspective, the opinion of each individual citizen or electorate may seem quite insignificant, and as mentioned earlier, even in rare occasions where individual voters feel empowered by the electoral success of a preferred candidate or party, this feeling is not likely to last. Further still, there are many other actors (e.g. interest groups, lobbyists, political party donors, etc.) whose opinions have far greater political clout than an isolated individual.

Thus, while the democratic form of rule may seem more egalitarian in terms of the legal standing of opinion—one person, one vote—this is not to imply that all opinions carry equal weight. Different forms of rule have different ways of translating opinion into authority, with the consequence that some opinions are more preponderant than others, and democracy is no exception to this rule. (Though, of course, it is possible and meaningful to talk of the "degrees of democracy" based on "policy representation" and "public responsiveness.")[16)]

Another noteworthy point about the relationship between opinion and authority is that in general the intensity of opinion corresponds with the strength of authority.[17)] If people's opinion is such that it vigorously endorses the powers that be, then by virtue of the fact that people willingly obey the commanding authority, the authority will be strengthened. As is sometimes the

16) Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

17) This is also true in the context of international society. For example, the robustness and effectiveness of a rules-based international order correspond to the strength of international opinion—from both state actors and the broader public—that supports it. See Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro, *The Internationalists*, Allen Lane, 2017; Ken Tsutsumibayashi and Megumi Tsutsumibayashi, *"Opinion" no seijishisoshi: Kokka wo toinaosu*, Iwanami Publishers, 2021 [in Japanese, but an English translation with the title *Past and Future of "the State that Never Dies": A History of State Theory through the Lens of Opinion* under preparation].

case with patriotic or nationalistic sentiments that induce a strong sense of loyalty and obedience, even self-sacrifice, it is plausible that a widespread and intense support of the people for the ruling authority will lead to the latter's sway. Contrariwise, opinion characterized by weak support for the authority will weaken it.

Following this logic (and elaborating on Hume's insight regarding opinion and authority), Benjamin Constant, a nineteenth-century Swiss-French liberal thinker-cum-politician, claimed that a constitutional government committed to guaranteeing the basic rights of the individuals wields greater power than an absolutist government (whether monarchical or democratic) capable of violating them.[18] This he thought was evident since the moderns, with their preference for personal liberty and peaceful commercial activities, are more likely to support the former with enthusiasm than the latter which is bound to disrupt them. Of course, Constant was overly optimistic in his characterization of the moderns and the modern society, which turned out to be quite compatible with the spirit of conquest and heavy-handed autocratic rule, but this does not invalidate the claim that the intensity of opinion and the strength of government go hand in hand. As history attests, an autocrat's rise and fall is often dependent on the intensity and duration of popular support.

Now, having briefly sketched the relationship between opinion and authority, let us next consider how this pertains to fiction, another indispensable notion to understanding the workings of politics as a distinctive realm of human activity.

3 The Role of Fiction in Politics

"Fiction" is a polysemous term. In common parlance, it signifies something invented or imagined, often bearing the connotation that it is contrary to truth

18) Benjamin Constant, *Principes de politique applicables à tous les gouvernements représentatif (texte de 1806)*, dans *Œuvres complètes, Série Œuvres V*, dir. par Kurt Kloocke, De Gruyter, 2011, pp. 647–648. For an analysis of this idea in Constant's thought, see Ken Tsutsumibayashi, *The Idea-World of Benjamin Constant*, Sobunsha, 2009 [in Japanese], esp. pp. 83–86.

or fact. It may also mean a type of literature based on imaginative composition, such as novels and plays. In legal theory, it (or rather the term "legal fiction") means something quite specific and technical.[19] My intended meaning of the word differs somewhat from all of the above, so an explanation is in order.

Etymologically, the English word "fiction" can be traced back to the Latin noun *fictionem*, which derived from the verb *fingere*, meaning "to fashion or form." The term "feign" has the same root, which perhaps explains why fiction could also denote "pure (sometimes deliberately deceptive) invention."[20]

However, it is possible to use the term "fiction" without having to subscribe to the non-veritable overtone or the deceptive undertone, thereby to imply simply that it is something fashioned or formed by human beings—a creation of human imagination that shapes the human social milieu. In this sense, it can be seen as analogous to "artefact" or "artifice"—a human-made thing; something artificial. Indeed, one can find examples of such usage of the term in the works ranging from Thomas Hobbes's *Elements of Law* to some contemporary literature on social constructionism.[21] Hobbes famously described the state as an "artificial man,"[22] as a "fictitious body."[23]

Of course, it is possible to argue that the word "fiction" places greater emphasis on the imaginative aspect—that it is first and foremost a thing of the mind—while "artefact" refers more to the *product* of human imagination or

19） See for example, Lon L. Fuller, *Legal Fictions*, Stanford University Press, 1967. For a more expansive argument, one that is primarily focused on legal fiction but goes on to deal also with fictions pertaining to literature, God, free will, and social contract theory, see Saburo Kurusu, *Law and Fiction*, Tokyo University Press, 1999 [in Japanese].

20） Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 134.

21） For a social constructionist or post-modernist view, see for example, Karin Knorr Cetina, "Primitive Classification and Postmodernity: Towards a Sociological Notion of Fiction," *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3 [1994], pp. 1–22: "What constructionist studies suggest is the pervasiveness and relevance of *fictionality* as a *routine aspect of social life*. ... If science, and modern institutions in general, do not run on facts, this is no reason for despair and resignation—it is rather cause to investigate the ways in which these institutions, if they do not run on facts, *run on fictions*" (p. 5). As will become clear in the ensuing discussion, facts and fictions can conspire to create reality.

workmanship. However, I do not wish to be overly constrained by etymology or commonly accepted usage of these terms in English, since it is possible (I believe) to express the idea of something that is humanly imagined as well as humanly created in all existing human languages. "Fiction" in this article is meant to entail both—something humanly imagined as well as humanly created—with an added connotation that it is constantly rooted in the mind (as an ideational notion, as it were) and cannot exist independently of human consciousness. In this respect, fiction could include everything from morality, custom, ideology, religion, and gender to money, society, law, nation, and the state, but not tables and chairs (even though the latter are humanly created artefacts).

Despite these qualifications, some may still find the above characterization problematic in that all the things mentioned above (including tables and chairs) are humanly perceived representations, and hence all in the mind. It might also be pointed out that even tables and chairs cannot exist meaningfully without the underlying cultural context or social recognition regarding their purpose and function. While I do not deny these points, it is nonetheless possible and

22) Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), edited by Richard Tuck, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 9: "For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man." Hobbes also employs the term "Artificial person," and "person" is defined in the following way: "A PERSON, is he, *whose words or actions are considered*, *either as his own*, *or as representing the words or actions of an other man*, *or of any other thing to whom they are attributed*, *whether Truly or by Fiction*" (Ibid., p. 111).

23) Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (1640), ed. by Ferdinand Tönnies, second edition, Frank Cass, 1969, p. 120: "For a body politic, as it is a fictitious body, so are the faculties and will thereof fictitious also." For an insightful commentary on this passage and related matters, see Robin Douglass, "The Body Politic 'Is a Fictitious Body': Hobbes on Imagination and Fiction", *Hobbes Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2014), pp. 126–147. See also David Runciman, "What kind of Person is Hobbes's State? A Reply to Skinner," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 7, 1999, pp. 1–29. Douglass places significant emphasis on the role of imagination when discussing fiction and distinguishes it from artifice. My article (which is not about Hobbes) focuses more on the human-made aspect of fiction; therefore, I intend to treat it as almost synonymous with artifice. If one is discussing Hobbes, it is important to focus also on his idea of representation; however, this is not the aim of my article.

meaningful, I think, to assert that most people most of the time distinguish (or are able to distinguish) between artificial things rooted in the mind or social constructs (to use a word more familiar to social constructionism or social science in general) and tangible or material objects (such as tables and chairs). This perceived distinction, even if both appear at the level of what-seems and even if the distinction remains a hypothesis, is enough for the purposes of this article, which aims to focus mainly on politics and political thinking rather than on the ontological status of reality. Incidentally, my preference for the use of the word "fiction" over "social construct" or "social construction"—though these can be seen as synonymous at times—rests on a similar standpoint. I feel my own discussion will gain more clarity by using the word "fiction" in relation to "opinion," "legitimacy," and ultimately "what-matters." Moreover, I do not wish to delve too deep into the debate or controversies concerning social constructionism, which could again obfuscate the intent and aim of my argument (though, as mentioned earlier, the word "fiction" is not alien to the literature on social constructionism).

Thus, to reiterate my point about what counts as fiction, things such as morality, custom, ideology, religion, gender, money, society, law, nation, the state, and many other forms of norm and institution are all included, whether or not one is conscious of their human origins.[24)]

If understood in this way, fiction is hardly contrary to fact or reality. It would be difficult, for example, to deny the realness of the state, a human-made entity that affects the lives of those living within as well as without it to the extent that it can even take human life. Arguably, fiction is what constitutes (or allows us to constitute) our social and political reality. There exist, in the words of Yaron Ezrahi, "reality-producing fictions," and "in politics, that which is collectively imagined produces real political facts."[25)]

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24) Again, this outlook is common in social constructivism, and the following collection of essays is noteworthy in this respect. Takuzo Isobe and Masataka Katagiri (eds), *Society as a Fiction*, Sekaishisosha, 1996 [in Japanese]. For a study examining the fictionality of state and money, see David Runciman, "The Concept of the State: The Sovereignty of a Fiction," in Quentin Skinner and Bo Strath (eds), *States and Citizens*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 28–38.

As for political institutions, J.S. Mill's following assertion seems uncontroversial today:

> Let us remember, then, in the first place, that political institutions (however the proposition may be at times ignored) are the work of men; owe their origin and their whole existence to human will. Men did not wake on a summer morning and find them sprung up. Neither do they resemble trees, which, once planted, 'are aye growing' while men 'are sleeping.' In every stage of their existence they are made what they are by human voluntary agency. Like all things, therefore, which are made by men, they may be either well or ill made; judgment and skill may have been exercised in their production, or the reverse of these.[26)]

There may, however, be people who object that religion can be treated in the same way. They may argue that God or gods are not a product of the human mind—on the contrary, humans are the creation of God or gods. This may or may not be true, but again, humans have no direct cognitive access to the what-is (i.e., objective reality). This article merely looks at some aspects of collectively imagined human endeavor (especially those related to politics) through the lens of human beings with all their limitations. And if the lens cannot penetrate beyond representation (what-seems), and if we choose to rely on the sense of reality perceived from within the sense of self, it would seem reasonable to separate God or gods from their representations and see religious ideas and institutions as humanly construed or constructed.[27)]

That said, however, some things are more real than others. At least, it seems and feels that way. For instance, money seems very real and so does the state. They affect our lives in the most fundamental way—some would even kill or die for them—and there seems no escaping this.

These and other fictions that we cannot get away from are what constitute

25) Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 4.

26) John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Longmans, 1919, p. 2.

our social and political reality. According to Berger and Luckmann, and here I concur with the social constructionist view, reality is "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot 'wish them away')," [28] and yet despite its veneer of objectivity, it is nonetheless a "humanly produced, constructed objectivity." To quote more extensively:

> It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity is objectivation. The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. In other words, despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it.[29]

Of course, however, not all fictions are real, and some fictions are less or more real than others. Then we must ask, what accounts for this difference? The simple answer to this question is that reality-producing fictions are the ones upheld by opinion. In other words, for a fiction to assume a semblance of objectivity, and hence become real in the above sense, it has to be collectively

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27） This kind of claim is hardly controversial today (at least among social scientists), but for Hobbes, a seventeenth-century thinker, it had to be presented in a subtle manner: "Whatsoever we imagine, is *Finite*. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of any thing we call *Infinite*. No man can have in his mind an Image of infinite magnitude; nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, or infinite force, or infinite power. When we say any thing is infinite, we signifie onely, that we are not able to conceive the ends, and bounds of the thing named; having no Conception of the thing, but of our own inability. And therefore the Name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is *Incomprehensible*, and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;) but that we may honour him" (*Leviathan*, p. 23).

28） Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, 1966, p. 13.

29） Ibid., p. 78.

imagined or believed or sought (often by a large number of people), to the extent that fiction and opinion conspire to engender "objectivated human activity."

What this moreover entails is that while fiction must be supported by opinion to become real, once it becomes a reality, it in turn could operate as a locus around which opinions coalesce. Let us recall Hume's claim (about the opinion of right to power) that a long-established government is likely to attract feelings of attachment and deference on the part of the governed. Similarly, existing institutions and social norms could influence the nature of opinion or manners. For instance, and again referring to Hume, people living under a despotic regime may assume a character less propitious to liberal arts.[30] The influence of education upon opinion is another example that seems uncontroversial. Thus, the effect goes both ways. Opinion transforms fiction into reality, while realized fiction shapes opinion.

As for the mechanism by which this mutual influence and dependency occur, one might point to the kind of role-playing mentioned by Berger and Luckmann.

> Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles. The roles, objectified linguistically, are an essential ingredient of the objectively available world of any society. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him.[31]

To give an example, universities exist and continue to exist not because they are a free-standing entity persisting independently of human thought and action, but because professors, students, and staff all play and continue to play their respective, assigned or expected roles, while people in general for their part play their role in recognizing the societal functions of universities. Likewise for all other institutions, including money and the state, they exist only insofar as

30) A point made by Hume in his controversial essay "Of National Characters," in *Political Essays*, pp. 78–92 at p. 79.

31) Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 91.

people act under the belief that they exist. Concurrently, people act as they do because of their familiarity with the institutions that have come to shape their opinion. Again, the influence goes both ways.

However, situations could arise where the realized fictions become divorced from opinion. And if enough people turn away from them, fictions would become untenable and cease to be reality-producing. It could also happen that opinion redirects itself from one fiction to another, in which case one reality would be replaced by another. In politics, this may lead to fundamental changes in the way authority is organized and exercised. Let us recall that opinion is the source of authority.

The French Revolution is one such case where the shift in opinion led to an emergence of a new reality in the form of a new regime. It is, of course, not entirely clear which came first: the change of opinion or the institutional failures of the Ancient Regime. Usually, an event of this magnitude has complex, multidirectional causes. But whatever the causal sequence or the direction of causality, it is undeniable that such a revolutionary change would not have been possible without a sea change of opinion in favor of a new political fiction.[32)]

Thus the coalescence between opinion and fiction is fundamental to the emergence and continuance of certain reality, not least of political reality. And yet, the situation is made all the more complicated by the fact that in most societies there is diversity of both opinion and fiction, often comprising elements that are mutually conflictual, if not contradictory. Neither opinion nor fiction is ever uniform or immutable. As for opinion, we have already seen that its weight and reach can vary among individuals and groups, and how various opinions are channeled and made to cohere may differ according to the

32） Though exaggerated, Napoleon too emphasized the role of opinion in guiding major historical events: “[J]'ai trouvé tous les elements de l'Empire imperial; on était las de l'anarchie, on voulait en finir. Je ne serais pas venue, qu'il est probable qu'un autre aurait fait de même. La France aurait fini par conquérir le monde! Je le répète, un homme n'est qu'un homme. Ses moyens ne sont rien si les circonstances, l'opinion ne le favorisent pas. L'opinion régit tout. Croyez-vous que ce soit Luther qui a amené la réforme? Non, c'est l'opinion qui s'élevait contre les Papes. Croyez-vous que ce soit Henri VIII qui ait rompu avec Rome? Non, c'est que l'opinion de sa nation le voulait ainsi” (Gaspard Gougard, *Sainte-Hélène, Journal inédit de 1815 à 1818*, t. 2, Flammarion, p. 78).

structure of rule.

Fiction can equally be diverse, but for a society to attain a reassuring degree of stability and continuity, there needs to be an overarching fiction that encapsulates or accommodates all the rest—or that excludes those fictions that are incompatible with it. Historically, democracy, monarchy, theocracy, and many other forms of government have served as this overarching fiction. This kind of political fiction tends to require a widely recognized authority or decision-making mechanism, the existence and efficacy of which are dependent on various opinions coming together to sustain a coherent, if mosaic, whole. Of course, as mentioned earlier, the system of rule based on such an overarching fiction can breakdown when divorced from opinion, and this can spell a sort of legitimacy crisis where people no longer think or feel that there is good reason to obey the powers that be.

That said, however, a regime change does not usually occur at the first sign of crisis. Once established, and especially when they have existed for a long time, political institutions tend to acquire some degree of robustness. Let us recall that realized fictions influence opinion and the fact that they exist means there is already some degree of opinion in their support, however residual. Furthermore, like in the example of the Roman emperor or Sultan, an autocratic rule can be sustained so long as the ruler's immediate subordinates, especially those in possession of the means of violence, remain loyal and obedient. Further still, for a regime change to occur, there needs to be an alternative political fiction around which a wide range of opinions can rally anew. Without this alternative, the situation would simply descend into chaos.

It is often stated that, today, there are no viable alternatives to democracy (at least as an idea or institutional arrangement for authorizing political power).[33] If this is true, it becomes all the more difficult to replace democracy with other political fictions. (It goes without saying that most contemporary democracies are in practice not self-governing polities with people in control of their own destiny.[34]) But

33) As John Dunn stated more than forty years ago, "we are all democrats today" (*Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future*, Cambridge University Press, p. 1).

34) See John Dunn, *Setting the People Free*.

there is always a risk of democracy becoming dysfunctional without undergoing apparent structural change. Imagine a torn and divided democratic polity incapacitated by mutually hostile opinions.

What is more, the same institution, when misused or abused, could work against the purpose for which it was originally established. For example, if the electoral competition becomes divorced from the idea or perception that the winners rule in the interest of the whole and that the losers accept and obey the authority of the winners (i.e. the notion of losers' consent), the democratic system could transform into a simple instrument of power struggle. This would most likely lead to a serious dysfunctionality of the system, and beyond a certain critical point, people might become so divided and disillusioned with the overall system as to doubt that there is a common authority to which obedience is owed. In such circumstances, what will come in its stead, no one knows for sure.

Some pertinent issues related to the crisis or breakdown of political systems (including democracy) will be addressed later. But for now, I wish to return to considering the relationship between fiction and opinion, with the aim of explaining how communities of various kinds have hitherto attempted to conjoin the two in order to maintain stable and durable rule. This leads us to consider the notion of legitimacy.

4 The Role of Legitimacy in Politics

In the political lexicon, "legitimacy" (sometimes referred to more specifically as "political legitimacy") is often understood to designate a relatively durable belief or recognition concerning the right to rule or the rightful obedience to certain forms of authority or decision-making. Needless to say, not all commentators would subscribe even to this highly generalized formulation. The term "legitimacy" is as polysemous as "opinion" or "fiction," if not more so, and it is noteworthy that even those who are favorably disposed to the above description may differ among themselves regarding the specificities as well as the scope and extent to which it can be employed and elaborated for political analysis. There are commentators who assert that the notion of legitimacy can only be applied meaningfully to modern states, or even more narrowly to modern democratic

states. There are those who challenge this assertion and claim its wider applicability. Many others propose their own definitions and frames of reference. Some focus on the procedural aspect of decision-making, while others place greater emphasis on substantive values. Whether to focus on belief or on effectiveness can also be a point of contention. There is even disagreement as to whether obligation, especially moral obligation, constitutes a feature of political legitimacy.[35)]

Despite this bewildering diversity, however, I think it is generally possible to categorize various understandings of legitimacy as belonging to one of the two following conceptual schemes: descriptive or normative.

Max Weber is arguably the most representative figure in the descriptive camp. He famously proposed a typology of legitimacy or legitimate domination based on three criteria: rational, traditional, and charismatic. As he states:

> The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on:
> 1. Rational grounds—resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority).
> 2. Traditional grounds—resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or finally,
> 3. Charismatic grounds—resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority).[36)]

35) This diversity is well captured in Fabienne Peter's article on "Political Legitimacy" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy/ See also Fabienne Peter, *Democratic Legitimacy*, Routledge, 2008; Jean-Marc Coicaud, *Legitimacy and Politics: A Contribution to the Study of Political Right and Political Responsibility*, trans. by David Ames Curtis, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

36) Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, p. 215.

Weber's typology is descriptive in that it purports to offer an explanation of why it is that people typically do obey the commanding authority, and not why people should obey it. Of course, people may very well think there is good reason to obey—and may even frame the language in terms of the justification of political authority and obligation—but it is nonetheless the case that Weber's understanding is descriptive insofar as it is a description of why (for whatever reasons) people do in fact obey. This is different from the normative claim that is primarily concerned with providing criteria for judging whether an authority (or a claim to authority) deserves obedience or respect. And more often than not, the implicit assumption underlying this position is that there is no obligation to obey an authority that lacks legitimacy.

Now, while I do not take issue with any of the above formulations, though some are more convincing than others, I do wish to capture legitimacy in a somewhat different light, placing it within the context of the preceding discussion concerning the relationship between opinion and fiction. If, as we have seen, the reality of fiction is dependent on it being sustained by opinion, then the continuance of a realized fiction must rest on the continued procurement of opinion. This is particularly true of the overarching political fiction whose prolonged existence depends on its ability to amass over an extended period of time a wide and varied opinion in its support, opinion being the source of authority. And given that any durable human community must satisfy this condition, and given that most human collectivities seek longevity, it follows (or so I wish to maintain) that legitimacy can be understood as a mode of language that tries to guide or gravitate opinion towards fiction in a sustained manner. This formulation focuses, in the first instance, on the effect or function of the language of legitimacy rather than on its content. It simply states that legitimacy, whatever may be the semantic exposition, is a language that aims to unite opinion with fiction. In this respect, all stable and enduring communities, regardless of time, location, and size, have a language of legitimacy, even though its specificities can vary according to the context and purpose of analysis. Thus understood, legitimacy is universal at one level and specific at another, and can be compatible with various kinds of formulations, descriptive as well as normative, and including those already mentioned.

As I hope eventually to show, this approach to legitimacy, combined with the notion of what-matters, will help produce a methodology for thinking globally about politics and political thought. In the meantime, however, I should like to elaborate on what I mean by the language of legitimacy.

I begin by distinguishing the language of legitimacy according to two types: (1) the language of legitimacy in a general sense, and (2) the theory of legitimacy. The latter is a sub-category of the former.

The language of legitimacy in a general sense (hereafter simply "the language of legitimacy") is meant to imply various kinds of verbal as well as non-verbal locutions or "texts" that draw opinion towards certain fictions (particularly overarching political fictions), so as psychologically to incline people to obey the command of the ruling authority. "Texts" here include everything from systematized bodies of knowledge to oral traditions, customs, rituals, habits, manners, symbols, signs, music, dance, art, and so on.[37] These texts are themselves forms of fiction (more of which later).

The theory of legitimacy is a subcategory of the language of legitimacy in that it too is a form of text with much the same aim and effect, i.e., conjoining opinion with fiction so as to induce voluntary compliance on the part of the governed. But in being a theory, it is expressed as verbal texts (written as well as spoken) with the aim of articulating what good reason there is for people to obey the commanding authority. It is noteworthy that prior to modernity, not all societies and cultures developed or employed the theory of legitimacy. Today, however, in almost all parts of the world, a particular strain of the theory of legitimacy (i.e., democracy or popular sovereignty) predominates. How this came about and what it entails for politics and political thought will be discussed later in relation to what-matters, but for now, it suffices to note the following.

The theory of legitimacy is neither inherently nor morally superior to any other forms of the language of legitimacy. And while one might get the impression that being able to explain verbally or rationally (though what counts

37) In this usage of the word "texts," I follow James Tully, "Deparochializing Political Theory and Beyond: A Dialogue Approach to Comparative Political Thought," in *Deparochializaing Political Theory*, pp. 25–59 at pp. 34–35.

as rational is itself the subject of learned debate) why the authority deserves obedience is conducive to political stability, this is true, if at all, only insofar as there already exists a widely shared opinion or political culture that demands or takes for granted such an explanation. Let us recall once again that opinion is the source of authority and what matters first and foremost for political rule and stability is the durable psychological inclination on the part of the governed to obey the commanding authority. What is most important here is the fact that people obey, not necessarily why they should. Hence the focus on the effect of the language of legitimacy, and in the absence of opinion that values a reasoned exposition as to why people should obey, the theory would remain ineffective or inoperative.

Given the above, the efficacy of a democratic theory, for example, is dependent upon there being people who find the logic and fiction of self-governance convincing or at least minimally necessary for political obedience. Similarly, the effectiveness of the theory of the divine right of kings rests on there being religious people whose opinion is inclined to accepting the logic and fiction that the king's authority derives from God, the ultimate source of authority.

Incidentally, even in societies where the theory of legitimacy plays an important role, the theory on its own cannot draw enough opinion to sustain an overarching fiction. Hence the necessity to buttress it with other forms of the language of legitimacy (particularly non-verbal texts) such as ceremonies, rituals, symbols, music and so on. Think of the pomp and circumstance of the elected-leaders' inaugurations and royal ceremonies, for instance.

In contrast to the above, it is perfectly possible for a human collectivity to subsist solely by relying on the non-theoretical language of legitimacy, one that does not explicitly spell out the reason or reasoning why one should obey. Indeed, this had been the case for the majority of communities in the premodern era, dating back to prehistoric times. Non-verbal texts can be as effective as theories in sustaining communities, and each community would have its own distinctive value system and institutions, i.e., overarching fiction comprising various conceptions of justice and morality, around which opinions coalesce. It might even be argued that the non-verbal texts are more effective than the

theory of legitimacy for prolonging voluntary compliance because whereas the latter is always open to challenges at the verbal level (a theory about what good reason there is for people to obey the commanding authority opens up a theoretical space for making opposing arguments), the non-verbal texts (especially those based on long familiarity of usage) that foster a sense or habit of obedience are less prone to challenges so long as they are considered or felt to be just or natural or venerable, even sacred. We shall later see how different societies in the past have grappled with the issue of legitimacy in different ways and how, despite all these differences, the historical trajectory towards modernity have realigned various languages of legitimacy towards one specific kind of theory of legitimacy.

Before closing this chapter, however, I would like to reaffirm and elaborate on what I take to be some distinctive features of legitimacy understood as a mode of language that tries to guide or gravitate opinion towards fiction in a sustained manner. I have focused primarily on the effect or the function of this language, since this allows me to claim that every enduring community regardless of time, location, and size has a language of legitimacy. This universality will prove apposite to comparative studies of politics and political thinking.

But what kind of language is the language of legitimacy? How does it differ from other forms of language that we employ for other purposes? What can it do? I obviously cannot provide a detailed and exhaustive response to these questions, but I will try to highlight two features that are relevant to thinking about social and political reality.

Needless to say, most things human are mediated by language. Societal existence is impossible without language or "texts" as defined above. Some would even argue that thought is impossible without language. And no doubt, opinion and fiction are dependent on language.

Opinion, as defined in this article, is a subjective, psychological inclination (and its expression in the form of judgment or belief or view) attributable to individuals and groups of people. Fiction implies a humanly imagined and created ideational notion, the reality of which is dependent on there being opinion to support it, and could include everything from morality, custom, ideology, religion, and gender to money, society, law, nation, and the state. In

this respect, the language of legitimacy is itself a fiction, and opinion too is inseparably linked to it.

Opinion and fiction are, however, not one and the same thing. Whereas opinion constantly emanates from the individual mind (even when collectively expressed), fiction is first and foremost a product of collective imagination—an artefact of a kind. And the point of distinguishing as well as relating the two, if we remember, is to show that fiction is dependent on opinion for attaining the status of reality. This is especially true for an overarching political fiction since opinion is the source of authority.

And yet, the two can appear almost indistinguishable at times. For example, what is the difference between a belief in justice (=opinion) and the notion of justice itself (=fiction)? From the individual's point of view, they may seem identical. Opinion tends to be an opinion about something, and when that something is a fiction, the two can merge almost seamlessly.

However, when dealing with politics, and especially when opinion and fiction are discussed in the context of collective human endeavor, it becomes meaningful to distinguish the two. Given that opinion of the people is the source of authority and since its support is what makes fiction real, the effect of opinion is invariably bottom-up. Even a theocracy based on the descending thesis (i.e. a top-down theory of legitimacy) is dependent on this opinion from below.[38)]

Political fiction, on the other hand, could comprise a logic that is either bottom-up or top-down. For example, the logic of democracy is bottom-up, while the logic of the divine right of kings is top-down. And by focusing on the relationship between opinion and fiction, and by seeing how their mutual influence change over the course of time, we can come to understand how the reality, and hence legitimacy, of a particular political fiction is strengthened or weakened. As we have seen, when fiction is divorced from opinion, fiction loses its reality, and in the most extreme instance, such as in a revolution, we are able to discern the process of one fiction being replaced by another. This inevitably

38） For descending and ascending theses, see Walter Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, second edition, Methuen, 1966.

involves the process of de-legitimization of an existing fiction and legitimization of an alternative fiction.

Given the above, it is worth clarifying what it is about the language of legitimacy that makes it distinctive and how it relates to social and political reality. Of course, it is impossible to deal comprehensively with this expansive topic in a short article such as the present one, and what is more, it is beyond my competence to do so. I will, however, make a brief attempt to shed light on one aspect.

Philosophers, linguists, mathematicians, and many others from various disciplines have grappled with the issue of language and how it relates to the world or reality. Guy Deutscher, a linguist, for example, provides an interesting account of how language can affect our perception of the world. I am not in a position to be able to judge whether and to what extent his position on linguistic relativity is valid, but I mention this because his criticism of George Orwell, which I find problematic, could help us understand one important feature or effect of the language of legitimacy in relation to social and political reality.

Deutscher argues against a certain type of linguistic relativity, i.e., linguistic determinism, and in that process, he criticizes Orwell in the following way:

> Of course, no list of such blunders could be complete without George Orwell's novel *1984*, where the political rulers have such faith in the power of language that they assume political dissent could be entirely eliminated if only all offending words could be expunged from the vocabulary. "In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it." But why stop there? Why not abolish the word "greed" as a quick fix for the world's economy, or do away with the word "pain" to save billions on paracetamol, or confine the word "death" to the dustbin as an instant formula for universal immortality?[39)]

Given how the protagonist in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* suffered excruciating

39) Guy Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, Arrow Books, 2011, p. 148.

pain through sustained torture, it would seem reasonable to suppose that Orwell would not have thought that the way to alleviate it was by getting rid of the word “pain.” Nor is it likely that Orwell, a socialist, would have agreed with the idea that getting rid of the word “greed” would fix the world economy. As for attaining immortality by abolishing the word “death,” instead of guessing how Orwell might have responded, I should like to explain how this might make sense if seen as part of the language of legitimacy.

In so doing, let us first look at some passages from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, so that we can see how Orwell too was addressing the issue of legitimacy.

> “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.”[40)]

> “Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like ‘freedom is slavery’ when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.”[41)]

Orwell may have exaggerated the extent to which thought could be controlled by the manipulation of language. It is one thing to abolish the word but quite another to abolish the concept that corresponds to it.[42)] But the pertinent point here is that a totalitarian regime that aims at the total domination of its citizens is always wary of words and expressions that can

40） George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with a critical introduction and annotations by Bernard Crick, Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 201.

41） Ibid., p. 202.

42） As for the difference between word and concept, see Quentin Skinner, “Language and political change,” in Terence Ball, James Farr, Russell Hanson (eds), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 6–23.

legitimize or problematize issues that can shake its foundation. Certain words and expressions are considered problematic because they are capable of transforming into a locus around which opinions coalesce, thereby affecting the shape of political reality. And since "freedom" is one such word, Ingsoc (i.e. the Orwellian totalitarian regime) is bent on abolishing it. In this respect, Orwell's examples are more about de-legitimizing words.[43)]

Seen from this perspective, and referring to Deutscher's example, the abolishment or prohibition of the use of the word "greed" will unlikely dissipate the desire itself—Orwell was mainly concerned with the effect of language on thought[44)]—but it could prove devastating for a coordinated movement that seeks to problematize and address the issue of poverty and inequality.

As for the word "death," nobody in their right mind (not least Orwell) would seriously believe that its expulsion would prevent physical death. And yet, when incorporated into the language of legitimacy, it could have surprising outcomes. If people share a belief or opinion that physical death does not signify real death because the soul is immortal (thereby refuting the notion that there can be death in the real sense), and if people value the afterlife more than the earthly life, then it is perfectly possible for them to have a sense of reality (which from the subjective point of view is as real as it can be) wherein death (not only the word but also the demise of the physical body) gives way to immortality.

Again, it is beyond human ability to know what the true nature of reality is.

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43) Apart from "freedom" or "liberty," there are numerous words familiar to us today that can be used to legitimize certain social and political actions. E.g. "peace," "solidarity," "independence," "autonomy," "liberation," "democracy," "sexual harassment," "MeToo," "LGBTQ," "BLM," "genocide," etc.

44) In the Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell states the following: "The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words" (p. 417).

We are confined to our sense of reality and there is no way to go beyond it; and yet we are the authors of our social and political reality, and how we think and act will affect how that reality is. Thus, regardless of whether or not it is true that the soul is immortal, the shape of social and political reality (and I should add moral reality) will be affected by whether or not people believe it to be so. Opinion, fiction, and the language of legitimacy are the fundamental building blocks of our social and political world.