



STRATEGY, INSTITUTIONS AND
"THE AUTONOMY OF THE POLITICAL"

Fábio Wanderley Reis

Working Paper #3 - December 1983

This paper was originally presented to the session on "Representation, the Institutional and the Autonomy of the Political" at the International Political Science Association, Rio de Janeiro World Congress, August 9-14, 1982. Members of that study group were also at the conference on "Issues on Democracy and Democratization: North and South," held in November 1983 at the Kellogg Institute, where some of the problems addressed in the paper were again discussed. Scott Mainwaring kindly tried to improve my English prose, but should not be blamed for the result.

Dr. Fábio Wanderley Reis received his M.A. (1970) and his Ph.D. (1974) in Political Science from Harvard University. He holds the rank of Professor at the Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais in Brazil. Dr. Wanderley Reis was Faculty Fellow at the Kellogg Institute for the Fall 1983 semester. Former President of the National Association for Post-Graduate Studies and Research in the Social Sciences, he has published extensively on Brazilian politics. His most recent work, Social Processes in Post - 1964 Brazil, is co-authored with Bernardo Sorj et al., and will be published by Manchester University Press.

ABSTRACT

As its ultimate objective, this paper attempts to place in a more fruitful perspective the comparative study of problems linked to authoritarianism in different forms, particularly the apparent convergences between some Latin American and European state structures, the central theme of the working group of the 1982 World Congress of the International Political Science Association for which the paper was originally written. The paper begins with an attempt to reexamine the notion of politics, based on the exploration of the consequences of known propositions of Jürgen Habermas. From there it moves to the discussion of problems connected to the notion of "the autonomy of the political" and to an attempt to reformulate the question of the relationships between different analytic "dimensions," particularly the contrast between the so-called "political-institutional" level and the level of the "base" or "substructure." The text then indicates the relevance of the proposed reformulation for a theory of change which could serve for comparative purposes, with attention to questions currently associated with the general theme of authoritarianism.

RESUME

O trabalho tem como objectivo último o de procurar colocar em perspectiva mais frutífera o estudo comparativo de problemas ligados ao autoritarismo em diferentes formas, particularmente das aparentes convergências em certas estruturas estatais latino-americanas e europeias, tema central do grupo de estudo do congresso mundial de 1982 da IPSA para o qual foi elaborado. Parte-se da tentativa de reexaminar a própria noção de política, com base na exploração das conseqüências de proposições conhecidas de Jürgen Habermas. Passa-se daí para a discussão de dificuldades ligadas à idéia de "autonomia do político" e para a tentativa de reformular a questão das relações entre diferentes "dimensões" analíticas, em especial o contraste entre o chamado nível "político-institucional" e o nível da "base" ou "substrato". A relevância da reformulação proposta para uma teoria da mudança capaz de servir a objectivos comparativos é indicada em seguida, com atenção para questões correntemente associadas ao tema geral do autoritarismo.

I

I will address here the theoretical questions to which we are invited in the title given to our session. Besides reasons of a general nature which might be presented in favor of such a decision (and which one may suppose to lie behind our convenor's choice of those questions as a framework for our discussions), I was encouraged to do so after realizing, when looking at the list of tentative titles of papers, that nearly all communications to be presented seemed to intend either to address the experience of particular countries with regard to certain aspects of our general theme or, in a few cases, to propose frameworks referred immediately to problems of authoritarian regimes. I thought it might be well for someone to try to tackle the problems at a more abstract theoretical level. Though I am perhaps not the most qualified of us for the task, I am convinced that the "contextualized" discussion of authoritarian regimes and associated themes currently going on has much to gain from an effort adequately to link some of the issues at stake to more general theoretical questions.

I will thus hopefully be forgiven if I start with no less a problem than the definition of politics itself, which will be dealt with by means of a short critical examination of some propositions by Jurgen Habermas. That will allow me to advance, at the next step, some ideas on the question of the "autonomy of the political", which in turn will be helpful in discussing the interrelationships between the institutional level and the level of the

"substratum". I expect to be able to bring some new light to the discussion of problems bearing on authoritarianism, repression and representation, and hopefully also to an adequate theory of political change.

II

The starting point is Habermas's distinction between the contexts of instrumental or "purposive-rational" action (work) and of communicative action (interaction), and the place to be made for strategic action in connection with this distinction. The importance of the separation between work and interaction in Habermas's thought is well known. It is linked to the Aristotelian distinction between the "technical" and the "practical" (which is elaborated upon by Hannah Arendt, particularly in The Human Condition), and is intended to play a crucial role from both the epistemological and theoretical points of view. Indeed, the separation of these two contexts aims at providing the grounds for opposing a technical rationality to a practical one, each of which, in turn, is referred to a particular kind of interest. Thus, technical rationality and technical interest would correspond to the "empirical-analytic sciences". Two other types of science, "historical-hermeneutic sciences" (in short, history) and "critical sciences" (Marxism, as a critique of ideology, and psychoanalysis, as a sort of "critique of neurosis", are instances of the latter) would correspond largely to the sphere of practical knowledge and of practical interest, where we are no longer in the realm of instrumentality and efficacy, but rather of symbols, consensual norms, communication and "the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding".² Since it would be pointless to try to recover here the many intricacies of Habermas's ideas, let me just add that the

critical sciences are also conceived of as resorting to what he calls "reflexive theories", that is, theories devoted to emancipation. In other words, with them the practical interest becomes an emancipatory interest, so that critical science, on the model of the psychoanalytic dialogue, is by definition oriented toward a future condition of "anticipated state" in which we would have the elimination of the restrictions and distortions that are imposed upon the process of communication by the mechanisms of domination, ideology and neurosis. ³

Now, whatever the evaluation to be made of the overall accuracy of the distinction between work and interaction and of its solidity as a building block in Habermas's conception of the critical science, ⁴ from the point of view of my present concerns Habermas's views on strategic action are of special interest. Strategic action is obviously a source of important difficulties for Habermas: it clearly plays an intermediate role between work and interaction, for, being instrumental and purposive-rational action (work), it is also unequivocally interaction and communication. The very idea of strategic action concerns the fact that it is that form of instrumental action (oriented toward criteria of efficacy, of means-ends relationships) which takes place in a social context. Habermas's problems on this point, which are related to some rather awkward contortions on the relevance of "reflexive theories" to the demands of political struggles (to be found in the introduction of the 1971 German edition of Theory and Practice), show up very clearly in the oscillations and even contradictions concerning the status of strategic action found in different passages of several of his works. In "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", we see strategic action assimilated to instrumental action or work; in Theory and Practice, in turn, there is the acknowledgment of the

presence of communicative elements in it, but that acknowledgement is made within a framework of denouncing the recourse to the idea of strategy as corresponding to a design of technical rationalization and ultimately of cybernetic control of society. Finally, in Logic of the Social Sciences (which is not, of course, the last of the three works in chronological order of appearance) we can find the emphatic affirmation, against "positivism", of the communicational character displayed even by strategic action.

For my present purposes, it is worth quoting at length a particular passage of Logic of the Social Sciences. The context within which it occurs is a discussion of the relationships between "intentional action" and "stimulated behavior". After briefly indicating such contributions as Max Weber's and W. I. Thomas's to the problem with their emphasis on the meaning attributed by the acting subjects to their own action, Habermas states the provisional conclusion that "if we do not want, in the social sciences, to give up considering intentional actions as data, the system of experience within which these data are accessible is linguistic communication, and not observation devoid of communication". He then goes on:

There is, however, a limiting case of intentional action, to wit, strategic action, in which the subjectively grasped meaning is not necessarily reached on the basis of a cultural tradition, nor has to be clarified and understood as a concrete meaning in communication, and hence to be made the object of "experience". The meaning toward which strategic action orients itself can always be univocally defined as a rule to obtain maximum or optimal values on the basis of magnitudes that are measurable or at least definable in a comparative way. Univocity is here warranted by the form of the assertion, which sets up a maxim for purposive-rational action, and not by the universality of meaning, which constitutes the semantic content of the end toward which one strives. In effect, strategic action is always referred to such categories as riches or power, which of course may operate in various ways according to the institutional framework. Riches can be measured in prices or in goods, that is to say, in terms of the potential of need satisfaction; power can be measured in

votes or in arms, that is to say, in terms of the potential of legitimation of domination or of physical annihilation. The meaningful content of predicates used for stating action maxims, i.e., the meaning of riches or power, expresses, no doubt, anthropologically well rooted and hence universally diffused experiences, so that such expressions need not be explained in every case, nor be clarified in communication with the acting subjects themselves or with traditions which render their actions comprehensible. The limiting case of strategic action presents the quality that the subjective meaning can be established monologically: it turns out to be "univocally" clear, that is to say, accessible without hermeneutic effort. The experience basis of understanding is nearly completely liberated, in this area, from the reference system of ordinary linguistic communication, so that it can be seized in a seemingly "introspective" way; but even the "univocal" meaning of strategic action is susceptible to being "understood" only because it has always to do with communication and can, therefore, be interpolated by another subject, by means of symbolic interpretation, in the observable behavior of the agent.

Strategic action is just the limiting case of a social action which is normally oriented in a communicative sense. 7

The interest of this passage seems clear enough. Strategic action is seen, on the one hand, as communication and inter-action, and this is even thought of as ultimate reason why it can be understood in its subjective meaning. Nonetheless, it is also conceived of as having its distinctive characteristic in that it is loaded with a meaning or intentionality which is univocally clear, apprehensible in a monological or introspective way, capable (or "nearly" so) of dispensing with ordinary communication, corresponding to anthropologically well rooted and universal experiences -- in other words, in that it is loaded with what may be called an abstract intentionality which is independent of the particular institutional (communicational) context in which the action takes place so that it may become intelligible as such, or so that the action itself may become intelligible in its intentionality. Therefore, while such propositions categorically and emphatically

place us within the context of interaction, they nevertheless stress a certain aspect of the intentionality of the actions under consideration, which is that abstract and--as it were--immediately intelligible character proper to strategic actions.

I will not stop to consider to what degree the above passage⁸ is an adequate expression of Habermas's current views. Instead, I propose to argue that the synthesis of the instrumental and communicational contexts we find there turns out to correspond to the sphere of politics as such, and that the statements by means of which Habermas formulates that synthesis amount to nothing else than a definition of politics.

Let me note, as a first step, the remarkable parallelism between certain basic aspects of what Habermas has to say on strategic action and its relationship to communicative action, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, some propositions by Alessandro Pizzorno on the dialectic between interests and solidarity in an article written several years⁹ ago. Habermas's conception of strategic action as oriented toward maximization or toward the achievement of optimal values "on the basis of magnitudes that are measurable or at least definable in a comparative way" fits quite strictly Pizzorno's definition of the interest of an actor as "the action by means of which he distinguishes himself from other actors, striving to improve his relative position with regards to the latter". (In another text, Habermas speaks also of a "self-affirmation" -- "une affirmation de soi", in the French version -- as characteristic of strategic action.)¹⁰ For this action to be possible it is necessary, for Pizzorno as well as for Habermas, "that its results be measurable -- that is to say, susceptible to being evaluated in terms of better or worse, of more or less".¹¹ But Pizzorno adds

that the possibility of such an action also requires that the criterion of mensuration be common to the actor and to others, and hence that there exist a common system of evaluation -- in other words, that there exist an underlying solidarity system, even if reduced to certain basic elements needed for the bare forms of communication involving in the comparative game. (In general, the establishment of a system of solidarity involves, in turn, according to Pizzorno, reference to the values of an interest system, through the formation of "equality areas" : "those who partake in a solidary collectivity place themselves, as members of the latter, as equal with regard to the values of a certain interest system".)¹² It is easy to see that the latter requirement corresponds not only to what leads Habermas to see in strategic action also a form of communicative action, but further to what leads him to look at it as the "limiting" case of communicative action -- "univocally" clear, liable to being understood "monologically", etc. It seems only natural, therefore, that Habermas comes to find the examples of this abstract intentionality (which involves comparison, "distinguishing oneself" or "affirming oneself" that is, interest) in the area of those phenomena that we are used to associating with such words as "riches" and "power."

But this remark permits an important ramification of the argument. In the above passage, Habermas deals with an aspect of the intentionality of action which is abstract and independent of the concrete institutional framework, without ceasing, however, to be communicative or interactional. Now, in the level at which the analysis is placed in that passage, though,

the reference to "riches" and "power" by way of examples may be suggestive, it is also misleading if these terms are taken in a common sense according to which it is possible to set up precisely a contrast between riches and power. In other words, either the term "power" is taken in a specific sense of "political" or "political-institutional" power, so as to justify the joint mentions of power and riches as examples of relations in two supposedly different areas which would both present the property of permitting comparisons and the apprehension of that "abstract intentionality"; or else "power" is taken in a broad sense according to which we would have in riches itself a form of manifestation of power. The point to be noted is that if the term is taken in the narrow sense, it is quite obvious that the spheres of "power" and "riches" are not the only ones to provide a possible substratum or reference to strategic action and its abstract intentionality: what is to be said of the "comparative" and strategic relations, of "self distinction" and "self affirmation" actions, that may take place around such issues as race, skin color, ethnicity, sex, generation or age, greater or lesser freedom to practice one's religion, honor or prestige, competence, and so on? Would one perhaps be inclined to say that in all such cases it is always a question of power? But that means to replace the narrow sense of "power" by the broad one. And this is precisely the core of the ramification of the argument indicated above: the independence of the intentional character of strategic action with regard to any given "institutional" context, that which gives it its peculiarly abstract character, has to do with just the fact that any context whatsoever, or any field of substantive problems whatever the intrinsic nature of the latter, may

serve as a substratum or reference point for the emergence of interests or for the establishment of strategic relations -- relations which will always involve, with the content of "self-distinction" or "self-affirmation" that defines them, a problem of potential or actual conflict and a problem of power in the broad sense of the term.

Thus, strategy, interest and power make up jointly a certain abstract aspect of any concrete process of interaction in a given sociological context. Provided that we keep in mind that interests may correspond both to individual and to collective agents (foci or systems of solidarity); that, therefore, the problem of power poses itself not only in terms of the distribution and exercise of power among agents, but also, from the point of view of collective agents, internally to such agents, whether it be the case of a production of power for external exercise or of the very articulation of that aspect with the internal distribution of power; that this involves, in turn, a question of strategy at several levels; we can then say that we have here what is specific and distinctive of politics, or -- to put it that way -- the content of politics in general, which is paradoxically distinguished by not having a content, insofar as any substantive issues, or ends of whatever nature, may occasion strategic interaction.

From this derive some important analytical consequences for the institutional aspects of political life, or, in other words, for the relationships between the "political" and the "institutional." If the political character of any action or interaction is linked to its abstract strategic character, regardless of the substantive area of problems or of the specific feature of the ends at play,

two consequences can be pointed out: (1) any confrontation or conflict of objectives of whatever nature corresponds to the sphere of politics, whether these objectives be "economic" (in the sense of "material"), religious, ethnic, of class, of region or any other type; (2) there emerges room for a particular set of institutions, a certain institutional sphere, which corresponds specifically to politics and which may be called "political institutions." Such institutions, however, draw their specificity from the fact that they deal generically with conflict, that is to say, with conflict of whatever nature, whether they seek: (a) to eliminate or settle conflict; (b) to frame and regulate it, i.e., to change it into a form of "mitigated" strategic interaction, disciplined by rules and, which is at the limit, non-belligerent or non-violent; (c) even to participate in conflict, in which case we shall be dealing with a political institution (or with political institutionalization) in the specific sense of organizing efforts on the part of certain interest focus with the aim of assuring efficacy in strategic interactions it comes to engage in.

III

If we turn now to the question of the "autonomy of the political," I think the above discussion sheds some new light on it. It is important to stress the rather large variety of senses in which the idea of the autonomy of the political may be taken. The following are examples of different issues usually mixed up in the debates somehow related to it: (a) the question of greater or lesser "neutrality" of the state apparatus with regard to antagonic classes or social forces; (b) the question of greater or lesser "presence" or "initiative"

on the part of the state as opposed to society in general ("state-ness", as it is usually called in English language literature); (c) the question of the degree of consolidation of the "rules of the game" or of "political institutionalization", which in principle can vary independently of the degree of "stateness" or of "neutrality" and which is sometimes called "autonomy of the political arena";¹³ (d) the question of the autonomy to be ascribed to the political sphere --however defined--in terms of its causal relationships with other spheres in different analytical models.

If we start with question (d), it seems quite clear that the conception of politics proposed above turns much of what is discussed in this regard into a set of false problems. For the "sphere" of the political, insofar as related to a strategic "dimension" or aspect that can put its imprint on social relations regardless of the nature of the ends or interests at issue in different concrete circumstances, does not correspond, properly speaking, to a "sphere" or "level" that might be caused or determined by another in any intelligible sense. Of course, I do not mean by that to denounce as unintelligible or meaningless the opposition between something which is presented as a substratum ("basis", "infrastructure") and something else which is supported by the former or lays its roots in it. But I suggest that the terms into which this antinomy is adequately translated oppose, on the one hand, the substratum of the actual or potential conflicts of any nature, as well as the actual or potential foci of solidarity and agglutination which corresponds to them, and, on the other hand, the plane where their organization is sought in other words, the plane of the "social basis"

of conflicts, which is itself always political insofar as it involves always, by definition, the strategic dimension; and the plane of the institutionalization of conflicts or of political institutionalization. To be sure, a certain terminological ambiguity remains: there is the organization or institutionalization of conflict in general-- that is to say, the constitutional level, where one deals with the political-institutional apparatus insofar as it is designed to regulate conflicts and to establish the rules of the strategic game, i.e., to set up the "political arena"; and there is also organization insofar as related to the possibility for a certain interest nucleus, as such, to get efficiently involved in the strategic game of power, whether this involvement takes place under belligerent or mitigated forms, that is, under forms either compatible or incompatible with the general or "constitutional" institutional parameters. I would propose, though, that organizational efforts at the latter level (say, the "operational" level of political coexistence, by contrast with the "constitutional" one, such as the antinomy is used by Buchanan and Tullock)¹⁴ should be seen as integrating, in principle, the plane of the "social basis" of conflicts. However, the terminological ambiguity is also expressive of a substantive difficulty: it concerns the fact that we have here a "gray zone" or a dialectic in which interests that become generalized and the corresponding "operational" organizations or procedures may come to redefine, either gradually or abruptly, more or less crucial aspects of the "constitutional" framework of political institutions.

At any rate, with regard to the question of the autonomy of the political seen from the angle of causal relations between

different "spheres", the real problem has to do with the relations between the level of political institutions and the social basis of conflicts of any kind. And it seems to me that, in these terms, the problem undoubtedly allows for a definite answer, to the effect that there is a general determination or conditioning of the forms found at the level of political institutions by the social basis of conflicts--above all if due stress is layed upon the "voluntary" element which is present in political institutions, in contrast to the "givenness" and opacity of general social relations where conflicts have their roots and which make up the context of political institutions even in their "constitutional" dimension. This amounts, to sum up, to looking at political institutions (including the state) as part and parcel, after all, of society, and is not at all incompatible with occasionally acknowledging a large degree of "stateness" in a certain society, a characteristic whose explanation is ultimately also to be sought at the level of social relations or of the social basis of conflicts.

In turn, the question concerning the "neutrality" of the state apparatus and the one of political institutionalization in the sense of consolidation of the rules of the game articulate with each other in an interesting way. The former, in the last analysis, has to do with the problem of the extent to which political institutions are themselves instruments in a process of strategic interaction or of domination. The latter raises the issue of the degree to which a certain society may have succeeded in setting up stable institutional parameters regardless of the question of whether such a success should be seen as the consequence of an effective "neutralization" of the

state apparatus or rather of the effective consolidation of precisely the relations of domination, a consolidation which might hypothetically have reached the point of rendering "opaque" the domination feature itself of the relations in question and of achieving compliance and legitimation for the latter.

It should be noted, in the first place, that both these questions--and, of course, the one of "stateness" as well--are of a clearly empirical character. In contrast to the question of casual relationships, there is no theoretical-methodological reason to assume that they deserve a determinate generic answer. That seems quite obvious as regards the problem of political institutionalization: I think no one is willing to challenge the view that political institutionalization, in the sense established above, can vary enormously. But even in the case of autonomy as "neutrality" of the state, granted that one must presume that political institutions are themselves the product of processes of a strategic nature (a presumption which stems from the very conception of politics adopted here), there is no reason to suppose a priori that such processes must result once and for all in a certain degree of subjugation of the state by certain forces. Thus, the state will be less or more "autonomous" according to the more or less complete triumph of certain social forces over others.

Second, we can see that the practical problem, the political problem par excellence, has to do with an issue that poses itself in the junction of those two questions: how to achieve political institutionalization, in the sense of "rules of the game" that are both stable and capable of allowing for non-belligerent strategic

interaction, and simultaneously to avoid having such rules turn out to consecrate relations of domination, whether open or "opaque." In other words, how to make of political institutions a set of agencies and rules that may be: (a) not only non-instrumental for domination, but also capable of operating so as to check the proclivity of the strategic game to result in the establishment of relations of domination; and (b) capable, moreover, to keep themselves--whatever the measure of "stateness", which may even increase as a consequence of the previous requirement--"porous" and open to the plurality of interests at play, so as to make it possible to avoid having the state become, no longer merely the instrument, but the very subject of domination. And we can see, further, that the interesting analytical and empirical issues with regard to those two questions are always at least implicitly linked to such an articulation between them.

A few closing remarks on this. Although the definition of the political by reference to the strategic with its "abstract intentionality" makes it necessary to treat strategic relations as political wherever we find them (emphasizing for instance, the affinity between what there may be of strategy in family relations, on the one hand, and the manifestly strategic relations between political parties or even the factions in a civil war, on the other hand), it is impossible not to recognize--besides being in accord with the current usage of the word "political"--that the interest and relevance of conflictive and strategic relations occurs chiefly when they go beyond a certain threshold in terms of magnitude and/or salience. This threshold corresponds, I suggest, to the point where the conflicts in question

achieve some sort of resonance in the area of political institutions, whether translating themselves in organizations or institutions of the "operational" type or somehow occasioning the mobilization of agencies or norms proper to the "constitutional" level and perhaps eventually displacements and changes in this level.

With this I mean to indicate that, in spite of the analytical and theoretical importance of paying attention to the strategic aspect of interaction, the "sphere" of politics may often be taken to correspond to the sphere of political institutions. What is indispensable is to keep in mind that political institutions are those dealing with conflict or strategic relations as such, in one of two possible ways, either constituting themselves as institutions or organizations in order to participate as strategic agents in a relation of that kind or seeking to regulate such relations. That permits avoiding the circularity of those analyses which make of the whole institutional realm the equivalent of politics while defining the political itself, without further ado, by reference to the institutional. This circularity seems to me to be present in much of the discussion related to the question of the "autonomy of the political", regardless of the propensity to affirm or to deny that autonomy.

Finally, the proposed perspective does not imply neglecting what a certain literature has called the question of "non-issues" nor "non-decisions," those possible political items which do not crystallize as real issues in the political agenda of a society. For what is involved in this question is precisely the two-sided problem either of the conditions for the occurrence of successful processes of mobilization and "operational" organization with regard to certain issues, or

of the sensitivity shown by the "constitutional" arrangements toward the corresponding "latent" or real interests--and these two "sides" are, of course, intimately linked to each other. At any rate, if we are to have a genuine practical and analytical problem, there is the need for some actor to be able to propose the issues in question as actual political issues.

IV

I think the above provides a basic perspective from which stem some important consequences for the problems that concern our group. The central proposition might perhaps be stated in a seemingly trivial way: ours is basically a problem of the process of emergence, consolidation and also disappearance of collective subjects (of collective identities, of solidary nuclei to which correspond interests and of the relationships of this process to the constitutional aspect of political institutions. Our basic problem involves the question of which potential or latent sets of interests turn out to be capable of actualizing themselves and of acting collectively to promote themselves institutionally, and of the weight and effectiveness of several such sets relative to one another in the process. However trivial this proposition may look from a certain angle, the point I want to stress here concerns the proper appreciation of the status of different analytic dimensions and their inter-relationships, as well as some ramifications thereof.

To put in a paradoxical form what seems to me to be one such ramification: it is by avoiding equating the political with the institutional that it becomes possible to evaluate adequately the importance of the institutional "sphere", that is to say, to evaluate

the extent to which the problem produced by the play of collective identities and interest foci in the process of seeking to constitute themselves as actual collective subjects and confronting one another turns out to be an institutional problem. Such a problem revolves around the relationships among some of the meanings given above to the question of the autonomy of the political, and translates itself into the question of how, in the last instance, it may be possible to institute (or institutionalize) a political arena or a set of rules of the game, which, regardless of the degree of "stateness", at once ensures neutrality of the state apparatus and effective operation of the latter with the aim of avoiding the crystallization of relations of domination of whatever nature. It is, in other words, always a problem of institution-building (or -rebuilding) in correspondence with the forms assumed by the play of interests and identities that take place at the level of the social basis of conflicts. And it always poses, therefore, in connection with just the strategic and voluntary element necessarily involved in it, a challenge to be affirmatively faced again and again at the institutional level--even if the latter also represents, in any given moment, a context or parameter for the strategic game.

I will now indicate the gains to be made with this perspective by referring briefly to some difficulties that can be found in recent works devoted to themes bearing on our general problems. I have no intention of being systematic, nor of providing an adequate sample of problems to be found in the literature. My only aim is to furnish some contrasting illustrations.

The first illustration can be taken from works dealing with the

general theme of political authoritarianism, particularly with authoritarian regimes to be found in developing countries at the periphery of the capitalist international system. A frequent way of diagnosing such regimes is to link them to "étatist" traditions, whether in a political-culture sense or otherwise. The key element in efforts of this kind often consists in opposing a model which stresses "civil society" or "interest group politics" as an explanatory principle to another in which emphasis is given to the state as such. This is frequently described in terms of opposing a more "sociological" explanation to another stressing "political" variables.¹⁵

The difficulties to which this approach exposes itself can be shown by reference to a volume that was published in Brazil some years ago, Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza's Estado e Partidos Políticos no Brasil.¹⁶ The author deals with the dynamics of political parties in Brazil in the period from 1945 to 1964, seeking to explain the institutional crisis of that period, which ended up in the military take-over of 1964. Two basic dimensions are distinguished, the one concerning the "class-party correlation" (understood as the electoral strength of parties and, in general, the articulation between parties and social bases, linked to such factors as social mobilization and extension of the suffrage) and the other having to do with the "institutionalization of the party system" or the "institutional strength" of parties (defined as "the extent to which governmental policy-making is ... subject to the influence of party organizations").¹⁷ The distinction is clearly parallel to the usual polarization between "society" and "State" in current explanatory models, and Campello de Souza emphasizes the "crucial problems" of the period.¹⁸

The separation of the two dimensions certainly plays down the importance of the "class-party correlation" and the factors associated

with it for the very institutionalization of the party system. The author herself resorts, regarding the idea of institutionalization, to the notion of "incorporation" formulated by Arthur Stinchcombe, in which the aspect of governmental effectiveness is explicitly linked to the mobilization and participatory one.¹⁹ It seems out of question that the institutional strength of parties, in the above sense, depends in a decisive way on their electoral strength and mobilizational capacity, unless one is dealing with a political system which is so oligarchical as to render meaningless the attempt to describe in terms of "institutionalization" the effectiveness that a party may show even with respect to the level of policy-making. Nonetheless, Campello de Souza sees the distinction and the emphasis on the "institutional"--in an attitude that is currently partaken by many--as an adequate corrective for common methodological errors.

This shows up very clearly in several methodological comments explicitly dealing with the "autonomy of the political sphere" which are addressed at some theses concerning the "institutional crisis" of the 1945-1964 period found in the Brazilian literature. Campello de Souza criticizes the current interpretative models (which she associates with such names as Gláucio Soares, Celso Furtado, and Hélio Jaguaribe) on the grounds that the perception of a crisis situation which would break out "in a nearly automatic way" (as a consequence of the change in the correlation of forces obtained in the wake of socio-economic change) involves an ambiguous position as to the autonomy of the political sphere. On the one hand, the author argues, it postulates this autonomy, since, according to it, "a formally democratic electoral mechanism... works in the long run as a political corrective to the class structure." On the other hand, however, it would deny the

autonomy of the political, since it sees changes in the correlation of forces as synonymous to institutional crisis, and thus incurs in "pure economicism."²⁰

But how could one conceivably think of a change in the correlation of forces that would not produce crisis, particularly if such a change is seen to be a result of the incorporation of new and important interest foci engendered by socio-economic change, and if one keeps in mind that this incorporation takes place--as argued by Campello de Souza herself--within a hitherto oligarchical and elitist institutional framework? Such transformations could only be thought of without institutional crisis if one could conceive the institutional framework as being--to put it in the redundant way--highly institutionalized (in the sense of sensitive, flexible and open to any emergent interest focus). But the paradoxical character of this solution is quite obvious: first, it would require the assumption that one can achieve institutionalization in that sense independently of effective social forces, or that institutionalization can occur in a social void; second, what is to be made, in this case, of the assumed oligarchical and elitist nature of the system?

What we have, then, in Campello de Souza's propositions, seems to me to be a complete failure to properly grasp the meaning of the level of political institutions in its relationships with the social basis of conflicts--and hence confusion as to the question of the autonomy of the political, for the several senses that were distinguished above are mixed up. Thus, if political institutions are seen as the sphere in which, by definition, the conflicts arising in the social basis reflect themselves--conflicts that are no less political in themselves--to look at changes in the correlation of forces in the

social basis as bringing about institutional crises is not to incur in "economicism." Conversely, the operation of a "formally" democratic electoral mechanism, insofar as it is real and effective, amounts precisely to ensuring that changes in the correlation of forces in the social basis (in the level of the class structure, to take the aspect stressed by Campello de Souza) can count upon an institutional leverage to manifest themselves in a consequential way. And that must not necessarily be seen as the equivalent, analytically speaking, of postulating the autonomy of the institutional sphere in terms of casual relations: there would remain, of course, the need to explain the "social" reasons of changes in the correlation of forces and their articulation with the possibility (or the fact) that certain electoral mechanisms go on operating--an operation that turns out to represent, in the given situation, an acknowledgedly "corrective" presence of agencies or aspects of the state apparatus.

Another example, taken from an area in which the concern with the genesis and dynamics of authoritarian regimes is coupled with developments in other kinds of political systems, has to do with the uses made of the notion of "corporatism" in the recent literature of political science. My general impression is that the current success of this notion, with the various meanings ascribed to it and with its application to the political systems of advanced capitalist countries as well as to developing "bureaucratic-authoritarian" countries, should itself be seen as an indication of the difficulties that I have in mind here, rather than as the due acknowledgement by political scientists of the fruitfulness of a conceptual tool. Even if we put aside the approaches in which corporatism is seen as a special kind of tradition or of "political culture" (an approach

that seems to attract increasingly consensual criticism, even with due reservations for its residual contributions), I have serious doubts whether anything is to be gained by insisting on resorting to the notion of corporatism as a general explanatory or descriptive concept a la Schmitter or O'Donnell. If we agree that we must be subtle enough to make room for the various shades in the inter-relationships of--to make it short--"state and society," I cannot see what we gain in our substantive understanding of the problems when, in order to stick to the notion of corporatism, we have to oppose "state corporatism" to "societal corporatism," or to distinguish between the "privatists" and "etatist" forms or ingredients of a "bifrontal" and "segmentary" corporatism which, in turn, is seen as only a variety among many others of a phenomenon that "changes from country to country, and within the same country as time goes by, depending, above all, on the differences and changes in the type of state that it contributes to link with civil society." It seems clear that everything remains to be done once the name "corporatism" is saved from its political-culture sense and from being disposed of. I admit, however, that this is a point which deserves further discussion, around which some potentially important institutional issues emerge: the issue, for instance, of corporatist versus territorial representation, on which there seems to be much to be done by way of cleaning up the dust of prejudices and creating a favorable disposition toward institutional experimentation (on the assumption that it is possible in terms of power) in an era of bureaucracies, large corporations, "bureaucratic rings" and so forth.

At any rate, some further illustrations of the difficulties that encumber our general themes can be produced by resorting to

some very recent works on precisely the problems relating to "corporatism". I have in mind specifically the contributions by Alessandro Pizzorno and Claus Offe to the volume Organizing Interests in Western Europe,²² edited by Suzanne D. Berger. Both Pizzorno's and Offe's chapters deal with the post-liberal presence, in the advanced capitalist countries, of major organized interest groups, seeking to evaluate their political significance vis-à-vis the traditional (liberal) model of democratic representation that includes elections, parties and parliament. They give, however, different names to the new arrangements: Offe calls them "corporatism", Pizzorno prefers "pluralism". If this looks somewhat strange for the different associations that conventionally tend to go together with each of these words, especially as far as the more or less democratic character of a polity is concerned,²³ there is something else that seems more revealing to me. Offe, who argues that the characteristic feature of modern corporatist polities is "the coexistence of the two circuits" -- the corporatist circuit of "interest groups, their relative procedural status, and bodies of consultation and reconciliation", in conjunction with the democratic representative machinery --²⁴, also sustains that "the advantage of corporatist modes of representation over democratic representative ones resides in the potential of the former for depoliticizing conflict, that is, in restricting both the scope of the participants in conflict and the scope of strategies and tactics that are permitted in the pursuit of conflicting interests".²⁵ Interestingly enough, Pizzorno, in turn, sees the "final stage" of the process of emergence and consolidation of organized interest groups (a process which includes the emergence of structures that defend

special interests and then, later on, the expansion of the range of aims to be pursued by them) in the "politicization of the interest organizations, when their status is legally recognized and various public functions are officially handed over to them".²⁶

Of course, we might be dealing here with a substantive disagreement between the two authors. But this does not seem to be the case, for the aspect to which Pizzorno links the politicization of interest organizations (the attribution of public functions to interest organizations) is of central concern also to Offe -- in fact, it is the very title of Offe's chapter. Besides, it seems plausible that Pizzorno's "politicization" of interest organizations may be instrumental to Offe's "depoliticization" of conflicts, that is to say, the attribution of public status to interest groups may turn out to be a form of cooptation of leaders and organizations that would be inclined to conflictive forms of promoting their aims. This is actually the tenor of Offe's argument, which explicitly points out the class bias of the "modern brand" of corporatism.

However, two comments are in order here. In the first place, regardless of the substantive compatibility or agreement that we may find among the propositions of our two authors, two different conceptions of the political seem nonetheless at play. The interference of (or the direct contact with) the state is what "politicizes" the interest groups for Pizzorno, whereas for Offe the conflicts in which they engage are political independently of any transition through the state, and the intermingling of the state can even result in depoliticization. Of course, I do not mean to say that Pizzorno is not aware of the political content of interest groups conflict even previously to the attribution to them of public functions by the state--an awareness

that requires an analytical definition of the political which goes beyond the mere reference to the state conventionally found. Nevertheless, his proposition on the politicization of interest organizations seems to me to illustrate a willingness to use critical terms in a quite loose way -- and many of the seemingly substantive issues on such questions as the autonomy of the political (or, in general, the relationships between analytic dimensions) turn around the confusions that derive therefrom.

But it is important to stress that there is more to this than a mere exhortation to the effect that words be used in a careful and precise way. In my view, what is involved here is, in the last analysis, the problem of the status and role of theory in our discipline. If the attitude just described prevails, there should be no reason for amazement if such a mess as we presently have concerning "corporatism" can be created in so short a span of time as the one elapsed since the notion became fashionable--with crucially important consequences from the point of view of the objective of achieving an adequate grasp of the substantive problems we are concerned with.

In the second place, this plea for theory and theoretical sensitivity can perhaps become more forceful if we look at Pizzorno and Offe's propositions from a different viewpoint. Let us take the view of a final "cooptational" (or "étatist") stage which succeeds a more exclusively "representational" one. It is quite apparent that this view runs counter, in important ways, to much of the common wisdom in current political analysis. In particular, by envisaging a process in which the very pluralistic assertion of the interests proper to civil society leads, by its own logic, to increasing

encroachment on the part of the state, it brings a most serious blow to "methodological" conceptions which oppose the state and civil society to each other as explanatory principles. Indeed, Pizzorno and Offe's texts (as well as other texts included in the volume cited above, to stick to it as an example) sometimes read, in spite of dealing with the relations between state and interest organizations in advanced capitalist countries, like many well known interpretations of such phenomena as the relations between populism and patrimonial states in "developing" countries which emphasize an "etatist" principle. Maybe someone wishes to argue that this is all to the good, we are discovering "convergences", "corporatism" is multiform and pervasive. I think, however, that this risks to amount to giving up the aim of actually grasping the logic at play in the overall process. By keeping too close to the events, we are just as likely to find out new "peculiarities" and peculiar "traditions" as to stumble on new "similarities" and "convergences" -- in either case not really understanding, quite probably, what is going on. Just as some countries are authoritarian, according to certain authors, because they are--they always were, their tradition is "Iberic-Latin," for instance--now we are all corporatist, albeit with different shades. If we want to avoid the fluidity and inconsistency of this state of affairs, it is indispensable, in my view, that different sets of findings and interpretations like the ones discussed by Pizzorno and Offe, on the one hand, and those of the literature on populism and patrimonialism, on the other, might be looked at jointly with recourse to a set of categories rich and complex enough. In short, we need a bold theory of political change--and that is what

the comparative thrust of our study group seems to me to be all about.

V

I shall finish by sketchily indicating what I think that theory should be like, even at the risk of being somewhat cryptic. As I have just said, it should be bold--by which I mean that it should not be inhibited by over-zealous fears of such sins as "evolutionism" and "linearism", which it became fashionable to denounce. Since its aim is to apprehend the logic at play in long run processes (or in processes taking place in apparently widely different contexts), it cannot but dare to try to recover such "linearities" as may actually exist in operation in these processes. That would, by itself, pose the problem of the direction of change, which inevitably brings about the reference to a future state and the question of the relationship between "descriptive" and "normative" ingredients in a theory of this sort. But this question is all the more forcefully introduced given our central concern with problems of representation and repression, which become meaningless if they are not immediately associated with the ideas of identity and autonomy. Since collectivities are a crucial part of our object of study, this in turn brings about the issue of collective subjects dealt with above, as well as the strategic elements involved in their emergence and consolidation, or their frustration as such, their neutralization and possible disappearance (either forced or otherwise). Many of the problems bearing on representation and repression hinge upon such questions, but a decisive aspect must still be mentioned: how the problem of collective identity and autonomy should be related to individual identity and autonomy in an adequate theory of political change.

I submit that the dialectic between interests and solidarity such as quickly sketched above represents an important point of convergence for those many-sided issues, being a possible way of stating the dialectic between the individual, on the one hand, and different levels of the collective, on the other. Moreover, this dialectic can be seen as resolving itself in the notion of a "political market" in which -- in the prevalence of forms of solidarity of broad scope and limited emotional and ideological involvement -- individual participation in "partial" collective entities of whatever kind that may take place will correspond to an extreme or "ideal" form of the "classical" (not the "corporatist") model of the pluralist society. That is to say, it will be, in the limit, only segmental and voluntary participation in intermediate groups or organizations whose composition or membership is ever changing. Therefore, the "political market" as an ideal model (if you will, an "anticipated state") incorporates the concern with freeing individuals from participation in ascriptive, non-voluntary and permanent collective entities of whatever nature, besides involving a synthesis in which there is the pursuit of interests (and hence strategy) under conditions which imply, as suggested by Weber in connection with the general idea of a market, the existence of community among the agents in interaction. For this to occur fully, of course, a process of "individuation" (to borrow another term from Habermas) should necessarily also take place -- and the autonomous individual turns out to be a necessary reference point.

By resorting to a conceptual model of this sort, we should be able to conceive of the process of political change so as to incorporate

in a coherent way the "structural" (substratum), socio-psychological (or ideological) and institutional dimensions -- and, on the march, more easily and lucidly account for the meaning of the different forms of "corporatism" that have recently attracted so much attention. ²⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).
2. See Jurgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", in J. Habermas, Toward a Rational Society (London: Heinemann, 1971): Théorie et Pratique (Paris: Payot, 1975), two volumes: Connaissance et Interêt (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
3. Besides the works cited above, see also Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975): and Logica delle Scienze Sociali (Bologna: II Mulino, 1970).
4. I have dealt with difficulties of Habermas's ideas in this regard in Fábio W. Reis, "Change, Rationality and Politics", paper presented to an international seminar on Political Science in the Eighties, held at the Instituto de Estudos Econômicos, Sociais e Políticos de São Paulo, São Paulo, November 3-6, 1981.
5. See Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", op. cit., pp 91-92: Théorie et Pratique, op. cit., volume II, p. 104: Logica delle Scienze Sociali, op. cit., pp. 85-86.
6. Logica delle Scienze Sociali, op. cit., p. 84.
7. Ibid., pp. 85-86.
8. Logik der Sozialwissenschaften, which originally appeared in 1967, has seemingly been repudiated by Habermas. Whatever else this may mean, it is certainly an indication of Habermas's vacillations on important points.
9. Alessandro Pizzorno, "Introduzione allo Studio della Partecipazione Politica", Quaderni di Sociologia, 15, 3-4 (July-December, 1966).
10. See Habermas, Theorie et Pratique, op. cit., volume II, pp. 104-105.
11. See Pizzorno, op. cit., pp. 252-253.
12. Ibid., pp. 256.
13. See, for instance, Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
14. James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, The Calculus of Consent (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962).
15. In the Brazilian literature, a recent example of recourse to this sort of opposition can be found in Simon Schwartzman, Bases do Autoritarismo Brasileiro (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Campus, 1982). See also, for another recent example, Pierre Birnbaum. "Estados, Ideologias y Acción Colectiva en Europa Occidental", Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales, 32, 4 (1980).

16. Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza, Estado e Partidos Políticos no Brasil, 1930 a 1964 (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1976).
17. Idib., pp. 48-49 and 58.
18. Idib., p. 59.
19. Idib., p. 57.
20. Idib., p. 142
21. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Sobre o 'Corporativismo' e a Questão do Estado", Cadernos DCP, 3 (March, 1976), p.4. See also Philippe Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" The Review of Politics, 36, 1 (1974).
22. Claus Offe, "The Attribution of Public Status to Interest Groups: Observations on the West German Case", and Alessandro Pizzorno, "Interests and Parties in Pluralism", both in Suzanne Berger (ed.), Organizing Interests in Western Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
23. Actually, Offe clearly seems hesitant as to whether he intends to attribute an undemocratic character to "corporatism", for, on the one hand, he contrasts "modern corporatism" to "authoritarian models of corporatism", but, on the other hand, he also opposes "corporatist models of interest representation" to "democratic representative ones". See Offe, op. cit., p. 141.
24. Offe, op. cit., p. 141; Offe's emphasis.
25. Idib., p. 141; Offe's emphasis
26. Pizzorno, "Interests and Parties in Pluralism", op. cit., p. 257; my emphasis.
27. For those who may want to decipher these over-compact remarks, the following texts can be of interest: Fabio W. Reis, "Solidariedade, Interesses e Desenvolvimento Político", Cadernos DCP, 1 (March, 1974): Política e Racionalidade: Problemas de Teoria e Método de uma Sociologia "Crítica" da Política (Belo Horizonte: Edições da Revista Brasileira de Estudos Políticos, forthcoming); and "Change, Rationality and Politics", op. cit.