Preface

A common mistake is to regard arguments about words and meaning as "merely semantic." Words, after all, represent and construct ideas. A self-conscious approach to concepts thus presents itself as a vital tool to generate and communicate knowledge. Very few political scientists have understood this quite as well as David Collier.

This book encapsulates Collier's strategies for working with concepts, developed over a fifty-plus year career. The book has two components. First, nine chapters by Collier bring together his essential contributions to the field of concept analysis, forming and applying concepts. These contributions represent the cornerstones of how social scientists now approach concepts. Second, fifteen other scholars apply, debate, and extend Collier's ideas, in research notes that explore ongoing innovation in the field. These contributions advance the discussion by provoking ongoing scholarly reaction and opening up new lines of research. Four of them express some disagreement with Collier's views, thereby adding a valuable counterpoint to the discussion. Collier's chapters and the research notes comprise an integrated framework, which organizes the field and pushes its frontiers.

Political scientists have likely encountered Collier's ideas on concept analysis at *some* point in their career. After all, two books on the subject identify him as a "dominating figure,"[2] and a "giant" in the field.[3] And Collier received the Johan Skytte Prize, the preeminent international award in the

[2] Goertz suggested that "Giovanni Sartori and David Collier stand out as the dominating figures in work on concepts." Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A Users Guide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 1.

[3] Schaffer identifies David Collier, along with Hanna Pitkin and George Lakoff, as "giants" in the field. Frederic Charles Schaffer, *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. xv.

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discipline of political science – in substantial measure based on his work on concepts. Yet an equal number of scholars know Collier primarily for his substantive work, which arguably feeds his methodological ideas. After all, a theory among some observers of science is that the most innovative work in methodology happens in *applied* fields, as opposed to those organized along *technical* grounds (e.g., statistics); another case, apparently, of necessity being the mother of invention.[4] Collier's empirical applications concern big questions in comparative politics, particularly those involving Latin America. And it is these questions that have motivated his methodological ideas right from the start. Look no further than the Introduction, in which Collier tells of a humbling moment in his dissertation work on squatters in Peru when he learned to take concepts more seriously.

LOCATING COLLIER'S WORK ON CONCEPTS

But what does it mean, exactly, to "take concepts seriously"? And who else does so? In which fields? Presumably, most scholars care about concepts at some level, and so it should come as no surprise that there is a methodology built around developing and analyzing them. But in which discipline is one to find these insights and these methods?

As it happens, political scientists may be disproportionately preoccupied with concepts. It is tempting to think that some of this is *because* of Collier's outsized impact on colleagues, students, and fellow scholars in the discipline. But there is also something about the discipline's wide range of methodological approaches and its uniquely self-conscious approach to methodological training that lends itself to an explicit focus on concepts.[5] And before David Collier, there was Giovanni Sartori, another giant who generated enthusiasm for concepts in the 1970s and 1980s. In those days, Sartori was concerned about a Tower-of-Babel problem in the discipline – that is, the undesirable proliferation and duplication of terms and meanings. He and others were influential in directing the resources of the fledgling International Political Science Association (IPSA) toward a more self-conscious use of vocabulary. The organization's first Research Committee – still active as the Committee on Concepts and Methods – was founded to develop and disseminate knowledge regarding political science concepts.[6]

[4] For example, as Gary King puts it: "the most important developments in the field of statistics happen outside the field of statistics, close to the applications. This includes experimental design, random assignment, machine learning, and many others" (personal correspondence). He makes broadly similar points elsewhere, including in his "What Is the Field of Statistics?" Lecture Notes: Basics of Statistics, https://gking.harvard.edu/files/basics, p. 6.

[5] For example, many history and anthropology departments, including our own at the University of Texas at Austin, simply do not teach a dedicated graduate methods course at all, much less one on concept formation and analysis.

[6] As outgoing chair of the committee, I have been especially appreciative of this institutionalization.

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If Sartori anchored the early years of concept analysis, Collier pushed the movement into the next era as part of a second wave. Collier's work builds on, extends, and in important respects modifies Sartori's framework – in particular, Sartori's strategies for cross-contextual use of concepts, as well as for operationalization and measurement. Like Sartori, Collier was very involved in developing an infrastructure for methodological work. For example, he was founding president of the Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research of the American Political Science Association.[7] But perhaps the most lasting legacy of Collier's fascination with concepts is the effect on his legion of students who, imbued with "conceptualism," undoubtedly continue to interrogate *their* students with the recurring Collier line "What is that a case of?" A taste for concept analysis thus has diffused widely. Some of those effects are obvious in the research notes in this book, many of whose authors worked closely with Collier.

For political scientists who run across this fascinating line of work on concepts, the question may be, where can I find more of it? One might sense that political science, with its focus on applications, may not be the natural home for "pure" concept work. Consider the streams of research on language and concepts, all of which have fed Collier's reservoir of ideas and help to locate his ideas. One stream focuses on how individuals acquire, store, and use knowledge. Think here of ideas from prototype theory, exemplar theory, and strategies of categorization. Not coincidentally, important figures in this area (e.g., Eleanor Rosch in cognitive psychology and George Lakoff in cognitive linguistics) have been Berkeley colleagues of Collier. Collier's critical work on diminished subtypes and other partial or probabilistic methods of categorization is drawn from this area.[8] One of Collier's important insights is to take some of these theories about how individuals *do* categorize the world and operationalize them as methods for how scholars *should* do so effectively. Many political scientists became conversant with these ideas only after Collier's application to concepts such as democracy.

One also finds in linguistics a sharp focus on the structure of language and syntax, semantic networks, and the role of language in shaping thought. Word meanings and word relations (e.g., hyponym, hypernym, and meronym) are especially important in this field. One sees some of this in Collier's precise focus on terms and meanings, on their referents in the empirical world, as

[7] He likewise initiated the transition within IPSA from Sartori's original Committee on Conceptual and Terminological Analysis (COCTA) to a refocused Committee on Concepts and Methods (IPSA Research Committee No. 1). In addition, he played an active role in supporting the creation of the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, an ambitious training program now located at Syracuse University.

[8] I have a distinct memory of accompanying David Collier to his presentation of an early draft of "Democracy with Adjectives" to Lakoff and company in the Berkeley Linguistics department. On the walk over, he humbly mentioned that he was preparing for the linguists to react very critically. As it worked out, they came to greatly appreciate his innovations.

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well as in the relationship between narrower and wider versions of concepts. The importance of the mechanics and architecture of concepts is immediately noticeable if one flips through the figures in this volume.

Finally, consider the persistent concern of Collier and others about the (mis) use of the same concepts across domains. Here, the Collier work relates to the long tradition of work in psychology, anthropology, and sociology that focuses on the structure of language across cultures. Scholarship in this area has demonstrated variation in how individuals across different settings perceive and categorize phenomena, as well as in how they use contrasting cognitive models, schema, and metaphors. These ideas are related to Collier's central concern with how concepts "travel" across domains of study. Again, however, his approach to problems such as conceptual "stretching" is pragmatic: not just that researchers approach concepts differently, but how they can understand each other. This focus on conceptual translation is vitally important to scholarly communication and the accumulation of knowledge, which is after all one of the dividends of a focus on concepts.

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DAVID COLLIER ESSAY

It is one thing to say that one should be careful and systematic about concepts, but what does that actually mean? And how would one go about it? An operational, pragmatic approach may be the defining feature of David Collier's writing on concepts – there is a reason, after all, why "working" is in the title of this volume.[9] In this sense, Collier's work stands opposed to some of the more philosophical treatments of language and language use. Recall that Collier is motivated by the application of these methods, which situates his ideas very much in the realm of political methodologists whose primary goal is to prepare graduate students to conduct original research.

Precision of language is likewise a characteristic that leaps out from the work. Of course, this attribute makes sense given the subject matter. How can one encourage careful, deliberate use of language without taking such care oneself? Assiduous attention to the concepts about concepts is one of the important show-by-doing lessons of Collier's work. None of that precision comes easily. The Collier articles have benefited from iterative drafting and redrafting almost ad infinitum. The result is a certain density of thought, with a high ratio of ideas to words, and a clear and internally consistent presentation.

Another aspect of the Collier approach to concepts is the importance of empirical grounding and, thus, measurement. One senses that, for Collier, concepts are useful only to the extent that they can make sense of phenomena on the ground. This back-and-forth between the abstract and the concrete

[9] It will not surprise any Collier aficionados to hear that the title of this volume went through multiple changes.

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typifies the work. In this sense, data collection, research design, and the translation of data across users and readers is a driving factor. I should note, relatedly, the Collier emphasis on methodological pluralism, which characterizes much of how modern political scientists approach their object of study. Collier may be best known for case-oriented research, but his early work included large-*N* statistical work, and his methods of conceptualization are decidedly agnostic with respect to empirical method. So, too, is he agnostic to styles of theorizing, whether broadly comparative or more inductively idiographic. The result is a stand-alone focus on concepts that is compatible with many different ways to generate and measure them.

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All this to say, if the goal of the scholar is to make sense of what we perceive and to communicate it to others – which is achieved by working with concepts – this book offers a path forward. And it does so with all the style and precision that one would expect from a Collier project. My hope is that the content of the book will be as helpful and inspirational to others as it has been to me.

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