TONY KING

Anthony Stephen King

17 November 1934 – 12 January 2017

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2010

by

ALBERT WEALE
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Anthony (Tony) King was Professor of Government at the University of Essex from 1969, having been appointed Senior Lecturer in 1966, to his death in 2017. Originally from Canada, he was educated both at Queen's University Ontario and Oxford, gaining a First in both institutions, before going on to DPhil work at Nuffield College, which was completed in 1962 after he had become a Fellow of Magdalen College. He researched and published across a wide range of political science topics, including elections, parties and party systems, the practice of government, public policy, political leadership and American politics. He was instrumental in founding the *British Journal of Political Science*, which he also edited over a number of years. He served on the Committee on Standards in Public Life and on the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords. As a journalist and broadcaster he was much in demand, particularly on election nights.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy, XIX, 395–417
Posted 16 October 2020. © British Academy 2020.

TONY KING

At one point during the 1997 BBC Election Night broadcast, when it was becoming clear that Labour was heading for a landslide victory, David Dimbleby turned to Tony King—Anthony King always preferred to be known as Tony—the principal commentator on the night, and asked how he would describe the turn of events. King replied immediately, offering the image of an asteroid hitting the planet and destroying practically all life on earth. That vivid metaphor was just one example of King's ability to sum up the meaning of contemporary political events in a way that both captured their significance in the longer term and was accessible to a wide audience. It was as a fluent and knowledgeable commentator on current events that King was known to the world at large, and it is no surprise that, when he died on 12 January 2017, the event was reported on the national news. King's death also resonated widely in the world of political science, occasioning an outpouring from professional colleagues of obituaries, tributes, a symposium in the *Political Quarterly* brought together by Wyn Grant and Alan Ware, and a volume edited by Ivor Crewe and David Sanders dedicated to King's life and work, arising from a conference at the University of Essex, where King taught for over fifty years.[1] John Bercow, then Speaker of the House of Commons, hosted a memorial event in Speaker's House in the Houses of Parliament on 22 June 2017, attended by a wide range of people from politics, public life, journalism and academia.

Such widespread marking of the passing of his life was testimony both to King's presence in the media, where he seemed to combine Lord Reith's imperatives to inform, educate and entertain in one role, and to his influence in academic political science, where his writing and research touched on some of the most profound questions of modern democratic life.

[1] D. Sanders, 'A letter to Professor Anthony King', 13 January 2017, https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2017/01/13/a-letter-to-professor-anthony-king (accessed 16 August 2020); 'Political expert Anthony King dies aged 82', BBC News, 12 January 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-38596584 (accessed 16 August 2020); D. McKie, 'Anthony King: obituary', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/15/anthony-king-obituary; 'Professor Anthony King – opinion poll expert: obituary', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 January 2017, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2017/01/12/professor-anthony-king-opinion-poll-expert-obituary/; A. Weale, 'Obituary: Anthony King (1934–2017)', *Political Studies News*, 27 January 2017, https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/anthony-king-1934-2017; A. Weale, 'In memoriam: Anthony King', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 50 (2017), 590–2; W. Grant and A. Ware, 'Anthony King: his intellectual legacy. Introduction', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 5–8, prefacing the following papers: N. Allen, 'Great expectations: the job at the top and the people who do it', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 9–17; T. Bale, 'Change – and scepticism – as a constant: Anthony King on parties and party systems', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 38–46; M. Moran, 'Whatever happened to overloaded government?', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 29–37; M. Russell and P. Cowley, 'Modes of UK executive-legislative relations revisited', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 18–28; G. K. Wilson, 'Anthony King and the United States', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 47–51; and T. Wright, 'Remembering Tony King', *Political Quarterly*, 89 (2018), 52–5. The volume from the Essex conference is I. Crewe and D. Sanders (eds.), *Authoritarian Populism and Liberal Democracy* (Cham, Switzerland, 2020).

Early life and career

Born in Toronto in 1934, King was brought up in an archetypically progressive household for the 1930s. His father, Harold, was an art teacher and an artist, his mother, Marjorie, a librarian. Among their friends the Kings counted C. B. Macpherson, the theorist of 'possessive individualism' in the history of British political thought, as a regular visitor to their home. King was an only child, and like many only children showed an independent streak from a young age. At around the age of five, he decided to ride a streetcar around Toronto by himself to explore the city. He told his mother what he was going to do, and she let him. To his independence of spirit, he added early journalistic skills, writing a regular sports column for the local newspaper as a teenager.

After gaining a First Class BA in History and Economics at Queen's University Ontario in 1956, King moved to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, reading PPE and graduating with a First in 1958, the same year as Brian Barry. He later collaborated with Barry in founding the *British Journal of Political Science* when both were at the University of Essex, joking that Barry had gained the best first in their year, while he had gained the second best first. He became a student at Nuffield College in 1958 to undertake a DPhil on the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century, but moved as Fellow to Magdalen College in 1961, before completing the DPhil in 1962. He remained at Magdalen until 1965, but was recruited to Essex as Senior Lecturer in 1966 by Jean Blondel, the founding Professor of the Department of Government.

These were the days when vice-chancellors took their academic mission seriously, aiming to build up intellectually distinctive centres of learning, as did Albert Sloman at Essex with his idea of a research-led university. They were also the days when outstanding heads of department such as Jean Blondel, arguably the greatest institution-builder in post-war UK political science, were given the freedom to recruit the best and the brightest in order to promote high standards of academic excellence in new institutional settings. Having been recruited as a Senior Lecturer, King became a Reader in 1968, followed by a Chair in 1969. He relished the opportunity to play a part in building up a strong department, attracted by the freshness and modernity of Government at Essex, both in its organisation and in its professional understanding of the discipline of political science. Approached on more than one occasion with offers of lucrative posts in prestigious American universities, he remained at Essex for the rest of his career, spending only periods of study-leave abroad. He never regretted this choice. He continued to teach, write and research well past retirement age. On his death he left an unfinished paper on ministerial turn-over in British government, as well as an unfinished monograph on the British prime ministership.

Research and writing

King researched and wrote across a wide range of topics, including elections and referendums, parties and party systems, executive-legislative relations, politicians and political leadership, the conduct of government and public policy, and American politics. These are all sub-fields of political science in which highly specialist research is conducted. However, King saw these elements as hanging together in complex ways and recognised that all needed to be understood if we are to explain governmental decision-making. The study of mass politics seemed to appeal to his sporting interests, with opinion polls providing a running commentary on who were the favourites and who were the outsiders in the race. However, crucially, elections provided the context within which the modern art of government had to be practised. Along with constitutional conditions and political culture, electoral rules provide the circumstances within which political leadership—or lack of it—is exercised, and therefore within which public policy choices are made.

Elections and referendums

King's earliest publications included co-authorship, with David Butler, of the 1964 and 1966 British general election studies, and it was as a student of elections that King was commonly known.[2] However, although King continued over the course of his career to write extensively about elections, he was not an electoral studies specialist in the style of those who seek to model electoral behaviour statistically. In his writing he used public opinion data extensively, not least because he wrote columns for the *Observer* and *Daily Telegraph* presenting an analysis of their commissioned polling. However, those data consisted of time-series over months or years based on approval ratings of politicians and parties, and were deployed to illustrate the waxing and waning of political fortunes. King took seriously the statistical analysis of electoral behaviour, for example the work of Ivor Crewe and colleagues on partisan dealignment in Britain in the 1970s and of David Sanders and colleagues concerned with the influence of economic conditions and subjective perceptions on government popularity. Yet King's own approach to voting and elections was synthetic and historical, rather than statistically analytical. He sought to weave a narrative about how different variables might combine to produce an outcome, and what that outcome meant for the evolution of the party competition and government. This approach was put to good use in his analysis of the result of the 1975 referendum on the UK's membership of

[2] D. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London, 1965); and *The British General Election of 1966* (London, 1966).

the European Economic Community (as it then was). Using public opinion polling evidence, he argued that the decisive shift of opinion in favour of continued membership was the consequence of Labour voters, who had little by way of fixed views on the matter, following the lead of the Labour government.[3]

Between 1992 and 2006, King edited the series *Britain at the Polls*, the last with John Bartle from Essex (King was always keen to draw on Essex's considerable electoral expertise for his projects).[4] These volumes were not intended to compete with the authoritative volumes of David Butler on the elections themselves, but were instead meant to place those elections in their historical and political context, looking as much to the future as to the past. Thus, in the volume on the 1992 election, King surveyed the prospect of continuing Conservative party dominance drawing an extended comparison with the predominant-party systems of Sweden and Japan, contrasting the UK with the rationalism of the first and the corruption of the second. In the 2005 volume, examining the way in which Blair, in a way unprecedented for a Labour prime minister, repeated Thatcher's achievement of three successive election victories in a row, King ascribed the causes of this success to a pragmatic emphasis on good government (even when the achievement fell short of the aspiration), together with the inability of the Conservative party to develop a line of attack on a Labour party that defied left-wing stereotypes. This placing of elections in their historical and political context was connected in King's writing with another of his other spheres of interest, namely parties and party systems.

Parties and party systems

One of King's relatively early papers cast a sceptical eye on the prevailing view held by many political scientists at the time that political parties performed a distinctive number of functions within the political system.[5] Written at a time when the functional analysis of politics was at its height, King enumerated the various putative functions that had been assigned to political parties, before going on to identify a number of disconfirming instances. Political parties did not structure public opinion, because some parties were not programmatic and those that were often exhibited a mismatch between their views and that of the electorate; political parties often failed to integrate the electorate into politics or mobilise political activity; though political parties did

[3] A. King, *Britain Says Yes: the 1975 Referendum on the Common Market* (Washington, DC, 1977), particularly Chapter 6.

[4] A. King (ed.), *Britain at the Polls, 1992* (Chatham, NJ, 1993); *New Labour Triumphs: Britain at the Polls* (Chatham, NJ, 1997); and *Britain at the Polls, 2001* (New York, 2001); J. Bartle and A. King, *Britain at the Polls, 2005* (Washington, DC, 2006).

[5] A. King, 'Political parties in Western democracies: some skeptical reflections', *Polity*, 2 (1969), 111–41.

recruit people to political office, there were many alternative channels of recruitment besides political parties; in many countries parties only had limited reach in organising government; parties did not always play a role in policy formation; and the function of 'interest-aggregation', typically regarded by functionalists as central to politics, was performed by a number of agents other than political parties.

However, King's major contribution to the study of party politics was *SDP: the Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party*, written with his close friend and colleague, Ivor Crewe.[6] The definitive work on the subject, it was awarded the 1995 W. J. M. Mackenzie Prize by the UK's Political Studies Association, shared appropriately enough, given their intersecting biographies, with Brian Barry's *Justice as Impartiality* published in the same year.[7] In the Preface King and Crewe joked that the book had taken longer to write than the SDP had been in existence. Moreover, since the book's conclusion was that the SDP had had virtually no lasting impact on the shape of British party politics, it might be regarded as an exercise in the study of futility. However, it is rescued from this fate by its rich account of political developments in the UK since 1964, setting the backdrop to the birth of the SDP, as well as its detailed telling of its rise and fall. Crewe and King acted as advisers to the new party, and so had the advantage of being able to draw upon insider information. King was a longstanding personal friend of Shirley Williams, who, together with Bill Rodgers and David Owen, formed the original Gang of Three breakaways from Labour, later to be joined by Roy Jenkins, on his return to the UK from his spell as President of the European Commission, to form the Gang of Four, the founders of the SDP.

The book melded Crewe's psephological expertise with King's close experience and knowledge of the world of parties and politics. Crewe and King's overall judgement was that the SDP faced a virtually impossible task in breaking the mould of British politics. The first-past-the-post electoral system made it hard for a third party with geographically wide support to translate votes into seats and, since it responded slowly to party political change, it enabled existing parties to adapt and reform in the face of incipient competition. Moreover, the SDP lacked the advantage of the Labour Party in the first half of the twentieth century, which had successfully broken the mould of British politics by virtue of its having a large core class constituency, the interests of which Labour could distinctively represent. This overall judgement is complemented by a wealth of material of great interest. Chapter 4, for example, is a fine study of the mental anguish undergone by individuals contemplating defection from a political party, torn, as they are, by the conflict of established loyalty and personal integrity. Chapter 11 tells the story of the meeting between Steel, Jenkins and

[6] I. Crewe and A. King, *SDP: the Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford, 1995).
[7] B. Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford, 1995).

their party companions at Steel's home in Ettrickbridge on 29 May 1983, when in the middle of an election campaign in which Jenkins as leader was performing badly, there was a failed attempt by the Liberal representatives present to persuade Jenkins to stand down—an incident exemplifying the hand to hand combat that party politics can involve even among potential coalition partners. And there are a series of brilliant character sketches of leading figures in the story, not least that of David Owen in Chapter 17, a man 'who appeared to see life as necessitating a continuous assertion of will: his will'.[8] It is a fine work of political sociology; it is also a rattling good yarn.

The practice of government

The SDP emerged against a background of policy failures by British governments, most notably in economic policy. The study of government failure was to be a recurring theme in King's work. In 1975 he published 'Overload: problems of governing in the 1970s'. It made a large impression at the time. The paper was originally published in a learned journal, it formed the basis of a radio series and then produced an accessible volume of essays edited by King.[9] The theme of the paper was that UK governments increasingly lacked the capacity to deal with the policy problems that they faced, including local government, the health service, higher education and, especially, incomes policy and economic policy more generally. This lack of capacity arose from intensifying expectations in the electorate about the extent to which governments could provide economic security, reinforced by the intractability of problems as a result of increasing social and economic inter-dependence. In the latter connection, King contrasted the limited effects of the coal miners' strike in 1926 with the widespread effects in 1974. Inter-dependence led to complexity, and complexity challenged the ability of those governing to understand how to manage the social and economic system. The only solution King could canvass was to find a way of reducing the population's expectations of what governments could do.

By 2013, when he came to write *The Blunders of Our Governments*, again jointly with Ivor Crewe, the sense of intractability had disappeared. Blunders were defined as avoidable mistakes by governments.[10] To take one example that figured prominently in the book, when the Thatcher government's poll tax was abandoned in 1992, it was replaced by a banded property tax, a policy that had always been a viable option for

[8] Crewe and King, *SDP*, p. 304.

[9] A. King, 'Overload: problems of governing in the 1970s', *Political Studies*, 23 (1975), 162–74; A. King (ed.), *Why is Britain Becoming Harder to Govern?* (London, 1976).

[10] In April 2011 the British Academy hosted a closed roundtable event to help gather material for *The Blunders of Our Governments*. It held a similar event in March 2014 to gather additional material for the paperback edition.

those looking to reform the old rating system. To blunder is to err not from the intractability of the problem but from an error of decision-making. And for King and Crewe blunders abounded. In addition to the poll tax, there was the mis-selling of personal pensions, the workings of the Child Support Agency, the UK's participation in Europe's Exchange Rate Mechanism, the Millennium Dome and the financial arrangement for upgrading the London underground, to name but a few.

The last part of the book was given over to trying to explain the causes of these blunders, which were divided into two categories. The first of these categories involved assumptions in the thought-world of high-level policy makers that made it hard for them to make well-grounded decisions. In their private lives policy makers inhabit a world in which people have regular incomes, own houses with garages and possess sufficient means to maintain more than one family, all circumstances creating a cultural disconnect with many to whom the rigours of public policy will apply, whether that be storing fuel in times of shortage without a garage or paying maintenance for families on divorce or separation. Policy makers are all too prone to group-think, exemplified at a crucial point of decision on the poll tax, when the key actors were beguiled by the seeming elegance of the solution they were being offered to replace the rates. Policy makers often hold to simple models of how a market economy works, making them prejudiced towards certain types of solutions, no matter how unworkable in practice those solutions are. They know little about implementation and are not required to undergo the discipline of mapping backwards from an eventual goal through the steps necessary to achieve that goal. They are prey to the temptation of the thought that something must be done, so they substitute activity for achievement and rely on symbolism and spin.

The second category of causes was associated with institutional arrangements that fail to check the disposition to error. The power of prime ministers to tame departmental initiatives is not as great as many think. Frequent reshuffles mean that individual ministers may not properly understand developments in their own department. Civil servants often lack the confidence to challenge ministerial initiative and in any case a 'can do' attitude too easily pervades government. Despite the rhetoric of accountability, individual ministers are seldom required to take responsibility for faulty decisions. Parliamentary accountability is weak relative to government power. There are inevitably asymmetries of expertise between governments as purchasers of services and the suppliers of those services, particularly in such fields as IT and finance. All of which together leads to a deficit of deliberation at the heart of government.

The idea of there being a deficit of deliberation in British government was reprised in King's last book, *Who Governs Britain?* Although the themes in that book overlap with *Blunders*, its approach is not a narrative of cases but an anatomy of institutions. Taking the main institutions of British politics one by one, it sets out their principal

features and offers an account of their place in the body politic.[11] Despite being aimed at a general audience—it would still make a good recommendation for anyone who wanted an introduction to British politics, though the EU referendum and its aftermath has made it outdated in some respects—it nonetheless managed to offer an insightful analysis of the workings of government. For example, in Chapter 9 King describes the underlying selection mechanism for government ministers and its restrictive effects on the recruitment of talent for high office. Of the up to 400 members of the governing party in the Commons, some will rule themselves out by personal failings or political unsuitability. MPs are selected by local constituency parties with little eye to their capacity for ministerial office. Moreover, those who do succeed in entering parliament now come overwhelmingly from the political class. The resulting governing style is contrasted with a Nordic deliberative mode that is more problem-orientated. As evidence of its insight, the last chapter offered an uncannily accurate foretaste of British politics in the post-Brexit age, with its conclusion that the cardinal sin of British politicians is to hold out the promise 'that they can influence world events and effect change at home on a far larger scale than in fact they can'.[12]

One field in which British governments have brought about large-scale change, not always in a predictable form, is constitutional reform. King was invited to deliver the 2000 Hamlyn Lectures, a rare honour for a non-lawyer, and he took as his title 'Does the United Kingdom still have a constitution?', reviewing the period between 1970 and 2000.[13] Describing the traditional UK constitution up to 1970 as a system that hoarded rather than dispersed power, King identified twelve major constitutional changes—including among others the rise of judicial review, devolution, the Human Rights Act and the Bank of England's freedom to set monetary policy—as substantially modifying the principles on which the UK's political system was based, transforming it into if not a power-dispersal system then at least to what he termed a 'power-fractionated' system.[14]

The analysis was developed in his 2007 book, *The British Constitution*.[15] The UK has a notoriously flexible constitution, but no one reading this book, with its masterful account of the transformations of constitutional and political practice since the middle of the twentieth century, could under-estimate the significance of this flexibility. King set the origins of constitutional change against the background of the admiration which many US political scientists in the middle of the twentieth century held for the UK's system of government. This golden age was summed up in Harry

[11] A. King, *Who Governs Britain?* (London, 2014).
[12] King, *Who Governs Britain?*, p. 287.
[13] A. King, *Does the United Kingdom Still Have a Constitution?* (London, 2001).
[14] King, *Does the United Kingdom Still Have a Constitution?*, p. 99.
[15] A. King, *The British Constitution* (Oxford, 2007).

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

Politicians and political leadership

When he died, King was working on a book-length study of the British prime ministership, a volume that would have examined the office and its holders from Attlee through all subsequent post-war prime ministers.[16] His interest in the role of prime ministers had gone back to the 1960s, when he edited a reader of essays and interviews on the subject.[17] Throughout his working life he retained an interest both in the role of the prime minister and in the behaviour of those who occupied the office. This was an aspect of his more general interest in political leadership. His very last paper to see publication was in a *Daedalus* issue edited by Archie Brown with the title 'In favor of "leader proofing"', in which he examined the performance of the thirty men and one woman in office either as US president or as UK prime minister between 1935 and 2015. The conclusion that King derived was that the so-called 'strong leaders', indicated by a disposition to centralise power and control, were, if anything, inversely correlated with successful achievements. Strong leadership did not require 'strong leaders'.[18]

[16] Allen, 'Great expectations', p. 9 mentions and discusses the planned monograph. The first four draft chapters can be found at: https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2018/01/10/professor-anthony-king-the-closing-chapters (accessed 16 August 2020).
[17] A. King (ed.), *The British Prime Minister* (London, 1969).
[18] A. King, 'In favor of "leader proofing"', *Dædalus,* 145 (2016), 124–37.

In that essay King showed himself to be a voracious reader of political biographies and memoirs, reading that had been put to good effect in his two highly innovative articles for the *British Journal of Political Science*, one 'The rise of the career politician in Britain—and its consequences' in 1981 and the other 'The outsider as political leader: the case of Margaret Thatcher' in 2002.[19] In the former he showed how the top echelons of British politics had become increasingly dominated by career politicians. Although career politicians had existed for decades, what was new was the proportion of people in high office for whom there was no other meaningful occupation. In the latter paper, he distinguished the social outsider from the psychological outsider and also from the tactical outsider, seeing Margaret Thatcher as an example of all three types, using her social and psychological outsider status to tactical advantage. The theme of the distinctiveness of Thatcher's leadership style was followed up in a third *British Journal of Political Science* article, co-authored with Nichols Allen, '"Off with their Heads": British prime ministers and the power to dismiss', which showed how many of Thatcher's dismissals were on ideological grounds compared to other prime ministers.[20]

American politics

Generally speaking, US political scientists pay relatively little attention to non-Americans writing about their country's politics, but King was an exception. His first foray into the analysis of US politics and public policy was a pair of articles published in the *British Journal of Political Science* in 1973, arguing that the role of the state in US public policy was smaller than in other democracies, not because of the institutional separation of powers frustrating a desire for more public action, as was widely thought, but because public opinion favoured a smaller state.[21] The paper was innovative not only in its anticipation of the 'ideational turn' in political science, which placed ideas at the centre of political life, but also in placing US public policy in a comparative context.

King also analysed US politics in terms of its internal development over time. In 1978, he edited a series of essays, *The New American Political System*, which noted

[19] A. King, 'The rise of the career politician in Britain – and its consequences', *British Journal of Political Science*, 11 (1981), 249–85; 'The outsider as political leader: the case of Margaret Thatcher', *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (2002), 435–54.

[20] A. King and N. Allen, '"Off with their heads": British prime ministers and the power to dismiss', *British Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2010), 249–78.

[21] A. King, 'Ideas, institutions and the policies of governments: a comparative analysis: parts 1 and 2', *British Journal of Political Science*, 3 (1973), 291–313; 'Ideas, institutions and the policies of governments: a comparative analysis: part 3', *British Journal of Political Science*, 3 (1973), 409–23.

how developments in the US political system, for example the changing role of party conventions, undermined the received wisdom about how politics was conducted in the US. The book became a bestseller, and was followed by a completely new version, with different contributors in 1990. Between the two, King edited a collection on US government and legislation, *Both Ends of the Avenue*, that sought to lay out the consequences of changes in the workings of the Presidency and Congress in an era when party identification had weakened and the traditional institutions of power, most notably the decline of the seniority system in Congressional committees, were being reformed. In all three volumes there were contributions by a remarkable band of distinguished US scholars, including Charles O. Jones, Nelson Polsby, Austin Ranney, Martin Shapiro and Aaron Wildavsky.[22]

King's two major single-authored books on US politics were *Running Scared: Why America's Politicians Campaign Too Much and Govern Too Little* published in 1997 and *The Founding Fathers v. the People* published in 2012.[23] The sub-title of *Running Scared* summarised its principal argument: US politicians had to spend too much time campaigning to give sufficient attention to governing. After an opening chapter in which King surveyed the security or vulnerability in office of three individual politicians—a UK Conservative, a German Social Democrat and a Democratic Representative from Maryland—King went on to analyse the conditions under which in the US individual politicians are required to campaign for re-election. By comparison with other countries, US politicians are distinctive in the ways in which they interact with their electorate, their parties and their legislative responsibilities. Elections are frequent, to which must be added the contest of primaries. Because parties are relatively weak, individuals lack the cover given by a party campaign. And, because they campaign individually, they need to raise large amounts in funding. In short, American politicians have a high degree of electoral exposure, an exposure that provides the incentive to campaign rather than govern responsibly.

Towards the end of *Running Scared* King noted that many of the mainstream reforms proposed for the US political system, like term limits or popular recall and national referendums, which were aimed at promoting greater democracy, would actually enhance the bias against the capacity of representatives to govern. He traced this mainstream preference back to a belief in a theory of what he called 'agency democracy' as contrasted with a theory of 'division of labour' democracy. A similar distinction of political theories carried over into the central theme of *The Founding*

[22] A. King (ed.), *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC, 1978); *Both Ends of the Avenue* (Washington, DC, 1983); *The New American Political System*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC, 1990).
[23] A. King, *Running Scared: Why America's Politicians Campaign too Much and Govern too Little* (New York, 1997); and *The Founding Fathers v. the People* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

Fathers v. the People, where King identified what he called the 'two nostalgias' of American democracy, one harking back to the founding fathers' idea of constitutional government and the other invoking the principles of popular democracy. According to King, the founding fathers advanced a vision of government and politics that was constitutionalist and republican. Radical democrats, by contrast, advanced a view of democracy that was populist and participatory. For King, it was the clash of these two traditions of thinking about democracy in American political culture that explained what would otherwise seem a puzzling mix of institutions, some of which were constitutionalist and others of which were populist: the restrictions on who can stand for presidential office; term-limits on the presidency; primary elections; the absence of national referendums; the role of the courts in deciding policies like abortion; the practice of electing judges; the longevity of the Electoral College; and the Senate filibuster. King quoted proponents of direct democracy as saying that the two principles of US government—government by the people and government by constitutional rule—will co-exist in any functioning polity.[24] American government and politics was shaped by the clash of these two 'tectonic plates'.

Common themes

In *Microcosmographia Academica* Francis Cornford advised young academics to follow the principle of sound learning, the central tenet of which was that 'the noise of vulgar fame should never trouble the cloistered calm of academic existence'. He went on to advise that the principal method for achieving this goal required ensuring that any academic book be unreadable, lest the author be called 'brilliant and forfeit all respect'.[25] In general, political scientists have had no trouble following Cornford's advice. There are few political scientists whom one reads for the sheer pleasure of their prose. Exceptions include Hugh Berrington, Sammy Finer and Rudolf Klein. King is a member of that select company.

What were the ingredients of style that made King's work so readable? There were many, but one important one was the extensive use of similes, metaphors and analogies to add colour to the prose. At the beginning of this memoir I referred to King comparing the impending Labour election victory in 1997 to an asteroid hitting the planet and destroying potentially all life. But vividness of phrase abounds in his work. Here are some examples taken from across the course of his career. Writing of the tendency of US writers on parties to refer to 'the party in the electorate', he noted that

[24] King, *The Founding Fathers v. the People*, p. 178.
[25] F. M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica: Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge, 1908), p. 11.

this was a strange notion 'as though one were to refer not to the buyers of Campbell's soup but to the Campbell-Soup-Company-in-the-market'. Discussing the Blackpool hoteliers who sought compensation for the cancellation of the Labour party conference in October 1974 as a result of the election's being called, he wrote: '[t]he hungry sheep look up and reckon that they have at least a reasonable chance of being fed'. Mrs Thatcher was said to haunt the 1992 election 'like some hyperactive ghost'. The old contest of left and right meant that party positions cohered, so that people's 'views came in neatly tied bundles, and the bundles were tied in blue and red ribbon'. By the time of the 2005 election, Labour no longer looked new: 'it looked old and scruffy, even a little shifty, like a dog that has been caught raiding the pantry'. The hedges around the secret garden of constituency party candidate selection 'remain dense and impenetrable' and parties seem to base their choices not on the capacity of individuals to be effective ministers, but on their local electoral appeal and political compatibility 'as though dental surgeons were appointed largely on the basis of their ability to freeze patients' teeth painlessly'.[26]

In line with Cornford's observation, King's brilliance of phrase led some to think that it was style alone that united King's writing and research, without there being any underlying intellectual structure. Yet, although King was certainly a fox—he knew and cared about many things—he was a fox whose haunts reflected a closely related set of concerns.

One clue to his unity of interest is found in the fact that in both *Running Scared* and *The Founding Fathers v. the People* King cited John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* to the effect that the task of elected politicians is to exercise judgement and determine what was in both their constituents' best interests and the nation's best interests. In other words, good government in a democracy meant responsible government in conditions in which parties struggled for the popular vote. King was a scholar of government because he cared about good government. He uncovered the incentives that led American politicians to campaign too much and govern too little. He documented the transformation of the British constitution over recent decades to identify the haphazard and incomplete reforms the process had encompassed, leaving as serious a set of dilemmas as they resolved. In the work with Ivor Crewe on the blunders of governments, he exposed the psychological and institutional conditions that made governments blunder-prone, and revealed the deliberation deficit in decision-making so strongly highlighted by the comparison with the Nordic democracies. He worried

[26] For the quotations, see respectively 'Political parties in Western democracies', p. 114, n. 8; 'Overload', p. 164; 'Preface', *Britain at the Polls, 1992*, p. vii; 'The implications of one-party government', *Britain at the Polls, 1992*, p. 228; 'Why Labour won – yet again', *Britain at the Polls, 2005*, p. 159; *Who Governs Britain?*, pp. 50, 54.

that well-intentioned reforms sometimes made countries harder to govern and therefore less likely to provide for their citizens' order, security and other public goods as well as high standing in the community of nations. As a professional he wrote clearly for the public, because, as a professional, he was absorbed by the problem of how government can best serve the public.

His work was also marked by a unity of method. He practised a ground-floor empiricism. This did not mean that he ignored social science generalisations. For example, when reviewing books he described as the 'splendidly old-fashioned art form' of political biography—including Pelling on Churchill and Morgan on Lloyd George—King suggested that what was missing from each was a concern for the general themes that US political scientists, including his close friend Richard Neustadt, had pursued: how leading politicians were perceived by those with whom they interacted, how they went about their work and what were their underlying psychological dynamics.[27] It was not generalisation to which King was opposed: it was generalisation that went beyond observational warrant. And for King observational warrant was a matter of taking the trouble to go beyond abstract categories to the individuals and cases that those categories purported to represent.

This quality was well revealed in an early and influential paper on government–parliament relations.[28] When talking about government–parliament relations, people often echo Montesquieu's famous distinction between legislature and executive. Yet, in parliamentary systems, the party in government is also present in parliament. In 'Modes of executive-legislative relations', King stressed the need to 'think behind' the Montesquieu formula. The relationship between executive and legislature might be a relationship of government with its own backbenchers, of government and the opposition, or of government and some combination of the opposition and government backbenchers. Having identified the set of logically possible relations between government and parliament, King eliminated some on empirical grounds and showed how the remainder map onto parliamentary systems in the UK, France and Germany.

Given his methodological approach, much of King's work would nowadays be characterised as case-orientated qualitative analysis. For example, discussing the power of the prime minister in *The British Constitution*, King went through all the prime ministers between Attlee and Blair assessing how far each of them could be judged dominant in relation to their cabinets, 'dominant' being defined by four explicit criteria.[29] In place of bland generalisations, the reader is provided with an empirical

[27] A. King, 'Political biography', *Parliamentary Studies*, 28 (1975), 438–41.
[28] A. King, 'Modes of executive-legislative relations: Great Britain, France, and West Germany', *Legislative Studies*, 1 (1976), 11–36.
[29] King, *The British Constitution*, pp. 314–18.

analysis of individuals and their role-types according to an explicit scheme of classification. However, this approach was supplemented by what would be called in the methodological text-books participant observation, the method of the anthropologist or the journalist. King took trouble to get to know the world of high politics, not least by taking the people to whom he wished to talk to lunch in Tate Britain's restaurant, where he always reserved a table carefully chosen for its discreet location. Sometimes when he was presented with rational choice analyses of politicians' motivations and behaviour he would ask 'Do these people actually know any politicians?'. His worry was not that rational choice modellers did not know any politicians; it was that they did not want to know them. King knew a lot personally, and personal knowledge is a knowledge of persons, not abstract agents.

The mentor and teacher

Amid all his research and writing, King was strongly committed to PhD supervising and to mentoring younger colleagues, whilst never neglecting his undergraduate teaching responsibilities. His hands-on PhD supervision was legendary among those who experienced it. He would write copious notes in red ink by hand on successive drafts, not only on points of substance, though they were many, but also on the construction of particular sentences. One of his supervisees, who went on to an academic career, said that the amount of red ink on his early PhD chapters 'made them look like some animal had been sacrificed to the gods'. This was no special case. Writing in 2018, at a distance of nearly fifty years, Mick Moran said that the detail of his comments on PhD drafts were 'not just marginal annotations but detailed editing of text designed to get me to write and think more clearly'.[30]

King's PhD supervision was part of a wider pattern of mentoring early-career academics. As well as reading and commenting on their writing, he would suggest projects leading to joint authorship. The collaborations were made more enjoyable by being often conducted over a long lunch, inevitably with good wine, either at a restaurant or at his home in Wakes Colne.

King did not neglect undergraduate teaching. He gathered together the most accomplished students in a special voluntary seminar that he ran. He also followed the principle of the old Scottish universities, holding that it was the job of a senior professor to give the first-year lectures. Over a number of years, he and I taught a

[30] Nicholas Allen, personal communication; Moran, 'Whatever happened to overloaded government?', p. 36, n.1. For Mick Moran, see D. Sanders, 'Mick Moran, 1946–2018', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 18 (2019), pp. 15–29.

first-year course at Essex on democratic ideas and institutions. King began the lecture series against a projected backdrop of the Lorenzetti frescoes in Siena 'The Allegories of Good and Bad Government', to underline the point that we should not confuse the ideas of good government and democratic government: if there was a relation, it was empirical, not conceptual. His lectures were brilliant, well crafted, amusing and wore their learning lightly. This was not a quality that he developed late in his career. Mick Moran, who had acted as a teaching assistant on the first-year course between 1968 and 1970, described himself as 'astounded' by the lectures, saying that for King a lecture 'was a social, indeed a dramatic, encounter in which the lecturer engaged in a Socratic dialogue with his audience'.[31]

As well as the lectures, King insisted that he and I meet regularly each week with the class tutors to go over issues of teaching and marking, and he actively second marked essays before they were returned to the students. We did these duties willingly, both sharing an interest in protecting academic freedom from the regulators of so-called teaching quality, whom King used to refer to as 'the thought police'. He reminded our tutorial assistants that a good class would follow the logic of discussion not a pre-formed template, universities not being the Prussian military implementing something called a 'teaching and learning strategy'. Was his insistence on the integrity of the academic enterprise successful? I tell just one story. In December 2016 I gave a public lecture at UCL. Afterwards a former Essex student came to me saying that he had enjoyed the lecture, giving as his reason that it almost—*almost*, I stress—reminded him of listening to the lectures from Professor King all those years back. Whenever I think of teaching quality, I think not of bureaucratic processes, but of King's engagement with a high ideal of learning and education.

Professional life and public service

Academics teach and research. Good academics also contribute to the public goods of scholarship by refereeing papers, reviewing books or editing journals. King contributed in all these ways, but most visibly in his editorship of the *British Journal of Political Science*, which he founded early in his career with Brian Barry. Although these days it seems extraordinary, when the two put the proposal for a new journal to Cambridge University Press, it was opposed by luminaries in the Political Studies Association, lobbying the Press that it would be wrong to have a journal that was in competition with *Political Studies* and claiming that to call the journal the *British Journal of Political Science* would be to pass it off as the official journal of the

[31] Moran, 'Whatever happened to overloaded government?', pp. 36–7, n.1.

Association, just as the *British Journal of Sociology* was the official journal of the British Sociology Association. Barry and King were summoned to a meeting in Cambridge with Sir Frank Lee, formerly permanent secretary at the Treasury, but by then the Chairman of the CUP Syndics, and by all accounts a fearsome figure. Sir Frank interrogated them both, being particularly exercised about the proposed journal title. Barry and King explained how they had come to the name after the exploration of various alternatives and pointed out that the official journal of the British Sociology Association was called *Sociology*, not the *British Journal of Sociology*, the latter being separate and independent. Sir Frank concluded the meeting with the words: 'Gentlemen, I think you ought to know that I leave this meeting with a different opinion from that which I entertained when I came in.'

King loved to tell this story.[32] Over the years he remained active in the work of the journal, as editor, editorial board member and referee. In his editorial capacity he always insisted that referees were advisors, not judges. He would give the example of what is now a highly cited paper by an eminent US political scientist, where the unanimous recommendation of the referees was 'reject'. King thought otherwise, wrote a letter to the author explaining his reasons for dissenting from the recommendation and setting out the changes needed before the paper could be published. Apparently the letter did the rounds in the author's department eliciting a mixture of amazement, amusement and admiration.

This close attention to the work of others was characteristic of King's generosity of intellectual spirit. In the Acknowledgements to *Political Change in Britain*, the pioneering book on UK electoral behaviour, Butler and Stokes wrote that they 'must reserve a pantheon for Anthony King who laboured through successive drafts of our manuscript, offering searching but always constructive criticisms'.[33] There are many academics and writers who would echo those words. Characteristically, King was always fulsome in his thanks for any help that he might have received from those who commented on his drafts, though any assistance King received will have been outweighed by the assistance he gave others.

King's professional networks reflected a Political Science Atlanticism. He knew US academia well, spending various sabbatical leaves at Columbia University (1962–3), Wisconsin (1967), Stanford (1977–8) and Princeton (1984). He enjoyed personal friendships with leading US political scientists. *The Founding Fathers v. the People* was dedicated to the memory of his first mentors in the field of American

[32] King was the source of this tale as published in Albert Weale, 'Brian Michael Barry, 1936–2009', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 166 (2010), pp. 3–23, at pp. 19–20.

[33] D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: the Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 2nd edn (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. vii.

politics: Richard E. Neustadt, Nelson W. Polsby, Austin Ranney and Donald E. Stokes. He always enjoyed meeting and talking to US scholars, particularly the more able younger ones, and remained excited by new ideas coming out of those conversations. To read the acknowledgements in his published work is to read a roll-call of the best and the brightest in the profession. He was a regular attender of the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, using his visits to scout for papers for the *British Journal of Political Science*, to catch up with old friends and to make new ones, in a way that combined ferocious organisation and convivial eating and drinking. (He was the only person I have ever known who could drink a bottle of red wine at lunch-time without any impairment of his faculties.)

His standing in the US rightly earned him election as a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994 at the age of 60. His election as a Fellow of the British Academy did not come until he was nearly 76, in 2010. Why so late? When he was finally elected, it was not the first time that his name had gone forward. It can be hard to know what thought-processes move Fellows when they vote, but a reasonable speculation would be the influence of the Cornford effect, by which fame depresses academic reputation among those academics not so famous, combined with an institutional conservativism that was generally late in recognising the outstanding achievements of the Department of Government at Essex.

King was a 'public intellectual' in a rounded sense of that term. It was not only that he was well known to the public, but also that he took seriously his responsibilities to uphold and promote the good conduct of public life. Tony Wright recalls that over the ten years that he chaired the Public Administration Committee of the House of Commons, he regularly sought to ensure that King was a witness to an inquiry, because he could be relied upon 'to combine scholarly expertise with a real-world grasp that few could match'.[34] Between 1994 and 1998 King was a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan/Neill Committee), and he was also a member of the 1999–2000 Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords (the Wakeham Committee). In 1999 he convened the Scottish Election Commission. Between 2005 and 2007 he chaired a Royal Society of Arts Commission on Illegal Drugs, Communities and Public Policy.

King's journalism covered newspapers, radio and television. Around 1970, Rudolf Klein, who was then the Home Affairs Editor for the *Observer*, recruited King to comment upon the paper's political polling, where his fluency of phrase turned out to be perfectly suited to the task. In 1984 King started to write for the *Daily Telegraph* and from 1989 he provided a regular column interpreting their opinion polling, drawn from the monthly Gallup sample. Consequently, he spent the 1990s charting the

[34] Wright, 'Remembering Tony King', p. 52.

decline of Conservative party fortunes from the high point he had identified in the 1992 election. He also steered *Telegraph* readers through the change from Gallup to YouGov, after the editor, Charles Moore, decided, on the basis of the 2001 election result and the subsequent Conservative leadership election, that the new internet form of sampling did a better job than the traditional opinion poll.[35]

With his soft Canadian accent and his ability to articulate elegantly cadenced sentences, King was a natural performer on radio and television. In the early 1970s he wrote and presented 'Talking Politics' for BBC Radio, produced by Anne Sloman, a programme that went out during the parliamentary recess and which was intended to present listeners with aspects of political life beyond the headlines, looking, for example, at the non-partisan work that MPs did. The transcripts were subsequently published as *Westminster and Beyond*.[36] During 1983 King became one of the presenters on Channel 4's *Week in Politics*, though only for that year. He first appeared on the BBC's election night broadcasts in the mid-1960s with David Butler, becoming the election night key anchor commentator between 1983 and 2005, a role in which he always entertained as well as informed.

Personal life

In 1965 King married Vera Korte, but their marriage was to be short-lived for Vera died from cancer in 1971. After her death King became close to Shirley Williams, recently divorced from Bernard Williams. Richard and Bert Neustadt invited King, Shirley Williams and her daughter Rebecca to spend time at their summer house at Wellfleet on Cape Cod.[37] The relationship became public in late 1974, and predictably, the press made a fuss about it, at one point setting up outside of King's house in Wakes Colne in Essex. However, as a devout Catholic, Williams did not feel free to remarry without an annulment, which was not granted until 1977, by which time the relationship had cooled. Friends wondered if it would ever have been a success since King was by temperament exceptionally punctual and Williams exceptionally tardy. But both remained good friends, and King was delighted that Williams eventually married Neustadt after he had been widowed. The only time that anyone is likely to have seen King in a pulpit is when he spoke at the memorial service that Williams had arranged for Neustadt in St Martin's in the Fields at the end of January 2004.

[35] Rudolf Klein, personal communication; 'Obituary', *Daily Telegraph*.
[36] A. King and A. Sloman, *Westminster and Beyond* (London and Basingstoke, 1973).
[37] S. Williams, *Climbing the Bookshelves* (London, 2009), pp. 257, 323–4.

In 1980 King married Jan Reece, a UCL graduate in History of Art and German, who shared his interest in politics, music and art, as well as his enjoyment of football. Both used to watch *Match of the Day*, in a non-partisan way, though King did at one time express his pleasure at seeing Ipswich Town at Portman Road. Jan even went with him on two occasions to see the Chicago Cubs playing at Wrigley Field, since King loved baseball. He was delighted when the Cubs won the 2016 World Series, after a long period in the doldrums.

Jan and Tony King were wonderful hosts, frequently inviting people to their house at Wakes Colne in the Essex countryside for meals and entertainment. Academic visitors to the department would comment on the warmth of the Kings' hospitality. It was always a pleasure to go there through the 'sweet uneventful countryside' (as Betjeman called it) of Essex, and it was an equal pleasure to arrive given the display of Jan's talents as a garden designer, a professional occupation at one period of her life. Both Jan and Tony went out of their way to avoid purely academic dinners, and the guests included neighbours, journalists and politicians of all the main parties. On one occasion I remember there were three baronesses. King liked to preside over the conversation, but when he did pause to eat for a couple of minutes, he would normally return with the words 'Can I say a word? I haven't had a chance to speak yet.'

Both were fond of music, often going to concerts in London and convening a small group that would listen to different recordings of the same work in anonymised performances, before discussing their relative merits. The group still continues under Jan's inspiration. King was passionate about music and to hear him give his appreciation of an improvised cadenza in a Beethoven piano concerto or the viola playing in the slow movement of a Haydn quartet was a pleasure in itself. From 2002 until his death, he chaired the Suffolk Villages Festival Committee. The Suffolk Villages Festival specialises in playing Renaissance, Baroque and Classical music in Suffolk village churches. Three of its members (Philippa Hyde, Louise Jameson and Peter Holman) gave a moving performance of Monteverdi's *Laudate Dominum* at the celebration of King's life on 22 June 2017.

Coda

The last occasion on which I saw King was a few days before he went into hospital for the operation, the after-effects of which were to be the cause of his death. With his interest in good government, I wanted to hear his thoughts on executive discretion in the light of democratic principles, a subject that had been given topical edge with the attempts of the government to make important post-Brexit decisions by use of the Royal Prerogative. When we talked, he was his usual self: intellectually curious, willing

to explore new ideas and probing on conceptual and empirical detail. We parted agreeing that there must be some middle ground between a strict rules-bound form of government, which was impractical, and arbitrary discretion, which was oppressive. I like to think that had those conversations gone on, we might have been able to define what that middle ground was. John Stuart Mill once wrote that 'those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigour of youth and health'.[38] I read these words and think of Tony King more than anyone else I have ever known. He was, quite simply, exceptional.

Acknowledgements
I am indebted to Nicholas Allen, Archie Brown, Ivor Crewe, Des King, Rudolf Klein, Jack Nagel, Ian O'Flynn, Meg Russell, David Sanders, Tony Wright and, most especially, Jan King for information and comments in preparing this memoir.

Note on the author: Albert Weale is Emeritus Professor of Political Theory and Public Policy, University College London. He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1998.

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[38] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, originally 1861, edited with an Introduction by John Gray (Oxford, 1991), pp. 144–5.