
ONE SOUL AT A TIME:
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
POLITICAL REFORM

SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON
Harvard University

Political scientists want to do good. They want to expand knowledge about political life, but also they wish to use knowledge for political reform. Usually this means desiring to promote "democratization." Historically democracy and political science have tended to develop together. In modest ways political science can contribute to the emergence of democracy. Political reform succeeds best if it occurs incrementally, in the spirit of "one soul at a time."

Let me begin with what may be an unsettling and perhaps even shocking observation about our profession but one that I derive from forty-four years of watching political scientists at work: by and large, political scientists want to do good. To mitigate the impact of this statement, let me quickly add two additional points. First, because political scientists want to do good does not mean that they actually do good. They may fail miserably to realize their intentions, although that does not mean that they therefore do evil. Second, by *want to do good* I do not mean that political scientists simply want to expand our understanding of politics. Political scientists want to do that: that is the professional calling of political science. The expansion of knowledge is, of course, a good in itself and may be pursued as such. What I am suggesting is that political scientists want to expand our knowledge of politics because they usually see or sense a link between this expanded knowledge and broader social goals or public purposes. The exact nature of these purposes varies, of course, among members of the profession. Prominent among them are the promotion of justice, well-

being, order, equity, liberty, democracy, responsible government, security for individuals and states, accommodation among groups, peace among nations. In some measure these goals may be subsumed under the broad category *political goods* that Roland Pennock elaborated over two decades ago (1966, 415-34).

In particular circumstances these goals may conflict with each other. Few people, however, would deny ultimate legitimacy to any of them, even if they disagreed vigorously over their relative priority in situations where choices have to be made. It is hard, indeed, to think of a major work in political science that is not inspired in some measure—perhaps remotely but often very directly—by one of these purposes. Political science, in short, is not just an intellectual discipline; it is also a moral one. Morality, observes Albert Hirschman (who, I might note, was elected most deservedly although belatedly to the National Academy of Sciences last spring), "belongs into the center of our work; and it can get there only if the social scientists are morally alive and make themselves vulnerable to moral concerns—then they will produce morally significant works, consciously or other-

wise" (1981, 305). From this it follows that works in the social sciences should be judged not only on their intellectual merit but also by the contributions they make to achieving moral purposes. We may intellectually admire "neat" and highly sophisticated analyses, quantitative or otherwise, of esoteric scholarly issues; but implicitly we do not accord them the same status we do the works of Dahl probing the preconditions of democracy, Walzer grappling with the nature of just war, Verba illuminating the dimensions of equality, or Horowitz exploring the ways of resolving ethnic conflict.

The phrase *doing good* is rather sweeping in scope, in that it could encompass all sorts of personal and public goals, political and otherwise. It also conveys a somewhat mushy impression. Let me, therefore, dispense with that phrase and instead use one more directly emphasizing doing good in politics, that is, political reform. By *political reform* I mean the peaceful—hence gradual, hence usually negotiated—enhancement of liberty, justice, equality, democracy, and responsibility in politics. The impetus to do good in the sense of promoting political reform is, I would argue, embedded in our profession.

The historical relation between political science and political reform, it should be noted, has a very specific meaning in the American context. The emergence of political science was "part of a broad movement of Progressive reform in American intellectual and political life" at the end of the nineteenth century. The major figures in political science, among them A. Lawrence Lowell, Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, Albert Bushnell Hart, and Charles Beard, were associated with the Progressive movement (Huntington 1974, 7). "To call the roll of the distinguished social scientists of the Progressive era," Richard Hofstadter noted, "is to read a list of men prominent in their criticism of vested interests or in their support

for reform causes" (quoted in Huntington 1974, 5).

This particular historical association between political science and political reform rests on a logical basis. Political science, as Lowell and Wilson emphasized, is or should be devoted to studying the realities of politics, the how and the why of political behavior. This heavy emphasis on the empirical exploration of the realities of politics tends to drive political scientists in two directions. First, politics turns out to be extremely complex and ambiguous; hence there are not only no easy solutions but also generally speaking no simple or obvious solutions to political problems. The nature of politics tends to reinforce nonideological, nondoctrinaire, and pragmatic tendencies among those who study it. Now obviously I do not want to push this argument too far. We all know political scientists—much-admired political scientists—who are ideological if not doctrinaire and who have advanced simple, if not simplistic, remedies to complex problems. I am arguing only that the logic of political inquiry works in the opposite direction, not that everyone is necessarily persuaded by that logic.

Second, while the exploration of political reality—understanding things as they are and why they are as they are—may push political scientists in a conservative direction, it also tends to leave them in a dissatisfied mood. Knowing how things work in practice can only remind one of the large gap between that and how they ought to work in theory. As political scientists quickly discover, the behavior of politicians, bureaucrats, and voters and the operations of political institutions and processes often leave much to be desired. In a sense, political scientists suffer an intense disciplinary version of what on a broader scale I once called the *IvI gap*. And a not unnatural response to this gap on the part of political scientists is, implicitly or explicitly, to suggest ways—

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usually modest and occasionally practical—for reforming things. Quincy Wright once said that after a “general education in political science . . . it is hard to see how a political scientist can be either a Nazi or a Communist” (quoted in Ricci 1984, 170). It is also hard to see how a political scientist can be entirely happy with the status quo.

The study of political science thus tends to highlight both what’s wrong with politics and how difficult, complex, tedious, ambiguous, and uncertain it is to correct what’s wrong. Political scientists come to learn only too well the truth behind Oxenstierna’s famous lament, “If you only knew, my son, with what little wisdom the world is governed!” But they come to learn equally well the familiar biblical truth that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” The problem of combining both truths, both perspectives, is perhaps most dramatic in our teaching. How do we make our students wise about politics without also making them disillusioned with politics?

Despite the efforts of political scientists, wisdom about politics is in short supply in today’s world. Much of modern politics is, on the surface, abolitionist politics. It is devoted to efforts to do away with things: abolish war, abolish nuclear weapons, abolish injustice, abolish tyranny, abolish apartheid. Those demanding fundamental change typically describe the existing political system as the epitome of evil, the worst system possible. Hence all contact or cooperation with it must be avoided. Hence it must be totally destroyed. This is a simple and effective political strategy. Focusing on an evil, whose evilness cannot be denied, generates moral outrage, facilitates political mobilization, and sets forth a clear, simple, and unifying goal, while avoiding the divisive issue of what should replace that evil. If the existing political system is the worst possible system, then of course vir-

tually any means, any amount of violence, is legitimate in attempting to overthrow it.

The study of politics, however, shows clearly that the process of doing good involves far more than simply doing away with evil. It is difficult to imagine worse political systems than those of Hitler or Stalin. Yet however bad a given evil may be, a worse one is always possible and often likely: witness the unhappy recent experiences of Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and Iran, among others. The political scientist, consequently, can only be skeptical of a claim that, as one Chilean dissident put it, “there is no way in which we are going to see anything worse than General Pinochet” or the argument of an opponent of apartheid that “the first African government of South Africa . . . could scarcely be any worse” than the current regime. And let me hastily add, lest this be read as a political statement, that I can easily conceive of worse systems than that in the Soviet Union, even before Gorbachev began to change it. Fifty years ago, indeed, the Soviet system was much worse than it is now. Military authoritarianism, racial oligarchy, and Communist dictatorship are evil political systems; but the assumption that things could not become worse than they are in Chile, South Africa, or the Soviet Union defies logic and history.

Political reformers wise in the ways of politics understand this and hence tend to be leery of simple solutions and of revolution and revolutionaries. This skepticism has been well expressed in the statements of three notable contemporary democratic reformers from three different continents, one unsuccessful, one successful posthumously, and one as yet neither successful nor unsuccessful. First, “We know lots of revolutions, great revolutions, and magnificent people,” said Lech Walesa, “who after taking over power, produced systems that were much worse than the

ones they destroyed. We do not want to make this mistake." Second, "In a revolution," said Benigno Aquino in a speech drafted for delivery at Manila Airport, "there can really be no victors, only victims. We do not have to destroy in order to build." Third, "Bloody revolutions," Mangosutho Buthelezi warned, "fought against terrible oppression do not automatically bring about great improvements."²

An extremely close relationship exists between political science and one particular type of political reform. Robert Heilbroner once noted that it is impossible to have economists in the absence of commercial relations and that it was the development of the market system in early modern times that, in his phrase, "called forth the economists." Had Adam Smith lived in an earlier age, Heilbroner says, he "might have been a great moral philosopher," but "he could never have been a great economist; there would have been nothing for him to do" (1980, 18, 27). Somewhat similarly, it can be argued that it is impossible to have political scientists in the absence of political participation, and political science has only developed with the expansion of political participation. In a society in which there is no participation—no competition for power—political scientists would have nothing to do. Consequently, it is not surprising that a market propensity tends to prevail among economists and a participatory or democratic propensity among political scientists. Command economies have no use for economists, nor authoritarian politics for political scientists.

The connection between democracy and political science has been a close and continuing one. Nowhere was that connection more meaningful than in the event whose two hundredth anniversary we celebrate this year. The men who gathered in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 were, in John Roche's felicitous phrase, "a nationalist reform caucus":

They were democratic politicians struggling to fashion a pragmatic compromise that would both create a strong national government and be acceptable to the people of the states (1961, 799). As Austin Ranney pointed out on this occasion twelve years ago, Washington, Hamilton, Adams, and Jefferson all stressed the central importance of the study of the "science of politics" and the "science of government" to the work they were engaged in of creating a new nation (1976, 141-43). A gathering at Harvard the year the Constitution was ratified voted that it was "more necessary in a Republic than in any other form of government that young men should be instructed in political science" (William Coolidge Lane, quoted in Crick 1959, 5).

The creation of a republic and the development of democracy called forth political science and political scientists. The relationship is nowhere more notable than in countries, such as Germany and Italy, that, prior to World War II, had strong traditions of scholarship in history, social theory, and sociology but not in political science. As Hans Kastendiek has pointed out in his study of Germany, "Because of the structure of politics in the 19th century and the political power relations which characterized the Weimar Republic and were mirrored in the academic system, conditions for a distinct political science simply did not exist. . . . The emergence of the discipline after 1945 was due to specific political constellations. . . . 'To build up democracy' and to install a distinct political science were needs directly connected to each other" (1987, 26).

Bernard Crick thus got it wrong in the title of his famous book about our discipline. There is not an *American* science of politics; there is a *democratic* science of politics, which developed first and fullest in the United States because the United States was the first and fullest democracy in the modern world. That science is a

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universal science to the extent that democracy is a universal system of government. Where democracy is strong, political science is strong; where democracy is weak, political science is weak. Authoritarian societies may produce and in some cases have produced Nobel Prize-winning physicists, biologists, novelists, and statesmen; they do not produce great political scientists. The emergence of democracy encourages the development of political science, and the development of political science can and has in small ways contributed to the emergence and stabilization of democracy.

Since 1974, dictatorships have given way to democracies in many countries, including Portugal, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, and the Philippines. A transition may be underway now in the Republic of Korea; modest steps toward broader political participation have taken place in Taiwan. In still other countries elections seem to be acquiring new popularity. If not reversed, all this bodes well for the future of democracy and for the future of political science. Political scientists are uniquely qualified to study these processes of change, to derive generalizations and lessons from them, and to suggest ways in which this knowledge may be applied to countries where democracy is yet to be realized. Many political scientists, including Linz, Stepan, Lipset, Diamond, O'Donnell, and Schmitter, as well as others, have responded to this challenge and have carried out studies that add importantly to our understanding of the conditions and processes of democratization (see Diamond, Linz, and Lipset n.d.; Linz and Stepan 1978; and O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986).

I cannot summarize their findings here and I will not attempt to advance any systematic analysis of my own, but I do suggest that the most important lesson from the history of democratization is that what is difficult is not the termination of

the nondemocratic regime but the development of stable democratic institutions. In this process political science, if given a chance, may be able to play some small constructive role. Let me illustrate this by reference to three contemporary cases.

Brazil is perhaps the most striking example of democratization introduced from above by a military elite that realized and indeed supported the need to move toward democracy.³ In 1973 Brazil was a military dictatorship; in 1985 it was a democracy. The genius of the Brazilian transition is that it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the time during the twelve years in between when Brazil stopped being a dictatorship and became a democracy. The Brazilian transition to democracy was in many respects a masterpiece of obfuscated incrementalism. Political science played a modest role in this process. The military leadership that guided the transition was aware of the experiences of other countries and sensitive to the need first to encourage "decompression" (*distensao*) and the "opening" (*abertura*) of their society so as to minimize the probability of extreme polarization and violent upheaval and second to proceed with changes incrementally, often on a two-steps-forward-one-step-backward basis and thus to make democratization, as President Geisel put it, "slow, gradual, and sure." The leading military figure guiding the democratization, General Golbery, was a long-term member of the American Political Science Association; he and other key figures in the democratization process solicited the advice of political scientists; and a younger generation of Brazilian political scientists—who, thanks to the Ford Foundation, had been trained during the 1960s at Stanford, UCLA, Harvard, MIT, Michigan, and elsewhere—played active roles in developing and articulating ideas that were central to the Brazilian process.

For several years China has been in the midst of economic reforms, some of

which are quite far-reaching. These changes naturally raise the question as to whether equally meaningful political reforms will follow. The centralized authoritarianism of the Chinese political system has, however, had its correlate in the undeveloped state of Chinese political science. Major universities do not have political science departments as such; what is termed *political science* has so far been generally limited to the study of foreign societies and public administration. Kent Morrison quotes one of his graduate students at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou as saying in 1984, "To be a political scientist in China is, I think, very dangerous" (Morrison and Thompson 1985, 1). The student is right and the reason is that ultimately, political science can only be very dangerous to the regime in China. Yet the Chinese government is now sending scores if not hundreds of graduate students to the United States to study political science. Inevitably, these students also learn democracy. One can only wonder what the Chinese leaders expect to achieve by doing this. It seems very likely that the leaders either will have to accept a massive brain drain from their society; or will have to find room in their society for a highly intelligent, articulate, and well-connected group of scholarly lobbyists pushing for truly meaningful democratization; or will have to expand their prison system. (In the Soviet Union, it should be noted, what is termed *political science* remains in a primitive state. The work of Soviet political scientists has, however, been closely associated with efforts to reform the Soviet system and to broaden participation in it (Hill 1980; also Brown 1986, esp. pp. 466-69). One test of the meaningfulness of Gorbachev's commitment to *glasnost* and democratization will be the extent to which Soviet scholars are permitted to develop a truly empirical political science, to broaden their contacts with Western political scientists, and to import elements

of Western political science into their research and teaching.

Perhaps nowhere in the world is political science more relevant today than in South Africa. Much of the debate over the South African future has been conducted in terms of concepts and hypotheses from political science.⁴ Political scientists—white political scientists—have been in the vanguard of those working for the end of apartheid and some form of meaningful sharing of power among all racial groups. What has been most dramatically and tragically missing from the debate have been the voices of black political scientists. The reason is that almost none exist. Yet surely black political scientists should and could make a major contribution to the future political development of their country. Recognizing this need, last year the council of our association advanced a proposal, modeled in part on Ford's 1960s program for Brazil, to bring nonwhite South Africans to U.S. universities for graduate work in political science. I am happy to say that the Ford Foundation will provide a substantial grant to get this program started in the coming year.

Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev may be reformers but clearly neither has any intention of abandoning the Communist party's monopoly of power in his country. Similarly, P. W. Botha has made significant reforms in the South African system of apartheid. These reforms have, however, been followed by intensified and at times vicious repetition; and there are no signs of any intention to relax the National party's grip on power. In all three countries the intent of the reforms is to strengthen the existing system, not to change it. Under these circumstances, the question then becomes, How can democratic reformers exploit the opportunities offered by preservative reforms to promote more meaningful change? One notable historical case where an exercise in preservative reform was made over into an exercise in fundamental

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reform was the constitutional convention of 1787. That process has perhaps been most closely approximated recently in the 1986 constitution-making efforts that occurred in South Africa.

For eight months, over fifty representatives of the government of the South African province of Natal, the government of the Zulu homeland of KwaZulu, and over thirty other organizations representing all South African racial groups met in Durban and hammered out a constitution for a racially integrated, democratic system of government for that region of South Africa. As in Philadelphia in 1787, provisions for majority rule had to be reconciled with the need to protect minority rights. As in Philadelphia, frequent references were made to the lessons of political science and the experiences of other societies. As in Philadelphia, a few delegates did not sign the final document, but over eighty percent of them did. As with the Philadelphia convention, the Durban Indaba was attacked from both Right and Left (by the revolutionaries of the African National Congress and its front groups on the one hand and by the Afrikaner standpatters on the other). As with the Philadelphia constitution, agreement on the Durban constitution was eased by the anticipation that one widely respected person (in this case Chief Buthelezi) would become the chief executive of the new government. As with the Philadelphia constitution, the Durban constitution also needs to be ratified. In this case, however, ratification means approval not by state assemblies but rather by the national government. To date, that approval has not been denied, but it also has not been forthcoming. It is not clear that even the persuasive logic of a Hamilton, a Madison, and a Jay could bring it about; but it is possible that hard-headed negotiations between the Indaba supporters and the National party may allow some version of the proposed institutions to come into being.

This effort at constitutional change has been virtually ignored in the United States. Closed meetings devoted to the undramatic bargaining and drafting required for political reform do not make good copy for the media; nor do they provide the opportunity, as do police brutality and necklacing, for expressions of moral outrage at the evils of apartheid. The Durban constitution is no overall solution to the traumas of South Africa. Within the context of this one province, however, it is a constructive and hopeful effort to create democratic institutions to replace apartheid. Like the Philadelphia constitution, it is the compromise product of political practitioners informed by political science working to reconcile conflicting interests and principles.

I began these remarks with the suggestion that political scientists, by and large, want to do good and then went on to argue that a close connection exists between political science and political reform and particularly between political science and one type of political reform, that is, democratization. Let me close by emphasizing again the central lesson the study of politics offers to those who wish to bring about political reform.

The Salvation Army has a motto, "Save the world, one soul at a time." Political science has helped, can help, and should help to save the world by generating understanding of political processes, by illuminating the feasibility and consequences of alternative governmental arrangements, and by enhancing appreciation of the potentialities and the limits of political engineering. The most fundamental lesson of the study of politics, however, is that there are no shortcuts to political salvation. If the world is to be saved and stable democratic institutions created, it will be done through *incremental* political reform undertaken by moderate, realistic men and women in the spirit of one-soul-at-a-time. That is the sobering yet hopeful message of our discipline.

Notes

This essay is the presidential address presented on September 3, 1987 at the 83rd annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago.

1. Ariel Dorfman, quoted in *Campus Report*, 1986, 1: 8; Pierre L. van den Berghe, quoted in Adam 1971, 118.

2. Lech Walesa, interview with Neal Conan, 5 February 1985, National Public Radio; Benigno Aquino, speech text, *New York Times*, 22 August 1983; Chief Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, "Disinvestment is Anti-Black," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 February 1985.

3. See, in general, the comprehensive study by Skidmore n.d., esp. chaps. 6, 7.

4. See, for example, Republic of South Africa, esp. chaps. 3 and 4, and the central role that Arend Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy has played in discussions of possible political solutions in South Africa. Lijphart (1985) applies his theory specifically to that country and also provides a comprehensive bibliography of the relevant literature (pp. 137-71).

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Samuel P. Huntington is Eaton Professor of the Science of Government, Department of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138.