



The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics

Author(s): Timothy Mitchell

Source: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Mar., 1991), pp. 77-96

Published by: [American Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1962879>

Accessed: 13/08/2013 06:01

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Political Science Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Political Science Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE LIMITS OF THE STATE: BEYOND STATIST APPROACHES AND THEIR CRITICS

TIMOTHY MITCHELL
New York University

The state has always been difficult to define. Its boundary with society appears elusive, porous, and mobile. I argue that this elusiveness should not be overcome by sharper definitions, but explored as a clue to the state's nature. Analysis of the literature shows that neither rejecting the state in favor of such concepts as the political system, nor "bringing it back in," has dealt with this boundary problem. The former approach founders on it, the latter avoids it by a narrow idealism that construes the state-society distinction as an external relation between subjective and objective entities. A third approach, presented here, can account for both the salience of the state and its elusiveness. Reanalyzing evidence presented by recent theorists, state-society boundaries are shown to be distinctions erected internally, as an aspect of more complex power relations. Their appearance can be historically traced to technical innovations of the modern social order, whereby methods of organization and control internal to the social processes they govern create the effect of a state structure external to those processes.

Despite the recent proliferation of literature on the subject, it remains difficult to explain exactly what is meant by the concept of the state. There is no shortage of competing definitions. But a definition of the state always depends on distinguishing it from society, and the line between the two is difficult to draw in practice. The modern state, Philippe Schmitter (1985, 33) points out, seems to be "an amorphous complex of agencies with ill-defined boundaries, performing a great variety of not very distinctive functions."

In the postwar period, American political science has offered two alternative responses to this difficulty in drawing the boundaries of the state. The first was to abandon the state as a concept too vague and too narrow to be the basis of a general science of politics, replacing it most frequently with the concept of political

system. But the change in vocabulary failed to solve the problem. The boundaries of the political system, where its edges meet those of the social or other systems, proved, if anything, even more elusive than the boundary of the state. In addition, the state itself refused to disappear. It seemed to retain what Nettl (1968, 565-66) called a "conceptual existence" as a "sociocultural phenomenon" whose salience could not be ignored.

The second response, since the late 1970s, has been to "bring the state back in" (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). The new work on the state has defined the term in a variety of ways, most of which take it to be not just distinguishable from society, but partially or wholly autonomous from it. Rather than addressing the difficulty of drawing the elusive line between the two, however, the literature has largely evaded the prob-

AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW
VOLUME 85 NO. 1 MARCH 1991

lem. It has done so by reducing the state to a subjective system of decision making, a conception that is both exceedingly narrow and, it can be shown, essentially idealist. This conception, moreover, fails to fit even the evidence presented by statist authors.

I present a third possible approach beginning with the assumption that the elusiveness of the state-society boundary needs to be taken seriously, not as a problem of conceptual precision but as a clue to the nature of the phenomenon. Rather than searching for a definition that will fix the boundary, we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced.

The distinction must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities, but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained. The ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were the external boundary between separate objects is the distinctive technique of the modern political order. The technique must be examined from a historical perspective (something prevailing approaches fail to do), as the consequence of certain novel practices of the modern age. This approach can account for the salience of the state phenomenon, but avoids attributing to it the coherence, unity, and absolute autonomy that result from existing theoretical approaches. I will conclude by offering five propositions on the study of the state.

Why the State Was Abandoned: Seeking a "Total Science"

There has been sharp disagreement between advocates of the two successive approaches to the problem of the state about the nature of the difference between them. Those advocating a return to the concept

of the state distinguish their work from the political systems approach by characterizing the latter as society centered (Skocpol 1985, 4). Responding to such characterizations, Gabriel Almond (1988) argues that the earlier work did not locate explanations solely in society but examined a complex interaction between society and governmental institutions, and therefore the new writings on the state at best offer nothing conceptually new. At worst, Almond warns, with their unfounded talk of "paradigmatic shifts" they have encouraged "a generation of graduate students to reject their professional history" (853). They now "threaten us with a return," in the words of David Easton (1981, 322), ". . . to a conceptual morass from which we thought we had but recently escaped."

For the advocates of the statist approach the dispute concerns where to center political explanation, in the action of the state or in society; for their opponents it concerns the feasibility and usefulness of this distinction. As we will see, their opponents are correct in pointing to the difficulty state theorists encounter in defining the state-society boundary. Yet it can be shown that the same boundary problem is present, in a different way, in their own approach. In fact for systems theorists the boundary itself expanded without limit to fill the entire space of society. To see how this occurred we will have to look more closely at the systems theorists' own now-neglected professional history and recall why the language of state versus society was first abandoned.

When Easton, Almond, and other scholars eliminated the term "state" from their political vocabulary in the 1950s, it was not on the grounds that the focus of political analysis should be moved from state to society but that the word itself suffered from two related weaknesses: its meaning was vague, producing disagreement about exactly what it referred to;

and even if agreement might be reached, the term excluded important aspects of the political process (Easton 1953, 106–15). Almond recently reiterated this view. “The tendency to abandon the state concept and replace it by other concepts,” he argues, “was attributable to the enormous political mobilization that took place in the Western world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” and to the proliferation of parastatal and extrastatal political institutions such as parties, interest groups, and mass media, located on the uncertain boundary between society and state and thus not clearly covered by the latter term (Almond 1988, 855).

Yet these factors alone do not account for the demise of the state concept, or explain why boundaries were to expand without limit. The transformations in the state had occurred well before the 1950s, as Almond himself once admitted (1960, 3), and the corresponding weaknesses of the concept had long been recognized (Sabine 1934). It can be argued that the reasons for abandoning the concept lay not in changes in states themselves but in the changed postwar relationship between American political science and American political power. This can be identified from rereading what was written at the time, particularly in documents describing the mission of the discipline. Postwar comparative politics, according to Loewenstein, would have to relinquish its narrow concern with the study of the state in order to become “a conscious instrument of social engineering” (1944, 541). This instrument would be used for “imparting our experience to other nations and . . . integrating scientifically their institutions into a universal pattern of government” (p. 547). To achieve these ends, the discipline had to expand its geographical and theoretical territory and become what Loewenstein’s report called a *total science*. “We can no longer permit the existence of white spots on our map of the world,” the report said, employing

metaphors reflecting the imperial climate of postwar American politics. “The frontier posts of comparative government must be moved boldly,” both to encompass the globe and, by expanding into the territory of other disciplines (anthropology, psychology, economics, and statistics), to open up each country to far more detailed methods of observation and questioning and thereby “gain access to the true *Gestalt* of foreign political civilizations” (p. 541–43).

The opening up of this new territory to scientific investigation seemed even more urgent by the 1950s, when postwar American optimism had turned into political uncertainty. It was what Easton (1953, 3) gravely called “our present social crisis”—the global unfolding of the cold war and the accompanying domestic struggle against subversion—that made suddenly imperative the elimination of ambiguity from political vocabulary and the construction of general social scientific laws broad enough to include all significant political phenomena and “pass beyond the experience . . . of any one culture” (p. 319).

The “Research Strategy” for Western Europe proposed in 1955 by the new Comparative Politics Committee of the SSRC, chaired by Gabriel Almond, criticized once again the “too great an emphasis on the formal aspects of institutions and processes,” but now spoke of the need for a change in terms of “urgent and practical considerations.” In the major Western European countries, the committee reported, “Large bodies of opinion appear to be alienated from the West, politically apathetic, or actively recruited to Communism.” The state was too narrow a focus for research, because “the basic problems of civic loyalty and political cohesion lie in large part outside of the formal government framework.” Research was needed that would trace the degree of political cohesion and loyalty to the West beyond this formal framework,

"into the networks of social groupings, and the attitudes of the general population." Such close examination could confirm the committee's expectation that, in cases such as France, "there is at least the possibility of breaking the hold of the Communist party on a large part of its following" (Almond, Cole, and Macridis, 1955, 1045).

In response to the political crisis the discipline also expanded its geographical territory. The foreword to Gabriel Almond's *Appeals of Communism* (1954) noted that Communism had now begun to spread to non-Western areas, and warned that this was "so menacing a development that it is deserving of special attention" (Almond 1954, vii). The attention was provided by a number of individual studies, such as Lucian Pye's (1956) analysis of the communist threat in Southeast Asia, and by Almond and Coleman's *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (1960), in which the proposed extension of political science to include in it what were called "the 'uncouth' and exotic systems outside Western Europe" was attributed to these "practical policy motives" (p. 10). The same global concerns were the stimulus to the research undertaken in the late 1950s and subsequently published as *The Civic Culture*. The book's introduction addressed itself to the pressing need to export to the colonized areas of the world, now seeking independence, the principles of the Anglo-American political process. To this end it sought to "codify" not just the formal institutional rules of the state but the "subtler components" that formed its "social psychological preconditions"—that combination of democratic spirit and proper deference toward authority that was celebrated as "the civic culture" (Almond and Verba 1963, 5).

The scientific tone of this literature promised to overcome the ambiguity of the state and its boundaries. Far from solving the problem, however, its totaliz-

ing ambition presented the possibility of a science whose object, the political system, had no discernible limits. The ever-expanding empirical and theoretical knowledge that would have to be mastered by the future scientist of comparative politics, Almond warned in 1960, "stagger[s] the imagination and lames the will." Despite the tendency "to blink and withdraw in pain," he wrote, there could be no hesitation in the effort to accumulate the knowledge that will "enable us to take our place in the order of the sciences with the dignity which is reserved for those who follow a calling without limit or condition" (1960, 64).

Advocates of the shift from the formal study of the state to the meticulous examination of political systems realized that they were embarking on a scientific enterprise without limit. They assumed, however, that the very notion of system would somehow solve the question of boundaries. "Once we begin to speak of political life as a system of activity," wrote Easton, "certain consequences follow . . . The very idea of a system suggests that we can separate political life from the rest of social activity, at least for analytical purposes, and examine it as though for the moment it were a self-contained entity surrounded by, but clearly distinguishable from, the environment or setting in which it operates" (1957, 384). Easton's language here already indicates the problems. Like the statist approach, systems theory depends on the political being clearly distinguishable from its social environment. Rather than an actual distinction, however, we are told that it is only as though the distinction exists, for the moment, and merely as a *consequence* of speaking of politics as a system. The basic tenet of systems theory, that the political realm is discrete and thus identifiable as a system, reflects a temporary phenomenon arising only from "the very idea of a system."

The boundary question created even

more difficulties for Almond. The concept of political system, he said, was intended to "separate out analytically the structures that perform political functions in all societies," and therefore implied the "existence of boundaries"—the points "where other systems end and the political system begins." The boundary required a "sharp definition," otherwise "we will find ourselves including in the political system churches, economies, schools, kinship and lineage groups, age sets, and the like" (1960, 5, 7–8). Yet this is precisely what happened. The edge of the system turned out to consist not of a sharp line but of numerous, shifting associations that "man the boundaries of the political system" (p. 9). These "interest articulation" structures, as Almond called them, were virtually limitless, for they were said to include every conceivable form of collective expression of demand, from "institutional" groups such as legislatures, churches and armies, to "associated" groups such as labor or business organizations, "nonassociated" groups such as kinship or ethnic communities, and "anomic" groups such as riots and demonstrations (p. 33).

Far from solving the problem of the uncertain boundary between state and society by substituting the enlarged but sharply defined edges of a self-contained system, the systems approach unfolded the very space of the boundary into a limitless and undetermined terrain.

The Return of the State

Even if the boundaries of the political system proved as elusive as those of the state, the latter concept suffered from one more weakness in the opinion of systems theorists. The state seemed to Easton (1953, 111–12) "less an analytic tool than a symbol for unity, . . . a myth." It represented something "transcendental" that "symbolizes the inescapable unity of one

people on one soil." The imprecision that made the term unsuitable as an analytic tool was the source of its political strength as a mythic or ideological construct.

Yet for this very reason, despite its unsuitability for constructing a universal science of politics, the concept of the state refused to disappear. By 1968, Nettl was remarking that although the concept was out of fashion in the social sciences, "it retains a skeletal, ghostly existence," which "no amount of conceptual restructuring can dissolve" (1968, 559). The state, Nettl wrote, is "essentially a sociocultural phenomenon," which occurs due to the "cultural disposition" among a people to recognize the state's "conceptual existence" (pp. 565–66). Notions of the state "become incorporated in the thinking and actions of individual citizens" (p. 577), he argued, and the extent of this conceptual variable could be shown to correspond to empirical differences between societies, such as differences in legal structure or party system (pp. 579–92).

The importance of the state as a common ideological and cultural construct, I argue, should be grounds not for dismissing the phenomenon in favor of some supposedly more neutral and accurate concept (such as political system), but for taking it seriously. Politics, after all, is a process built out of such shared constructs. Yet Nettl's presentation of this construct as a subjective disposition that can be correlated with more objective, empirical phenomena is misleading. A construct like the state occurs not merely as a subjective belief, incorporated in the thinking and action of individuals. It is represented and reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers. The cultural forms of the state *are* an empirical phenomenon, as solid and discernible as a legal structure or a party system. Or rather, I argue, the

distinction made between a conceptual realm and an empirical one needs to be placed in question if we are to understand the nature of a phenomenon like the state.

Unfortunately, such questions have not been posed. In fact the conceptual-empirical distinction has become the unexamined basis of a new literature. A decade after the publication of Nettl's article, the state began to reemerge as a central analytic concern of American political science. "The lines between state and society have become blurred," warned Stephen Krasner, whose book, *Defending the National Interest* (1978, xi), was one of the important early contributions to this reemergence. "The basic analytic assumption" of the new approach it advocated, "is that there is a distinction between state and society" (p. 5). The statist approach has presented this fundamental but problematic distinction, as in Nettl's article, in terms of an underlying distinction between a conceptual realm (the state) and an empirical realm (society). Such an approach appears to overcome the problem the systems theorists complained about and reencountered, of how to discern the boundary between state and society: it will be assimilated to the apparently obvious distinction between conceptual and empirical, between a subjective order and an objective order. As we will see, however, this depends on both an enormous narrowing of the phenomenon of the state and an uncritical acceptance of this distinction.

Statist approaches to political explanation present the state as an autonomous entity whose actions are not reducible to or determined by forces in society. To present the state in this way requires not so much a shift in focus, from society back to the state, but some way of establishing a clear boundary between the two. How are the porous edges where official practice mixes with the semiofficial and the semiofficial with the unofficial to be turned into lines of separation, so that the

state can stand apart as a discrete, self-directing object? The customary Weberian definition of the state, as an organization that claims a monopoly within a fixed territory over the legitimate use of violence, is only a residual characterization. It does not tell us how the actual contours of this amorphous organization are to be drawn.

The new advocates of the statist approach have not filled in the organizational contours. They have retreated to narrower definitions, which typically grasp the state as a system of decision making. The narrower focus locates the essence of the state not in the monopolistic organization of coercion, nor, for example, in the structures of a legal and ideological order, nor in the mechanisms by which social interests find political representation, nor in the arrangements that maintain a given relationship between the producers of capital and its owners, but in the formation and expression of authoritative *intentions*. Construed as a machinery of intentions—usually termed "rule making," "decision making," or "policy making"—the state becomes essentially a subjective realm of plans, programs, or ideas. This subjective construction maps the problematic state-society distinction on to the seemingly more obvious distinctions we make between the subjective and the objective, or even that between meaning and reality. The state appears to stand apart from society in the unproblematic way in which intentions or ideas are thought to stand apart from the external world to which they refer.

Beginning at the Subjective Level

The logic of the statist approach can be illustrated from the writings of almost any of its major advocates. I use three examples as evidence: the work of Eric Nordlinger, Stephen Krasner, and Theda Skocpol. I begin with Nordlinger and

Krasner, and afterward consider Skocpol's somewhat different approach.

The core of the statist perspective, according to Nordlinger (1988, 881), is to begin with "public officials forming their own policy preferences." Starting with these individual mental acts, the first question asked should be: "Is the state—that is, public officials writ large—acting on its own policy preferences, translating them into public policy. . . ?" (Nordlinger 1987, 353). The "emphasis on individuals" (p. 362) rather than institutionalized structures in the study of the state is defended on the grounds that institutions themselves do not have preferences or act on them, but merely influence the way individual officials do so; moreover, 'since the extent of this influence in different states varies, we are told it cannot be included in a definition of the state (1981, 9; 1987, 362–63). Even if one accepts these points, they all depend on the initial decision to take preferences as the core of the state.

Nordlinger's decision to "begin at the subjective level" is not explained on theoretical grounds. We are simply told that an "analysis of state autonomy may profitably begin" there (1987, 371). Yet it is the choice of this starting point that creates the effect of an autonomous state. The starting point determines the nature of the state as an originally subjective entity composed of individual preferences, thoughts, decisions, and other ideational phenomena—a person writ large. In our ordinary understanding of personhood, it is the possession of ideas and preferences that makes the human individual appear to be a self-formed and separate unit. Such subjectivity is the basis of the fundamental separation we experience between the person and the social world. In the modern political thought of the Enlightenment, this separation constitutes personhood as a condition of freedom or autonomy, opposed to and originally undetermined by external social forces. Nordlin-

ger's subjective starting point automatically attributes this same originality, separateness and autonomy to the state.

The dependence of this kind of state autonomy on the subjectivist starting point is confirmed by the way it collapses as soon as one moves away from that point. Nordlinger postpones the collapse by insisting that societal factors first be represented as far as possible as subjective variables in the minds of state officials. Thus state autonomy is said to be affected by such factors as "the degree to which public officials are susceptible to expressions of societal interests" and the "importance that they attribute to active societal support" (1987, 372). With this sort of phrasing, social pressures that partly determine state action are transformed into autonomous features of the state, by substituting for the pressures themselves their perception in the minds of state officials. The substitution is justified with the argument that "societal explanations . . . should not be introduced until it is evident that statist ones are insufficient" (1987, 360), however compelling the societal factors may be—an indication of the threat they pose to the evidence for autonomy.

Nordlinger acknowledges that this sort of explanation does not amount to a very deep account of state autonomy. He turns next to various "structural features of the state"—features he had originally rejected as aspects of the state's definition—that may impinge upon how officials make decisions (1987, 372). These are categorized as the malleability, insulation, resilience, and vulnerability of state organizations. Even at this level the argument is phrased not in terms of how the strengths and weaknesses of an organization depend on its relations with wider social forces but in terms of its subjective perceptions. A vulnerable state, for example, is one that "dissuades itself" from acting on its preferences because it fears they "will probably not be realized," usually

because the means of implementation are "seen as" unwieldy or "tainted with a poor track record" (p. 383).

Finally Nordlinger admits the need to go deeper still and ask how the structural features of the state are determined, by looking at society-centered explanations. At this point, he says, "the entire question of statism's distinctiveness will have been left behind." The statist perspective is abandoned as no more than a "beachhead from which to reconnoiter and then move into the societal interior" (pp. 385-87) although we still have no way of knowing where the beachhead of the state ends and the societal interior begins.

Nordlinger's statist approach does not, it turns out, locate explanations in the state rather than society. Still less does it establish a clear boundary between the two. It simply begins with the intentions of the state, thereby attributing to it an apparent separateness and autonomy that subsequently go unquestioned. Although this starting point is justified by its usefulness, it has in fact a more specific outcome. The statist approach creates a state not simply autonomous from society, but one that acts in the "national interest." Nordlinger complains of the "sledgehammer attacks to which this concept has been subjected" in recent years. He defends the idea of the national interest as something real, on the grounds that the autonomous vantage point of officials and their desire to retain a respected self-image leads them to "articulate public interest pronouncements so as to gain popular support and ward off private pressures." They therefore adopt "long term, broad gauged policies" aimed at such goals as "the maintenance of the political and economic order" (1988, 882). It is a measure of the bias of the analysis that maintaining the political and economic status quo is regarded as unquestioned evidence of a genuine national interest.

The dependence of the statist approach

on a subjectivist starting point can be further demonstrated by turning to my second case, the work of Stephen Krasner (1978). Like Nordlinger, Krasner starts from the premise that the state should be understood essentially as a subjective process of policy making. His study of the relationship between corporate overseas investment in raw materials and U.S. foreign policy "is premised on the intellectual vision that sees the state autonomously formulating goals that it then attempts to implement against resistance from international and domestic actors" (p. 10). This autonomous state is construed even more narrowly than Nordlinger's "public officials writ large," for its meaning is limited principally to just two executive offices, the presidency and the Department of State, which are said to enjoy a "high degree of insulation from specific societal pressures" (p. 11). Krasner considers the possibility that other offices, such as the Pentagon, the Treasury, the Commerce Department, or the CIA, might "be thought of as part of the state," but decides to discount them on the grounds that "their behavior has varied. At some times they have acted to promote collective goals, at others to further specific societal and bureaucratic interests" (p. 11). Thus the author sustains his intellectual vision of the state as an autonomous promoter of collective goals by excluding from consideration state organs that sometimes fail to live up to this vision.

The book analyzes U.S. government policy toward the control of foreign raw materials by American multinational corporations. It seeks to show that the state is autonomous from these societal interests, by proving that U.S. policy has been shaped by neither strategic nor economic interests (which would indicate some degree of corporate influence) but by a consistent ideology. Strategic interests are eliminated as an explanation for U.S. policy by simply defining *strategic* to

mean only cases where the territorial or political integrity of the U.S. is directly threatened (pp. 313–14). Under this definition, American efforts to protect oil interests in the Persian Gulf, for example, are said not to have been strategically motivated because the physical survival of the United States or its political system was not at stake.

Economic interests are eliminated as an explanation largely on the ground that an explanation in economic terms “does not account for the relatively passive American response to the dangers posed by economic nationalism” (p. 316). Krasner’s most important evidence for this alleged passivity is the United States’ reaction to Muhammed Musaddeq’s nationalization of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company in 1951–53. Yet when examined carefully, this case (whose victim was a British—not an American—corporation) offers no support for his thesis. It is true that the United States was initially less hostile than Great Britain toward a conservative Middle Eastern nationalist like Musaddeq, especially in a case where support for such nationalism enabled the U.S. to challenge Britain’s dominant position in the region. Yet the passive American response consisted of first helping to enforce the British-led embargo on Iranian oil and then, when the resulting collapse of Iran’s economy failed to change Musaddeq’s policies and radicalized his support, organizing a coup to remove the elected government and restore the authoritarian power of the shah (Gasiorowski 1987).

Krasner bases his argument that U.S. policy “cannot easily be explained in terms of corporate interests” on the fact that the U.S. did not initially pressure Musaddeq to allow U.S. multinationals access to Iranian oil (1987, 127). But the interests of the oil companies did not lie in acquiring access to Iranian oil. They lay first in preventing the Iranians from marketing their oil themselves through in-

dependent dealers, which would break the oil majors’ global monopoly and the illegal system of price fixing dependent on it, and second in halting the U.S. Justice Department’s criminal investigation of this price fixing. The U.S. government complied with both these wishes—and as a bonus forced the Iranians to let U.S. companies share in the control of their oil.

Having appeared to refute economic and strategic explanations for U.S. policy toward foreign raw materials investments, Krasner presents the case for ideology as the explanatory motive. His decisive evidence here does not consist of any of the raw materials cases analyzed in the book, but rather the Vietnam War. He admits that America’s ideological justifications for its involvement in Vietnam were neither logical nor consistent (pp. 321–22). This might suggest that ideological justifications were adapted according to political need, or reflected conflicts within the administration, or were simply a confused attempt to defend a war in which even those responsible no longer believed. Krasner considers none of these possibilities, but declares instead that lack of consistency and rationality is the “hallmark of an ideological foreign policy.”

The possibility that economic interests might have played some role alongside ideological motives in prolonging the war, given the large profits of arms corporations, is dismissed with the remark that it would have been easier to sustain high military spending “by picturing the Soviet Union and China as implacable enemies than by engaging in a land war in Southeast Asia” (p. 324). Even if one were to agree with this unproven claim it would not demonstrate that corporate interests played no role in sustaining the war; yet the book’s entire argument for state autonomy rests on this single assertion. It enables Krasner to conclude that a “revulsion towards Communism,” attributable to “the exclusive dominance of

Lockean liberalism within the United States" determines U.S. policy toward the control of foreign raw materials, and hence that state policy cannot be explained by reference to societal interests.

For both Krasner and Nordlinger, the alleged autonomy of the state is in large part produced definitionally. The amorphous object of analysis is reduced to something called *policy*, meaning the intentions and desires of certain state officials. The state becomes this disembodied ideality, which is characterized as the *national interest* and examined not as a rhetorical effect but as a self-generated and governing idealism. Writing of this sort should not be considered according to its own scientific claims. As the examples from Krasner show, the case studies supporting the claim of state autonomy are brief and unconvincing readings of complex political episodes. Nordlinger's recent essays avoid this problem by offering no case studies at all. Almond (1987, 476) has suggested that the result of much of this literature is "to remystify the state concept." If so, then such writing should be seen as part of the much larger social process of generating the mysterious effect of the state, as a separate, self-willed entity.

The State as an "Actual Organization"

The contributions of Theda Skocpol to the statist approach appear to offer something very different from the work of Krasner and Nordlinger. Both her work on the politics of the New Deal and her earlier comparative study of social revolutions are based on detailed readings of carefully constructed case studies. Moreover, she explicitly rejects a "voluntarist" approach to the study of the state. In *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), she argues that neither the occurrence nor the outcome of major social revolutions can be explained by the ideological visions of revolutionary or state leaders. The book

proposes instead an "organizational" approach, in which revolutionary collapse and the building of new states are explained by the structural vulnerabilities and potentials of states themselves.

Despite these differences, however, it can be shown that Skocpol's argument for state autonomy remains a voluntarist, ideological explanation. Once again, the clear boundary between state and society, on which the argument for autonomy depends, relies on an essential subjectivity as the basis of the state's distinctiveness. Skocpol later moves beyond this subjectivity. But as soon as she does, the boundary between state and society—and the evidence for autonomy—disappears.

Skocpol's explanation of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions focuses on the collapse of autonomous states, whose autonomy is to be demonstrated by showing that the collapse comes as a consequence of the state's own flawed policies and institutional ties with society rather than any larger conflict between dominant social classes (p. 48). As with other state theorists, the first step in the argument is to narrow the definition of the state to ensure that apparatuses into which "nonstate" elements may penetrate are excluded. To this end, Skocpol distinguishes "fundamental" state organizations from the broader "political system." "The state properly conceived," she writes, consists of "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority." Such organizations represent only a part of "overall political systems," which may also include "institutions through which social interests are represented in state policy-making as well as institutions through which nonstate actors are mobilized to participate in policy implementation" (p. 29). This distinction between the *state properly conceived* and the *political system* is clearly vital to the argument for state autonomy, yet it is made only in

passing and we are given no actual means of knowing whether a given institution belongs merely to the political system or to the state proper. In practice the difficulty is overcome by substituting for the latter phrase even narrower terms, in most cases simply *the monarchy*.

Having narrowed the meaning of the state in this way, the next stage in the explanation is to present an interest or policy of the state that brings on the revolutionary crisis. In all three prerevolutionary societies, Skocpol argues, "monarchs were interested in appropriating increased resources from society and channeling them efficiently into military aggrandizement or state sponsored and centrally controlled economic development" (p. 49). As in Krasner and Nordlinger, this interest of the state is to be the basis of its autonomy. It must be construed not in relation to any broader commercial or political interests, but as the state's independent desire.

In France, for example, revolutionary collapse was brought on by the state's costly involvement in foreign wars, as it competed for markets, trade routes, and colonies. Skocpol explains this involvement in ideological terms, as something "necessary for the vindication of French honor on the international scene," adding, almost as an afterthought, "not to mention the protection of seaborne commerce" (p. 60). France is called a "commercial power" but we are told nothing about the nature of this commerce or the broader kinds of political or economic interests involved (the trading companies, the commodities traded and their producers, the industries served, or the role of finance houses, the shipping industry, and colonization corporations). The possibility that interests of this sort might be at least as significant a factor in state policy as the ideology of French honor is dismissed, it seems, for on the following page the state's involvement in "protracted and repeated general welfare" is

attributed simply to the monarchy's unwillingness to abandon its "martial ambitions," and three pages later we are told that what "carried the eighteenth-century Bourbon monarchy into an acute financial crisis" was "its unquenchable penchant for war" (pp. 61-64). The initial crisis of the state is thus reduced to a question of ideology—an interest in "the vindication of French honor," the pursuit of "martial ambitions," or an irreducible "penchant for war." A seemingly self-formed monarchical interest becomes the irreducible element in the explanation of state behavior.

This narrow, subjectivist image of the state, however, is contradicted in Skocpol's case by her own further explanation of revolution. In responding to the crisis brought on by defeats in war or other external threats, she explains, the state is constrained by its institutional relationships with the landed upper classes. Skocpol provides detailed accounts of these relationships for each of her case studies, from which it becomes clear that the pre-revolutionary state is something much larger and more amorphous than a monarch. Although the "organizational" approach to the state insists that states are "actual organizations" whose boundaries are distinct from society (p. 31), Skocpol's illuminating account of these organizations in France, Russia, and China shows that the boundaries are impossible to draw in practice. In all three cases, the provincial and local power of the state is inseparable from the political power of the landed classes.

In France the state structure is described not as an actual organization but as an "extraordinary complex . . . and multiply layered" network of seigniorial domains, municipal corporations and provincial assemblies, maintained through the system of "venality of office" whereby revenues are raised through the sale of state offices, which become individual possessions to be rented, resold or be-

queathed (pp. 52–53). Russia and China present analogous pictures, but in the latter case Skocpol drops the increasingly awkward distinction between state and society and introduces the more fluid metaphor of “two ‘worlds,’” an agrarian economy and society and an apparatus of imperial administration. The interpenetration of the two worlds was so extensive, we are told, that the separation between them exists only for analytic purposes (p. 68). The existence of the state as an actual organization thus disappears altogether. Skocpol eventually acknowledges the impossibility of distinguishing state and society by bringing the two terms together in a single phrase and referring to the three countries as *statist societies* (p. 167).

Similar problems arise in the second half of *States and Social Revolutions*, where the analysis moves from the causes of revolutionary collapse to the reasons for the emergence of strong, centralizing postrevolutionary states. Once again the explanation minimizes socioeconomic factors and stresses ideology—not the specific content of revolutionary ideologies, but the fact that the new leaders were men already “oriented to” state building (pp. 164–68). But again, the case studies of this process in France, Russia, and China reintroduce a broader socioeconomic explanation, accounting for the direction and stages of state building largely in terms of the different social bases of support for each regime.

The arguments advanced by Nordlinger, Krasner, and Skocpol in favor of a statist approach to political analysis face a common problem and respond similarly. The problem, as they each more-or-less admit, is that the edges of the state are uncertain; societal elements seem to penetrate it on all sides, and the resulting boundary between state and society is difficult to determine. They respond by giving the state a narrow definition, personified as a policy-making actor. Like per-

sonhood, statehood is conceived in fundamentally idealist terms. The state stands apart from society as a set of original intentions or preferences, just as persons are thought of as units of autonomous consciousness and desire distinct from their material or social world. However uncertain its edges, the state, like the person, is an essential unity.

This image of unity is preserved even in analyses that introduce the element of conflict between different parts of the state apparatus. Such conflict is an important indication of the permeability of state boundaries because it enables one to trace how wider social differences reproduce themselves within the processes of the state. But in the statist literature, such wider connections are not examined. The essential unity of the state is taken as given, and conflicts are treated as secondary phenomena internal to this larger unity. Indeed the impact of such internal conflicts on policy making is turned into part of the evidence for the state’s independence from society.

In her work on the New Deal, for example, Skocpol argues that state and party organizations should be treated as “independent determinants” of political outcomes (1981, 156), for they have “their own structures and histories, which in turn have their own impact upon society” (p. 200). Her argument is based on the failure of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and liberal Democrats during the reformist phase of the New Deal (1935–38) to transform the federal government into a fully interventionist, social democratic state (pp. 191–99). The principal reason for this failure was that popular support for FDR’s reform program was not reflected in Congress, where conservative interests were powerfully entrenched. This entrenchment was due to the influence of southern Democrats (reflecting, of course, political and economic arrangements in the South that excluded blacks from participation) and in general to the local con-

trol of congressional elections by "machines or special agglomerations of organized interests" (p. 195). The conservatives in Congress blocked spending on social programs for the poor, and led the opposition to administrative reforms for fear that they "would disrupt existing symbiotic relationships among Congress, bureaucrats, and organized interest groups in the society at large" (p. 194). Despite the election of a president with a program of popular reform, the power of conservative and other organized interests in society was sufficiently represented within the state to derail the reforms. Skocpol interprets this as evidence for the argument that state institutions are essentially independent determinants of political outcomes. In fact the case offers an excellent example of how conflicts within the state reflect the penetration of wider social forces.

An Alternative Approach

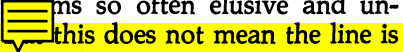
The statist approach always begins from the assumption that the state is a distinct entity, opposed to and set apart from a larger entity called society. Arguments are confined to assessing how much independence one object enjoys from the other. Yet we have seen that in fact the line between the two is often uncertain. Like the **systems theorists** before them, advocates of a statist approach have been unable to fix the elusive boundary between the political system or state and society. An alternative approach to the state has to begin with this uncertain boundary. In a given area of practice, how is the effect created that certain aspects of what occurs pertain to society, while others stand apart as the state? More importantly, what is the significance of effecting this distinction?

The Aramco Case

To introduce such an alternative approach, one can begin with a case discussed in Krasner's study of U.S. foreign policy: the relationship between the U.S. Government and the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), the consortium of major U.S. oil corporations that possessed exclusive rights to Saudi Arabian oil (1978, 205-12). The case illustrates both the permeability of the state-society boundary and the political significance of maintaining it. After World War II, the Saudis demanded that their royalty payment from Aramco be increased from 12% to 50% of profits. Unwilling either to cut its profits or to raise the price of oil, Aramco arranged for the increase in royalty to be paid not by the company but by U.S. taxpayers. The Department of State, anxious to subsidize the pro-American Saudi monarchy, helped arrange for Aramco to take advantage of a loophole in U.S. tax law whereby the royalty was treated as though it were a direct foreign tax, to be paid not from the company's profits but from the taxes it owed to the U.S. Treasury. This collusion between government and oil companies, obliging U.S. citizens to contribute unaware to the treasury of a repressive Middle Eastern monarchy and the bank balances of some of the world's most profitable multinational corporations, does not offer much support for the image of a neat distinction between state and society.

Krasner copes with this complexity by arguing that the oil companies were an institutional mechanism used by central decision makers to achieve certain foreign policy goals; in this case the secret subsidizing of a conservative Arab regime. Policies that might be opposed by Congress or foreign allies could be pursued through such mechanisms, "in part because private firms were outside of the formal political system" (pp. 212-13). This explanation offers only one side of

the picture: the firms themselves also used the U.S. government to further corporate goals, as the Aramco case illustrates and as several studies of the oil industry have demonstrated in detail (I. Anderson 1981, Blair 1976, Miller 1980). Yet despite his failure to portray the complexity of such state-society relations, Krasner inadvertently points to what is crucial about them. The Aramco case illustrates how the institutional mechanisms of a modern political order are never confined within the limits of what is called the state (or in this case, curiously enough, the "formal political system"). This is not to say simply that the state is something surrounded by parastatal or corporatist institutions, which buttress and extend its authority. It is to argue that the boundary of the state (or political system) *never marks a real exterior*. The line between state and society is not the perimeter of an intrinsic entity, which can be thought of as a free-standing object or actor. It is a line drawn internally, *within* the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained.

The point that the state's boundary never marks a real exterior can suggest why it seems so often elusive and unstable.  this does not mean the line is illusory. On the contrary, as the Aramco case shows, producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power. The fact that Aramco can be said to lie outside the formal political system, thereby disguising its role in international politics, is essential to its strength as part of a larger political order.

Many similar examples could be explored, such as the relationship between state and private institutions in the financial sector, in schooling and scientific research, or in health care and medical practice. In each case it could be shown that the state-society divide is not a sim-

ple border between two free-standing objects or domains, but a complex distinction *internal* to these realms of practice. Take the example of banking: the relations between major corporate banking groups, semipublic central banks or reserve systems, government treasuries, deposit insurance agencies and export-import banks, and multinational bodies such as the World Bank, represent interlocking networks of financial power and regulation. No simple line could divide this network into a private realm and a public one, or into state and society. At the same time, banks are set up and present themselves as private institutions clearly separate from the state. The appearance that state and society are separate things is part of the way a given financial and economic order is maintained. This is equally true of the wider social and political order. The power to regulate and control is not simply a capacity stored within the state, from where it extends out into society. The apparent boundary of the state does not mark the limit of the processes of regulation. It is itself a product of those processes.

The approach to the state advocated here does not imply an image of the state and private organizations as a single, totalized structure of power. On the contrary, there are always conflicts between them, as there are between different government agencies, between corporate organizations, and within each of them. It means we should not be misled into accepting the idea of the state as a coherent object clearly separate from society any more than we should be misled by the complexity of these phenomena into rejecting the concept of the state altogether.

Conceived in this way, the state is no longer to be taken as essentially an actor, with the coherence, agency, and subjectivity this term presumes. We should not ask "Who is the state?" or "Who dictates its policies?" Such questions presume what their answers pretend to prove: that

some political subject, some *who*, pre-exists and determines those multiple arrangements we call the state. The arrangements that produce the apparent separateness of the state create the abstract effect of agency, with concrete consequences. Yet such agency will always be contingent upon the production of difference—upon those practices that create the apparent boundary between state and society. These arrangements may be so effective, however, as to make things appear the reverse of this. The state comes to seem a subjective starting point, as an actor that intervenes in society. Statist approaches to political analysis take this reversal for reality.

What is proposed here, instead, is an approach to the state that refuses to take for granted this difference, yet can account for why social and political reality appears in this binary form. It is not sufficient simply to criticize the abstract, idealist appearance the state assumes in the writings of the statist approach. Almond (1987, 476), for example, complains that the concept of the state employed in much of the new literature “seems to have metaphysical overtones” and Easton (1981, 316) argues that the state is presented by one writer as “a ‘ghost in the machine,’ knowable only through its variable manifestations.” Such criticisms ignore the fact that this is how the state very often appears in practice. The task of a critique of the state is not just to reject such metaphysics, but to explain how it has been possible to produce this practical yet ghost-like effect. What is it about modern society, as a particular form of social and economic order, that has made possible the apparent autonomy of the state as a free-standing entity? Why is this kind of apparatus, with its typical basis in an abstract system of law and its almost transcendental association with the nation as the fundamental political community (see, for example, B. Anderson 1983), the distinctive political arrangement of the

modern age? These **practical, historical** questions are ignored by systems theorists, who desire to throw out the entire concept of the state and reestablish a more “scientific” vocabulary.

State theorists themselves have also ignored these historical questions. For some authors, such as Nordlinger, this is because, like systems theorists, they seek explanations in the form of generalizable statements, applicable to every political order. By definition this excludes a specific, historically based explanation of the nature of modern states. But even theorists of the state who adopt a historical perspective, such as Skocpol, **are unable to offer a historical explanation** of the appearance of the modern state. Committed to an approach in which the state is an independent cause, Skocpol cannot explain the ability of the state to appear as an entity standing apart from society in terms of factors external to the state. The state must be an independent cause of events, even when those events, as in a case such as revolutionary France, involve the very birth of a modern, apparently autonomous state.

The Appearance of Structure

To illustrate the kind of explanation that might be possible, one can return to Skocpol’s account of the French case. Skocpol describes prerevolutionary France as a *statist society*, meaning a society in which the powers of a landed nobility and the central administration were inextricably bound together. We can now describe this situation another way, as **a society in which those modern techniques** that make the state appear to be a separate entity that somehow stands outside society had not yet been institutionalized. The revolutionary period marks the consolidation of such novel techniques. Skocpol characterizes the revolutionary transformation of the French state

as principally a transformation in the army and the bureaucracy, both of which became permanent, professional organizations whose staffs were for the first time set apart from other commercial and social activities and whose size and effectiveness were vastly extended. For Skocpol, such changes are to be understood as the *consequence* of an autonomous state, whose officials desired to embark on the expansion and consolidation of centralized power. We are therefore given little detail about the methods on which such revolutionary transformations rested.

How was it now possible to assemble a permanent army of up to three-quarters of a million men, transform an entire economy into production for war, maintain authority and discipline on such a scale, and so "separate" this military machine from society that the traditional problem of desertion was largely overcome? By what parallel means were the corruptions and leakages of financial administration brought under control? What was the nature of the "mechanical efficiency and articulation," in a phrase quoted from J.F. Bosher (Skocpol 1979, 200), that in every realm would now enable "the virtues of organization to offset the vices of individual men"? What kind of articulation, in other words, could now seem to separate mechanically an organization from the individual men who composed it? Rather than attributing such transformations to policies of an autonomous state, it would be more accurate to trace in these new techniques of organization and articulation the very possibility of appearing to set apart from society the free-standing apparatus of a state.

An exploration of such questions would have to begin by acknowledging the enormous significance of those modern, microphysical methods of order that Michel Foucault calls *disciplines* (Foucault 1977). The new bureaucratic and military strength of the French state was founded

on powers generated out of the meticulous organization of space, movement, sequence, and position. The new power of the army, for example, was based on such measures as the construction of barracks as sites of permanent confinement set apart from the social world, the introduction of daily inspection and drill, repetitive training in maneuvers broken down into precisely timed sequences and combinations, and the elaboration of complex hierarchies of command, spatial arrangement, and surveillance. With such techniques an army could be made into what a contemporary military manual called an "artificial machine," and other armies now seemed like collections of "idle and inactive men" (Fuller 1955, 196).

None of these new methods appeared overnight. The French military reforms of 1791, for example, were developed from earlier reforms in Prussia, which had their own antecedents elsewhere in Europe. Nor were they confined to the army. As Foucault has shown, similar methods of enclosing and partitioning space, systematizing surveillance and inspection, breaking down complex tasks into carefully drilled movements, and coordinating separate functions into larger combinations were developed around the same period in factories, schools, prisons, hospitals, commercial establishments, and government offices. The spread of such methods from field to field in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries represented a new, localized, yet enormously productive technology of power.

Disciplinary methods of power have two important consequences for our understanding of the modern state—only the first of which is analyzed by Foucault. In the first place, we can move beyond the image of power as essentially a system of authoritative commands or policies backed by force. This legalistic approach, as we have seen, is adopted by all the theorists of the state discussed here. It conceives of state power in the form of a

person (an individual or collective decision maker), whose decisions form a system of orders and prohibitions that direct and constrain social action. Power is thought of as an exterior constraint: its source is a sovereign authority above and outside society, and it operates by setting external limits to behavior, establishing negative prohibitions and laying down channels of proper conduct.

Disciplinary power, by contrast, works not from the outside but from within, not at the level of an entire society but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them. A negative, exterior power gives way to an internal, productive power. Disciplines work within local domains and institutions, entering into particular social processes, breaking them down into separate functions, rearranging the parts, increasing their efficiency and precision, and reassembling them into more productive and powerful combinations. These methods produce the organized power of armies, schools and factories, and other distinctive institutions of modern nation states. They also produce, within such institutions, the modern individual, constructed as an isolated, disciplined, receptive, and industrious political subject. Power relations do not simply confront this individual as a set of external orders and prohibitions. His or her very individuality, formed within such institutions, is already the product of those relations.

One should not overstate the coherence of these technologies, as Foucault sometimes does. Disciplines can break down, counteract one another, or overreach. They offer spaces for maneuver and resistance, and indeed can be turned to counter hegemonic purposes. Resistance movements often derive their organizational forms from the military and their methods of discipline and indoctrination from schooling, and in fact are often generated within the barracks, the

campus or other institutions of the state. At the same time it follows that just as we must abandon the image of the state as a free-standing agent issuing orders, we need to question the traditional figure of resistance as a subject who stands *outside* the state and refuses its demands. Political subjects and their modes of resistance are formed as much *within* the organizational terrain we call the state, rather than in some wholly exterior social space (see, for example, Mitchell 1990).

The second consequence of disciplinary power, the one that Foucault does not discuss yet the more important for understanding the peculiarity of the state phenomenon, is that at the same time as power relations become internal in this way, and by the same methods, they now appear to take the novel form of external structures. As I have argued elsewhere (Mitchell 1988; N.d.), the distinctiveness of the modern state, *appearing as an apparatus* that stands apart from the rest of the social world, must be sought in this novel structural effect. The effect is the counterpart of the production of modern individuality. For example, the new military methods of the late eighteenth century produced the disciplined individual soldier and, simultaneously, the novel effect of an armed unit as an artificial machine. This military apparatus appeared somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as though it were a structure with an existence independent of the men who composed it. In comparison with other armies, which now looked like amorphous gatherings of idle and inactive men, the new army seemed something two dimensional. It appeared to consist on the one hand of individual soldiers, and on the other of the machine they inhabited. *Of course this apparatus has no independent existence.* It is an effect produced by the organized partitioning of space, the regular distribution of bodies, exact timing, the coordination of movement, the combining of elements, and endless

repetition, all of which are particular practices. There was nothing in the new power of the army except this distributing, arranging, and moving. But the order and precision of such processes created the effect of an apparatus apart from the men themselves, whose structure orders, contains, and controls them.

A similar two-dimensional effect can be seen at work in other institutions of the modern nation state. The precise specification of space and function that characterize modern institutions, the coordination of these functions into hierarchical arrangements, the organization of supervision and surveillance, and the marking out of time into schedules and programs all contribute to constructing a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert structure that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives. Indeed the very notion of an institution, as an abstract framework separate from the particular practices it frames, can be seen as the product of these techniques. Such techniques have given rise to the peculiar, apparently binary world we inhabit, where reality seems to take the two-dimensional form of individual versus apparatus, practice versus institution, social life and its structure or society versus state.

The State as a Structural Effect

The state needs to be analyzed as such a structural effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist. In fact the nation state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern social world. It includes within itself many of the particular institutions already discussed, such as armies, schools, and bureaucracies. Beyond these,

the larger presence of the state in several ways takes the form of a framework that appears to stand apart from the social world and provide an external structure. One characteristic of the modern state, for example, is the frontier. By establishing a territorial boundary and exercising absolute control over movement across it, state practices define and help constitute a national entity. Setting up and policing a frontier involves a variety of fairly modern social practices—continuous barbed-wire fencing, passports, immigration laws, inspections, currency control and so on. These mundane arrangements, most of them unknown two hundred or even one hundred years ago, help manufacture an almost transcendental entity, the nation state. This entity comes to seem something much more than the sum of the everyday activities that constitute it, appearing as a structure containing and giving order and meaning to people's lives. An analogous example is the law. Once again, one could analyze how the mundane details of the legal process, all of which are particular social practices, are so arranged as to produce the effect that "law" exists as a sort of abstract, formal framework, superimposed above social practice. What we call the state, and think of as an intrinsic object existing apart from society, is the sum of these structural effects.

To approach the state as a set of structural effects is very different from a structural approach (Poulantzas 1974; 1978). Structuralism takes for granted the idea of structure—an actual framework that somehow stands apart from physical reality as its dimension of order—and does not ask how this apparently metaphysical separation is brought about. It thus shares the ideal-material dualism of the statist approaches examined in this essay. By approaching the state as an effect, one can both acknowledge the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their

elusiveness. One can examine how it is that the state seems to stand apart from society and yet see this distinction as an internal arrangement. The boundary of the state is merely the effect of such arrangements and does not mark a real edge. It is not the border of an actual object.

To conclude this critique, the argument for a new approach to the state and the question of its boundary can be summarized in a list of five propositions:

1. The state should not be taken as a free-standing entity, whether an agent, instrument, organization or structure, located apart from and opposed to another entity called society.
2. The distinction between state and society should nevertheless be taken seriously, as the defining characteristic of the modern political order. The state cannot be dismissed as an abstraction or ideological construct and passed over in favor of more real, material realities. In fact, this distinction between conceptual and material, between abstract and real, needs placing in historical question if we are to grasp how the modern state has appeared.
3. For the same reason, the prevailing subjectivist view of the state as essentially a phenomenon of decision making or policy is inadequate. Its focus on one disembodied aspect of the state phenomenon assimilates the state-society distinction to the same problematic opposition between conceptual and material.
4. The state should be addressed as an effect of detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance, which create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society. The essence of modern politics is not policies formed on one side of this division being applied to or shaped by the other, but the producing and reproducing of this line of difference.
5. These processes create the effect of the state not only as an entity set apart from society, but as a distinct dimension of structure, framework, codification, planning, and intentionality. The state appears as an abstraction in relation to the concreteness of the social, and as a subjective ideality in relation to the objectness of the material world. **The distinctions between abstract and concrete, ideal and material, and subjective and objective, which most political theorizing is built upon, are themselves partly constructed in those mundane social processes we recognize and name as the state.**

References

- Almond, Gabriel A. 1954. *The Appeals of Communism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Almond, Gabriel A. 1960. "A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics." In *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, eds. Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Almond, Gabriel A. 1987. "The Development of Political Development." In *Understanding Political Development*, eds. Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington. Boston: Little Brown.
- Almond, Gabriel A. 1988. "The Return to the State." *American Political Science Review* 82:853-74.
- Almond, Gabriel A., Taylor Cole, and Roy C. Macridis. 1955. "A Suggested Research Strategy in Western European Government and Politics." *American Political Science Review* 49:1042-44.
- Almond, Gabriel A., and James S. Coleman. 1960. *The Politics of the Developing Areas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, Irving H. 1981. *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Blair, John M. 1976. *The Control of Oil*. New York: Pantheon.
- Easton, David. 1953. *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*. New York: Knopf.
- Easton, David. 1957. "An Approach to the Analysis of Political Systems." *World Politics* 9:383-400.
- Easton, David. 1981. "The Political System Besieged by the State." *Political Theory* 9:303-25.
- Evans, Peter, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds. 1985. *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.
- Fuller, J. F. C. 1955. *The Decisive Battles of the Western World and Their Influence Upon History*, 3 vols. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.
- Gasiorowski, Mark. 1987. "The 1953 Coup d'Etat in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19:261-79.
- Krasner, Stephen D. 1978. *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Loewenstein, Karl. 1944. "Report on the Research Panel on Comparative Government." *American Political Science Review* 38:540-48.
- Miller, Aaron David. 1980. *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. *Colonising Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1990. "Everyday Metaphors of Power." *Theory and Society* 19:545-77.
- Mitchell, Timothy. N.d. "The Effect of the State." *Journal of Historical Sociology*. Forthcoming.
- Nettl, J. P. 1968. "The State as a Conceptual Variable." *World Politics* 20:559-92.
- Nordlinger, Eric. 1981. *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nordlinger, Eric. 1987. "Taking the State Seriously." In *Understanding Political Development*, eds. Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington. Boston: Little Brown.
- Nordlinger, Eric. 1988. "The Return to the State: Critiques." *American Political Science Review* 82:875-85.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. 1974. *Political Power and Social Classes*. London: New Left Books.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. 1978. *State, Power, Socialism*. London: New Left Books.
- Pye, Lucian. 1956. *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sabine, George. 1934. "The State." *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. New York: Macmillan.
- Schmitter, Philippe. 1985. "Neo Corporatism and the State." In *The Political Economy of Corporatism*, ed. Wyn Grant. New York: St. Martin's.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1981. "Political Response to Capitalist Crisis: Neo Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal." *Politics and Society* 10:155-201.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1985. "Bringing the State Back In." In *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Timothy Mitchell is Assistant Professor of Political Science, New York University, New York, NY 10003.