
REDEEMING AMERICAN POLITICAL THEORY

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A*American political theory has been accused of being uniformly liberal; but its history is diverse and is worth studying to understand the development of political science and the institutions it reflects (representative government, federalism, judicial review, and slavery). While modern social science expresses a slow democratization of values, it has been compatible with many ideologies. This can be seen in Jefferson's anthropology, Madison's theory of collective rationality, and Hamilton's empirical political economy. Jacksonian democracy encouraged social history, while its opponents devised an elitist political sociology. Southern defenders of slavery were the earliest to develop a deterministic and authoritarian sociology, but after the Civil War Northern thinkers emulated them with Social Darwinism and quests for causal laws to grasp constant change in industrial society. Though social critics abounded, democratic empirical theory emerged in the universities only in the generation of Merriam and Dewey, who founded contemporary political science.*

As is evident, I am in some ways an unusual president of this association; and I feel my responsibilities tonight particularly deeply, both as a woman and as a political theorist.

What I plan to do in this talk is therefore quite ambitious, namely, redeem American political theory, in order to bring out both its intrinsic intellectual importance and its significance for American political science. Far from being demeaning and scientifically superfluous, I would like to show that we have much to gain from seeing our present work as a continuation of the history of political thought in America. Such an outlook would serve to integrate political theory into political science, where it belongs; and it would also offer mainstream political science the self-understanding that only a historically grounded analysis can give it.

Such an effort is necessary, I believe, because American political theory has

long been neglected. It has been charged with an obsessive and unconscious commitment to a liberal faith that prevents it from asking profound and critical questions. Incapable of envisaging alternatives, American political thought is said to be mired in the legacy of John Locke and a mindless optimism. The fact that there have always been many lively controversies, moreover, does nothing to dispel this bland uniformity, because all parties are at some level said to be liberal. In any event our petty intellectual squabbles are mere shadowboxing compared to the *real thing*, the kind of ideological combat that feudalism and class war generated in Europe.

I do not think that American political thought is a compulsive repetition of the same theme. Nor has it suffered a single fall from grace, as some now claim, when it abandoned a premodern republicanism in favor of an amoral, atomized individualism. Nor, finally, need we continue

that endless Jeremiad about the absence of socialism and conservatism. I believe that when we take a good look at our actual tradition of political theory, we will find something better than a drab and cheerless heritage, a poor thing, but our own.

On close examination American political theory is not, in fact, just our own; for it has not been hermetically sealed off from European thought. Isolating it in order to illuminate its peculiarities is bound to reduce it to charmless uniformity. We do have special political traits; but from Locke to Social Darwinism, from the negative to the positive state, from Montesquieu to the Chicago School of political sociology, the controversies and the agreements have been shared, even if not shared identically by both sides of the big puddle. One should not overlook the local circumstances that give a special color to American political ideas, but there is no reason at all to treat them either in quarantine or contemptuously.

At least four obvious political phenomena have contributed to distinguishing American political thought from its cultural neighbors: the early and painless acceptance of white adult male suffrage, federalism, judicial review, and most deeply, the prevalence of chattel slavery long after it had disappeared in the rest of the European world. Not racism—which is universal—but *slavery* in a modern constitutional state is truly unique. Until the Civil War amendments America was neither a liberal nor a democratic country, whatever its citizens might have believed. Yet it did have in place a set of institutions that were capable of becoming so and to an unequal degree. This country had embarked upon two experiments simultaneously: one in democracy, the other in tyranny. This list of the characteristics of our political development is hardly complete (I would add our unique university establishments), but it does point to

features that have set American political institutions apart and have had a decisive impact upon its most reflective citizens.

Of all aspects of this political culture none might seem more peculiarly local than political science, in all its many manifestations and eclecticism. To be sure, political science is only one of the modern social sciences; but it is the one that has flourished most in America, where it has also lately become notably democratic. At the deepest level all the social sciences are part of a process of intellectual democratization. For only recently (in the last two centuries) has either the inclination or the political need to think seriously about the lives of ordinary people as intrinsically significant emerged at all. The history, remote or contemporary, of great men and dramatic events has only very lately made a place for people who are absent from the annals of monumental history. These lives can never be more than statistics; but they have come to matter, partly because social scientists became convinced that they were important in and of themselves and partly because the many began to assert themselves as urban citizens, as voters, as strikers, and as members of increasingly diverse and lay-oriented religious denominations.

All the social sciences are submerged biographies of the silent majority of humanity: the peasant, the artisan, the immigrant, the slave, women, and (in our case) that basic irreducible unit of representative politics, the voter. All of them, even as mere numbers, have surfaced in the human sciences as part of a long and slow democratization of values in a period whose ideologies were often in every degree hostile to these aspirations. This is the historical context that makes the fact-mindedness of the social sciences different from that of those ancient bureaucratic regimes that also liked to keep minute records about their subjects. At their purest, the social sciences are

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knowledge for its own sake about everyone, because everyone is interesting as a social being.

We should not be surprised that this expansiveness has not been a continuous movement in either America or Europe. It would also be far too facile to attribute either the ups or the downs of scientific concern only to ideological commitments. Some of the finest social scientists from Alexander Hamilton to Vilfredo Pareto have been utterly opposed to democracy. Others have been ardently democratic. The democratization of values that is implicit in the social sciences in general is entirely compatible with a great variety of political beliefs and theories, including some of the most destructive and cruel. Nevertheless, I do want to argue that within a welter of diverse ideas the social sciences are fundamentally inclusive in their orientation and that given the institutions of American government, a democratic political science was eventually to be expected. It need hardly be mentioned that this trend was in no way incompatible with a rich tradition of flailing every aspect of America's political culture.

I see no homogeneity and no straight line in our history at all; but I do think that our end was in our beginning, and that those who originally framed our institutions can be seen in retrospect to have given us, in embryonic form, the elements of a science that would best correspond to our political institutions and the social circumstances within which they arose. The works of Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton display the intellectual germs of several kinds of political science, all responding integrally to the government that they created and understood.

The authors of the *Federalist Papers* and Jefferson belonged to a fact-minded and science-oriented cosmopolitan culture. In the brief experience of democracy that the French enjoyed after the Revolution, Jefferson's close friend,

Condorcet, went well beyond anything that had been done in America by applying advanced mathematics to voting in legislative bodies. The older administrative science of the Colbertian tradition was Alexander Hamilton's acknowledged inspiration. And Madison admired Montesquieu as the master of the new science of politics.

There were, from the first, three political sciences in America. Jefferson's was speculative and physiological. Madison's was institutional and historical, and Hamilton's was empirical and behavioral. None was perfect, all were prophetic. Let me begin with Jefferson's occasional writings. He had an undeniably scientific mind in the sense that he had fully absorbed the advances in the natural sciences of his age and that he took a scientist's interest in the physical characteristics of the New World and its inhabitants, especially in order to refute Buffon's slanders upon our flora and fauna. He also accepted Locke's cognitive psychology, which encouraged the empirical study of humanity within its many social and natural environments. As an observer of the human species, he examined his objects exactly as a naturalist would study the beasts and vegetation of an area. The extent to which this set him apart from them is worth noting because Jefferson, who was ideologically by far the most democratic of our intellectual ancestors, was enormously elitist as a scientist and educator. I stress the point and its implications in order to insist that ideology does not determine scientific work nearly as simply or as completely as has been assumed.

Jefferson was sure that our beliefs and preferences were not a matter of choice but that each one of us had been quite differently endowed by nature. We are also the creatures of our environment, which impinges upon us as we try to form a cognitive picture of our experiences. It follows that any effort to impose a single

belief system upon us was as futile as it was psychologically unscientific. What we needed was an education to protect us against false associations of ideas imposed upon us by superstitions, traditions, and other errors. Free government was to be sustained by public education from compulsory primary school to the university. An educated meritocracy, open to all talented citizens, was to prevail, as natural aristocrats were annually "raked from the rubbish" to become the political and scientific leaders of Virginia. Public education was not a random public good for Jefferson, it was based on a scientific theory of learning with obvious political implications. If more democracy was the cure for political ills (as he certainly believed), it was because all governments were to be distrusted. The prosperity of the new nation could not be left to governments, but would depend on the educational system.

These attitudes point to an extraordinary faith in the social and practical value of learning. Schools may, of course, also become constricting institutions—a point that Condorcet understood better than Jefferson, who had no interest in the study of how educational institutions function both to enhance and restrict freedom. He was simply sure that the arts and sciences would underpin liberal democracy.

There were other implications in this anthropology. If Jefferson looked at his fellow citizens as educable subjects, the native American was just part of the scenery. It was his great regret that "they had never been viewed by us as subjects of natural history." He was also sorry that their languages had not been recorded in time in the service of linguistics, a science in which he was deeply interested. It comes as no surprise, then, that in his dealings with the native American population he was in some respects even less just than with his slaves. At least he acknowledged guilt and shame in the lat-

ter case. The Indians were told to behave like the Anglo-Americans; and if they could not do so, they must expect to be exploited. He consistently treated them as children and openly boasted of his intention to bribe them into submission.

The truth of the matter is that it is not social science as such but the kind of inquiries we choose that are often questionable. Jefferson wanted to assimilate social science to natural history. Current psychology permitted him to believe in progress through education for his own kind and to treat the native populations as subjects of physiological speculation and manipulation. Having remained, as it were, natural rather than political beings, they were to be scrutinized and classified, as if they had no rights. This had nothing to do with Jefferson's consistently democratic ideology; he certainly trusted those yeomen, but we should recall that most of the ethical objections to the sciences of man have been rooted in the perception that no human beings should be treated like laboratory animals.

What of Jefferson's friend and loyal associate, James Madison? No man was ever more conscious of public unsteadiness, of change and mutability. He had a historian's mind, which was a great intellectual advantage. It enabled him to penetrate to the logic of collective action even when on the surface there seemed to be nothing but random irrationality and partisan wrangling. By reflecting upon previous occurrences and experiences he was always able to see a pattern amid the confusion of men and events. Consider his papers on representation and the likely conduct of legislators under various rules. Too large an assembly puts Michel's law of oligarchy into effect. The group that sets the agenda is bound to dominate the whole. How long should terms of office last? Long enough for the representatives to learn their jobs, not so long as to make them forget the voters and the fact that they would soon be private citizens

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again, obliged to live under the laws they had passed. Here, too, size and the interactions of parties and factions are considered. Or take his response to Jefferson's suggestion that the Constitution be rewritten every twenty years to allow every generation to decide its own fate. Against this daft proposal, Madison offered two arguments, one psychological, the second prudential. First, there is a need for habit and emotional attachment to institutions if they are to function. Second, deinstitutionalization creates intolerable economic and political instability. No credit will be extended to such a country and there is no guarantee that some future generation might not be swayed to abolish republican government and ruin the system permanently.

Madison devised a profound theory of political rationality that recognized that individuals must be expected to bring limited and self-directed policies to the public arena but that in a constitutional system not only do they become collectively more rational as a whole people, but they also learn to appreciate the necessity of limiting their interests in response to the rights of others (as well as the best possible outcome for the country as a whole). The critics of procedural republicanism have often misread Madison and the institutions he championed. The individual political agent learns to adapt and is forced to become more public-spirited as he accepts and follows the procedures that institutions compel him to follow.

When the question of universal white adult male suffrage came up in Virginia, he cut right through the rhetoric of both parties. If the majority of landless citizens were disenfranchised, they would have every reason to rise up against the freeholders, he warned. In a republic the inequality of property depends upon the consent of the majority. That is its only security. Here was a deeply functional view of democracy, which held that even

some political rights might be institutionally validated. Thus, Madison did not expect the freedom of the press or "the right to amendment" to promote truth or learning. Nevertheless, they were the only way to keep the citizens informed about what the government was doing; and republican government depended on an electorate that could check up on its representatives.

Madison was intellectually not only remote from Jefferson, he was also very unlike his one-time coauthor, Hamilton. I must confess to an intense admiration for Alexander Hamilton as a political scientist but also because he proves how shallow ideological analysis can be. Hamilton was not a democratic or even a liberal politician, but he was quite capable of giving a sophisticated and unbiased account of how electoral politics worked in New York and subordinating his immediate political concerns to his scientific ambitions. His friend Chancellor Kent said of him that he had contemplated "a full investigation of the history and science of civil government . . . and to have the subject treated in reference to past experience upon Lord Bacon's inductive philosophy." And it is with this in mind that all of us here can share his distress when he wrote to Robert Morris in 1782 about New York's balance of trade, "These calculations cannot absolutely be relied on because the data are necessarily uncertain, but they are the result of the best information I can obtain." Here is a fact-minded thinker who fully knows the difference between basing one's policies on always-incomplete information and lusting after certainty.

To understand republican government—which he accepted as necessarily based on the consent of the majority—he looked to its irreducible unit, the individual voter. The first thing that impressed him was "the alarming indifference discoverable in the exercise of so valuable a privilege as voting." When the

citizens do exert themselves, however, they behave quite rationally. Mechanics and manufacturers will always be inclined, with a few exceptions, to give their votes to a merchant in preference to a person of their own profession because they see a friend and patron in him (since he trades in their products) and so are quite ready to trust him to promote their interests. They vote not identity but agency, in short. Hamilton also thought that the electoral chances of "the learned professions"—by which I think he meant lawyers—were good by virtue of their education and presumed impartiality. Voters certainly do want candidates "to understand their feelings and interests," Hamilton noted; but they also want reliable brokers to bring diverse preferences together, which calls for the skills of the lawyer.

Hamilton's greatest contribution to a disaggregating science of political economy was surely his *Report on Manufactures*, in which he displays as much of an interest in individual producers and the incentives to which they might respond, as his political reflections centered on voters. This inclination may well have been fueled by his frantic efforts to make America a strong and active state. Such a structure would demonstrate (even as the frail and miserable Constitution of 1787, which he despised, might fail to demonstrate) that good government can be established by societies of men "from reflection and choice" rather than being driven by "accident and force." The modern state that he envisaged depended on information as no older regime had to, because it must regulate, indirectly, not only a single, unified military, administrative, and productive system but a system based on the rule of law and the consent of its citizens. Its government needed to know exactly not only what should be done but what its citizens would agree to do, individually and collectively.

Starved for sovereignty, Hamilton put his hopes into the Supreme Court; but it was not what he had really wanted. What he got was a far from centralized or coherent state, but it did require information just as much as his administrative model. Representative democracy also needs information. Hence, the Constitution mandates a national census every ten years, and there is a built-in interest among elective officials in the actual interests and beliefs of the voters. Constitutional democracy is inherently a fact-hungry political system, in which both those who govern and those who are governed yearn for solid information.

So far, I have only tried to show how diverse and complex American political theory has been from its very origins. Not all periods in our history have been as creative as the Enlightenment. We have in our bitter century learned again to appreciate their ideals of freedom, human rights, and justice. The founders have left us not only several ways of trying to make sense of American politics but also an enduring public ethos.

In one important respect all three also illustrate the limits of political science. Not one could even suggest a plausible solution to America's greatest single failure, black chattel slavery. History, institutional analysis, and economic calculation were all equally useless. For all their confidence in political knowledge and in their own ability to determine the fate of a nation, they were unable to imagine a multiracial citizenry. No one saw the likelihood of a sectional conflict more clearly than Madison did, yet no one temporized more disastrously than he did when he came up with the federal ratio. The narrowness of the politics of rational compromise confront us starkly (as do those of merely accurate knowledge) when we recall the drift to the Civil War.

Nevertheless, for the study of democratization few eras in American history are more revealing than the first four decades

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of the last century. This is not only because of the enduring political changes that emerged at that time but also because the vocabulary of American political controversy was transformed. President Jackson's use of the language of his most radical supporters in the course of his war against the Bank of the United States really justifies the phrase Jacksonian democracy. This new political style was forged in the state constitutional conventions called to establish white adult male suffrage as a right and not as a limited privilege. No less significant was a new and radically democratic journalism that stressed the dignity of work, equal rights, and free public education not as a means to create a natural aristocracy but as the ground upon which equality of opportunity and self-respect would be built. If economic inequality appeared natural to these democrats, political inequality was excoriated. From the first, fairness was the very essence of their notion of justice. And *rights* was a word that appeared in every democratic sentence. For they were threatened by "aristocrats"—citizens who used wealth to acquire an unfair share of political influence and corrupted the laws. They were the tarnished remnants of Europe and a cultural and a political menace. The European past should be forgotten.

The sense of political isolation from Europe was not felt as a deprivation, but it did raise enduring and perhaps insoluble questions about the proper education for a democratic people. History is not a useful subject. It was all about undemocratic practices and ideologies, and it stuffed young minds with inappropriate fantasies. The sciences, natural and social, were safer. They were also more edifying, reminding the young of the contribution that the inventions of artisans had made to civilization. Madison's plea for reverence as a politically positive state of mind had no appeal for these democrats, but they longed for a usable past of

their own. The study of the unsung many is as much a demand for recognition by the democratized public as it is an object of interest to scientific observers. Unhappily, both were so self-absorbed that they simply ignored what did not touch them immediately. Fearing and hating both slavery and the slave, they looked the other way until they were forced to consider both.

The democrats' ferocious attack on aristocracy could, however, not go unchallenged. One response was to rewrite American history relegating the Revolution to the background and stressing the disciplined Puritans as the fathers of America's free, but hardly egalitarian, political institutions. Literary Whigs, such as Rufus Choate of Massachusetts, offered a disgruntled upper class just such a reading of the past. Tocqueville was one among several visitors who were disturbed by this commercial aristocracy, who disdained the free institutions of their country. These commentators received a perceptive answer from Frederick Grimké, who, in his remarkably dispassionate study of American government, *The Nature and Tendency of Free Institutions*, noted that these elites had no hereditary caste features and no distinct military ethos.

It was also among Whig opponents of democracy that one can discern the beginnings of a political sociology with a special interest in the functions of elites. Choate quite agreed with Tocqueville that the bench and bar had an extraordinary position in the United States. He saw them as bringing tradition, continuity, and stability to the political system. They tied the generations together. Not legislation, but the accretion of judicial precedents must determine the rules; and they develop inarticulately as a slow process, comprehensible only to a few. The law is a single moral unit; but significantly, it did not, for Choate, exist in a social vacuum. It was the creation of a

special group that operated within a political system and was meant to impose itself upon wayward majorities and elected governments. Fortified by this view of the primacy of law as an unchanging inheritance and by the constitutional jurisprudence of Kent and Storey, the operative ideology of the courts became that they were meant to protect every form of property by building an infrangible wall against the threat of democratic legislation.

These conservative thinkers, with their sense of society as a fragile structure, were not opposed to slavery. It was part of the historical inheritance. Nevertheless, political sociology could also serve the few abolitionists who were not moved by religion. Richard Hildreth's truly remarkable book, *Despotism in America*, was, as its title indicates, partly an answer to Tocqueville but also a close analysis of the entire plantation system of the South. Hildreth was no Jacksonian democrat. He defended democracy as the most stable of political systems and the one most likely to promote economic prosperity. All his work on comparative government and on slavery was deeply indebted to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, both in the analysis of equilibrium and disorder in various forms of government and of despotism as a distinct political system. That is what he saw in the South, where fear was the active principle of rule and where the ruling class possessed no discernible political virtue or will to improve. They were not Tocqueville's decadent aristocrats but despots on their plantations, and democracy could not compromise with them. Also like his master, Montesquieu, he saw much that was vital, as well as much that was crushed, in the lives of the enslaved. Finally, Hildreth tried to demonstrate that the bench and bar could use their authority and the existing law to abolish slavery in the United States. Mercifully, he died some years before the Civil War.

One cannot think of Emerson as either a Jacksonian democrat or an aristocratic Whig. No label could do him justice. He remains, after all, *the* American philosopher. And it was as such that he tried to grasp and represent the entire world in which he lived. He not only responded intensely to the stirrings around him, but he also tried to show his enormous public what they meant. The two warring parties were not really the few and the many, they were the party of memory and the party of hope; and America needed both. If Emerson found memory as hard to bear as his democratic neighbors, he also met the reformers with an irony that was truly devastating. They were not at all self-reliant, just self-centered and futile. Nevertheless, his "American Scholar" is all hope, a scientists' Declaration of Independence. It is not just a Jacksonian rejection of the European past but a passionate affirmation of the spirit of discovery. And his essay "Young America" is a hymn to the independent Yankee lad and to the democratic ethos of the age.

Emerson was, however, not only repelled by the frivolity of radical gestures; he was also haunted by memory, especially of the great men of the past. He might believe that we *should* say, "Damn George Washington" every morning; but he was not up to it. Instead, he remembered those who were truly great and tried to integrate them into a democratic faith. *Representative Men* was Emerson's answer to Carlyle's hero worship. The term *representative* was deliberately political. Great men could not be great unless they were able to move, and to be moved by, their public. Greatness was a transaction in which we all had a part. Aristocracy was tamed.

It was a way to encapsule the age in a vision of social interaction in which the normal and the rare could live with each other on democratic, if isolated, terms, bound by a direct unmediated under-

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standing. Thus, also, science and common sense had for Emerson an equal dignity, not because they yielded any certain knowledge but because both were acts of personal and public creativity. Scientific knowledge was not merely Baconian power but an adventure and a door to the new. Though he was utterly skeptical and solitary, Emerson's generous ambition was the same as Lincoln's: to sum up and renew the promise of pre-Civil War America. And they still remind us of it.

If Emerson and his New England disciples defined themselves in contrast to Europe, many Southerners came to think of themselves as a culture distinctly opposed to that of the North. It may well be that political sociology flourishes amid conflict. The defenders of the "peculiar institution," no less than the abolitionists, perceived that they were defending two different ways of life, not just two incompatible labor systems. The Civil War was not only a monumental bloodbath and the first modern war, it was also an ideological struggle that had raged for decades before the first shot was fired.

I wish I could do full justice to the intricacies of Southern political thought; but as I cannot, I will just point to its more lasting characteristics. One was an emphasis on the ethical primacy of society as an organism. The second was a celebration of its elite. And finally, there was the affirmation of personal authority as both inevitable and inherently good. In most cases these notions were couched in the language of social science. Baconian fact-mindedness was very much an overt feature of secular Southern political thought. Malthus and Comte were the accepted authorities. Demographic pessimism and the sociology of hierarchical integrity had an instant appeal. Jefferson's natural rights were abandoned, but not his scientific inclinations.

To any careful reader of pre-Civil War Southern political theory, it is perfectly obvious that this mixture of ideas con-

stituted an indigenous authoritarian ideology that was as utterly unique as was the slavery it encompassed. The secular defense of Southern society took three forms. Slavery might not be just in the abstract, it was conceded, but the idea of the right was not primary. Communal, shared values rooted in the very structure of society really defined the social good. Slavery was woven into the fabric of Southern life, which, as a whole, was well worth defending. It was a bastion of republican values. Generosity, civic duty, honor, a lively sense of the public good, and a martial spirit—all the essence of republican virtue—marked the planters, in contrast to their mercenary and rights-oriented Yankee opponents. Jefferson, who lamented the effects of slavery on the masters, had been wrong. Solidarity and public virtue were rooted in slavery and more than justified it.

Southern political science also supported this view. A good deal of it was exceptionally neologistic. The invention of new words to give readers the impression that they were absorbing an objective, nonevaluative, systematic treatise was a marked trait of its most Baconian writers. Henry Hughes's *Treatise on Sociology* is a particularly intelligent example of this style. Society was divided into *warrantors* and *warrantees* in the South. The *warrantees* had a peculiar ethnic character but were not slaves, since, as in all societies, the *warrantors* were limited by obligations and restraints. They had to provide safety and comfort, as well as public hygiene, already a matter of much social concern.

Third and last, there was the sociology of the ineffable George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All*, which has received more attention now than it did when it was written. His argument was that free labor was pure exploitation, since the laborers lacked the paternal benefits enjoyed by slaves, who, as the planters' capital, were valuable assets. Even more interesting was his

claim that this was indeed a despotic regime but that despotism was really a benign system, because it gave the weak a whole range of informal ways of asserting themselves within a society in which each one had a suitable niche. Given that all political regimes were exploitative, despotism was quite tolerable. So much for Montesquieu and Hildreth.

These political theories were heralds of things to come. In a way the South won the war of ideas. Northern social scientists certainly did not come to approve of slavery, but after the Civil War they adopted the sociological fatalism that had been so notable a mark of Southern thought. Moral pessimism was nothing new in America. It had its roots in Calvinism, and both John Adams and John Calhoun shared its overwhelming sense of human depravity. Ambition, avarice, violence, and guile marked the few no less than the many, and both feared for the fate of the republic. Yet in very different ways, both put their minds to devising governmental institutions that might withstand the inevitable onslaught of corruption. Adams looked to checks and balances, Calhoun to an intricate system of vetoes; but both took it for granted that institutions could and should stem the tide of political decay. The fatalism of the post-Civil War period was quite different. It was not moral but biologicistic and was indifferent to political initiative, which seemed irrelevant in an overdetermined social world.

The intellectual tone of the veterans was often coarse and aggressive. One can find it in the letters of Justice Holmes to Sir Frederick Pollock no less than in the writings of William Graham Sumner. Facts are always hard and insuperable. They function as weapons against the "sentimental," the "humanitarian" and presumably feeble. The hopes that had rung in the essays and speeches of Frederick Douglass during the struggle for the Fifteenth Amendment were soon dis-

persed. Indeed, rights were said to be meaningless, except as acts of force. The end of Reconstruction, especially, had a deadening impact. Both Burgess and Dunning, the founders of academic political science, wrote books on it, applauding the nationalization of politics that Reconstruction had achieved and deeply deploring the effort to secure the rights of the freedmen. Their equality was impossible for Burgess because of racial reasons, for Dunning because blacks were socially backward and only military force could ever impose them on their former masters. Peace and justice required their exclusion from Southern politics. Sumner, to be sure, was no racist; but Reconstruction was his favorite example to illustrate the power of custom and the impotence of the state. Southern black and white mores were simply too different to be joined. A total separation of the two populations would thus quickly reestablish harmony. This, we might recall, was the social science written into *Plessy versus Ferguson* of unlamented memory.

The end of Reconstruction was only one inducement to sociological fatalism. A baffled inability to understand the world that followed the Civil War had the same effect. Social scientists felt overwhelmed by changes that reminded them of the forces of natural necessity. This sometimes served as an alibi for inaction; but it was also a pathway to a new science, one that would at last uncover the interactions of all the human elements that compose society and order them according to comprehensive laws. If only the underlying causes of change could be grasped, then certainty and even predictability might restore a measure of intellectual control. Southern sociological fatalism—now amply fortified by new race sciences, Social Darwinism, and classical economics—revealed regulative impersonal forces, which would explain the effect of new immigrants, urbanization, and the new technological indus-

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trialism. Every conceivable biological and geological theory was snapped up and ground to fit what passed for "hard" facts and to assuage the need for intellectual certainty.

With this in mind, one ought to read *The Education of Henry Adams* with some respect. He took the message of evolution and perpetual social change to its logical end. Given that nothing endured, education was simply impossible. Every lesson learned in youth was false and burdensome in one's mature years. The America he had left before the Civil War was gone forever and all its doctrines had been shown to be absurd. There was no point in trying to teach anyone anything, except perhaps history, since it was settled (though merely ornamental). In politics all was vanity.

But if Adams was the extreme that illuminates, William Graham Sumner and Lester Ward were the norm that defined an intellectual generation. They really put Spencer and social evolution on the intellectual map as they labored to give the social sciences the same prestige that the natural sciences enjoyed. At first Sumner had used the vocabulary of natural selection to justify the new captains of industry but also to hammer in such facts to prove that political action was futile. When he came to write *Folkways*, he had, however, given up biological analogies. It is in many ways a very remarkable book. Nothing endures, and nothing can be done. Even scientific knowledge is temporary. We are all the blind prisoners of the mores of our time and place. In America democracy is above being questioned, and evolution is the fad of the age. Sumner was the real inventor of the paradoxes of the sociology of knowledge. *Folkways* is both dogmatic and skeptical. We may know nothing, but he was sure that Hamilton had been wrong in believing that will, rather than fate and force, could determine the government of a people.

Ideologically, Sumner's most outspoken and admired critic was Lester Ward. The argument between them was by no means the only ideological conflict of this contentious period, but the scholars of the time regarded it as by far the most significant. Ward did not challenge Sumner's scientific assumptions. He only added Comte's taxonomies to them, which hardly made his system more flexible. His message was that evolution had made humanity capable of mastering nature and of transforming society through democratic governmental action, which meant not a return to ideas of rights and consent but universal education guided by social science. This would bring about a "sociocracy," in which an informed public and a powerful executive would soon prove that art could triumph over nature. Not that Ward offered any specific examples of how political invention or social technology would work. He was keen on statistics and on the diffusion of knowledge; but beyond that, the big picture was his real terrain. And while Sumner finally recognized that science was unstable, Ward never doubted that it was the rock upon which social engineers would stand. Yet for all their differences, they inhabited the same intellectual universe, in which society was a determined organic whole, subject to laws that social science would eventually fully grasp.

Even Thorsten Veblen shared many of these assumptions, but he does stand out as a conspicuous nay-sayer. His eyes were fixed on the enemies of progress, on the atavistic, nonproductive plutocracy of America that stood in the way of the productivity, the instinct of workmanship, and the egalitarian values that industrial society demanded and could evoke. Quite apart from the lasting interest of his assault on the betrayers of the work ethic, Veblen is a fine example of the diversity of American social theory. He was also an unclassifiable moralist. In this no one

resembled him more than Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who argued that the domestication of women away from the productive process was out of step with the demands of a society geared to efficient production. Every line Gilman wrote shows an outraged sense of justice, but she could not resort to the liberal vocabulary that could best have expressed it. The notion of individuals as items in an evolutionary whole seemed no less necessary to her than to Veblen. These were certainly voices of protest, and they illustrate two things at least: that American intellectual life even in that rather dismal age was anything but uniform and that one cannot pin conventional ideological labels on them. And none of them—not Sumner any more than Veblen—felt at home in the muscle-flexing, imperialist and megapolitical world of Theodore Roosevelt.

It was time for a generational change and for the emergence of reform-minded political movements, of which a new political science was to become a part. It was more modest in its intellectual ambitions and perfectly frank about its civic ideals. I refer specifically to the birth of the study of public administration and of municipal government, inspired by what Charles Merriam called "a saturnalia of political corruption," which mobilized political scientists. They took an empirical turn to the investigation of actual political conduct and institutional functions and considered what could be done to put them on a more honest path. It was the beginning of contemporary political science.

As the memory of the Civil War receded, neither fatalism nor struggle seemed quite so ineluctable. Their and our university culture favored more contained, pragmatic, and specialized social sciences. The surrounding cities offered an open field for reform-minded study, as their condition affected many a conscience. Charles Merriam was the perfect

representative of this new, university-based, city-wise social science but also a Janus figure; and that is why I shall end with him. He looked back to Sumner and ahead along with John Dewey. And through his students he became the architect and guide of American political science as it developed after World War II.

The great theoretical question for him was, "What did democracy mean in the days of the union, the railroad, the trust and of modern business organization. . . . What was to be the theoretical and practical program of democracy?" He had no use for the crude Darwinism that equated social success with biological fitness, nor was he a racist in any of its numerous forms. Nevertheless, in retrospect, it does seem clear that he was as overwhelmed by change and uncertainty as his predecessors. And so he looked to statistics and to depth psychology—both poorly understood—and applauded all that was being done in the name of eugenics with little reflection and with baseless expectations of permanence. However, he also followed Dewey in his efforts to construct a meaningful democratic theory that took change for granted.

Merriam and Dewey did not return to the doctrines that had guided American politics before the Civil War. The Constitution was thought to be seriously flawed, especially the separation of powers. In any case, processes, not structures, mattered. Everything Dewey said against abstraction took root among Merriam's students. This was not, however (as it is often said to be), just a revolt against juristic formalism. It was, rather, an effort to realize an ideal of an impossibly perfect science that had reached the ultimate determining causes of change, which would permit accurate predictions, professional expertise, and unchallengeable political reform.

Merriam's own theory restated Dewey's notion of social planning not as a matter

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of fixed governmental blueprints imposed on the citizens but as a continuous process. If Dewey insisted on the need to create a public, that is, a body of actively engaged citizens, Merriam hoped for political learning by doing and for a new prudence. Both mixed democratic participation and social science, and this corresponded to the emerging practices of both state and national governments. Perhaps regrettably, Merriam was less inclined to see science—as Dewey did—as a state of mind, rather than as an accumulation of facts. In the face of unceasing change, however, both did offer a philosophy of citizenship in which the capacity for perpetual adaptation to novelty was sustained by information and communal activity. The outcome was that the democratic tendencies of the social sciences generally and the overt ideology of mainstream American political scientists were now in harmony. They were to be both good democratic citizens and rigorously objective adherents of the ethos of science.

With that, I have come to the door of the present. But I cannot close without remarking that in the wake of World War II and the Civil Rights movement, we no

longer feel compelled to despise the values expressed in the language of rights, justice, liberty, and consent with which American political theory began. I hope that I have shown that its history has been a profound meditation upon our political experiences and our peculiar and often tragically flawed institutions. I expect—indeed hope—that others will give different accounts. However, if one were to cast aspersions on American political theory, it should not be that it is Oedipally attached to liberalism but that like the rest of the political classes of Europe and America, it failed to understand itself and lacked the imagination to project a plausibly better future. If we can learn to do better, it will be because democracy is itself dynamic. The history of American political science is a part of its development, which was neither painless nor uniform; but it has been an intellectual adventure of the first order.

Note

This essay is the presidential address presented on 30 August 1990 at the 86th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in San Francisco. I offer these remarks for the records of the Association rather than as a scholarly paper.

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