Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States
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Political Science in the United States: Past and Present

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Political science has been defined in many ways—as the study of power, the study of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force, the study of the good life, of the state, and so on. If there is one thing that distinguishes Western political science, it is that it has not yet arrived at a consensus on how to describe its subject matter at the most inclusive level. For reasons that are elaborated at length elsewhere (Easton 1981a), I have chosen to characterize political science as the study of the way in which decisions for a society are made and considered binding most of the time by most of the people. As political scientists, we are interested in all those actions and institutions in society more or less directly related to the way in which authoritative decisions are made and put into effect, and the consequences they may have (Easton 1981b). To seek to understand political life is to address oneself to the study of the authoritative allocation of values (valued things) for a society.

In effect, this description applies to any and all political systems, whether modern or ancient, large or small, industrialized or agricultural, mass or tribal, and so on. It is probably fair to say that this way of identifying political systems seems to have won the favor of many political scientists over the last quarter of a century. Thereby we are able to distinguish our interests from those of economists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists.

With this conception of the study of politics, let us now turn to an examination of what has been happening in Western, especially United States, political science during the twentieth century. It has passed through four stages. Each of these has been distinctive. Each has been incorporated in and,

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one hopes, improved upon by each succeeding stage. I shall give the following names to these stages: the formal (legal), the traditional (informal or prebehavioral), the behavioral, and the postbehavioral. I discuss each in turn.

The Formal and Traditional Stages

Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, political science started out with the conviction that once the laws governing the distribution of power in a political system have been described, we will have obtained an accurate understanding of how political institutions operate. Students of politics assumed that there was a reasonably close fit between what constitutions and laws said about the rights and privileges people held in various political offices and the way in which they acted in those offices.

Late in the nineteenth century, Walter Bagehot in Great Britain, followed by Woodrow Wilson in the United States (where he was a student and later a professor), made a major discovery. To everyone's surprise, they found that around the formal structure of political offices and institutions there were all kinds of informal behavior and organizations in which power over decision making might lie. Bagehot, Wilson, and others discovered them in the informal committees of their respective legislatures and in the political parties. Later scholars added interest or pressure groups to a growing list of informal institutions to be taken into account.

These findings introduced a new stage in the development of political science, dividing attention away from the formal, legal structures to the informal practices surrounding them. This change, which had occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century, was in full swing by the 1920s. People who were trained in the United States from the 1920s to the 1940s were exposed largely to what has come to be called traditional political science, the name for the second distinctive phase of political research in the twentieth century. During this period, training included a great deal of attention to the operation of political parties and their effect on Congress or Parliament and to the growth, in the United States, of pressure groups and other types of groups. The latter were drawn to our attention and analyzed in depth, initially by Arthur Bentley (1908), who was ignored at the time, and later, in new ways, by Pendleton Herring (1929) and David Truman (1951).

Methodologically, this traditional period was one in which more attention was paid to mere description and the collection of information about political processes than to overarching theories about how they operated. In fact, however, a latent theory unobtrusively guided research. Even though most of the scholars of that period were not conscious of it, they really say the political process is a giant mechanism for making decisions. Decisions were, as one scholar, Merle Fainsod (1940), put it, a product of a "parallelogram of

forces." This meant that when decisions were to be made, whether at the legislative or administrative levels, they were seen as being subjected to a vast array of pressures from social groups—from political parties, from other parts of the bureaucracy itself, from interest groups, from public opinion, and so on. These pressures played against each other, developing a parallelogram of forces that, through bargaining, negotiation, adaptation, compromise, and adjustment (terms commonly used to describe the process), would arrive at some equilibrium point for that time and place. This equilibrium point would yield a particular policy, or the policy could be called the point of equilibrium among the various competing forces pressing against the decision makers. If at some time one of these social forces should change, for example, because of a change in the economic structure, in the social attitudes, or in the occupants of decision-making roles, demands for modification of old policies or for the introduction of new policies might arise. Competition among the various groups for influence over the policy would then begin again, and a new point of equilibrium might be achieved (Easton 1981a). As I have indicated, for the most part, this equilibrium theory remained only latent in the literature.

The characteristic methods of research during this traditional period were no less informal than their theoretical base. Few special methods were used for the collection of data or for their analysis. Methods were not considered to be problematic, that is, as areas that required special attention or skills. Everyone was equally well equipped to collect and analyze information about politics. As a result, there were no formal or specified methods for testing the reliability of information acquired or of findings and interpretations based upon such information.

In addition, it was often difficult to distinguish whether the research worker was expressing his or her own preferences or was, in fact, describing how institutions operate and how people behave in political life. Statements relating what should be and what is were often almost inextricably intertwined. Facts and values played havoc with each other.

Finally, my own experience as a graduate student reflects the lack of theoretical coherence of traditional political science. At Harvard University, I took many different courses in political science. They covered the history of political thought, municipal or local politics, constitutional law, foreign policy, government regulation of industry, interest or pressure groups, international relations, the governments of specific foreign countries, and lawmaking in Congress. At the end of my graduate training my head was in a whirl. No one had ever tried to help me understand why my interest in politics required me to be exposed to such a wide variety of subject matters aside from the fact that, loosely, they all had to do with something called government. I gained no sense of a basis upon which I could infer that political science formed a coherent body of knowledge. There was no theoretical framework

into which, for example, I could place all these courses or by which I could check their relevance.

Political theory might have been the area in which, because of its name, I might have expected to find the opportunity to address this. But theory turned out to be devoted largely to the study of the history of political thought. Such history was, of course, interesting and important in itself, but it did not fulfill what might have been one of the functions of theory in, say, economics, chemistry, or physics, namely, the conceptualization of the discipline in part or as a whole.

The traditional stage then was one in which political science discovered the rich body of informal activities out of which public policy was formed. Yet it was a period during which description was often hard to distinguish from values, when theory did not measure up to the promise implicit in its name, and when method was so taken for granted that it was nonproblematic.

The Behavioral Stage

The formal-legal and traditional periods were the first two phases of recent times. They were displaced by the so-called behavioral revolution in American political science, which rapidly spread to many other parts of the world. This third phase began after World War II although it had its roots in the earlier period. Without question, this is the central transformation that has occurred in Western political science in this century.

Despite the common root in the English terms, behaviorism and behavioralism, the two have little in common and should not be confused. Political science has never been behavioristic, even during the height of its behavioralistic phase. *Behaviorism* refers to a theory in psychology about human behavior and has its origins in the work of J. B. Watson. I know of no political scientist who subscribes to this doctrine. Indeed, I know of no political scientist, although there may be the occasional one, who accepts even the psychological theory of B. F. Skinner, the founder of the "operant conditioning" school of psychology and the modern successor to Watson.

The only real relationship between the terms behaviorism and behavioralism is that both focus on the behavior of human actors as the appropriate source of information about why things happen as they do. Both also assume that a methodology based on that of the natural sciences is appropriate for the study of human beings. Thus, aside from this acceptance of the individual as the focus of research and of scientific method, there is little resemblance between these tendencies.

Behavioralism in political science had the following major characteristics, which distinguished it from earlier stages in the study of political science (Easton 1962). Behavioralism, first, held that there are discoverable uniformities in human behavior and, second, that these can be confirmed by empiri-

cal tests. Third, behavioralism showed a desire for greater rigor in methods for the acquisition and analysis of data. Methods themselves became problematic. They could no longer be taken for granted. Courses and books on methods for acquiring and analyzing data, once nonexistent, became commonplace. Quantification, whenever possible and plausible, assumed an important place in the discipline. As a result, during the 1950s and 1960s, political science became adept at using a vast array of increasingly sophisticated and empirical and quantitative techniques—questionnaires, interviews, sampling, regression analysis, factor analysis, rational modeling, and the like.

Fourth, the behavioral movement committed itself to much greater theoretical sophistication than existed in the past. The search for systematic understanding, grounded in objective observation, led to a marked shift in the meaning of theory as a concept. Traditionally, in the distant past, theory had been philosophical in character, asking questions about the nature of the good life. In more recent times, it had become largely historical, seeking to explicate and account for the emergence of political ideas in past centuries. Behavioral theory, on the other hand, is empirically oriented. It seeks to help us explain, understand, and, if possible, predict the way people behave politically and the way political institutions operate.

A considerable amount of the energies of theoreticians in this period went into the construction of empirically oriented theory at various levels of analysis. So-called middle-range theory has sought to build theories about large segments of the discipline, as in the case of power pluralism, which offers a theory of democratic systems, game theory, or public-choice theory (Riker and Ordeshook 1973).

In part, however, theory was of the broadest character, called general theory. This type of theory sought to provide an understanding of political systems at the most inclusive level. Structural-functional theory and systems analysis (Easton 1981b) represent two major theoretical efforts of such broad scope.

Fifth, many behavioralists felt that the values of the research worker and of society could be largely excluded from the process of inquiry. Ethical evaluation and empirical explanation were viewed as involving two different kinds of statements that clarity required to be kept analytically separate and distinct. Behavioralism adopted the original positivist assumption (as developed by the Vienna Circle of positivists early in this century) that value-free or value-neutral research was possible. Although some of us, including myself (Easton 1981a, chapter 9), did not share this point of view, it is nevertheless correct to suggest that it was a dominant one during the height of the behavioral stage. As a result, among the priorities of interesting and acceptable things to do, moral inquiry receded far into the background.

Sixth, behavioralism represented a new-found emphasis on basic or pure

theory as against applied research. Its assumption was that the task of the social scientist was to obtain fundamental understanding and explanation. It was felt that only after we have reliable understanding of how political institutions operate and people behave politically would it be possible to apply such knowledge, with confidence, to the solution of urgent social problems. The period of behavioralism, therefore, helped to divert the interests of scholars from social reform and encouraged them to set their sights on the needs of scientific development as a guide to research.

How can we explain the behavioral revolution of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States? It was clearly a product of a number of complex tendencies. It was part of the natural evolution of the discipline. The common sense, proverbial style of traditional political science, with its dependence on historical description and impressionistic analysis, had simply exhausted itself. A developing mass-industrialized society could not cope with its social problems with explanations of the degree of unreliability offered by traditional research. Too many difficulties in understanding political institutions and processes had been left unresolved. The epistemic successes of the natural sciences and of other social sciences, such as psychology and economics, using more rigorous methods of data collection and of analysis, left their impact on political science as well. They suggested alternatives that led political analysis away from "common" sense to "scientific" sense in which theoretical rather than social criteria defined the problems of research and technical skills took the place of mere description and common-sense methods.

In addition, however, there were social forces that encouraged a commitment to the introduction of science into the study of politics. Early in the cold war period in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, especially during the Korean War (1950–53), Senator Joseph McCarthy inaugurated and led a reign of psychological and legal terror against liberals and others in the United States. Scholars were selected as particularly vulnerable targets for attack. McCarthyism succeeded in driving underground an interest in social reform and critical theory.

From this perspective, objective, neutral, or value-free research represented a protective posture for scholars, offering them intellectually legitimate and useful grounds for fleeing from the dangers of open political controversy. This is perhaps an instance in the evolution of knowledge in which inadvertent gains may have been won for the wrong reasons. McCarthyism, of course, had nothing to do with the emergence of behavioralism as a new approach to political research. It represented simply a historical circumstance that drove an interest in social reform underground. In doing so, it led scholars into politically less dangerous grounds of basic research, an area that, as it turned out, had major benefits to offer for the development of political science.

In addition to McCarthyism, another important social condition con-

tributed significantly to the sustenance of behavioralism. Post–World War II prosperity, with its associated conservatism of the 1950s and the early 1960s, led to the prevalent view that ideology had indeed come to an end in the United States. Rapid economic growth offered material benefits to all segments of the population, even to the poorest. Critical social thought, including critical liberalism itself, seemed to all but disappear in the United States and, with it, all semblance of ideological conflict. Bell (1960) wrote a distinguished book entitled *The End of Ideology* that expressed this conviction.

In retrospect, it is clear that ideology had not disappeared but only seemed to have ended, because mainstream, liberal-conservative ideology was dominant and unchallenged for the moment. There were no major contenders. This situation, of course, changed during the late 1960s with the rise of the civil rights movement on behalf of blacks. But prior to this period, contending ideologies did recede or go underground. This lack of challenge to established ideologies turned the social sciences away from social problems as a source of inspiration for its research toward criteria internal to social theory, derivative from the logic of the development of social science itself. This gave social science the appearance of withdrawing from society into an ivory tower of scientific research, at least if one took the rhetoric of social research at its word.

It is clear that what from a social point of view could be interpreted as a retreat from social responsibility by social scientists, from the point of view of science could be interpreted as a breathing spell free from social involvement. This had the effect of enabling political science to address, in a relatively undisturbed atmosphere, many technical matters that have become central to its development, such as the place of theory in social research, the need for rigorous methods of research, the refinements of techniques for acquiring and analyzing data, the establishment of standards of professionalism among political scientists and social scientists in general, and so on.

In short, we can now recognize the behavioral phase as one in which the social sciences, for whatever historical reasons and fortuitous circumstances, were busy strengthening the scientific bases of their research. The cost was a significant withdrawal from an interest in social criticism and social involvement.

The Postbehavioral Stage

What I have called the postbehavioral revolution—a name now generally used for this next phase—began during the 1960s and is still with us today (Easton 1969). It represents a deep dissatisfaction with the results of behavioralism but has not led to the abandonment of scientific method in political science. It is,

however, leading to a substantial modification of our understanding of the nature of science, and it is a movement that is still evolving.

Why did the postbehavioral movement arise? What were its sources? In the United States, this movement accompanied the so-called countercultural revolution, which arose in the West, and touched the East as well, during the later 1960s and early 1970s. It represented a period of worldwide social change. Much of the leadership came from large masses of students congregated in rapidly growing colleges and universities around the world. In the United States, it had its origins in the civil rights movement, especially after the 1954–1955 Supreme Court decisions against educational segregation of blacks, and was accompanied by demands for the improvement of the condition of blacks and other minorities and by widespread protests during the Johnson and Nixon administrations against the Vietnam War. It was most clearly evident in new attitudes toward forms of dress, sexual behavior, the place of women and minorities in society, poverty, respect for the physical environment (pollution, atomic waste, the dangers of nuclear energy), and social inequality. The postbehavioral movement, in its broadest meaning, represented the awakening of the modern world to the dangers of rapid and unregulated industrialization, ethnic and sexual discrimination, worldwide poverty, and nuclear war.

This is not the place to describe this movement in detail. All we need to do is to draw attention to the impact that the countercultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s had on the social sciences in general and on political science in particular. For social scientists, it raised the question as to why we were unable to foresee the kinds of problems, just mentioned, that became salient in this period. In addition, even if the social sciences had foreseen some of these problems, how did it happen that they did nothing about them? It appeared that the social sciences had simply withdrawn into an ivory tower. Questions such as these led to large-scale debates on the nature of our discipline and what it ought to be.

From these debates several things are now clear. The original commitment to science during the behavioral period, that is, during the 1950s and 1960s, has been seriously questioned. Some of the criticisms of scientific method reflect well-known arguments inherited largely from the nineteenth century: Human behavior is composed of too many complex variables and therefore we are not likely to be able to discover any lawlike regularities; unlike atoms, human beings are not determined. They have free will, and therefore their actions can never be predicted even on a probable basis. Even if the methods of the natural sciences have manifested great epistemic success, this is because they deal with inanimate matter. Atoms, however, do not have feelings or intentions that, by their very nature, are unpredictable or inaccessible to observation or prediction.

Other criticisms of social science were directed to its positivistic claims that behavioral research was value free. As I mentioned earlier, some social scientists had proclaimed the "end of ideology." With the countercultural movement came the argument that all social research is, on the contrary, really shot through with ideology. The point was advanced that the claim that social science was valuationally neutral was possible only because social science had assumed the ideological coloring of the status quo (bourgeois liberalism) and the existing power structure. Its ideological premises were at one with those of the establishment and disappeared into the received views of the day. This claim to false objectivity was seen as serving the interests of the establishment. It seemed to justify or excuse the withdrawal of social scientists from involvement in social issues, to divert social inquiry from urgent social problems, and thereby to allow the status quo to go unchallenged.

This attack on the ideologic presuppositions of scientific method in the study of society broadened into a wholesale challenge of the epistemological and ontological bases of social research. In a widely read book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by T. Kuhn (1962), the view was advanced that all science, natural as well as social, is essentially an irrational process. In this book, scientific change is no longer seen as the product of a gradual accumulation of knowledge and understanding; change now represents only the shift of scientists from acceptance of an existing paradigm or set of ideological and other presuppositions to a new one, for a variety of explainable reasons. The history of science, from this point of view, appears as a random shift from one set of premises (paradigms) governing research to another.

Despite the initial impact of this book, it is now realized that this criticism, in denying the possibility of any objective and cumulative knowledge, went far beyond the realm of necessity and plausibility (Suppe 1977). The criticism did however draw attention to the need to reconsider how we do manage to acquire a valid understanding about the real world despite the fact that research may be saturated with evaluative presuppositions.

I have touched only briefly on the fierce attacks that have been launched against scientific method since the 1970s. They have, however, led to serious reassessments of the original commitment to the positivistic conception of scientific method that was prevalent during the behavioral period of the 1950s and 1960s. We can see the results of this reassessment in the current approaches to political inquiry, which are far more diverse than during the behavioral period. The earlier impressionistic methods have even regained some plausibility, as has the method of interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) put forward at the turn of this century by Max Weber. We have also witnessed the reemergence of proponents of Marxism as an alternative way to develop a social science (Ollman and Vernoff 1982; Poulantzas 1973).

Indeed, there are now so many approaches to political research that

political science seems to have lost its purpose. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the behavioral phase, there was a messianic spirit and collective effort in the promotion and development of the methods of scientific inquiry even while there continued to be opposition to it. Today there is no longer a single, dominant point of view or one that unmistakably catches the imagination, especially of younger members of the profession. Nor is there even a single defensive adversary. The discipline is fragmented in its methodological conceptions, even though it is probably fair to say that scientific inquiry still represents the mainstream. However, it is not, as we shall see in a moment, only science in the old positivistic sense. Instead we are adding a new and more relaxed understanding of the nature of science itself. In addition to losing its sense of a dynamic purpose concentrated on the pursuit of scientific validity, political science seems to have lost its core. There was once agreement that political science was a study of values or of the good life. Also, if it will not seem self-serving on my part to say so, there was a dominant point of view. If there was any single comprehensive description of the subject matter of political science it was to be found in the notion that it studied the authoritative allocation of values for a society. This was a conception that I had put forward in 1953 in my book, *The Political System* (Easton 1981a), and it found widespread acceptance.

Today, however, students are no longer certain what politics is all about. They may be even less concerned than they were in the past. Political science as a study of the state, a conception that, after World War II, had been driven out by the idea of the political system, has now been revived. It has accompanied the reemergence, in U.S. political science at least, of Marxist and quasi-Marxist points of view (Easton 1981c) and in them, of course, the state is a central concept.

What is being offered today to draw the discipline together, to give it a sense of common purpose, and to provide alternative methods, if any, for inquiry? Here is where the real difficulty arises. As the 1990s begin, political science is still trying to develop a new sense of identity and a new drive or sense of purpose. We are clearly in a transition phase, and it is difficult to predict just where we will end up. We look fragmented and display a great variety of objectives for the very reason that theories, methods, and perspectives are still being questioned, that is, they are in the process of change.

We can get some flavor of the reconstruction taking place by recounting the different interests and approaches of U.S. political science, at least at the present time. Theoretical Marxism, after lying dormant in U.S. social science since the 1940s (even though very much alive in Europe), was reintroduced during the 1970s. However, no single orthodoxy in the Marxist methods or theories has been adopted. The fragmentation of European Marxism is reflected in its American renaissance. We find all schools of Marxism

represented—critical theory, humanist, cultural, structural, as well as orthodox. All have had some impact on U.S. political science, although structural Marxism, as developed by Althusser and Poulantzas, has probably been the most influential.

What is clear, however, is that in being absorbed into U.S. social research, the various schools of Marxism have been attenuated; most inquiry is only quasi-Marxist in character. Even in that form, however, the revival of Marxist thinking has brought to political science a renewed awareness of the importance of history and of the significance of the economy, social classes, and ideology, as well as the total social context (the social formation, as Althusser would phrase it). As of the moment, with the disintegration of the socialist-bloc countries, the emergence of *perestroika* in the USSR, and the outbreak of democratic ideologies in Eastern Europe, it is not yet clear what effect these events will have on the plausibility of Marxist theories for future social inquiry.

The mainstream of U.S. political science has, however, moved off in a variety of other directions. The interests of the behavioral period in voting, judicial, legislative, administrative, and executive behavior as well as in interest groups, parties, developing areas, and the like have continued. But during the postbehavioral period new topics of political research have arisen to satisfy the desire to understand the new concerns typical of this period—environmental pollution, ethnic, racial, social and sexual equality, and nuclear war, for example.

In the search for answers to urgent social issues such as these, political science in this period has joined all other social sciences in making an extraordinary commitment of its resources to the application of knowledge. We witness this in the rapid and widespread growth of the so-called policy-analysis movement. Literally hundreds of institutes have arisen not only for the understanding of the way in which policies are formed and implemented, but for the formulation of policy alternatives to help solve the urgent social problems facing all societies at the present time. These institutes ring the changes on all questions of policy creation and execution: What are the policies in various areas? How are they formed? What alternatives are neglected or rejected and why? What are their consequences, direct or indirect? To what extent do they fulfill their ostensible objectives (contributing to the emergence of a vast subfield of policy evaluation)? How does a given set of present policies influence subsequent policies (the feedback process)? Because the effects of policies are felt not only in the political sector but also in most other areas of study, policy institutes typically have been built around interdisciplinary curricula (Fleishman 1990, chapter 9). In this way policy research has reawakened the hope of an earlier day for integrating the social sciences, at least in the application of its knowledge.

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Another shift in interest that is part and parcel of this new policy orientation is reflected in the rebirth of the field of political economy. In the nineteenth century, as modern political science was evolving, economics and politics had already shown a close and natural affinity, as revealed in the work of John Stuart Mill, which he explicitly called political economy, and of Karl Marx. The revival of this link, beginning in the 1970s, is in part attributable, of course, to the revival of Marxist thought. But it has also blossomed independently through efforts to show the numerous relationships between the state of the economy on the one hand and political events and institutions on the other (Frolich and Oppenheimer 1982; Monroe 1983).

As I have just noted, political economy is a return to a traditional combination of interests common in the nineteenth century. But perhaps the most dramatic shift in perspectives has occurred recently in a different area, in what I shall call cognitive political science. The emergence of this approach reflects a movement away from the attempt to understand political phenomena as exclusively a product of nonrational processes, that is, as a product of social forces that influence decisions and actions of political actors and institutions.

The starting assumption of cognitive political science is that there is a strong rational component to political behavior. This can mean one of two things: that human beings do act rationally or that we can better understand their behavior if we adopt rationality as an assumption.

Whereas the outcome of empirical scientific research consists of generalizations about behavior that are grounded in observations, the products of the cognitive approach are models about how human beings would or should act under varying circumstances if they were to act rationally. The product of inquiry takes the form of rational-choice models, game theories, or other kinds of so-called rational-actor models (Downs 1957; Kramer and Hertzberg 1975; Riker and Ordeshook 1973; Taylor 1975). For some political scientists, these models only tell us how persons might behave if they acted rationally. They are of value insofar as we can compare actual behavior with the model in order to try to account for the deviance from the model. For others, however, these models represent the way in which people actually do behave. The assumption of rationality becomes a reality (Riker and Ordeshook 1973). For still others, however, rational models represent ways in which people should behave if they are to conform to rational norms, and such norms are assumed to be desirable in themselves. Rational models may, therefore, depict formal calculi of rational behavior, actual strategies of choice, or preferred strategies, if one values rational behavior.

Not only empirically oriented research but political philosophy also has been a major beneficiary of the rational approach. Rational modeling has breathed new life into political philosophy. During the behavioral period, moral research had all but died out for reasons already mentioned. Values

were sometimes thought to be mere expressions of preferences, as in economics to this day. In the current postbehavioral period, renewed efforts are under way to demonstrate that there is a rational basis for moral argument and judgment. Most of the work in this area has been inspired by John Rawl's *A Theory of Justice* (1971), itself influenced by economic modeling and game theory. In this book, the author attempts to develop valid and demonstrable criteria of justice derivable from the assumption of rational action. Using a similar convention about rational behavior, others have turned to the task of developing moral theories about equality, freedom, international justice, legitimacy, and the like (Beitz 1979; Elster 1986; Fishkin 1982; Lehrer and Wagner 1981).

Political philosophy is not alone in this new approach. It was preceded by and has in turn reinforced the application of the rational-actor approach in the areas of voting behavior and public choice, and as a technique has spread to other fields of political inquiry. In its essence, it reflects the theoretical approach of contemporary economics and in fact even borrows economic theories for application to political situations (Downs 1957; Kramer and Hertzberg 1975).

This rationalistic approach has not been without its critics, and their voices have been growing in number and intensity. In part they have challenged the rationality assumption on the grounds that actors do in fact behave nonrationally and irrationally and that prediction of the behavior of individuals or of aggregates unnecessarily handicaps itself by failing to take such facts into account (Eckstein 1988; Elster 1989; Jarvie 1984; Mansbridge 1990; Quattrone and Tversky 1988). In part, however, the rational model has been accused of being overly reductionist in assuming that individual attributes, such as rationality, can explain all behavior. Such a model fails to take into account systematically the institutional and structural context that may determine, or, at the very least limit, actors, severally or as aggregates (Easton 1990; March and Olsen 1989). By the beginning of the 1990s, however, it would appear that these increasing reservations about the applicability of the rationality model have not prevented it from carving out a sizable and, from all appearances, an enduring niche for itself in the discipline.

In substantive areas such as those just mentioned—policy analysis, political economy, and what I have called cognitive political inquiry (rational modeling and the new political philosophy)—there has been little difficulty in going beyond the range of interests characteristic of the behavioral period and in adding to the latter's methodological perspectives. However, in the matter of actual methods of empirical research and in the fundamental premise that human behavior is subject to scientific inquiry, much less success has been met in finding an alternative, despite the current pervasive criticism of scientific method.

Few people believe any longer in the value neutrality of science. That scientific concepts are value-laden can no longer be denied. But that this does not invalidate the search for objective knowledge and understanding is equally undeniable. How both these statements can be true is still the subject of much debate (Lakatos and Musgrave 1970; Suppe 1977).

What, however, do the critics of scientific method offer as an alternative to the methods of science? This is where the real difficulty for the critics arises. The only formal alternative, that is, the only alternative that involves something that looks like a method that can be articulated, formalized, and communicated to succeeding generations is Weberian interpretive (*verstehen*) or empathetic understanding. This method has been and continues to be discussed, and in recent years the interest in the writings of Max Weber has increased enormously. As yet, however, no one has been able to formalize, systemize, or standardize the so-called interpretive method in a way that makes it readily communicable to those who would seek to learn it. Despite this irreducible inexpressibility, strangely enough, many radical critics of conventional social science have adopted this method, implicitly or otherwise. This is especially strange as its inventor, Max Weber, has been called "the Karl Marx of the bourgeoisie."

The Present and the Future

The many, often conflicting tendencies in postbehavioral political science in the West make it difficult to draw general conclusions about the state of the discipline. Because political science is still in the process of change, as the 1990s begin we cannot speak of a single, dominant tendency or direction. If there is one, however, we can probably find it in the fact that most leading members of the discipline continue to accept the appropriateness for social inquiry of the scientific methodology found to be so successful in the natural sciences.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that our understanding of scientific method today is the same as it was during the behavioral period. Our conception of science has not stood still; it is itself undergoing change.

We no longer cast ourselves in the image of the positivist ideal of science. An incipient transformation is under way that may well displace that image with a new one. If so, this is probably the most dramatic thing that is happening in the social sciences, though most social scientists may not yet be aware of it.

Positivism as represented in the thinking of the Vienna Circle during the 1920s was largely subsumed, if not consciously articulated, as behavioralism took shape, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. In this image, the ideal product of scientific inquiry would be a body of knowledge, based on axioms,

with statements of relationships or generalizations that could be ultimately formalized, especially through the use of mathematics, and that would be well grounded in objective observations.

This model is still entertained by many social scientists, especially those who happen to be in areas where it can be either achieved or approximated, as, for example, in the areas of public choice and rational modeling. There, formal mathematization of propositions works well if only because it is intrinsic to the method of analysis in those areas. There are vast fields in political science, however, indeed most of political science to this point, that have not yielded this kind of intellectual product. Yet these areas of political science are clearly subject to rigorous inquiry through the use of the normal rules of logic, through careful acquisition of data consistent with the canons of science, and through equally sophisticated analysis of these data. The outcomes, though, do not measure up to the positivistic ideal of an axiomatized and mathematized set of propositions. Does this mean that they are not acceptable as scientific conclusions?

During the positivistic behavioral phase of political science, the answer might have been affirmative. Today, under the more relaxed understanding of science that is growing within philosophy of science, a different answer can be offered, one that accepts nonaxiomatized and nonmathematical statements as an integral part of scientific knowledge, even in its ideal form.

Philosophy of science is that special discipline in the West that is concerned with understanding the nature of science—how it acquires knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of the world we wish to know and understand (ontology). The findings of philosophy of science itself, no less than the findings of any other discipline, are subject to change and, we hope, improvement. Like other fields of inquiry it grows and changes. Although at one time philosophers of science, under the sway of early positivism, did indeed conceive of the appropriate outcomes of scientific inquiry in the manner of the positivists of the Vienna Circle, today, most recent findings are moving in a far less monolithically mathematical direction. No longer do all philosophers of science see science as restricted to a single kind of formalized product in the image of classical positivism. In a more skeptical mood, philosophers of science are now beginning to recognize that if we are able to understand science, we ought not to accept some abstract analysis of the nature of science as an adequate description of the way science operates to acquire valid knowledge. Rather, we are better advised to look at what scientists actually do.

When we do look at the history of scientific practices we find that a larger variety of research products are accepted as useful and necessary than we would have guessed if we had confined ourselves to the positivistic interpretation. Philosophy of science is now discovering that there are many varieties of outcomes with which scientists seem to be satisfied. These outcomes seem to

answer the kinds of problems that are being asked in a particular area of science even if the outcomes do not look like the formal or mathematical models of early positivism. For example, systems of classification, taxonomies, conceptual frameworks, and qualitative generalizations about evolutionary processes that do not permit prediction need have little to do with formal models or mathematized propositions. Yet in the various sciences in which they are found, such as botany and biology, they are just as acceptable as final products (Hanson 1969; Shapere 1974; Suppe 1977; Toulmin 1972).

If this is happening in the natural sciences where the success of their methods cannot be denied, then it ought not to be any less true in the social sciences. In this view, then, systematic classifications of political phenomena, for example, or conceptual frameworks, as developed in my own thinking in systems analysis, would be just as normal a product of scientific inquiry as any generalization about politics or any mathematical model. The only question one must ask is whether, at the time, the intellectual product satisfies the needs of a would-be scientific discipline, such as political science, in terms of rigorous and testable understanding. That is to say, if the knowledge we acquire seems to help us in attaining satisfactory explanation or adequate understanding of an empirically grounded sort, then that is the most that we can ask of the methods of science. The history of inquiry in the natural sciences now seems to reveal that, despite what classical positivism would have us believe, there is no single fixed kind of intellectual product that can be designated as appropriate and necessary to achieve understanding of any given phenomena.

As the 1990s begin, the postbehavioral stage that we have just discussed is still evolving. It will be some time before a definitive statement can be made about how it finally differs from behavioralism and about the new direction in which it may be leading political science. One thing is clear, however. It had its birth in efforts to cope with some of the unresolved problems generated by behavioralism: the indifference to moral judgments; the excessive commitment to formal mathematized statements flowing from the use of scientific method; the focus on theoretical criteria to the neglect of social issues; the preoccupation with social forces as determinants of behavior, overlooking, in the process, important cognitive (rational) elements; and a profound forgetfulness about the history of political systems that helps to shape their present.

In trying to cope with these problems bequeathed by behavioralism, however, we can assume that postbehavioralism is busily generating its own difficulties. Some of these are already obvious; others undoubtedly will emerge as new contemporary explanations exhaust their own potential. For example, in emphasizing the need to apply whatever knowledge we have to the solution of urgent social issues, we have already run into major difficulties in trying to reintegrate the various highly specialized disciplines. Descartes

taught us that understanding requires decomposition and analysis of a subject matter. Application of knowledge to the solution of social problems, however, requires the reassembly of the specialized knowledge of the various social sciences. We are still at a loss about how to do this. Application of knowledge has also diverted scarce resources from the continued search for fundamental knowledge so that we are already being called upon to reassess the appropriate division between applied and so-called pure research. Computer technology will clearly change the character of major aspects of research in all the social sciences, including political science, in ways that we can only guess at the present time. And finally, the growing international character of research raises fundamental issues about the universality of concepts in the social sciences as contrasted with the culturally conditioned nature of most thinking about social problems. Can we develop a genuinely transnational social science when different national cultures approach problems of understanding social phenomena in such transparently different ways, often with such different concepts?

To enter into a discussion of the impact of issues such as these on political science would, however, take us too far afield from our present purpose, an analysis of the four basic stages—formal-legal, traditional, behavioral, and postbehavioral—through which political science in the United States has passed in the twentieth century. These issues may, however, foreshadow a fifth stage that we have not yet begun to enter.

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