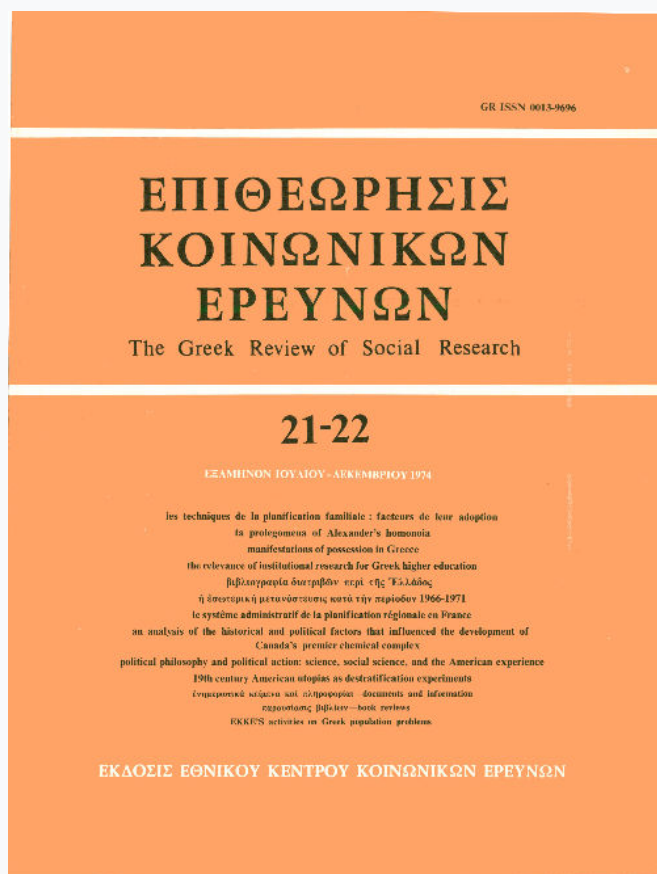


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Political philosophy and political action: Science, social science and the American experience

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political philosophy and political action

*Science, Social Science,
and the American Experience*

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Because of its preoccupation with technology and its predisposition toward the practical, America tends to be uncomfortable with speculation and with metaphysics. The «behavioral revolution» that elevated positivism to the highest seat of honor in American social science was certainly consistent with the practices of the society. Nevertheless, the tide is changing. Increasing numbers of critics are raising their voices. Some call simply for more concern with values and goals, and some seek a synthesis between scientific techniques and speculative philosophy.

Herbert J. Spiro, for example, expresses the sentiment of many of the new critics when he points out that hardly any constitutional system is adequately satisfying its own citizens' desires with regard to national purpose and goals. The general citizen, as well as the scholar, can hardly fail to perceive the «pervasive malaise over almost all the world about government and politics» that Professor Spiro notes. «Few political scientists today,» he writes, «address themselves to Aristotle's questions about the good man, the good citizen, and good *polis*, and the relations between these.» He remarks, however, that «philosophy is becoming more and more political again: this is true of even philosophies and philosophers who start off as explicitly apolitical or even anti-political, like the Existentialists.»¹ Even David Easton now speaks of the «post behavioral revolution» and agrees with the new critics regarding the impossibility of a value free social science.²

Because of the place of politics as, in Aristotle's words, the architectonic science, this paper examines the relationship of political philosophy to American politics and to the discipline which, for the sake of custom, it calls political science. It examines the consequences of the «behavioral revolution» and discusses the relationship of political science, hence political philosophy, to political action in the modern world. It contends that there *will* be political philosophy, that it will have political consequences, and that if these facts are unrecognized the consequences will be highly undesirable. Unless the context indicates otherwise, the terms political theory and political philosophy are used interchangeably.

the inevitability of political philosophy

We are told that political theory is in trouble be-

1. Herbert J. Spiro, *Politics as the Master Science: From Plato to Mao*, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, Chapter 13.

2. See David Easton, «The New Revolution in Political Science,» *American Political Science Review*, LXIII 4 (December, 1969, pp. 1051-1061). Presidential address delivered to the 65th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2-6, New York City.

cause it has failed to perform several important functions, such as unifying the discipline, clarifying political values, illuminating empirical political realities, facilitating prudent guidance in political life, and advancing more significant research.¹

If political theory is in trouble, it is only because it is unrecognized, and when it is unrecognized it is the discipline of political science itself that is in trouble. «To suppose... that there have been or could be ages without political philosophy», writes Isaiah Berlin, «is like supposing that as there are ages of faith, so there are or could be ages of total disbelief. But this is an absurd notion: there is no human activity without some kind of general outlook: scepticism, cynicism, refusal to dabble in abstract issues or to question values, hard-boiled opportunism, contempt for all theorizing, all the varieties of nihilism, are, of course, themselves metaphysical and ethical positions, committal attitudes. Whatever else the existentialists have taught us, they have made this fact plain. The idea of a completely *Wertfrei* theory (or model) of human action (as contrasted, say, with animal behavior) rests on a naive misconception of what objectivity or neutrality in the social studies must be.»²

It is difficult to question the contention that all action, particularly all political action, is directed either at preservation or change. If preservation is the goal, the desire is to prevent a change for the worse. If change is the goal, the desire is to produce a situation that is better. Therefore, all political action is motivated by some conception of «better,» or «worse,» which, of course, implies a conception of the good.³ T. L. Thorson carries the argument to an even more fundamental level when he writes, «No one can say anything, recognize anything, understand anything without committing himself to a theoretical apparatus. And this theoretical apparatus is not something that can be proved. If Lasswell thinks... that he is *merely* analyzing, he is wrong. There is no such thing as *mere* analysis... The serious use of the tools of logical and scientific analysis commits one to a certain view of the world.»⁴

It is superficial at best to conclude that approaches to politics or descriptive theories can be made «scientific» by discarding moral references and other value positions. The result of such an attempt is not

to produce a value free scientific theory but rather to produce «a simple-minded unconsciousness of valuations that have become habitual.» There are at least implicit assumptions regarding the significance of factors that are to go into any description of a social or political situation. The choice is not between values and no values, but rather between «implicit assumptions and the explicit avowal of what is assumed.»⁵

All political discussion, thought, and analysis involves value judgment. The questions political science must answer are *what* values, and this is the province of political philosophy. Thorson notes that David Easton, «for all his professed empiricism, is really in very much the same position as the classical metaphysician. He supplies us with a 'linguistic recipe' in terms of which observations about politics can be stated.»⁶

There will be political philosophy; it is implicit in political science. The question becomes one of rationally selecting a rational philosophy. Those who have predicted the demise of political theory have been unable to explain away the fact that the notion that there can be non-theoretical political study itself is all too plainly a theory.⁷

For example, «if social scientists think ideals to be mere functions of an underlying pluralistic order but do not hold that this holds to their own, does not at least one set of ideals, namely theirs, gain the status of objectivity?»⁸

Few scholars have approached the degree of insight and perception in unravelling the difficulties inherent in the attempted retreat from political philosophy found in the writings of Mulford Q. Sibley. Professor Sibley does not question the contributions of behavioralism, but whether the behavioral approach itself is adequate for an understanding of politics and society. He lists five points that go to the heart of the question:⁹

1. The very selection of subjects for investigation is shaped by values which are not derivable from the investigation;

5. George H. Sabine, «What is a Political Theory?» *Journal of Politics*, I (1: February, 1939), in Gould and Thursby, p. 18.

6. Thorson, *Biopolitics*, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1970, p. 75.

7. A.C. MacIntyre, «Recent Political Thought,» *Political Ideas*, David Thomson, ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 190.

8. Henry S. Kariel, «The Pluralist Norm,» *Frontiers of Democratic Theory*, Kariel, ed., New York: Random House, 1970, p. 163. See also Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969, *passim*.

9. Mulford Q. Sibley, «The Limitations of Behavioralism,» *Contemporary Political Analysis*, James C. Charlesworth, ed., New York: The Free Press, 1967, pp. 52-53.

1. Neal Riemer, *The Revival of Political Theory*, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1962, p. 166.

2. Isaiah Berlin, «Does Political Theory Still Exist?» *Contemporary Political Thought: Issues in Scope, Value, and Direction*, James A. Gould and Vincent V. Thursby, eds., New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1969, p. 343.

3. Leo Strauss, «What is Political Philosophy?» *Journal of Politics*, XIX (3 : August, 1957), in *Ibid.*, p. 47.

4. Thomas Landon Thorson, *The Logic of Democracy*, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1962, p. 89.

2. In the end, the concepts and values which do determine what and how one studies are related to one's judgments of the goals which one identifies with political life and to one's general «life experience»;
3. Once the investigation is launched, there are definite limits to what one can expect from behavioral studies;
4. Behaviorally oriented study will remove one from the stuff of everyday politics and cannot be related to that stuff except by means which would usually be regarded as non-behavioral; and
5. If clarification about policy-making is one objective of the politician, behavioralism, although destined to play a significant role, is restricted in what it can be expected to do.

In dealing with the nature of scientific thought itself, Professor Sibley points out that values must always be prior to any investigation. The techniques of behavioralism, or any other empirical approach, inevitably will be applied within a framework of value judgments—judgments that cannot be supported solely through behavioral techniques.¹

Probing deeply into the processes of investigation and verification, Professor Sibley notes that, «it appears to be impossible to define political things without answering the question of what constitutes a peculiarly 'political' society, and a society cannot be defined without reference to its purpose.»² The investigator must inevitably begin with an idea, and the conceptions that lead him to scientific investigation must rest ultimately on overall insights and what Leo Strauss has called pre-scientific knowledge, «as well as something very akin to aesthetic experience.»³ Even the most extreme empiricist assumes the direct experience of «facts,» but as Michael Polanyi points out, all knowledge is tainted knowledge. That is, at all levels of cognition, there is personal participation.⁴

Could there be a better illustration of the difficulties inherent in empiricism than David Easton's statement that «ethical evaluation and empirical explanation... should be kept analytically distinct?» K. W. Kim remarks, «whether this statement itself is an instance of evaluation or explanation is an intriguing question.»⁵ There are many other intriguing questions that become apparent to those who examine the empiricist epistemology.

All political action and all political studies presuppose a political theory whether recognized or not. Those who perceive a decline in political theory actually are observing a crisis in positivist political

science. In Dante Germino's words, what they see is «the inevitable demise of political theory within the positivist universe of discourse, where the 'fact-value' dichotomy reigns as dogma.»⁶ This situation has resulted in a considerably distorted view of political theory. Many students of government have lost sight of its original meaning. They no longer view it as an «experiential science of right order in society,» but rather as «ideology.» Ideology, of course, is conditioned by society whereas theory claims to be possessed of perennial insights. The new view of theory equates it with experimental hypotheses, and only those propositions that lend themselves to testing in terms of sense experience are granted the status of theory. The political scientist who accepts this view therefore can produce such formulations as theories of voting behavior, but he can conceive of no theories of the principles of right action in society or politics because such formulations would be «unverifiable» by sense observation.⁷ He probably finds it difficult to understand let alone accept the contentions of scholars such as Eric Voegelin, that political science and political theory are intimately bound up with one another into a «science of right order.»

The positivistic notion that only empirical knowledge is truly knowledge would appear to be a bias, conditioned by our contemporary scientific culture. Post-behavioral scholars are beginning to recognize that non-empirical knowledge exists, and that it cannot merely be equated with error. Polanyi calls it «tacit» political knowledge, Strauss calls it «pre-scientific» knowledge, William Riker calls it «political wisdom» as opposed to «political science,» Sheldon Wolin describes it as a composite knowledge that actually is a mode of activity, more a style of reflection than a style of search. It does involve logic but it also takes account of the «incoherence and contradictoriness of experience.» For this reason «it is distrustful of rigor» and it tends to be «suggestive and illuminative rather than explicit and determinant.»⁸ Concentration upon «data,» however valuable data may be, has pitfalls. «Even those who would wish to address their minds to 'data' are aware that data are constituted by abstractions, and that usually what has been culled from the phenomena are the subtle traces of past practices and meanings

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

4. *Ibid.*

5. K. W. Kim, «The Limits of Behavioral Explanation in Politics,» *Apolitical Science: A Critique of Behavioralism*, Charles A. McCoy and John Playford, eds., New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, p. 40.

6. Dante Germino, «The Revival of Political Theory,» *Journal of Politics*, 25 (August, 1963), *Ideology, Politics and Political Theory*, Richard Cox, ed., Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1969, p. 97.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

8. Sheldon Wolin, «Political Theory as a Vocation,» *American Political Science Review*, LXII (4: December, 1969), p. 1070.

which form the connotative content of actions and events.»¹

If we are to proceed intelligently, we must accept those propositions that can be verified by scientific techniques and reject the propositions that scientific techniques can demonstrate to be false. This leaves many things out of account. The proposition that God exists, for example, can be neither verified nor proven false, scientifically, which merely illustrates that science is incapable of answering all questions. It «simply does not provide an all-purpose epistemology. Its requirements for deduction in the context of the limited human mind require one to abstract and strip away much of the richness of life. Elegance and precision are gained at the cost of the poets' pleasures. It deals with the correctness of descriptions regarding relationships among abstractions, and not in the correctness of the ends of real men. Thus, to seek in science answers to questions of ethics or faith is to give science both more and less than its due.»²

The investigator must always begin with a non-empirically derived framework. He can demonstrate within that framework how men have acted under given and controlled conditions. He can demonstrate how men probably would behave in the future under precisely formulated conditions. He can also derive specific limitations beyond which, again under carefully controlled conditions, men probably would not act. These are the regularities that David Easton has concluded are the responsibility of the behavioral scientist to discover. The behavioral approach, on the other hand, can never explain the behavior of the behavioralist; it cannot tell what we ought to value in political life, nor can it forecast the future. At best it can produce only scientific predictions (i.e. «if-then» statements, not prophecies).³ It is well to outline the limitations of the scientific approach in order to prevent disillusionment about what it can accomplish.

Scientific techniques are indispensable to the modern study of politics, but if we are to understand politics thoroughly, we must not only know what it has been, what it is, and what it is likely to be, but also we must know what it could be and what it should be. We must therefore correct our scientific knowledge by «unscientific judgment about history and primary values.»⁴

the science of politics

One of the difficulties that has plagued the «scientific» investigator of politics is a tendency toward a naive view of science itself. He tends not to have progressed beyond pre-twentieth-century scientific theories. He frequently views the nineteenth century models that are inadequate for modern physics as the foundation of a science of politics. Floyd W. Matson, in his brilliant but too little known book, *The Broken Image*, has produced the definitive treatment of this situation and its consequences.⁵

Space prevents from doing justice to Matson's argument, but he demonstrates quite clearly that modern social science to a large degree has hardly progressed beyond the models of Newtonian mechanics. He notes the inherent dangers of this to human freedom and calls for social science to become aware of the newer developments in sub-atomic physics, biology, and psychotherapy. He warns that the social sciences have relied upon root metaphors and methods borrowed from classical mechanics and have thereby eclipsed the ancestral liberal vision of the whole man, giving us instead a «radically broken self-image.» The history of the breaking of this image has paralleled the disintegration of the inner sense of identity, and the retreat from autonomous conduct into automaton behavior in the contemporary world. «Despite the contrary inclinations of C. P. Snow and others,» he writes, «it is today less urgent that the humanities should be imbued with the values of science than that science should become alert to the values of humanity.»⁶

Regardless of the pretensions of many political scientists, «the social sciences today have yet to show one universal element or controlling 'law', one unit of measurement, one exactly plotted universal variable, or one invariant relation.»⁷ The discipline has yet to be revolutionized in the manner in which Thomas Kuhn describes scientific revolutions. There are many new «theories» available, but no new dominant theory has been accepted by the discipline to the exclusion of all its rivals.⁸ To those who would contend that systems theory is the new «dominant theory» (meeting Kuhn's criteria in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), Wolin points out that there is confusion about which of the several versions of the theory is accepted, whether any version at all is useful, and whether the popularity of systems theory followed rather than produced the behavioral revolution. He notes perceptively that American

1. *Ibid.*, p. 1071.

2. Arthur S. Goldberg, «On the Need for Contextualist Criteria,» *American Political Science Review*, LXIII (4 : December, 1969), p. 1249.

3. Sibley, pp. 61-66.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

5. New York: George Braziller, 1964.

6. *Ibid.*, preface, p. vii.

7. Jacques Barzun, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment*, New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 185.

8. See Wolin, p. 1063.

political scientists for the most part not only share a customary discomfort with theory *per se*, but that they have elevated this discomfort to a scientific status. Frequently, political scientists now allege a suspicion of theories to be a powerful contributor to American political stability and to the American genius for pragmatic rather than ideological politics.¹

Many social scientists have so oversimplified the procedures of science that they fail to recognize that there can be no continuum from the physical world to the intellect. There is a hiatus between the material world and recognition of that world, just as there is no continuous process, but rather a flash of insight, between the awareness of empirical facts and the formulation of a framework or theory. Albert Einstein has commented, «There is no inductive method which could lead to the fundamental concepts of physics... in error are those theorists who believe that theory comes inductively from experience.»²

It must not be thought that the elimination of bias requires a truly «objective» approach or disillusionment will be the inevitable result. The effort to eliminate bias must produce in the investigator an awareness of his own values and an explicit statement of his values *as values* rather than as facts. He must also be aware of the values of those whom he is studying. This does not mean, as Weber would have it, accepting the values of the subjects in theory construction. As Strauss, supported by many others, points out, this would create a corrupt methodology requiring the social scientist to commit an error for every deception and every self-deception of those whom he studies. If this is correct, total objectivity is impossible. Moreover, there is a basic difference between the mental constructs or thought objects formed by the physical sciences and those formed by the social sciences.³ So basic is this difference that it produces great difficulties for the process of verification in the social sciences. The only things that can be finally verified tend to be trivial.⁴ Or as Thorson puts it, «the fact is that any attempt to make absolutely general statements about politics, statements intended to apply regardless of time and place, will end in truism or something very close to it.»⁵

1. *Ibid.*

2. Albert Einstein, *The Method of Theoretical Physics*, New York: Oxford, 1933, quoted by Thorson in *The Logic of Democracy*, p. 98.

3. See Arthur L. Kalleberg, «Concept Formation in Normative and Empirical Studies: Toward Reconciliation in Political Theory», *American Political Science Review*, LXIII (1: March, 1969), pp. 29-32.

4. See George Kateb, *Political Theory: Its Nature and Uses*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968, p. 83.

5. Thorson, *Biopolitics*, p. 70.

We are told that politics is who gets what, when, how; that it refers to power. It is true that politics should refer to power, but also it should refer to some conception of human welfare or the public good.⁶ Bay has performed a public service in coining the term «pseudopolitics» to apply to apparently political activities that have no reference to a public purpose. Bay shares with Bernard Crick and others a concern for «politics.» He takes issue with the pluralist model that assumes that politics must remain «primarily a system of rules for peaceful battles between competing private interests, and not an arena for the struggle toward a more humane and more rationally organized society.»⁷

It is strange that the pluralist model has so seldom been recognized for what it is, a sophisticated group version of the outmoded individualistic laissez-faire ideas of the early economists. One would almost expect the discipline of political science next to conceive of the doctrine of an unseen guiding hand that governs the market place of politics. We arrive back at philosophy when we discover that many of the writings based upon the pluralist model affirm that American democracy works well without giving the criteria upon which the judgment is based.⁸

Any formulation of such criteria on a formal basis, of course, would be explicitly philosophical and would produce grave discomfort. Bay notes that if medical literature were to follow the practice set by most political science literature «its scope would in the main be confined to studying how patients choose to cope or at any rate do cope with their pathologies, while omitting or neglecting fundamental study of conditions for possible treatment and prevention.»⁹

Similar criticisms may be leveled at the «end of ideology» literature. The irony of the situation is that many of these writings themselves display every characteristic of ideology. Social science would be much better off if it acknowledged frankly that it has not solved Mannheim's paradox.¹⁰

In studying any society, knowledge of its political theory is of inestimable value. It gives insights into the political values held by the citizens. These, of course, define the goals of the society, and indicate which means may be appropriate for achieving them. Since all political writing will display political theory, even the most thoroughly, empirical works of

6. See Christian Bay, «Politics and Pseudopolitics: A Critical Evaluation of Some Behavioral Literature», *American Political Science Review*, LXI (1: March, 1965), p. 40.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

10. Joseph LaPalombara, «Decline of Ideology: A Dissent and An Interpretation», *American Political Science Review*, IX (1: March, 1966), p. 6.

fer insights into the values of their authors and of the societies producing them.

Political institutions and organizations can be understood only in the light of men's purposes.¹ Enlightenment regarding the basic nature of political institutions can and does come about as much from speculation and reflection as from studying descriptions. Empirical findings are essential, but theories of scientific determinism cannot lead to an adequate understanding of society. «One of the most useful insights of religion is the recognition that all human action takes place in a world in which both determinism and free will operate, and, indeed, are in perpetual tension with one another.»²

The retreat from explicit political philosophy undoubtedly has caused a major revision in the field of political science, but the retreat has not eliminated political philosophy. It has merely made it more difficult to recognize. It has produced a situation in which many investigators permit their methodologies to choose their philosophies rather than selecting their philosophies on a rational basis and then choosing their methods accordingly. Since political philosophy is inevitable how does it happen that many have been deluded into thinking that it can be avoided? Is this merely a matter of fashion or fad (the intellectual version of the «conventional wisdom»)? Such is the strength of intellectual fashion that it is frequently easier to judge propositions by their compatibility with the trends rather than by their merits. Thus fashion may make it relatively easy to accept «systems theories, communication theories, and structural-functional theories that are unpolitical theories shaped by the desire to explain certain forms of non-political phenomena. They offer no significant choice or critical analysis of the quality, direction or fate of public life.»³ Such theories rather than dealing with the «real» world instead take us from that world.⁴

But is this the only reason? How, for example, can fashion be so persuasive that some extreme exponents go so far as to argue that all theory should be scientific theory? Consider, for example, Heinz Eulau's statement that «the discovery and susceptibility of problems to behavioral treatment depends... on the quality and quantity of trained personnel that may be available in the future.»⁵

May this attitude also reflect the traditional Amer-

ican bias against the past and against theory? Americans have spent a large part of their existence attempting to throw off the shackles of history, attempting to break off and deny their European antecedents. The behavioral revolution may well be an instance of the typical American purging of the past. The effort to diminish the significance of political philosophy has activated a bias against tradition in the name of elimination of bias. The objection here is not to theory, *per se*, but to a tradition of theory.⁶

There may be another pertinent factor also. Might this not be an effort to obtain stability and consensus in a chaotic world? The «scientific» approach could be adopted in an effort to produce findings that cannot be disputed. If the history of science is any guide, of course, such an effort would be doomed to failure, although jargon, mathematics, and esoteric techniques may offer to some scholars an opportunity to hide their own insecurity. But, alas, in the real world security blankets in whatever form, cloth or sophisticated scientific techniques, psychologically satisfying thought they may be, provide little real security. «Access to an electronic computer or knowledge of the calculus does not transform a mediocre mind into a superior intellect.»⁷

The new approach appears to be a negative kind of political theory that maintains that virtually nothing worthwhile can be known or said about values; it is both a symptom and a cause of ethical relativism. In their search for rationalism the positivists have implicitly adopted a position that easily may be equated with the rejection of rationalism.⁸

At a recent professional meeting, a speaker announced that speculation was intellectually bankrupt. An engineer, he said, can accomplish nothing by speculation. Only by such activities, for example, as measuring the tensile strength of a steel beam can he produce a good bridge, not by speculating about the nature of bridges. When a questioner asked how scientific techniques could demonstrate whether the bridge were needed at all, and how scientific techniques could answer such other questions of import to the quality of life as those relating to aesthetics, the speaker declined to answer the former question but maintained that such a thing as aesthetics does not truly exist. The quality of modern life has deteriorated sufficiently as it is. What would be the import for the future if extreme positions such as this were to be universally accepted?

Greaves notes another, and as he says less respectable, reason for the acceptance of the new science

1. A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State*, London: Oxford, 1955, p. 38.

2. Robert Gordis, *Politics and Ethics*, Santa Barbara, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1961, p. 29.

3. Wolin, p. 1063.

4. Sibley, p. 66.

5. Heinz Eulau, «Segments of Political Science Most Susceptible to Behavioristic Treatment» in Charlesworth, p. 45.

6. Wolin, p. 1070.

7. Andrew Hacker, «The Utility of Quantitative Method in Political Science» in Charlesworth, p. 149.

8. See, H. R. G. Greaves, «Political Theory Today» in McCoy and Playford, pp. 323-334.

of politics. He calls it the «politics of political studies.» That is, there are financial advantages to the production of non-controversial scholarly works. They avoid the risk of clashing with foundations. He quotes the late Arnold Rose to the effect that it is probable that power holders increasingly restrict the activities of social scientists, as the implications of their studies become apparent, since the social scientists must depend upon grants and awards to continue their research.¹

«How much sounder and safer it seemed,» remarks McIntyre, «to be able to welcome the end of ideology and return to a comfortable and comforting English empiricism—to drop the theory and remain close to the facts. Henceforward the fact-gathering discipline of political science would replace the imaginative flights of political theory.»² It would seem that this hints at one of the most severe indictments that can be leveled at an intellectual group. The modern world is characterized by huge concentrations of power, and power has laws of its own. There are consequences that flow merely from the possession of power that cannot be avoided. The holder of power, if he acts, must bear the responsibility for the consequences. If he fails to act, he must also bear responsibility for the consequences. In our powerful, complex, world, the possibility of consequences that are bad in the extreme is ever with us. We cannot avoid them by choosing not to act. The only way to avoid the moral consequences for acts is to deny them; to deny that consequences exist, or to deny that morals exist. I submit that at the heart of the positivistic approach lies an attempt by its adherents to abdicate the intellectual responsibility for the consequences of their own acts.

consequences of the scientific approach

In his excellent book, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment*, Jacques Barzun analyses our modern scientific culture and its effects upon values and the human personality. «Consider, for example,» he writes, «the after effects of such a work as that published a few years ago on *Premarital Dating Behavior*. We begin with the apparatus of questions and definitions, which includes a table of 'stages' in the behavior under study. Stage 'A' is: 'No dates within specified period;' Stage 'B': 'No physical contact or only holding hands;' and so on with increasing embellishments up to sexual intercourse, which is stage 'F'. All this is as detached as an insect study, except now and then when a sad or touching re-

mark by one of the youths ('My, what a difference a car does make') reminds us we are dealing with human beings.»³

Barzun points out that a great deal of energy today is being expended upon manipulation. How many of us search for a science to control man? «Any social scientist in the grip of factuality—that is, who thinks that findings dictate choices—is potentially a manipulator.»⁴ When it comes to the individual, it is science itself that is inexact because it deals statistically with the mass. Its definitions, says Barzun, are always partial in both senses, which is to say that science works with great accuracy by hit and miss. When it announces that the half life of Radon 222 is 3.8 days, this tells us that half of any amount will disintegrate in that time; which half cannot be foretold. No one cares. «But if a law court jailed or hanged half of the accused brought before it in any three or four days, without caring which half, there would be commotion even among scientists. The courts dare not work, much less predict, by number as science does work with and predict the emission of alpha particles. What one ought to say, therefore, is that the law is exact, but not precise; science is precise, but not exact.»⁵

The effects of the scientific approach to the study of politics are apparent on all sides, but what is not so apparent are the subtle by-products of our attitudes towards science and technology. Take the polygraph as a case in point. First of all, despite popular terminology, it is not a «lie detector,» but merely a device to record variations in pulse rate, breathing, blood pressure, etc. The user of the machine must frame the questions and then interpret from the physiological readings whether the subject has lied, and if so, at what point. To be sure, such «evidence» is inadmissible in most courts, but the mere existence of the machine may well impede the course of justice. Both the public and the jury frequently presume that the refusal to submit to a polygraph test is an indication of guilt. «The 'infallibility' of machinery, the false name 'lie detector', overcome all but the most rational.»⁶ Few persons even question the validity of the far-fetched and probably unverifiable theory that associates truthfulness with physiological states.

An unfortunate study that was undertaken a few years ago at a leading university typifies much of the ill effects of positivism upon the social sciences today. The investigators sought to determine whether

3. Pp. 181-182.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 187; see also the writings of Thomas Szasz, M.D., for a discussion of psychiatry not as an «objective science» but as a manipulative tool with an implicitly coercive function.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

2. A. C. McIntyre, «Recent Political Thought,» *Political Ideas*, David Thomson, ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 180-190.

any «distinguishable difference» existed after twenty-five years between those who as freshmen students had received any vocational counselling (even «one, two, or... several hours») and those who had received none.¹ A few brief excerpts from the study can speak for themselves.

«In a later section of 'Contribution to Society' is a description of a rating made on all living and located subjects in this study. For the nonrespondents the rating was based on credit rating secured from a commercial credit agency.» (page 55)

«Perhaps the best argument for the use of income as a measure of success is that, in an informal way, most people consider it just that. The use of the husband's income as a measure of the wife's achievement is another matter. This introduces another source of error. Probably an overwhelming one... however, data for both sexes are presented in the following discussion.» (page 90)

«Virtually everyone still alive in this sample was rated. For 600 individuals, both the questionnaire and the interview notes were available to the raters; for another 16, the questionnaire; and for another 51, the interview notes. For the remaining 49, a credit report from the Retail Credit Association was used. These last reports were secured on all individuals declining to furnish information for this study. While this may have been a devious procedure, it was justified on the following grounds: Many of those refusing to cooperate in this study were obviously among the most unsuccessful individuals. It seemed unwise to eliminate this group from the study so the only available channel of information was used.» (pages 99-100)

Note the consistent use of the passive voice. The investigator says, «It was justified,» not «I justified it.» With the proper tools, that is the scientific approach and the passive voice, it would appear that any investigator may claim to be absolved of responsibility for the consequences of his own investigation.

Let us return to the field of political science for an example of the manner in which scientific terminology may be very persuasive even when substance is lacking. In the *American Political Science Review* of December, 1964, there occurred an exchange of letters on the construction of questionnaires.² The first letter refers to Herbert McClosky's article «Consensus and Ideology in American Politics,» in the June 1964 issue. Its writer, Howard H. Lentner, clearly demonstrated that many of the items Professor McClosky used did not necessarily measure the attitude that they purported to measure, others were ambiguous, and still others included statements both of ends and means.

For example, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement «People who hate our way of life should still have a chance to talk and be

heard.» McClosky refers to this as a general statement. The statement «freedom does not give anyone the right to teach foreign ideas in our schools» he refers to as a specific statement. Lentner points out that «freedom» is just as abstract as «our way of life» and «a chance to talk and be heard» is as general, or as specific for the matter, as «the right to teach foreign ideas in our schools.» Regarding ambiguity, he notes the item «If Congressional committees stuck strictly to the rules and gave every witness his rights, they would never succeed in exposing the many dangerous subversives they have turned up.» Lentner remarks that one might disagree with the statement and thus be classified as one who agrees with the rules of the game because he believes the Congressional committees have not turned up many subversives, or he might disagree with the statement because of its implication that congressional committees have not stuck to the rules. «Whose rules?» he asks. The rules of fair play or the rules of the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities? «On the other hand,» he says, «a respondent could agree with the statement, thus being classified as disagreeing with the 'rules of the game', but believe that the prize of exposing subversives was not worth the cost of violating the 'rules of the game'.» Lentner goes on in some detail.

The second letter was McClosky's response to Lentner. His response seems to prove Lentner's case. He says that Lentner «must know that the validity of a measure is not a matter of individual opinion... and cannot be resolved by individual inspection of its face content.» It may well be true that an item's validity cannot be established merely by its face content, but surely there are some items that can be ruled out on this basis. McClosky proceeds to say that «as anyone with knowledge of test construction can verify, unanimity in the rating of items is virtually impossible to achieve. No matter how clear and appropriate an item may seem to most judges, there are always dissenters who will rate it as irrelevant, ambiguous, or otherwise inadequate. Similarly... even if an item were to be rated as perfect by every judge, not all respondents who answered in a given direction do so for identical reasons. Some will respond for idiosyncratic reasons that have nothing to do with the 'purpose' assigned to the item by the investigator. Some will score the item 'correctly'... but for the 'wrong' reasons... Some will also score it 'incorrectly' for the wrong reasons. Every item in an attitude scale, in short, is in some degree inescapably 'multi-phasic'.» These difficulties would seem insurmountable, even though McClosky contends that they can be overcome by using large numbers of items with a large sample of respondents. In other words, abstraction added to abstraction produces

1. David P. Campbell, *Twenty-five Year Follow Up of Education-Vocational Counselling*, US Office of Education, Cooperative Research Project 1346, University of Minnesota, 1961-1963.

2. Pp. 963-965.

the concrete, or error added to error produces the truth.

If the social scientist is truly consistent, the more serious he is as a social scientist, the more likely he is to develop a state of indifference to goals, a state that some contend approaches nihilism. Since social science cannot pronounce upon the basic question of whether social science itself is good, it must be compelled to concede that society would have equal right to encourage social science or to suppress it as a nihilistic, corrosive, disturbing and subversive force. But despite this, we find social scientists «very anxious to 'sell' social science.»¹

Some of our present social difficulties may stem from actions of the social scientist who believes that he can loudly criticize the foundations of society, calling them merely ideology, myth, or emotional preference without shaking those very foundations.² Thorson believes that the tragedy of twentieth century political science is its inability to defend democracy against totalitarianism. He contends that this tragedy has been brought about by the artificially restrictive canons of rationality implicit in the acceptance of the positivistic point of view; that is, not by any genuine necessity, but by a philosophical mistake. The behavioral mood, moreover, is far from an intellectual advance. «The advocacy of scientific method in politics heard in the 1960's does not differ markedly from the pronouncements of Merriam and Lasswell in the 1920's and 1930's. The behavioral mood's most important philosophical support, Logical Positivism, has been dead in the halls of philosophy for nearly thirty years.»³

The source of the desire to manipulate that which is implicit in much of the social sciences is not evil, quite the contrary. The desire to manipulate comes about from the desire to do good, to improve. If they are ethically neutral, however, the social sciences cannot support these ends and the social scientist, because he presumes that his discipline is ethically neutral, may well forget that manipulation means power, and power in itself may be a force for evil. We ignore Lord Acton's dictum at our peril. In strange ways the social scientists have also been caught up in a situation that forces them to become advocates of the status quo. This despite their presumed ability to be value free or nearly so. As Kariel puts it, «an appreciable number [of social scientists] have in fact helped give theoretical stability and respectability to a technologically harnessed pluralism.»⁴ But an emphasis upon pluralism, upon the status quo, upon a reverent citizenry, is undesirable,

regardless of its importance as a stabilizing force, if we regard democracy as in part a development of the self.⁵

Basically, it should be expected that much American scientific social research should condone a closed order because the effort, the approach, is scientific rather than political, and science and technology are apolitical, if not antipolitical, forces. The moment methodology becomes an end in itself, the guiding theory becomes unchangeable and the political process is in difficulty.

The non-partisan city manager form of government is a case in point. Reformers have long advocated this type of government for reasons of its efficiency and its explicitly non-political character. Here we have an effort to remove «Politics» from the political process. From some points of view it undeniably works very well in smaller cities, it also places the people one step further removed from the control of the forces that administer their government. The lack of political responsibility and of political leadership combine to make it very difficult to replace incumbents on the city council, thereby producing great impediments to change and innovation.

Students of politics should recognize that however worthy the goals, a search for efficiency at the expense of politics is likely to produce ethical difficulties. In this regard political science has lagged behind some other disciplines such as anthropology.

Between the two world wars, anthropology had discarded its older monistic theory of linear evolution and had substituted pluralism. Each culture stood alone as a legitimate expression of human potential and was to be judged only by its own standards. Moral codes belong to a culture and are the result of its experience. Cultural relativity meant ethical relativity which worked admirably to cleanse the discipline of its older ethnocentrism. But the notions of universal values and fundamental law faded.

The rise of Nazism proved to be a great shock; if anthropologists were to remain thoroughly consistent regarding cultural relativism, if they were to remain thoroughly «scientific,» they would be forced to concede, before 1941, «that it was both irrelevant and impertinent for Americans to judge Nazi behavior by American standards. One of the founders of the functionalist school in anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, recognized this fact, abandoned the position, and spent his last years developing a cultural theory that would disclose the evil in Nazi methods.»⁶

5. Lewis Lipsitz, «If, as Verba says, the State Functions as A Religion, What Are We to Do Then to Save Our Souls?» *American Political Science Review*, LXII (2: June, 1968), p. 533.

6. Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, New York: The Roland Press, 1956, pp. 417-421.

1. Sabine, p. 51.

2. Thorson, *Logic*, p. 91.

3. Thorson, *Biopolitics*, p. 87.

4. Kariel, p. 139.

Other anthropologists joined in the endeavor. The scientific student of politics, however, only now is beginning to recognize that a discipline that fails to recognize values is sterile at best and is likely to be destructive. The fundamental objections to the Nazi theories of race are that they repudiate the claims of the brotherhood of man which are the basis of universalist ethics, leaving only an enlarged tribalism.¹

Political scientists often argue that methods are neutral and that they do not presuppose a point of view. The anthropologists have discovered differently. As Wolin points out, the elevation of «method» to a position of prime importance has had curricular consequences. More and more of the time of the student of politics is spent learning methodology rather than substance. But even more important is that the primacy of method affects the student's view of the world. Especially the political world.

«The alleged neutrality of a methodist's training overlooks significant philosophical assumptions admittedly incorporated into the outlook of those who advocate scientific inquiry into politics. These assumptions are such as to reinforce an uncritical view of existing political structures and all that they imply. For the employment of method assumes, even requires, that the world be one kind rather than another if techniques are to be effective.»²

When the world he is studying exhibits irregularities, rather than the assumed regularities, the student who emphasizes method is in trouble, as indicated by the sad state of theories of development or modernization.³

It is perhaps significant that many political scientists, e.g. Eulau, now describe themselves as «normal scientists.» The term is Kuhn's and means «...a type of scientist whose vocation is not to create theories or even to criticize them, but to accept the dominant theory approved by the scientific community and to put it to work.»⁴

At a time when the world appears to be progressing deeper and deeper into serious trouble, the discipline of political science, along with the other social sciences, has become largely a spokesman for the status quo. It is therefore open to the charges of irrelevance. It has said little about destruction of the environment, about restless youth, about cities that become more difficult to inhabit each day, about destructive wars, or about the possibility of havoc on a worldwide scale. The commitment to science

has served us ill. It has engendered a fear of the people, indicated by its support for pluralist or brokerage democracy, and its contention that apathy is a prerequisite to good government. It has transformed the social sciences into conservative disciplines, despite the personal tendencies of most social scientists toward liberalism. It had led to the more or less totally irrelevant, into a frenzied avoidance of the most pressing issues of the day. David E. Apter has, in fact, confirmed that American social scientists have been co-opted into the broader American establishment.⁵ It is true that there is now a great deal of social criticism. By and large, however, it is concentrated not in the social sciences but elsewhere, such as in literature, art, drama, film and music.

There seems to be an unfortunate tendency among many social scientists to select subjects for study not on the basis of their substance but rather their susceptibility to certain methodological treatment. Some government agencies, for example, have withheld approval of research grants until the proposed project was sufficiently altered to produce ease in computer processing of the information accumulated. This at times has resulted in major changes in subject matter emphasis. Such an approach will tend to produce studies that do not challenge the status quo, and that are irrelevant to the pressing problems of today. We have noted earlier that the scientific method, *per se*, is essentially antipolitical. Key has written that «a considerable proportion of the literature commonly classified under the heading of political behavior has no real bearing on politics, or at least its relevance has not been made apparent.»⁶

In reading much of the literature of contemporary political science, one cannot help but be struck by its apparent unawareness of some of the most profoundly significant changes in American culture. Does it not appear that the discipline is calling for «benign neglect,» when we hear leading political scientists announce that «apathy, non-voting and poor education are a good thing, i.e., system sustaining, and that we should be most cautious about consciously inducing social change because of the danger of destabilizing the political system?»⁷ It would appear that we could be less fearful of change

1. See George E. G. Catlin, «Equality and What We Mean by It,» *Equality (NOMOS IX)*, J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., New York: Atherton Press, 1967, p. 109.

2. Wolin, p. 1064.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Charles A. McCoy and John Playford, *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behavioralism*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967, p. 2.

6. V.O. Key, Jr., «The Politically Relevant in Surveys,» *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXIV (March, 1960), p. 54, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. Maure L. Goldschmidt, «Democratic Theory and Contemporary Political Science,» *Ibid.*, p. 220.

and more concerned with the direction in which we are heading.

Orwell wrote in 1948; we are now considerably more than halfway to 1984. Today we have the technology to destroy privacy; for example, the commercial credit organizations are already serving as an interim step toward a private version of a national data bank.¹ Senator Sam Ervin has undertaken a government-wide investigation to determine the extent to which federal data banks and the federal hunger for data are inconsistent with the constitutional rights of the American citizens. He and others have commented upon a data bank operated by the Army at the Investigative Records Repository at Fort Holabird, Maryland. For this bank the army collected files on private citizens who participate in certain civil activities and civilian politics. Subsequent investigations of the domestic intelligence activities of the military have been equally startling. As Senator Ervin declares, «clearly, the army has no business operating data banks for surveillance of private citizens; nor do they have any business in domestic politics.»²

The zeal for experimentation also can contribute to the increasing erosion of privacy. A few years ago the FAA conducted a series of experiments on the people of Oklahoma City to determine how many daily unannounced sonic booms they could tolerate without becoming totally irate. There have been many articles in the last few years that comment upon the need for much tighter supervision and control over medical experiments upon unknowing patients. Persons too often are denied dignity of treatment because they are considered by categories—welfare recipients, policemen, political radicals, students, travelers, racial, ethnic or religious minorities, businessmen—in short, as objects rather than as persons. This is understandable in an overpopulated world organized to promote industrial technology, but it fosters a tendency toward regimentation and toward a destruction of the privacy that remains.

Only by measuring our actions against an explicit political philosophy can we judge intelligently the

desirability of our present direction. Only by insuring that our political actions are consistent with our political philosophy can we have some control over the course we will pursue.

conclusion

We cannot determine scientifically which goals are proper, or which values are to be preferred. A value free political science is as undesirable as it is impossible. Since the study of politics presupposes a framework of values, hence, a political philosophy, we should consciously and rationally select the political consequences of our own actions.

Such scholars as Reinhold Niebuhr contend that politics cannot function without power and that it must therefore be inherently immoral or at least amoral. It must be purely a tool for achieving purposes that in themselves may be good, bad or indifferent, and yet, the best of purposes are tainted by aggression, self-seeking and violence. Despite these stated views, Niebuhr has evidenced a lifelong concern with social justice. His entire public activity, his liberalism is based upon the contention that in some manner ethics must be permitted to determine the character of politics. Many other who theoretically maintain that politics at best must be amoral, proceed to belie this orientation by their own public activities.³

There are few thinkers who do not implicitly recognize the truth that they may explicitly reject, that we must have a political philosophy that can direct us toward humane ends. This does not mean a narrow «moralism» which is sanctimonious and self defeating. Morality must be distinguished from moralism which has been described as «morality minus intelligence or honesty or both.»⁴

The demands of youth for «relevance» are justified; this pertains also to the social sciences. Society is faced with problems in urgent need of solution. Empirical studies are essential to show us what is, but they must be studies aimed at significant subjects, if they are to be worthwhile. We must also make our philosophy explicit, broaden our horizons, and direct our acts toward ethical consequences.

We must become aware of new factors that demand scientific investigation, but we must guide our actions by normative theory. This means that we must refrain from accepting the values of the status quo uncritically in the name of scientific objectivity. Social scientists «must avoid rigid presumptions which diminish their vision, destroy their capacity for criticism and blind them to some of the most signifi-

1. There is a vast amount of material available, particularly that resulting from the investigations of Representative Cornelius Gallagher, see e. g., «Credit Investigations and Privacy.» *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress Second Session, April 1, 1969, pages e2555-e2563; see also Campbell's study of members of a college class after twenty-five years: «After all sources were exhausted, 21 names were left. At this point, a commercial locating agency, The Retail Credit Association, was contacted and asked to help. Their efficiency was chilling. Within two weeks (after we had spent six months), they supplied the current address of 16 of the 21 people, at an average cost of \$18 per person.» (page 48)

2. Senator Sam Ervin, «Computers, Data Banks, and Constitutional Rights.» *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress Second Session, February, 3, 1970, S1084-S1091.

3. Gordis, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

cant social and political developments of our time».¹

The political scientist must recognize that philosophy is implicit in his work, and must develop a political philosophy that can provide practical guidance as well as theoretical insight. The discipline for too long has turned from its task of preserving and advancing worthy values. The political scientist must accept an activist role if he is to avoid eroding the principles and institutions to which he is personally committed. As Riemer reminds us, our primary concern is not for a puristic science for its own sake, but for the better life.²

As we pursue this goal we must remember Thorson's key principle, «do not block the possibility of change with respect to social goals.»³

If we are to avoid the burden of innocence, however, we must recognize that politics is the art of the possible. We must select our goals with care and not hope to achieve perfection. We must preserve our capacity for peaceful change and for the development of individual potential. We must select means that are consistent with our goals. We must reject rigid ideology, but articulate a core of values that can transcend personal and national interests; we must subject ourselves, our discipline, and our society to critical evaluation.

If political science is to contribute to these ends, it must again consider the recently ignored question, «What constitutes the good life?» It must acknowl-

edge the wisdom of the ancients, recognize the changes in modern society, and enrichen its findings with new insights provided by social psychology and other disciplines, as well as by interdisciplinary studies.

We must recognize the validity of democratic theory, the workability of the conception of the public good, the urgency of the need to improve the quality, and manner of life, and we must use both scientific knowledge and its counterpart, «tacit» knowledge. We must combine technical expertise with empathy and understanding. We must avoid the unpardonable sin that is expressed throughout the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne: a cold hard intellectualism unleavened by human feeling. Even men of good will frequently find it difficult to agree; nonetheless, we must articulate a common core of values that will permit certain principles and practices and exclude others. Must the political scientist study politics as though politics were the actions of non-rational or irrational creatures? Must an observer strip himself of all personal feelings when he studies? There is a possibility that lies between «ruthless partisanship» and «aseptic neutrality» that is a «strenuous but volatile combination of detachment and involvement.» We must distinguish between moral commitment and reckless partisanship.⁴

If political science is to survive, or if it is to matter whether any academic study survives; if we ourselves are to survive, we must recognize some absolutes—absolutes are very few, but very necessary.

4. Kateb, pp. 82-83.

1. Jack L. Walker, «A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy» in McCoy and Playford, pp. 218-219.

2. Riemer, p. 168.

3. Thorson, *Logic*, p. 139.

The political party is the primary means of modernization by virtue of its origin in the initiative of the modernist elites, its organization, which gives it a closer contact with the community than that possessed by the administration, and lastly its functions and aims, since it wishes to be, and in various fields is, the motive force behind economic development.

Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology*.