

Political Science and the State

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A new political science is needed for a world itself quite new.
—Alexis de Tocqueville

The most perfect example of the modern state is North America.
—Karl Marx

The national popular state alone furnishes the objective reality upon which political science can rest in the construction of a truly scientific political system.
—John W. Burgess

Much remains to be done—and undone—in the study of the history of political science. This is a simple consequence of the fact that political science remembers so little of its own history, and what history it does remember is often dismissed as dead wrong, or simply dead. In this way, when it does not forget its past altogether, political science engages in that “enormous condescension of posterity.”¹ Thanks to some recent labors, however, this posture of forgetfulness or condescension is beginning to give way to a more sympathetic and accurate historical stance, at least with respect to the twentieth (and the late nineteenth) century, when political science became a professional academic discipline, and with respect to certain of its concepts, like voting, public opinion, and political change.² But much remains to be done with

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Epigraphs: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 12; Karl Marx, *German Ideology* (New York: International, 1970), p. 80; John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1891), 1: 58.

1. Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 377.

2. See works cited in the General Introduction to this volume.

respect to the predisciplinary history of political science, and much remains to be undone with respect to the concept of the state.

On the eve of discipline, political science was conceived of as the science of the state. Twelve years after the Civil War, at a time when political science was becoming a professionally recognized field of higher education, Theodore Dwight Woolsey could publish his presidential lectures at Yale quite simply as *Political Science, or the State Theoretically and Practically Considered* (1877). The closing years of the century witnessed a profusion of books about the state, and the majority of their most influential authors (like John W. Burgess, W. W. Willoughby, William Dunning, and Woodrow Wilson, among others) were identified as academic political scientists. German scholars for some time had been contributing to the view that political science was the science of the state by conceiving of it as *Staatswissenschaft*. After the American Political Science Association was formed in 1903, the state continued to command the attention of professional political scientists, especially those of Progressive leanings who sought to reform its administrative structure. Well into the New Deal, political scientists cast their works on government, parties, and policy in terms of the state. However, as revolutionary regimes spread and another world war approached, many political scientists, increasingly identified with one or another strain of liberalism, soon came to find the very idea of the state suspiciously socialist or reactionary or both. Harold Lasswell made dark references to the “garrison state.”³ Yet so strong was the identification of political science with the study of the state that it would become a principal object of attack as late as the 1950s during the opening skirmishes of the behavioral revolution. Even now, as one historian of political science regrettably acknowledges, there is “a resurrection of an older concept, that of the state” as a principal locus for the discipline of political science.⁴

This much of the story of political science and the state appears to enjoy agreement among political scientists. On other aspects of the story, however, there appears to be less agreement. At issue are questions about the predisciplinary identity and ideology of political science; the origin of its concept of the state; and the credibility and coherence of its efforts to theorize about it. It has been alleged, for example, that before the 1870s there was a “sense of statelessness” in American political thought and culture largely because of the intellectual heritage of Lockean liberalism. Political science, we are told, came to be identified as the science of the state only *after* the administrative

3. Harold Lasswell, “The Garrison State and Specialists on Violence,” *American Journal of Sociology* 46 (1941): 455–68. An earlier rendition of this thesis was published in 1937.

4. David Easton, “The Political System Besieged by the State,” *Political Theory* 9 (1981): 303.

and bureaucratic revolution that created the “new American state.”⁵ Even then, however, the state, both in theory and in practice, was to appear “alien to American experience and institutions.”⁶ The concept of the state, this account continues, was a German import. Under German influence, the analysis of the state—“the least American of our political words”—proved to be narrowly legalistic, not to mention “perilously figurative,” “abstract and convoluted.” “Far removed from the everyday talk of the people, political science even reified the state into an entity higher than the people.” Consequently, political science proved to be an academic discipline whose “counterrevolution in political rhetoric” abandoned the principles of the American Revolution as it sought to “wrest political argument out of the hands of the people.”⁷

In this essay, I wish to counter these particular claims and try to undo their influence. By tracing the changing concepts of *political science* and the *state* amidst the ebbing tradition of republican political discourse, we may see that Americans had a sense of the state going back to the earliest years of the Republic.⁸ The language of the state was a broadly European and, then, an American one which had pervaded political discussion well before the Civil War and certainly before a number of young academics went off to Germany in the latter decades of the century in pursuit of *Staatswissenschaft*. Though abstract in the way that most complex theoretical terms are, the state provided self-styled political scientists with a framework for analyzing the organizational and ethical complexities of American political life, especially the Constitution, law, liberty, parties, public opinion, popular sovereignty, and republican government. There was, of course, considerable debate about the meaning of all this, but the concept of the state provided unity of attention amid diversity of detail and speculation. Furthermore, the self-styled political

5. Steven Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 5. Skowronek’s principal concern is to address the institutional and administrative developments which constituted the process of centralized state building in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. However, he begins with an eye to theories and concepts of the state, especially those of Tocqueville, Hegel, and Marx, when he suggests that there was an “absence of a sense of the state in early America” (p. 5). It is *this* claim that concerns me here.

6. Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 96. Also see his remark that the United States was, late into the century, “a nation which had no sense of the state” (p. 99).

7. Daniel Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 14, 145, 166, 171, 175. Political scientists, it is further claimed, “acquired the term State” from Germany because of their education there in the late nineteenth century (p. 167).

8. For the general project of conceptual history, see Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. chap. 2.

scientists of the nineteenth century thought of their pedagogic task as a directly political one: to educate nascent citizens in the public virtues long associated with the republican tradition.

In what follows, I propose to investigate how and to what effect *political science* and the *state* were expressly and jointly conceptualized and reconceptualized in American political discourse during the nineteenth century. The constitutional founders, Francis Lieber, and a number of late nineteenth-century professionals are singled out for particular attention in this conceptual approach to the history of political science. Their views help constitute three moments in the history of political science, the movement of which we might characterize as the development *from discourse to discipline*. That is to say, in the course of its first century, American political science was transformed from a political discourse in the service of republican principles to a professional discipline in the service of the administrative state.

This essay's brief conceptual history of political science and the state hopes to lay the historical groundwork for an argument about the lingering republican identity and the requisite methodological pluralism of a discipline designed to educate citizens. It also admits to taking its point of departure from the efforts of political scientists and sociologists who are presently "bringing the state back in."⁹ Let us, then, bring back in to the picture those statisticians who populated American political science from the very beginning of the Republic.

I.

The concept of the science of politics enters American political discourse in the late eighteenth century, and never more prominently than in the debates over the Constitution and the kind of republic the Constitution was to inaugurate. While most of the founders were retrospectively generous about the long history of ancient and modern contributors to this science (this "divine science of politics," as John Adams sermonized even before the Revolution), the most important and immediate influences were themselves eighteenth-century figures, especially those northern Britons credited with having ushered in a Scottish Enlightenment.¹⁰ Like the Scots, the American founders explicitly and repeatedly used the very terms to pick out this nascent science. Thereafter, these terms—*science of politics*, *political science*, *science of government*, *science of legislation*, and their kin—would help reshape American

9. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

10. See James Farr, "Political Science and the Enlightenment of Enthusiasm," *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 51–69.

political discourse and indeed the very institutions and practices of American political life.

During the Revolution, but especially during the debates over the ratification of the Constitution, the rhetoric of science was crucial. Science was invoked by all sides. Understandably, however, the methodological identity of this science was never fully specified by the various rhetoricians amid the more pressing struggles. Indeed, in the writings of the late 1780s and early 1790s, the science of politics (and its kindred sciences) seemed to range without careful methodological distinction between the rules and practical maxims that inhered naturally in American citizen-statesmen, and those laws, principles, and axioms of politics that formally resembled the generalizations of Newtonian mechanics.¹¹ The one drew inspiration from history and ordinary experience; the other from physics and controlled observation. But whatever its particular methods, there was a shared sense, as Alexander Hamilton pointed out, that “the science of politics, like most other sciences, has received great improvement.” There were “wholly new discoveries” and even “progress towards perfection in modern times.” David Ramsay thought America itself had played a foundational role in this, for the new nation had placed “the science of politics on a footing with the other sciences, by opening it to improvements from experience, and the discoveries of the future.” Yet political science or the “science of government,” as James Madison chimed in, had not answered all questions previously raised, especially in the matter of “the privileges and powers of the different legislative branches.”¹² The American scientists of politics were there to remedy this defect, fully aware of the experimental novelty of their task.

To remedy this scientific defect was to remedy yet other defects, especially those political ones attending the postrevolutionary constitutional arrangements. In this remedial task, political science took (or, rather, was rhetorically made to take) very different sides. At stake was the nature of republicanism in general and in particular the republican arrangements

11. See, for example, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *Federalist* (New York: New American Library, 1961; originally 1787–88), esp. nos. 9, 31, 37, 47. For Anti-federalists, see Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Complete Antifederalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), esp. vol. 2 (in the writings of “Brutus” and “The Federal Farmer”). Also see Nathaniel Chipman, *Principles of Government* (Burlington, Vt.: Edward Smith, 1833; originally 1793), pp. 3–4, 15, 45, 130, 219–20 on the science of government and the nature of its rules, maxims, and principles. Also notice the scientific tone of Chipman’s discussion of the “experiment . . . first made in these United States” when he avers that “it is true, this form of government is a novelty in the political world, it cannot, it does not, appeal to history for proof of its excellence; but to present facts” (p. 152a).

12. *Federalist*, nos. 9 and 37. Ramsay’s *The American Revolution*, quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 613.

thought to be necessary to an increasingly commercial society in a large territory of the new world. Indeed, the concept of political science (and its kindred sciences) should be understood as a relatively late addition to republican political discourse. Its introduction coincides with (and was conceptually party to) the demise of classical republicanism and the emergence of a new republican discourse more attuned to commerce, the balance of interests, and the institutionalization of virtue.¹³ It bears underscoring that neither Federalists nor Antifederalists can or must bear the burden of liberal categories which have been placed upon them by later nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpreters who thought liberalism was somehow “given” in America. Nor, I would suggest, should the identity of political science be understood as an unproblematically liberal one, not only in the founding period but throughout the course of the nineteenth century and perhaps beyond.¹⁴ Well into our century, political science bears the marks of its republican birth.

State was a term that came naturally to these American republicans, as indeed it had to most Western political writers of the previous two centuries upon whom the Americans readily drew.¹⁵ Machiavelli, Bodin, Calvin, and Hobbes are particularly prominent theorists in this stretch of early modern intellectual history who helped give voice to the transformation of the earlier idea of the ruler “maintaining his estate.” In its place there developed

the idea that there is a separate legal and constitutional order, that of the State, which the ruler has a duty to maintain. One effect of this transformation was that the power of the State, not that of the ruler, came to be envisaged as the basis of government. And this in turn enabled the State to be conceptualized in distinctly modern terms—as the sole source of law and legitimate force within its own territory, and as the sole appropriate object of its citizens’ allegiances.¹⁶

13. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), esp. chaps. 14–15. Also see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), esp. chaps. 2–3; Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, esp. chap. 1.

14. Wood suggests as much, as early as the end of the eighteenth century, in *The Creation of the American Republic*, esp. chap. 15. Crick even takes the methodological ideals of American political science as expressing liberal political principles in *The American Science of Politics*, p. xv. Raymond Seidelman tells a tale of disenchanted liberals in political science (in *Disenchanted Realists* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985]), but he also points to a variety of other traditions in political science, including the remnants of classical republicanism.

15. For the general background, see especially Quentin Skinner, “The State,” in Ball, Farr, and Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, as well as his studies of Machiavelli and Hobbes.

16. Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. x.

After the American Revolution the now-liberated colonies were conceptualized not only as republics but as states. The leaders of the new American nation were known not only as republicans but as statesmen. Such uses of the term *state* and its cognates were then, as now, so ordinary and taken for granted that citizens and historians then, as now, often overlooked them. However, the Articles of Confederation fully recognized what was at stake with this appellation. They insured the sovereignty of the thirteen new states. Of course, the Articles proved insufficient as an instrument of government, which was one of the few points of agreement of the Constitutional Convention and the ratification debates which followed. But another point of agreement, at least conceptually, regarded the state.

Though Federalists and Antifederalists would disagree about whether sovereignty could be divided and about where the state(s) did or should reside (in the thirteen subnational territories or covering the geographical fullness of America), the language of the state was not itself at issue. All agreed that they were discussing the supreme power which acted through government over a sovereign territory and to which citizens and leaders owed their allegiance. Antifederalists (and later John C. Calhoun) meant quite literally—and without the solecism of dual sovereignty—that the thirteen states were sovereign states in the full-bodied European sense.¹⁷ The Federalists denied this particular claim, but only to secure a statist identity for the nation as a whole. Repeatedly and naturally, Federalists spoke about the state or the civil state, including its “supreme powers,” “reasons,” “pride,” “real interests,” and “domestic police.” Hume, Montesquieu, and de Mably were all explicitly cited in the *Federalist* as appropriate European authorities on the state whose lessons were generally relevant (if not always directly applicable) to New World politics. This point was reinforced (and more authorities cited and criticized in light of the American experiment) by Nathaniel Chipman in 1793 when he repeatedly and naturally invoked the language of the state to discuss Americans’ constitutionally guaranteed rights, powers, and liberties.¹⁸

All parties to the debates, in short, agreed on the basic contours of the concept. The state was the collective political agency given voice by a written constitution and laws and expressing popular sovereignty, whatever governmental, administrative, or federal structure it assumed. Political parties were not seen as creatures of the state, for they fanned the flames of faction rather than channeled the competition of interests. But whatever its place or form

17. Herbert J. Storing, ed., as abridged by Murray Dry, *The Antifederalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 38, 281; and John C. Calhoun, *A Discourse on the Constitution*, in *Works* (New York: Appleton, 1851).

18. *Federalist*, nos. 4, 6, 8, 15, 17, 34, 51; and Chipman, *Principles of Government*, esp. pp. 56, 60, 119, 123–26, 137, 145, 176a, 171–79, 180–85. Hobbes, Pufendorf, Grotius, Locke, Vattel, Beccaria, Kames, Smith, Montesquieu, Blackstone, and (especially) Paley all come in for discussion and criticism during the course of Chipman’s remarkable treatise.

and whatever its legal or federal novelties, a state it was. As should be obvious, Publius never had a dream (or Brutus a nightmare) of a Bismarckian state of the sort to emerge on the Continent within a century. But their language fully attests to their sense of stateness, not statelessness. Such was the statist discourse of the republican scientists of politics.

II.

Despite all the conceptual connections it forged and the theoretical possibilities it thereby created, this initial episode in the history of political science in America produced no sustained treatises on the state or any on the scope and methods of political science itself. And no one then explicitly conceptualized political science as the science of the state. While political science and the state would continue to animate American political discourse throughout the early nineteenth century, including making some tentative entries into the moral philosophy and moral science curriculum,¹⁹ it would take Francis Lieber, a Prussian émigré of republican and nationalist commitments, to produce the first systematic treatises on these subjects. In the quarter-century before the Civil War, a time during which Karl Marx thought that America was already perfecting the modern state, Lieber produced a number of works which succeeded in raising the level of theoretical discourse about political science and the state, as well as securing him a chair at Columbia in 1857 as professor of history and political science, the very first of its kind in America. The title was Lieber's own creation and a point of pride he communicated to Alexis de Tocqueville, whose studies of American penitentiaries Lieber had assisted and translated.²⁰ Lieber himself hoped to provide for America that new political science which Tocqueville foresaw as necessary for a world itself quite new.

As early as the 1830s, the outlines of Lieber's political science were sufficiently well established, particularly in the *Manual of Political Ethics* (1838), *Legal and Political Hermeneutics* (1837), and a *Memorial Relative to Proposals for a Work on the Statistics of the United States* (1836). Later works fleshed these out, principal among them *Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (1853), *History and Political Science: Necessary Studies in a Free Country* (1858), and *The Ancient and Modern Teacher of Politics: An Introductory Discourse to a Course of Lectures on the State* (1860). Collectively, these

19. See Anna Haddow, *Political Science in American Colleges and Universities, 1636–1900* (New York: Appleton, 1939). Of particular importance in this literature is Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science* (New York: 1835) and Laurens P. Hickok, *A System of Moral Science* (New York: 1853).

20. Frank Freidel, *Francis Lieber: Nineteenth Century Liberal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), pp. 89–90, chap. 13.

works bore the marks of his German education under Niebuhr, Savigny, Humboldt, and Schleiermacher, especially the attention to philology and hermeneutics, not to mention history, law, and the state. But Lieber's works also bore the marks of his political naturalization, having lived in America since 1827 and having contributed to its first major literary effort in the New World, the *Encyclopedia Americana*. The *Encyclopedia*, and indeed all Lieber's works from the 1830s on, displayed a genuine integration of European and American sources. On its pages, Montesquieu and Jefferson, Hume and Madison, Humboldt and Calhoun, Haller and Story, Schleiermacher and Kent, Whewell and Hamilton, including the more ancient and venerable figures like Plato, Hobbes, and Pufendorf, in whose number Lieber immodestly counted himself, intermingled and provided authority for a heady brew. Much of this was a show of scholarship, of course, but much of it genuinely provided Lieber with the intellectual sources to take a new look at political science, republicanism, and the state in America.

In contrast to those who preceded him, Lieber wrote more, and more self-consciously, about the methods, objects, and educational objectives of political science. He proved to be a methodological pluralist who thought that statistics, causal generalizations, and hermeneutics all went into that "scientific treatment of politics" that "deals with man as a jural being . . . [that is,] as a citizen."²¹ Hermeneutics was helpful here, for citizens as well as for political scientists, because it was "that branch of science which establishes the principles of interpretation and construction," especially for those jural texts, like the Constitution, which (literally) helped constitute American political life.²² History was also methodologically important for political science because it provided, among other things, a wealth of facts; and Lieber himself was more historical and factual than any of his predecessors had been. In his inaugural address at Columbia, he put the point this way: "History is continuous Statistik; Statistik, history arrested at a given time." In his earlier *Memorial for Statistics* (which was read into the congressional record from the Senate floor by John C. Calhoun), he had called for "a careful collection of detailed facts, and the endeavor to arrive at general results by a comprehensive view and judicious combination of them." Statistics, in short, were "state-istics"—facts and generalizations useful for enlightened citizens and republican statesmen.²³

21. *Miscellaneous Writings* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1880), 1: 351.

22. *Legal and Political Hermeneutics* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1839), 2d ed., p. 64. A textual and contextual analysis of this neglected work can be found in James Farr, "Francis Lieber and the Interpretation of American Political Science," *Journal of Politics* 52 (1990): 1027–49.

23. *Miscellaneous Writings*, 1: 337; *Memorial Relative to Proposals for a Work on the Statistics of the United States*, Senate Documents 314, 24th Cong., 1st sess. 1836. Serial set 282, p. 1; and Rodgers, *Contested Truths*, p. 188.

Political science was conceptually connected to the state in two further ways beyond the methodological tie of statistics. Both may be appreciated by pondering the title of an important public address given in 1859 by Columbia's professor of political science: *The Ancient and Modern Teacher of Politics: An Introductory Discourse to a Course of Lectures on the State* (published in 1860). First, Lieber was a pioneer in transforming political science into an independent course of study in higher education (a task he began as early as the late 1830s, when he assumed his first and only other academic post at South Carolina College). While it was still part of the rhetorical armory of American orators and writers through the end of the century, political science was now increasingly identified with college and university. But this was not (yet) a purely academic confinement, at least in that "the teaching of the publicist may become an element of living statesmanship."²⁴ Lieber was among the first self-styled political scientists to conceive of the task of higher education in political science as instilling public virtues into (potential) citizens, those "sons of republicans," who were otherwise allured by the corruptions of the age, especially perhaps its "fanatical idolatry of success." Justice, fortitude, patriotism, duty, and moderation headed a long list of public virtues for republican self-governance. And a more disinterested, general education was required for this pedagogical task of political proportions: "The future citizen, or active member of the state, is then to be included in the objects of education." Thus our professor of history and political science could praise his newly minted efforts as "the very science of nascent citizens of a republic."²⁵

Second, political science was to make the state its principal object of investigation. Lieber first makes this clear well before the Civil War in the *Manual of Political Ethics*. This two-volume work, first published in 1838, should be read as the first systematic treatise on the state in American political science and perhaps in American political literature as such. In dealing with "man as a jural being," political science dealt with the state, for he conceptualized the state as a "jural society," one founded on the "relations of right" between its citizens. The state, he went on, flowed from the "sovereignty of

24. *The Ancient and Modern Teacher of Politics: An Introductory Discourse to a Course of Lectures on the State* (New York: Columbia College Board of Trustees, 1860), p. 10.

25. *Miscellaneous Writings*, 1: 28, 183, 343. Also see *Manual of Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1838), 1: 401, 2: 109. In a more popular, though less theoretical way, Andrew W. Young wrote with these ends in mind as well, especially in *Introduction to the Science of Government* (Rochester, N.Y.: 1842; originally 1839) and in *The Citizen's Manual of Government and Law* (New York: Derby and Miller, 1864). The former work (on pp. 3–4) singled out the massive and increasing number of immigrants as a problem, for their "education does not embrace even the first principles of political science." But common schools can remedy this and so help new and young Americans "assume the duties of citizens" of a republic increasingly the scene of "the collision of contending interests."

the people," which manifested itself not only in the law but in the governmental institutionalities of power, which best functioned when checking and balancing each other.²⁶ All this was best realized within a republican framework.

This much had been familiar to Americans for over half a century. But there was also some conceptual change here as well, including the very coining of the term *jural*. In calling the state a "jural society" he wanted to distinguish it from a mere association and thereby loosen the holds of contractarian thinking which had been influential at the founding (though not in the minds of a number of the founders' most important intellectual predecessors, in particular the enlightened Scots like Hume). This was one of the natural consequences of the historical and factual thinking with which Lieber sought to infuse political science. "Man cannot divest himself of the state," as he said in his Columbia inaugural address. "Government was never voted into existence." In contrast to the Federalists, he reunited sovereignty, thinking it incoherent to speak of a dual sovereignty. But, in contrast to the Antifederalists, he placed it in the nation as a whole over which the government ruled. In contrast to both, and in full recognition of the de facto rise and institutionalization of the American party system, Lieber confessed that "I know of no instance of a free state without parties." He heightened the theoretical importance of public opinion by making it a direct expression of popular sovereignty. These changes in the concept (or conceptual domain) of the state, once accepted, were to prove important in the subsequent history of American political science, including its veritable preoccupation with law, parties, and public opinion.²⁷

None of this, I submit, merits characterization as counterrevolutionary.²⁸ The evident nationalist sentiments are consistent with that greater half of the country preparing to fight to maintain the Union.²⁹ Furthermore, none of this is incoherent or overly abstract, at least not any more so than any other complex concept which does double duty in public discourse and academic treatise. This is as true of a concept like rights, which some take to be paradigmatically American and liberal, as it is of the state. In light of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century tomes and the gyrations which they put rights through, Bentham's celebrated words are worth recalling: "Rights, nonsense; Natural and imprescriptible rights, nonsense on stilts." But yet such nonsense, if nonsense it ever was, comprised the very soul of American rhetoric. And this is as true of the state as it is of rights. In the mid-nineteenth

26. *Manual of Political Ethics*, 1: 152, 217.

27. *Miscellaneous Writings*, 1: 351; and *Manual of Political Ethics*, 2: 253.

28. See n. 7 above.

29. Lieber helped in this task during the Civil War by writing, at President Lincoln's and General Halleck's request, a pamphlet on *Guerilla Parties* and a set of *General Instructions for the Government of the Armies of the United States in the Field*.

century, “the state” did not sound to American ears as a Teutonic invasion against good sense, at least if we can trust the sentiments that informed the reception of the *Manual of Political Ethics* by Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story in 1838:

It contains by far the fullest and most correct development of the true theory of what constitutes the State that I have ever seen. . . . To me many of the thoughts are new, and as striking as they are new. . . . [In] addressing itself to the wise and virtuous of all countries, it solves the question what government is best by the answer, illustrated in a thousand ways, that it is that which best promotes the substantial interests of the whole people of the nation on which it acts. Such a work is peculiarly important in these times, when so many false theories are afloat and so many disturbing doctrines are promulgated.³⁰

Nullification, states’ rights, and secession were indeed on the scene to disturb and frighten the new American statists who understandably had the law and the Constitution uppermost in their minds. Such were the specters haunting political science and the American state.

III.

Between the Civil War and the century’s end, the varied efforts of the sort which consumed Lieber’s energies came to fruition as political science moved toward discipline. Political science became increasingly self-conscious about its professional identity as a science.³¹ It continued to find its site in higher education and its pedagogical purpose in fostering public virtues for nascent republican citizens.³² This period could well be called the triumph of the state, both in fact, as well as in the self-conceptualization of the most important political scientists of the time.³³ This is made abundantly clear in Ameri-

30. Printed in the second, revised edition of *Manual of Political Ethics*, ed. Theodore Dwight Woolsey (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1876).

31. See Dorothy Ross in this volume and the works she cites.

32. Besides those to be discussed below, see Joseph Alden, *The Science of Government in Connection with American Institutions* (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1867), whose opening line reads: “The object of this book is to aid the young in acquiring the knowledge necessary for the discharge of their duties as citizens of the United States.” The locus of higher education during this period is an important theme of both Crick, *The American Science of Politics*, and David Ricci, *The Tragedy of Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

33. Skowronek’s *Building a New American State* is particularly helpful in documenting the centralizing administrative revolution in the American state during this time period—even if, as I have argued, the Americans had long had a “sense of the state.” One might even say that the *state* (and its cognates) provided ready-made terminology for the new theories in political science

can works like Theodore Dwight Woolsey's *Political Science, or the State Theoretically and Practically Considered*, W. W. Willoughby's *The Nature of the State*, John W. Burgess's *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, and future president Woodrow Wilson's *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics*. These works were to set the agenda for a generation of American political scientists, including those who became increasingly interested and actually involved in public administration and administrative reform. In theory, political scientists captured the state; in practice, the state captured them.

The late-nineteenth-century political scientists were increasingly methodological, if not always in actual practice, then certainly in self-presentation. The already much-used rhetoric of science and method continued to exert its pull over the American imagination. In *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, John W. Burgess, Lieber's successor at Columbia and founder of its School of Political Science in 1880, singled out his contribution to the discipline in this way: "If my book has any peculiarity, it is its method. It is a comparative study. It is an attempt to apply the method, which has been found so productive in the domain of Natural Science, to Political Science and Jurisprudence."³⁴ The natural scientific overtones had indeed been on the minds of self-styled political scientists for well over a century, and they would show no signs of abating well into the next. The methodological invocation of hermeneutics had not (yet) been silenced, as is understandable for a science concerned (for good historical and political reasons) with law, constitutional arrangements, and jural behavior. This was enough to temper the scientism that invariably attends the wish to make political science a natural science of politics. Beyond the scientism, however, it is true and worth underscoring that Burgess and Wilson and many of their peers were indeed more historical; thereby, they were more factual and statistical in their analyses of the state since, for them, history was a great repository of facts and events. And they were genuinely comparative in their focus, providing more or less systematic studies of American, British, French, and German institutions, practices, and laws. Thus their allegiance to the "historical-comparative" method.

This methodologically self-conscious science was to continue to conceptualize the state as its principal domain. This, too, would continue into the second quarter of the twentieth century, despite (or maybe because of) the Progressive reformers. Most of the late-nineteenth-century political scientists were conscious of the venerable conceptual materials with which they dealt,

which were emerging to help citizens and legislators understand and even justify national developments under way since the Civil War.

34. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1891), 1: v.

but also of the scientific novelty which they brought to bear upon them. All gave theoretical expression, as it were, to the Union victory in the Civil War. The modern constitutional state was that law-governed and liberty-protecting organization of the political community whose governmental apparatus was centered and increasingly centralized in Washington, D.C., and whose "principle of popular sovereignty" spread over the still-advancing political geography of America. Indeed, since the subnational governments were not sovereign, "it is no longer proper to call them States at all. It is in fact only a title of honor, without any corresponding substance."³⁵ Geography notwithstanding, the state was not (as Daniel Rodgers has recently argued) conceived of as an antonym to the people. If anything, it was a synonym, at least if we can trust Burgess's view that "the state is the people in ultimate organization" or Willoughby's view that the state was in essence "a community of people socially united."³⁶ Thereby the late-nineteenth-century political scientists entered into a century-old American political conversation whose terms were familiar, despite the changing theories which incorporated them and which contributed to their change of meaning. Neither abstract nor convoluted (or, at any rate, no more so than the other key words of American political thought), the state had been and would remain, as Woolsey pointed out, "a fixed political term . . . in our language."³⁷

Yet these increasingly professional academics displayed considerable diversity in their theories of the state. Thus we should appreciate that the concept of the state provided them more with an intellectual framework for theoretical debate rather than some universally accepted foundation for a disputation-free science. But this was nonetheless sufficient unity amid diversity. Woolsey began to work away at some distinctions (later to be refined by Goodnow) between the political basis and the practical administration of the state. Willoughby transformed American federal principles into the language of the "composite state" and quibbled about the finer points of popular sovereignty.³⁸ Burgess looked for "the state made objective in institutions and laws," especially in parties and public opinion. He also pried apart a distinction between state and government, a distinction which (like the modern

35. *Ibid.*, 81; and John W. Burgess, "The American Commonwealth," *Political Science Quarterly* 1 (1886), as noted approvingly by Charles Merriam, *The History of American Political Theories* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), pp. 301–2.

36. Rodgers, *Contested Truths*, p. 146; Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 1: 88; and W. W. Willoughby, *The Nature of the State* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 4. Willoughby also criticized those who would "speak of the State as . . . an entity independent of man" (p. 33).

37. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, *Political Science, or the State Theoretically and Practically Considered* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1877), 1: 140.

38. Frank Goodnow, *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1900); and Willoughby, *The Nature of the State*, esp. chaps. 10, 11.

constitution, individual liberty, and federalism) he thought had reached its greatest clarity in fact and in theory in America.

In America we have a great advantage in regard to this subject. With us the government is not the sovereign organization of the state. Back of the government lies the constitution; and back of the constitution the original sovereign state, which ordains the constitution both of government and liberty. We have the distinction [between state and government] already in objective reality. . . . This is the point in which the public law of the United States has reached a far higher development than that of any state of Europe.³⁹

Germany had hosted Burgess's postgraduate education, but his vision of the "objective reality" upon which political science rested was his own home-grown American state and its republican institutions of government. And there was nothing particularly novel or overly Germanic about this, despite the evident influence of the German academy over the structure of American higher education. From the constitutional founders, from Lieber, from countless American publicists and orators, Burgess simply took over the concept of the state as an integral component of American political discourse. And the discipline of political science was in the process of transforming the state, both in theory and practice. Soon enough Progressive political scientists would man the administration, and soon enough an American-educated statist of this period whose principal academic work would sell in Germany in translation as *Der Staat* would become president of the United States. For good or ill, the statist of American political science would see their country's highest office go to one of their number.

Having the state as the object of one's science did not require any particular partisan stance. Indeed, among the late-nineteenth-century political scientists there was considerable diversity in ideological orientation, though none came out explicitly against the people. Many statistes were racialists and imperialists; many others were not.⁴⁰ "Conservative" is not an altogether unfair description of Burgess, at least given some of his policy recommendations and given our contemporary terminology.⁴¹ The hints of elitism are not

39. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, 1: 57, 63. Also note Burgess's judgment that "America has yet to develop . . . her own literature of political science. Down to this time, the two names which stand highest in our American literature of political science are Francis Lieber and Theodore D. Woolsey" (p. 70).

40. The racist and even racist intimations deserve further study.

41. For this judgment, see Bernard Edward Brown, *American Conservatives: The Political Thought of Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951). Crick rightly complains of historians "reading back subsequent prejudices into a previous era"

unnoticeable (nor had they been in classical republicanism, for that matter), and these hints would be transformed into the ideology of technocratic expertise among the Progressives and statist administrators. Yet the concern with general welfare was shared by most of the nineteenth-century political scientists, and some of them thought this liberal and called it so. At least the author of the *Principia of Political Science* made this clear in his subtitle, *Upon a Reverent, Moral, Liberal and Progressive Foundation*.⁴² A student of Burgess's, Frank S. Hoffman, went further still. A socialist and a Christian, he thought that the state had "not only the right but the duty . . . to abolish all private possession" and to "better promote the well-being of the people."⁴³ No hegemony of political judgments, in short, followed with ironclad logic from the American political scientists' concept of the state, whatever the iron chancellor was preparing for Germany.

In conclusion, the late nineteenth century proved to be a period of vitality and fertility for an American science of politics which proclaimed its unity and identity as the science of the state. In the process of educating citizens while theorizing as scientists, the discipline became more professional and thoroughly academic. Soon enough this identity, as professionals and academics, would eclipse or fundamentally transform the republican convictions which had helped to bring it about in the first place. The movement from discourse to discipline would be all but complete.

IV.

Much still remains to be done. The subsequent history of "the science of the state" needs to be told. Many political scientists continued to work under that explicitly articulated identity well into the twentieth century. They did so in the face of criticisms from authors such as Arthur Bentley and later David Easton that the concept of "the state" was formalistic, abstract, metaphysical, time-bound, or ideological. Moreover, many of the deeper categories and assumptions of American statism were preserved even when political scientists went on to embrace "actual government," "behavioral process," or the "political system" as the discipline's identifying focus. When this subsequent history of political science is joined with the earlier history of "the science of the state" (that I have tried to sketch here in broad outline), we should see just what an inheritance this American science has been and continues to be.

and goes on to say that "in his day Burgess was among the leading ranks of 'progress,' a conservative liberal perhaps, but in no sense himself a conservative" (*The American Science of Politics*, p. 27).

42. R. J. Wright, *Principles of Political Science* (Philadelphia: R. J. Wright, 1876).

43. Frank S. Hoffman, *The Sphere of the State; or the People as a Body-Politic* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), p. 7.

Remembering this inheritance is, of course, a far cry from defending it, and much of it does not deserve defense. However, I have tried in this brief sketch to remove at least certain misunderstandings about the concept of “the state” in the early American science of politics—that it was a violation of native political experience, that it was an importation of uniquely German political thought, that it emerged as a belated consequence of late-nineteenth-century conditions, that it was egregiously nonempirical, and that it was necessarily conservative or even counterrevolutionary. Furthermore, I have tried to restore to the early political scientists of the state some of *their* principal problems and concerns—to introduce the concept of the state into modern republicanism, to educate citizens in their civic capacities, and to understand the state system of the New World. These problems and concerns are not so far removed from certain contemporary efforts to “bring the state back in,” to revitalize civic education, or to understand the state system in the “new world order.” If there are problems or perils in these contemporary efforts, then at the very least we should not forget their predecessors. Santayana’s warning is good for disciplines, too: Those who forget their history may be condemned to repeat it.