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THE STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE*

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When the turn of fate brings to a man the honor of speaking on this occasion, he is likely to review the remarks of his predecessors. Their practice, I find, has been, in the main, to address themselves to one or the other of two kinds of themes. They discourse either upon a substantive problem within their own specialty or upon a matter of common concern to us as members of the same profession. As our interests have become more diverse, the second alternative seems to have been followed with greater frequency. My decision to consider in my remarks the state of our discipline has, therefore, the support of precedent if not the merit of prudence.

The burden of my argument may be stated briefly and bluntly. It is that the demands upon our profession have grown more rapidly than has the content of our discipline. We are, in a sense, the victims of our own success. The achievements of our profession arouse expectations that our discipline enables us to meet only imperfectly. If we are to narrow the gap between our knowledge and our responsibilities, we must devote greater resources in manpower and ingenuity to the systematic analysis of the phenomena of politics.

I

The weight of the demands on our discipline may be sensed from a quick review of the growth of the activities of our profession. As each of us concentrates his energies upon his own narrow interests, we do not, I believe, commonly appreciate the range and extent of our concerns as a profession. An incidental but incontestable inference from a broad view of our profession must also be that its accomplishments, whatever our misgivings about them may be, have been impressive.

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The development that has affected the majority of us most directly has been the growth in our teaching tasks. In but a short period as time goes we have assumed a principal role in undergraduate instruction in our colleges and universities. Each year the senior classes include around 6,000 young men and women whose major studies have been in political science.[1] How many tens of thousands of non-majors are enrolled in our courses only the registrars, and perhaps the textbook publishers, know.

The peculiar place of civic studies in American society assigns to us responsibilities that are not easily fulfilled. We are looked to for the training of community leaders, for the instillment of a sense of civic duty, and for the transmission of an understanding of the world of politics. Perhaps we can take some credit for the sprinkling of the leadership echelons of American society with persons of high civic literacy. And perhaps we may also be held accountable for some of the less imposing aspects of American community leadership. I can only remark in passing that we know far too little about just what are the effects of our efforts in this area and that a critical examination of our program and performance in undergraduate teaching is in order.

The variety of demands imposed upon us in our teaching role makes plain enough the magnitude of our task in keeping our discipline abreast of the necessities. Our teaching obligations place upon us requirements far more trying than those that confront a relatively simple discipline, such as, for example, economics or nuclear physics. We must be prepared to expound the inner realities of governmental systems from India to Russia, to Latin America, to Australia. We must have sage observations to make on the relations among all the nations of the earth. We must be able to cope with the niceties of municipal administration and the profundities of the political philosophers. Our coverage must extend from the grand problems of the organization of authority in the national state to the factors affecting the vote of union members in Keokuk in 1958.

Although we tend to regard ours as primarily a teaching profession, in recent decades more and more of us have become public servants. Probably not more than two-thirds of the Ph. D.'s in political science are employed by colleges and universities.[2] Over one-half of the M.A.'s in our field are employed by governmental agencies. A substantial proportion of our number is thus now engaged in public administration. Others

[1] The Office of Education reported for 1955–56 that 5,670 bachelors' degrees were conferred in political science; 554, in international Relations.—*Earned Degrees Conferred by Higher Educational Institutions, 1955–56* (Circular No. 499), p. 19.

[2] One recent survey fixes this percentage at 76.7, with the warning that the respondents included a disproportionately high number of teachers.—*Personnel Resources in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Department of Labor Bulletin No. 1169), pp. 95, 129.

apply the materials of our discipline in staff roles for congressional committees and state legislatures. All this is in marked contrast with the rarity of public employment of political scientists only a few decades ago and is a measure of the enlarged role of our profession.

We contribute a steady flow of recruits to the public service. In other ways, too, the applications of political science in public policy and public administration have multiplied. Members of our profession have moved in considerable number into the staffs of research organizations concerned with national and international affairs, bureaus of municipal research, taxpayers associations, and other like private agencies.

The demands upon those of our number in these applied phases of political science are quite as diverse as are those that vex the teaching branch of the profession. Yet the applied political scientist must be possessed of an outlook, of skills, and perhaps of substantive knowledge not relevant, or at least not essential, in teaching. There can be no doubt that we have opportunities to develop our discipline better to meet these needs. Nevertheless, over the long run our impact upon public affairs has been far more powerful than we commonly realize. Many well settled governmental practices were but a few decades ago regarded as impractical schemes emanating from the ivory tower.

II

These comments touch only the broadest aspects of the responsibilities in teaching and in application that have been assumed by our profession as it has grown in stature. They involve problems of the gravest import; and they involve matters of endless variety and puzzling intricacy.

The nature of our fulfillment of all these responsibilities rests upon the nature of our discipline. Ultimately the quality of our teaching, our efficacy as public servants, and the wisdom of our work as consultants and advisors in the applications of political science depend upon the quality of the content of our discipline. A bit of artistry and devotion is helpful in teaching; courage and a sturdy stomach fortify a public servant; and a modicum of cunning contributes to the making of an effective applied political scientist. Yet all these characteristics, useful as they may be, do not enable us to rise far above the body of knowledge with which we are equipped.

Our most urgent problem consists in the enlargement, improvement, and refinement of that body of knowledge. In that respect ours may be only the common lot of all branches of learning. Yet the primacy of politics in the determination of the conditions of life gives warrant for a critical rating of our needs. Advances in our discipline can be quickly

converted into advances in all aspects of our work—teaching, administration, application.

Those who would blueprint a strategy for the acceleration of the development of any field of knowledge should proceed most tentatively. Perhaps we can have to some degree programs of planned invention, but in the main the enlargement of human understanding is a mysterious process that probably includes a large component of chance. The insights of an original mind may color an entire discipline for decades and scores of lesser men may preoccupy themselves in verification, refinement, and imitation. Or bits of inquiry by painstaking and plodding workers may gradually piece themselves together and at some stage cumulate into a broad advance on a wide front. Or a chain of inquiry started by a Frenchman, continued by a Briton, and picked up by an American may eventuate in a striking finding entirely uncontemplated at the beginning of the sequence. Or a new concept, perhaps borrowed from another discipline, will permeate a field of learning and throw into new and illuminating perspective old ideas and old bodies of data. Or a new technique of observation may open up entirely new lines of inquiry and permit new approaches to old questions.

Given the erratic and various processes of growth of human knowledge, we are justified in viewing with reserve those who contend that with their approach they command the only road to the advancement of human understanding. Nevertheless, it is perhaps feasible to indicate some broad directions in which the application of effort would most probably strengthen our discipline.

At times the specialties that make up our discipline seem to be flying apart, yet over the past few decades a major tendency has been an intellectual unification of all its elements. This unification has been no grand codification of our lore. Rather, common concepts and common outlooks have to a degree been adopted by all parts of the discipline. One of our colleagues has called this the "politicization" of the discipline.[3] In outlook the unification has been behavioral.[4] Although many of our colleagues would deny that they have been touched by the behavioral approach, I can only invite you to compare their work with that of their predecessors of 25 years ago. These tendencies toward unification facilitate communication among workers in all branches of the discipline,

[3] Dwight Waldo, *Political Science in the United States of America* (Paris: UNESCO, 1956).

[4] The following characterization of our discipline could not have been made a few decades ago: "Allowing for local variants, political science in the United States today may be said to focus on *political behavior* in the widest sense of the term. And this is true in varying degree of all contemporary political scientists, whatever their own specialized field may be. . . ."—Peter H. Odegard, "A New Look at Leviathan," in *Frontiers of Knowledge in the Study of Man*, edited by Lynn White, Jr. (New York: Harper, 1956).

stimulate new interpretations of old data, and increase the chances of getting ahead by bringing, in effect, more manpower to bear on the same problem. On occasion even now an expert in municipal administration can learn something from a specialist in international relations and vice versa. The further identification and analysis of the common elements of all aspects of our discipline hold, I believe, opportunity for building a base for broad and perhaps rapid advance.

As most of the branches of our discipline come to be characterized by a focus on political behavior, instead of the unique qualities of constitutions, charters, or practices, it becomes embarrassingly apparent that we need to exert ourselves to move from the description of the particular toward the formulation of modest general propositions. A modest general proposition need not deal with a modest or insignificant problem. Our work still bears the marks of its origins in history and in law, disciplines dedicated in peculiar degree to the analysis of the particular. Our journals are still in large measure filled with treatments of particular events, institutions, practices. Often these are well done, even ingeniously done, yet they add absolutely nothing new by way of general idea. They stand alone as isolated accounts of peculiar events or situations. They remain unconnected with what has been learned before; from their nature they will remain unconnected with what is learned later.

Lest I be misunderstood, I should say that to recognize our need for more work leading to modest general propositions is not to urge the construction of grand hypotheses to encompass all political action. Those who yearn for the psychic satisfactions of such systems underestimate the incorrigibility of the data with which we deal. In addition, I should explicitly observe that we shall always have to be concerned in great degree with the particular. The demands upon us, both in teaching and in application, tend to be for diagnosis and analysis of the unique rather than for dicovery and exposition of the general rule. Nevertheless, without a body of general knowledge, one must grapple with the unique situation with no weapon better than his bare hands.

We probably have a larger body of general propositions in our literature than we assume. But much of this knowledge is inchoate, poorly articulated, rarely tested adequately. An incidental consequence of this state of affairs is that in its training each generation of our profession must almost recapitulate the history of the discipline. And another consequence for the advance of the discipline is that the form of our knowledge requires that we dedicate not inconsiderable effort to the rediscovery of what was in reality already known before.

I am well aware that in these remarks I have made some tacit assumptions about the nature of the political process which are at variance with

the thesis that we are doomed to ignorance of the ways of man. Our analytical schemes must, to be sure, make provision for the accidental, the erratic, the unique. And we must be forever alert to the possibility that the verified general proposition of one era may not hold at a later time. Political systems have a plasticity; they also have an inertia. We have demonstrated well enough that political knowledge that retains a validity even for a generation or so has great utility as mankind endeavors to elevate itself by its bootstraps.

These comments should not be regarded as a reiteration of the ancient complaint that we have too much "mere description." Perhaps the advance of knowledge in all fields is associated with the contrivance of ways and means to achieve more perfect description. We have, in fact, ample reason for dissatisfaction with our techniques of observation and description as well as with the tenuous relationship of descriptive work to theoretical endeavors.

It seems to be requiring an inordinate amount of time for us to develop techniques of observation supplementary to the skills in legal and documentary analysis which for so long sufficed to meet our needs. When we began to venture out of the libraries and to study political action at first hand we went equipped with nothing more than whatever common sense and native ingenuity we possessed. Those qualities are admirable, and always in short supply, but they are not enough.

Our colleagues in other social sciences, notably in sociology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology have far surpassed us in the contrivance of techniques of observation. Many of those techniques readily adapt themselves to problems traditionally the concern of political scientists. That adaptability has been turned to advantage by our colleagues in other fields as their interests have led them into the study of political behavior and institutions. The consequence has been that a goodly proportion of the significant advances of recent years in several of our specialties have been the contribution of men not professionally political scientists.

The survey research technique provides an example of a handy means for coping with questions about which we have been limited to excogitation for lack of a workable method of observation. Yet few indeed are the political scientists who have a command of survey technique. The problems of its adaptation to the study of political questions have by no means been completely solved, but political scientists are slow to exploit its possibilities.[5] Consider, for example, what might be done with this

[5] I have touched upon some of the problems of adaptation of such techniques to the traditional problems of politics in "Strategy in Research on Public Affairs," *Items*, Vol. 10 (1956), pp. 29–32.

instrument in that field to which we have most ready access but about which we probably know least, namely, local government and politics.

On the whole we close our minds to problems of method and technique. This permits us to take a smug attitude toward the absurdities occasionally committed in the name of method. It also assures that we rarely come to grips with the fundamental question of how we go about pushing back the limits of our knowledge. Method without substance may be sterile, but substance without method is only fortuitously substantial. Technique and method in themselves perhaps may not generate many new ideas, but they are most handy for verification or, as occurs with melancholy frequency, disproof. And new techniques and methods often make it possible to raise new kinds of substantive questions.

Perhaps most of these worries about the state of our discipline relate in one way or another to the place of political theory in our studies. In an earlier day the place of political theory could be readily comprehended. It amounted to the history of political thought, an eminently respectable branch of intellectual history. It found an autonomous place in political science and could be pursued without influence upon, and without being influenced by, other branches of political science. The development of our discipline had merely brought it into loose academic alliance with various other specialties.

As the segments of political science have come to be, if not cemented together, at least infused by common terminology and common concepts, the question comes to be asked what relevance has political theory for other branches of political science. Most current work in political theory is, I suppose, in the tradition of historical analysis. Our theorists, or so it seems to me, nowadays manifest a sharpened sophistication in their analysis and exegesis of the classics of political thought. Yet among our theorists there seems also to be developing a view that a radical reorientation of their focus of attention may be in order if they are to contribute to the growth of the discipline. They are bestirring themselves, but I must confess to some bewilderment as I attempt to discern where they are leading us. In my mellower moods I lean to the forecast that the confusing cross currents in contemporary theory will turn out to have served usefully as probes in the process of trial and error by which we feel our way along the path ahead. The topic could be dismissed with that hopeful observation, but I shall comment on the odd relation that prevails between theoretical and empirical work, a matter that bears in a major way upon the advance of our discipline.

That relation tends to be one of antagonism, if not hostility, but its characteristic most significant for the present discussion is the supposition that theoretical and empirical work are separable. Extremely rare

is the piece of work by a theoretician which seeks to indicate lines of potential convergence between theoretical and empirical inquiry.[6] And it is almost solely among the older, and perhaps wiser, theorists that one finds occasional reflective consideration of the problems of knitting together theoretical and empirical work.[7] More commonly a separateness prevails. The extreme doctrine seems to hold that theorists should work in isolation both from empirical inquiry and from the empirical world of politics.

The only reason for mentioning such disputation is that it points to some real problems—and opportunities—for the advance of our discipline. I doubt whether in its present stage of development our discipline contains adequate foundation for a genuinely fruitful division of labor between theoretical and empirical workers. (I am, of course, not using the term theory in the sense of history of political thought.) For the specialist in theory to be creative he must be able to work from a foundation of more or less established propositions from which extrapolations may be made by logical procedures. Such hypothetical extensions of old knowledge may then be subjected to empirical test. And the sequence may then recur as the cumulation of knowledge proceeds.

The present chaotic state of our knowledge hardly suffices to permit an operative separation into specialized hands of these two kinds of intellectual processes. Both kinds of work need to be carried on, if not simultaneously in the same mind, then in the closest collaboration. And that collaboration rarely occurs. Most exceptional is the piece of theoretical writing that has the slightest use for the empirical worker, and the occurrence of reports of empirical work usable by the theorist may be equally infrequent.

I must take note of signs that forces are at work to close the gap between theoretical and empirical work, a tendency which, if carried for enough, would make the two indistinguishable and greatly expedite the development of our discipline. Our empirical work would become less irrelevant theoretically and our theoretical work less naive empirically. Such changes require time, but the opportunities for young men and women who wish to help bring them about are extraordinary.

While an impatience with the rate of development of our discipline is justified, I should say that I do not share the attitude of self-flagellation adopted by those of our colleagues who are overwhelmed by the

[6] For one of the exceptions, see Oliver Garceau, "Research in the Political Process," this REVIEW, Vol. 45 (1951), pp. 69–85.

[7] For two such considerations, see Frederick M. Watkins, "Political Theory as a Datum of Political Science," and Carl J. Friedrich, "Political Philosophy and the Science of Politics," in *Approaches to the Study of Politics*, edited by Roland Young (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1958).

massiveness of our collective ignorance. Our profession has built up a body of knowledge that is substantial indeed. That accomplishment we tend to forget as we are awed by the unsolved questions that confront us. One can also confidently assert that the quality of our research has mightily improved. To those who doubt this judgment I can only recommend a careful perusal of a few volumes of the *American Political Science Review* as it appeared around 1920. That is a trying but encouraging exercise.

III

The quality of our work may have improved, but there can be no doubt that the development of our discipline lags behind our requirements. A basic limiting factor is the amount of manpower that we allocate to the business of research and inquiry. Precisely what that quantity is one cannot say, but it is plain enough that we devote the most meager resources to the tasks of political inquiry.

One clue to the productivity of the profession is provided by a check on the publications of those receiving Ph.D.'s in political science and international relations in the years 1935, 1936, and 1937. Of this sample:

At least one-fourth have not been heard from since they received their Ph.D.'s; their theses were not published; nor have they helped to fatten the periodicals.

One-sixth appeared in the periodicals at least once or twice over a twenty-year period.

About a third have published a book (in some cases the thesis) and in some instances in addition an article or more during the first couple of decades of their career.

About a fifth have produced at least two books, although this count includes theses, textbooks, collections of readings, and other items that would scarcely be regarded as books by a knowledgeable dean as he considered a proposal for promotion.[8]

I hasten to say that the moral of all this is not that every Ph. D. should be a prolific contributor to the literature of our discipline. The specialization of labor among us dictates that some of us do one kind of work and others another. The meaning of the data rather is that we allocate the most inadequate resources to the labor of inquiry essential to the development of our discipline. Inspection of the detailed bibliographies underlying my proportions can only yield the impression that extremely few of us manage to make significant contributions to the con-

[8] The bibliographical check was of those persons (except Orientals) listed in *Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities* for 1934–35, 1935–36, and 1936–37, under the categories political science and international law and relations.

tent of our discipline. From my examination of my sample, I would judge, by what seem to me to be latitudinarian standards, that not over 10 per cent had made such contributions. I should say that I have far more confidence in the 10 per cent estimate than I would in an identification of the individuals making up the 10 per cent. Over the long pull a single article may turn out to be a more enduring addition to our knowledge than a shelf of books.

If my ratio based on a sample from the mid-thirties continues to prevail, we may forecast that of the 250 or so Ph.D.'s added to the supply this year, not more than 25 will during their careers make significant contributions to the substance of our discipline. I have the impression that the work of the new crop is distinctly superior to that of my sample from the mid-thirties; I am far less certain that any larger proportion will make durable additions to our knowledge. In fact, a sharp increase is occurring in the proportion of Ph. D.'s turned out by those institutions whose graduates had in my sample an especially low record of scholarly production.

IV

The conventions that govern discourses of this sort dictate that diagnosis should be followed by recommendations for action. Such prescriptions should be rooted in extended deliberation, and I have meditated upon the problem at some length. About the only proposition on which I have formed an obstinate conviction is that there is not much to be gained by appointing a committee to look into the state of the discipline. Yet, if you concur in the view of the pivotal importance of elevating the quality of the content of our discipline, two areas offer obvious opportunity for exertions by each of us individually.

The first of these is in the area of graduate instruction. The quality, nature, and objectives of graduate instruction differ widely among the 40 or so institutions offering Ph.D. degrees in political science. Yet it does not require an extensive survey of their varying practices to know that probably no single department offers truly adequate training in the problems of research in our field. Some departments have, to be sure, attempted to bring their instruction abreast of the new possibilities. Nevertheless, we have some distance to go if we are to have graduate instruction suitable to produce a larger number of political scientists adequately equipped to advance the discipline. This appraisal conflicts, of course, with the occasional plea that is heard for training leading to a teaching degree. What we now have is in fact by and large a teaching degree. A critical need of our discipline is for more, and far more rigorous, research training. The graduate department that first manages to orient

itself in this direction and to staff itself for that purpose will exert a pervasive influence on American political science.

A second area in which the exercise of individual initiative can contribute to the long-run advance of our discipline is that of recruitment of young men and women into our profession. Such vocational guidance—or proselyting—must, however, be discriminating as well as diligent. We need in some way or another to draw more recruits who will turn out to be genuinely creative scholars. The enlistment of even a score more such persons per year would mightily reenforce the propulsive power behind the growing edge of our discipline.

I do not underestimate the difficulties either in the early identification of such talent or in its attraction to our trade. The competition for talent among academic disciplines and among all professions is sharp and will become sharper. All branches of the academic profession are handicapped in this competition in ways too well known to require exposition here. Yet I am confident that we can in good faith more strongly advise many of the best of our students to follow a career of scholarship.

To many young men and women the academic profession offers opportunities, both economic and intellectual, that cannot be matched by alternative careers. No other profession has so nearly removed the economic bars to entrance for persons of exceptional talent. Moreover, I doubt that other lines of endeavor are so well organized to expedite the advancement of exceptional talent as is the world of higher education. Let an instructor in the most remote college demonstrate sufficient quality to make himself even slightly visible, and dossiers on him will begin to build up in the files of recruiting officers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Our own branch of the academic profession seems to me to hold special promise for young men with high potentials in research. Such persons can quickly make their mark, given the opportunities for the development of our discipline.

In short, our profession has a special attractiveness for the talent we need most, namely, those persons who can ultimately become contributors to the development of our discipline. We need to bring that attractiveness persuasively to the attention of young persons with curiosities about the nature of politics, with fortunate mixtures of methodicalness and imagination, with an impetuous drive disciplined by the persistence to pursue a problem to its end, and with the hope of youth tinctured by a precocious maturity of judgment. As we succeed in attracting a bit more than our share of such talent, the intellectual development of our discipline will take care of itself.