The State of the Discipline: One Interpretation of Everyone's Favorite Controversy

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Science is something more (and less) than the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge. How scientific information is shaped is often predetermined by the dominant organizing principles and assumptions of the prevailing paradigm.[1] And paradigmatic dominance is achieved and maintained partly by means exogenous to the science itself, for instance, by financial support, authoritative opinion and ideological orthodoxy. Scientists have paid dearly for maintaining certain views and their oppressors often have been other scientists working in hand with the authorities of university, state or church.

Nor have the social sciences been much different. Here, too, established views preempt the field of discourse, pushing alternative perspectives to the margins, thereby allowing important scientific questions to remain unexamined or to be settled by assertion and injunction rather than by a free exchange of evidence and ideas. To be sure, orthodoxy has not gone unchallenged. In the house of political science there are many windows. But some of them are easier to open than others. And those political scientists who have sought an *aggiornamento* have had to struggle.[2]

Today there exists more diversity of models, conceptual approaches, and fields of study than ever before—which isn't saying too much. For some perspectives are still far more equal than others, and if orthodoxy no longer goes unchallenged, it still rules. What follows is one person's interpretation of the major disputes that have emerged in our discipline.

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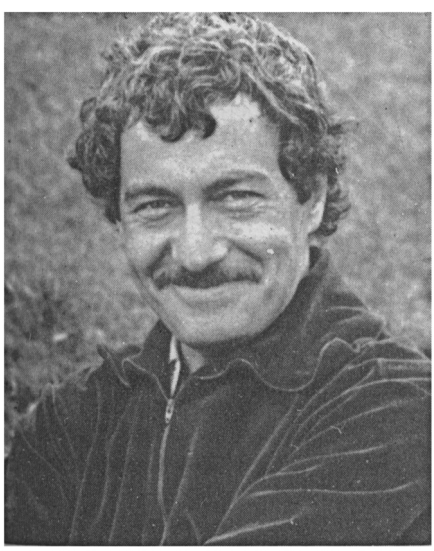

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[1]Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) has become the obligatory citation.

[2]See the excellent statement by the 1981 APSA president, Charles E. Lindblom, "Another State of Mind," *American Political Science Review*, 76, March 1982, pp. 9-21.

Looking Backward: From Traditionalism to Behavioralism

In the period before World War II, the predominant orientation in political science, and to a lesser extent in the other social science disciplines, might be described as nontheoretical and nonsystematic. Concepts were seldom operationalized and methods and data were rather haphazardly treated. The ideational goal of the research—the question of what was to be achieved—was often left unclear. Generally, the burden of one's research was descriptive and informational rather than abstracted and theoretical. The focus was often on specific institutions rather than on processes that cut across them. For this reason, the practitioners of this approach were sometimes described as "institutionalists."[3]

Political scientists studied particular political leaders, events, issues and policies with little thought to constructing theories of leadership, decision making or other generalizable subjects. Similarly in sociology and anthropology, or in the earlier "ethnology," one usually studied a group or tribe with the hope of reporting something interesting about its ways, usually with little attention afforded the broader questions about social relations or culture.

In short, the major focus was on the ideographic, that is, the concrete and particular, rather than on the nomethetic or the generalizable phenomena, the kind that modern science is supposed to uncover in order to advance our theoretical understanding and our ability to predict and manipulate. To be sure, more than half a century ago there were scholars like the political scientists Arthur Bentley and Charles Merriam and the sociologist W. I. Thomas who by word and example showed colleagues how to be more empirical in approach and more theoretical in intent. But in the pre-war era, as behavioralist critics would later charge (somewhat unfairly), the empiricists were of the journalistic variety, and the theorists were of the armchair kind, their game being "theory spinning" rather than theory building.

The Eisenhower era of the 1950s witnessed the emergence and rather swift triumph of what has been called, for better or worse, the "behavioralist" approach in political science. The emphasis was now on moving from the ideographic to the nomethetic. Political and social phenomena were to be studied not primarily for their intrinsic interest but for the purpose of extracting scientific hypotheses and theories that might be useful for further research. Cross-disciplinary approaches were encouraged, and political scientists learned to draw from other fields, specifically sociology and psychology. A greater emphasis was placed on quantification and on the rigorous testing of hypotheses so that subjective impressions might be minimized.

Behavioralists were to avoid making value judgments about their subjects. Their task was not to judge the world but to study it. Outstanding traditionalist political scientists like James MacGregor Burns and E. E. Schattschneider could still write books respectively entitled *Congress On Trial* and *The Semi-Sovereign People,* but behavioral studies of Congress and interest groups would contain no such muckraking overtones and would concentrate on a systematic delineation of process as such. Questions about the normative worth of the phenomena studied were to be left to the moral philosophers. Behavioral scientists might wish to speak out on these subjects but they could do so only as private citizens and not in their capacity as scientists.

Behavioralism's impact was soon to be felt throughout the profession. In the academic journals, plodding exegeses written, as it were, with patience and quill pen gave way to schematicized, quantified, formula-ridden studies written seemingly by computers. The same trend could be observed in sociology: if in the 1940s a study of a Boston street

[3]Keep in mind that terms like "institutionalist," "behavioralist," "centrist," "radical," etc. are themselves less than precise designations of complex variations and shadings. There are differences of opinion about who might be labeled what.

gang was entitled—as was William Foote Whyte's book—*Street Corner Society*, now an investigation of street gangs was more apt to be called: "Net Theory, Interactional Patterns, Status Resolution and Role Accession Conflicts: The Case of Street Gangs as Small Groups."

Many institutionalists greeted behavioralism with skepticism and hostility. In turn, behavioralists often dismissed the older political science as just so much deadwood. By the early 1960s young instructors seeking employment in political science departments of unknown or divided persuasion, when asked sharply: "Are you a behavioralist or institutionalist?" learned to say that they used "the best of both approaches" —a response that did not always save them from further questioning.

By the early sixties the behavioralists came to occupy the high ground in the discipline. In short time it seemed every department had to have a "quantifier." It would be wrong to assume that this ascension was achieved purely by intellectual means. Many factors having nothing to do with scholarly dialogue exercised a decisive effect, most notably the enormous financial support given to the behavioral persuasion by foundations, government, corporations and other interests that saw the behavioral sciences as useful to them. By the early 1960s the Pentagon alone was spending about $25 million a year on what it designated as "social science research." About $14 million went to such defense think tanks as the Rand Corporation, the Institute for Defense Analysis and the Research Analysis Corporation. Another $10 million went each year to the universities and their related research organizations. And approximately $500,000 in government funds went to the "social science" sectors maintained by industrial firms. Added to this were the millions given by the foundations and the lesser but still substantial sums that came directly from university sources, individual donors and private business.

Spurred by this largesse, a vast array of "centers," "institutes," "projects," "councils" and "programs" arose, offering the kind of research money the lonely traditionalist scholar had never envisioned and, as it turned out, never got his hands on. The money went to cross-disciplinary teams of behavioralists who produced elaborate studies on such subjects as the American soldier, voting behavior at home and abroad, community decision-making, the attractions of communism, social "deviancy," student protestors, urban riots, management systems, savings bond sales campaigns, military recruitment campaigns, lobbying techniques, cultural systems of Southeast Asia, and insurgency and counter-insurgency at home and abroad.

Whether it was a question of developing new techniques for making the tax burden less visible, or consumers more responsive, or assembly-line workers, inner-city residents and Asian villagers more compliant, the social science teams—with behavioralist political scientists among them—were there with bright and often ruthless ideas, never defining new goals or challenging the ideological premises and interests of their patrons, but always trying to develop ways of reaching and justifying the objectives desired by the economic and political elites who paid so well for their talents. Their task was not to change the world but to help those in power control it. As the Advisory Committee on Government Programs in the Behavioral Sciences proudly reported in 1968: "The behavioral sciences are an important source of information, analysis and explanation about group and individual behavior, and thus an essential and increasingly relevant instrument of modern government."

Writing in *PS* more recently, Joseph LaPalombara noted that political scientists can be useful to banks and corporations, helping them determine how political conditions in foreign lands might affect the safety and profitability of their business investments. "The day is past when banks and corporations operating abroad could call on their national governments, on their diplomats and/or gunboats, to keep the restless natives in line," said LaPalombara. Now they must deal with the restless natives on a "well-informed basis," hence the burgeoning field of "political risk analysis." If political scientists are to be of use to

these "intelligent, harried bankers and corporate managers," they must be prepared to apply their theories about political upheaval, stability and policy implementation in ways that serve the profit needs of the multinational corporations. For such services big business is willing "to spend hard cash." "It is a heady challenge," LaPalombara knowingly concluded.[4]

While composing less than a majority of the profession, the behavioralists were the ones who, with their research, outside funding, advisory council positions and control over graduate training and over the APSA and the *APSR*, defined the direction of the profession, its subject matter, implicit ideological limits and standards of professional success.

The "Post-Behavioralist" Challenge

In the late 1960s, during a time of urban rebellions and anti-war protests, various members of the discipline began complaining that the more important political events were being neither explained nor even acknowledged by the discipline. The more active of the "post-behavioral" critics, as David Easton called them, organized themselves into the Caucus for a New Political Science under the leadership of Mark Roeloffs and Christian Bay. Some of them wanted the behavioral sciences to be used as an instrument of the powerless rather than the powerful. Others were simply Luddites who wanted to smash the computers and return to plain English. Some complained that political scientists should give serious attention to value questions. Others felt that the behavioral sciences were already too riddled with hidden values, and conservative ones at that. The following are what I consider some of the more important criticisms of behavioralism made by the post-behavioralists.

1. In their search for the nomethetic, behavioralists tend to place undue emphasis on process and show a disregard for the content and substance of political events and systems. Processes abstracted from their concretia tend to be treated in an ahistorical reductionist fashion. Hence, it may be true that both Napoleon and his valet engaged in the decision-making process, one for the Empire and the other for the Emperor's household. Both organized staffs, set priorities, allocated scarce resources and saw that things got done. Perhaps one might come up with a model that could apply to the activities of both, but in doing so one would obscure differences in content that were of far greater significance than the generalizable patterns of behavior and process. A theory of decision-making abstracted in this fashion would be a somewhat meaningless accomplishment. *Indeed, there is a question of whether the process itself is being properly understood when so utterly divorced from the context of interest and power, purpose and substantive policy.*

2. As the behavioral methodologies became increasingly elaborate and complex, the problems studied seemed to get ever more narrow and insignificant. The very demand for precision of method imposed limits on the kinds of subjects that could be dealt with. So it seemed that the methodological mountain brought forth an intellectual mouse, a proliferation of what we used to call "The-greater-the-turnout, the-larger-the-vote" studies.

3. The behavioral sciences have developed the accoutrements of science, and this often leaves the impression that the behavioral approach is more rigorous than it actually is. But anyone who has worked with statistical models and materials appreciates the often ambiguous, elastic and inconclusive quality of most "hard data." The precision and objectivity of behavioralism is more an appearance than a reality. Furthermore, in their desire to maintain the appearance of scientific neutrality, the behavioralists often have selected neutral, noncontro-

[4]Joseph LaPalombara, "Assessing the Political Environment for Business: A New Role for Political Scientists?" *PS*, 15, Spring 1982, pp. 180-186. Similarly, in the January 1983 APSA Personnel Service Newletter the CIA advertizes for "Analysts to work in the areas of political change in the Third World. . . . They should have an interest in social change, revolutionary organizations and regime responsiveness and capabilities."

versial subjects to study. If politics, as Marx said, is concerned with "the Furies of private interest," we would never guess it from the kinds of dreary articles published in what are supposed to be the leading academic publications. Instead of neutralizing the investigator, the behavioralists succeeded in neutralizing, and therefore distorting, their subject matter.

This problem is not peculiar to political science. In the psychoanalytic journals of the 1950s, for instance, patients who had sexual feelings were apt to be described as "clients who cathect their affects onto libidinous objects." It is difficult to see how the cause of science is advanced by such nomenclature, but certainly the *pretensions* of science are well served. The highly abstracted jargon leaves the impression that the observer is detached and neutral when, in fact, it is the subject matter that has been diluted, often at a cost to its indigenous meaning.

4. The emphasis on process causes behavioralists to overlook the social *effects* of many policies. Frequently they think of outputs as inviting value judgments of a kind they say they do not wish to make. But most of their critics have not been asking them for *evaluations* (of which quite a few hidden ones already exist in the behavioralist literature) but for systematic descriptions of policy *repercussions*: who benefits and who pays? why and how? and what does this say about the distribution of power and the functioning of democracy—and other such questions. There is, after all, a difference between (a) making value judgments about empirical phenomena and (b) studying value-laden political activities in an empirical way. The desire to avoid the first should not lead us to ignore the second.[5]

5. Much of the behavioral literature rests on the assumption that the processes and outputs of the political system are generally beneficial. If the process is functioning properly, then it is presumed to be desirable. The eagerness of behavioralists to put their science at the service of government, the military and the corporations rests on the presumption that the existing social order is a good one. Thus, anything that increases the system's ability to assess, predict and control human behavior is for the better. The behavioralist persuasion, then, is anything but value free and nonnormative; rather, there is an implicit and often explicit acceptance of the presumed benign and beneficial qualities of our politico-economic system at home and abroad, an acceptance which puts a foreclosure on important kinds of empirical investigations or which treats such investigations as excursions into ideology and departures from science.

When confronted with the above kinds of criticism, the established behavioralists usually responded not by offering rebuttal to the anti-behavioralist arguments but by attacking the persons who made them. They accused their critics of being the unscholarly, ideologically oriented misfits of the profession.[6]

Radicals vs. Centrists

Not long after the Caucus was formed it became clear that the "post-behavioral" critique was really a radical one, directed less at a particular research mode than at the mainstream ideology shared by many behavioralists and traditionalists alike. It was not the behavioral methodology as such that prevented political scientists from studying the undemocratic and plutocratic features of the political system (although certain behavioral techniques did encourage a narrow conservative research approach); rather it was the unexamined centrist political persuasion of those who applied the methodology. Statistical methods should not be discredited, but why were they used only for questions that fit within the confines of the centrist paradigm? Case

[5]Studies of public policy outputs and ways of analyzing them did begin to appear in the 1970s.

[6]Readers may recall the verbal attacks at the 1968 and 1969 Association meetings. See also the letters directed against the Caucus in *PS* during this same period, and my communication in *PS* (Fall, 1969) in response to comments by Anthony King, Robert Dahl and Karl Deutsch.

studies were useful, but why were only certain kinds of cases studied?[7] A cross-disciplinary approach was helpful but why draw only from sociology and psychology while ignoring economics? Why leave political economy to centrist economists who in turn relegated that subject to the realm of politics.[8]

Today centrist ideological preconceptions still prefigure the research agenda of our discipline. Consider the following:

- The relationships between industrial capitalist nations and third world nations are described as (a) "dependency" and "interdependency" and as fostering a mutually beneficial "development" and "stability" rather than (b) an imperialism that exploits the land, labor and resources of the weaker nations for the benefit of the favored classes in both the industrial and less-developed worlds.

- The United States and other "democratic capitalist" societies are said to be held together by (a) a consensus of values that reflect some approximation of the common interest, or an interest-group pluralistic interplay that adheres to "the rules of the game," and not by (b) class power and domination.

- The fragmentation of power in the political process is supposedly indicative of (a) a fluidity and democratization of influence rather than (b) the pocketing and structuring of power in unaccountable and undemocratic ways.

- It is assumed that the millions of citizens who refuse to vote are (a) either content with their lot or manifesting a civic deficiency that poses serious problems for democracy, but not (b) manifesting a justifiable alienation and a desire for more meaningful choices than those offered by the existing two-party system.

- The inculcation of conventional political values and beliefs are described as (a) political "socialization" and "learning" and are implicitly or sometimes explicitly treated as a growthful, desirable process, rather than (b) an indoctrination that limits and warps critical democratic perceptions.[9]

In each of the above cases, the centrists fail to tell us why they choose the "a" views and why they feel free to ignore the evidence and analysis that have been made in support of the "b" alternatives.

The radical complaint is not that the centrists are evading the important value questions but that their work is riddled with unexamined values that are treated as empirical truths, while empirical hypotheses introduced by radicals are dismissed as polemics or value judgments. The centrists claim to be nonpartisan and nonpolitical. But the determination of what is nonpartisan is itself a highly partisan matter. Radicals argue that mainstream political scientists are nonpartisan in that their ideological commitment to liberal capitalism and to their own self-interested position within that system are seldom explicated. Indeed, their ideological interests are best served by denying the existence of such interests.

In turn, the centrists charge the leftists with failing to maintain a proper distance from political affairs and with being motivated by ideological concerns. "We want to study the world as it is," they say, "but the radicals want to change it. They wish to inject partisanship into our science." In truth, the centrists themselves have been up to their ears in partisan affairs. We already noted LaPalombara's unapologetic invitation to the discipline to help the rich and powerful deal with troublesome overseas situations. In 1981, Evron Kirkpatrick, who served as APSA director for more than

[7]For case studies that question the centrist pluralist assumptions see G. William Domhoff, *Who Really Rules?* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1978); Matthew Crenson, *The Unpolitics of Air Pollution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970); Micahel Parenti, "Power and Pluralism: A View From the Bottom," *Journal of Politics,* 32, August 1970, pp. 501-530.

[8]For a discussion of how the study of the power of money fell between the two chairs of political science and economics see Henry Bretton, *The Power of Money* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1980).

[9]See the discussion in Lindblom, *op. cit.* Not all centrists hold to all the above positions. I am talking about major tendencies.

25 years, said in a speech: "I have always believed that the knowledge we gain as scholars should provide a basis for others or for ourselves to play an active, effective and sound role in government and politics." He then went on to enumerate the many political scientists who occupied public office, worked in political campaigns or served office-holders in various capacities.[10]

His remarks evoked no outcry on behalf of scientific detachment. It seems there is nothing wrong with political activism as long as it is of the mainstream variety, as long as one plays a "sound" role *in* government rather than a dissenting role *against* government. The centrists never bother to justify this double standard. They also never explain how they themselves are able to avoid injecting politics into their science while so assiduously and proudly injecting their science into politics.

Radicals would not deny that they want to change the world. Research of any importance is rarely neutral in its effects: either it challenges or supports the status quo. But they also want to study the world. That's why they became professors rather than community organizers. In any case, it can be argued that activism may actually furnish insights and experience that will enrich scholarly work (although there is no guarantee of this), and that ideology in itself is not a bad thing, only *unexamined* ideology. It is important to have scholarly work of a wider ideological scope so as to open unexamined questions and put the centrist orthodoxy to the test. Indeed, the times demand it. One does not have to be a Marxist to know there is something very wrong with this society. Neither mainstream economists nor political scientists will come up with new answers until they start asking new questions.

[10] *PS*, Summer 1981, p. 597. The speech was in acceptance of the 1981 National Capital Area Political Science Association Pi Sigma Alpha Award to a political scientist who has made a significant contribution "to strengthening the relationship between political science and public service."

Scholars with dissenting viewpoints may have their blind spots but they also are likely to be free from mainstream blind spots. It is no accident that it is leftist scholars who are giving us studies of the relationship between capitalism and the political system, a subject left largely untouched by centrists. It is no accident that feminist social scientists are finding out new things about women's contributions to culture and history and are tending to gender-related issues that men never imagined were subjects for study. And it is no coincidence that black scholars see much of history, power and social reality as defined from a white perspective, while their white colleagues have preferred to think of such subjects as colorless. In sum, a "new" ideology can awaken us to things overlooked by the established orthodoxy.

Radical scholars, especially Marxist ones, have been keenly interested in theoretical questions, notably the kind that deal with political oppression and systematic conflict, and with the relationship of wealth to power and capitalism to politics. Marxists are interested both in current political issues and in the underlying forces that give coherence and generality to seemingly disparate phenomena. This would seem to be a scientific dedication. Yet most mainstream political scientists judge Marxism as beyond the pale of scientific scholarship. Thus they feel little obligation to sound like scholars themselves when making reference to Marxism. Our academic literature, book reviews, and discussions are cluttered with facile swipes at unspecified "Marxists" who supposedly say things I have never heard Marxists utter. Such forays are usually unburdened by any first-hand familiarity with the subject that is being disparaged.

Marxism is dismissed but not for a moment is it forgotten. Declared "simplistic," "dogmatic," and "irrelevant," it remains very much on the minds of the centrists. It is the other great paradigm that haunts the bourgeois scholarly world like a specter, repeatedly acknowledged in gratuitous asides that seek to contain it without having to confront it.

The competition of ideas between centrists and leftists, as with most class-

related ideational conflicts, is greatly influenced by underlying material factors. It is the centrists who control most of the foundations, funds, professional journals, fellowships, graduate programs, faculty appointments and promotions. The result is that there is only a handful of colleges with more than two or three Marxists on their faculties—if that. And it is common for leftist scholars to encounter serious difficulties when seeking employment or tenure. In recent years, financial exigencies have provided a convenient opportunity to purge younger and more heterodox scholars—although they have not been the only victims.[11]

There are many who prefer the sedative of orthodoxy to the stimulant of heterodoxy, relying on position to settle questions of science. Yet the struggles of the past fifteen years have not been for nought. There are murmurs of new life in our profession as reflected in the wider ideological range of topics, papers, and workshops at annual meetings, the sales of books and texts with an alternative perspective and the existence of journals like *New Political Science* and *Politics and Society.*

Some of the old lines have blurred a little. There are institutionalists who now dress up their work with behavioral accoutrements. And there are behavioralists who have long since given up their dream of developing an encompassing set of scientific laws and have returned to such institutionalist concerns as: what's happening in Congress and why certain people get elected president. There are mainstream luminaries like Robert Dahl and Robert Lane who now consider themselves democratic socialists. There are radicals who no longer attack "the establishment" because they have long since joined it. There are pluralists who, in the face of present-day economic realities are toying with a class analysis—even if they dare not label it as such. And there are Marxists who are arguing for a more pluralistic view regarding the state's role in class conflict.

Meanwhile, from beyond the confines of our profession, virulent forces interrupt our musings. Reality intrudes upon our paradigms. The times are changing. The old arrangements are dying even as the new cannot yet be born.

[11]Increasingly the purges are being conducted not by departmental peers but by administrators. Sometimes politicians and right-wing media play a crucial role as in the Bertell Ollman case and several others. In the 1950s faculties were purged by witch-hunting congressional, state and university committees. See the excellent work done on this by Ellen W. Schrecker, especially her "An Obligation of Candor: The Academy's Response to Congressional Investigating Committees" paper at the American Historical Association meeting, December 1982. Having judged leftist scholars as incapable of disinterested or "real" scholarship, the centrists can refuse to hire them under the guise of protecting rather than violating academic standards. Such was the argument used to deny Samuel Bowles tenure at Harvard where some contended that Marxist economics is not really scholarly nor is it economics.

Significant Works in Political Science: Some Personal Views

A number of political scientists have been asked by *PS* to name the three to five books or articles which have influenced their scholarship and thinking most significantly. Specifically, they were asked, "Which works have you found yourself referring to most frequently over the years? Which ones hold the most theoretical significance or offer the most useful constructs? Which ones have broadened your understanding of politics in general or your field specifically?"

In addition to listing the three to five most significant books and explaining their choices briefly, the scholars were asked to name the most significant work which, in their opinion, has remained relatively undiscovered by the profession or has not received adequate attention. Political scientists in all major fields of the discipline were invited to participate.

As *PS* went into production, 20 scholars had replied and others promised to respond for the summer issue. While not all the respondents answered both parts of