

## **BEHAVIORALISM IN AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 1908, a reaction against the formalism and legalism of the traditional political approach was expressed by Graham Wallas, an Englishman, and Arthur F. Bentley, an American. Not until the "Chicago school" of political science during the nineteen twenties and thirties did the behavioral approach achieve an empirical focus. Behaviorism gathered force in the forties, and its status in the fifties was a "movement of protest." In the sixties, behaviorist succeeded in reaching high and strategic positions in academic and the American Political Science Association, and an empirical political science has firmly established within the discipline. Starting from 1967, a post-behavioral "revolution" was underway in American political science. The revolution was motivated by a deep dissatisfaction with the contemporary political science as a discipline and as a profession. Post-behavioralists demand active political involvement. They believe that it is impossible to maintain a value-free position; that it is the moral obligation of the political scientist to take a more active role in politics for the reshaping society. At present the behavioralism in the American political profession is dominant; the post-behavioralist has survived.

### **BEHAVIORALISM IN AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

American political science follows the tradition of Plato and Aristotle in searching for the good life and the just state. In Platonic and Aristotelian thought there are certain universal and absolute principles of goodness and justice which man, by virtue of his reason, can discover. The state comes into existence in order to satisfy human needs and desires, and the most just state is that which enables each person to perform the social function for which he is best suited, that is, as Aristotle put it, to give every man his due. Politics within this tradition is not separate from ethics; the search for the good life is associated with the search for the just state.

It was not until the early Renaissance that Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) attempted to remove politics from its ethical context, to view the state and society in a purely amoral and detached manner, and to bring politics in touch with practices. He rejected traditional norms, such as natural law (instead, he conceived of law as a positive rule, created by the sovereign) and explored a pragmatic method of political analysis focusing on greatness, fame, and power. He considered the state to be an organized force, supreme in its own territory and pursuing a conscious policy of aggrandizement in its relations with other states. Politics was an end itself. In this sense Machiavelli is truly modern. However, because of his amoral methods, Machiavelli is chastised by Leo Strauss as a "teacher of evil."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, George Sabine points out the fact that "Machiavelli's political theories were not developed in a systematic manner, but in the form of remarks upon particular situations."<sup>2</sup> Probably Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was the first to develop a systematic political theory. His theory was based upon scientific principles and sloughed off religious elements. He came to terms with human nature both in its individual and social features. The first of the four parts of his *Leviathan*,<sup>3</sup> entitled "Of Man," is devoted to an analysis of human psychology. Human nature, asserted Hobbes, is naturally and fundamentally selfish, quarrelsome, power-hungry, cruel, and perverse. The principle behind all human behavior is self-preservation. Based on these psychological premises, Hobbes concludes that the state of nature is one of war of every man against every man. In order to maintain social order, it is necessary to submit society unconditionally to an absolute authority: the sovereign.

The significance of Machiavellian and Hobbesian theories lies not in their methodological orientation toward the analysis of concrete political behavior. Aristotle centuries before had carefully collected factual data as a prerequisite to theoretical formulation. The significance of their theories lies rather in their attempts to remove totally ethics from politics and in their analysis of human psychology which, in Hobbes' case, describe man's passions and ethics in terms of motion and the belief that political philosophy as a science is necessary and possible.

This behavioral tradition disintegrated after the day of Hobbes. The rediscovery of society became the dominant concern of political thought. The theory of social contract was developed by Locke to justify limited monarchy and the right of revolution, and by Rousseau to uphold pure democracy, which meant a society of free consent, and a sovereignty vested in all and voiced by the general will for the maintenance of liberty in law. Following the Industrial Revolution, socialism, first in an utopian form, then in the scientific and political doctrines of Marx, appeared. Because of the influence of the rising biological science and the theory of

evolution, the concept of the state as an organism was widely held. The tendency of those who held this view was toward a conception of a strong state. Since then, idealism and liberalism has emphasized the unity of the state and the predominant position of the common good over the good of the individual and has left little room for individual discretion. Totalitarianism, both of the right and left, has found in idealism an advantageous source of theoretical support. On the contrary, liberalism acknowledges no limitation upon individual will except that imposed by individual conscience. Therefore, the fundamental problems of political inquiry in the past years have been essentially the same as those of a thousand years ago: the relation between the individual and the state, or between liberty and authority. Political analysis has also centered on those same vague concepts such as justice, state, social contract, general will, sovereignty, common good, and liberty.

### BEHAVIORALISM

Modern political scientists are so burdened by reading and examination of the "Great Books"<sup>4</sup> that they are left with little intellectual energy with which to develop an original theory. In 1908, a reaction against the formalism and legalism of the traditional political approach was expressed by two political scientists. Their books marked the beginning of the modern behavioral approach to political analysis. "The study of politics is just now in a curiously unsatisfactory position," Graham Wallas, an Englishman, indicated in his *Human Nature in Politics*: "nearly all students of politics analyse institutions and avoid the analysis of man."<sup>5</sup> He stated that when these students dealt with "abstract men," they based their theories upon conceptions of human nature which have never been tested "either by experience or by study."<sup>6</sup> Wallas' feelings were supported by Arthur F. Bentley in the United States who stated in his *The Process of Government* that: "We have a dead political science, "because it is formal study of the most external characteristics of governing institutions . . . . When it is necessary to touch up this barren formalism with a glow of humanity, an injection of metaphysics is used. There will be a good deal to say about civic virtue or ideals or civilization."<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Wallas nor Bentley made any immediate impression on the prevailing current of political science. Not until the "Chicago school" of political science during the nineteen twenties and thirties when Charles E. Merriam and Harold D. Lasswell assumed the attitude of political inquiry formally held by Wallas and Bentley did the behavioral approach achieve an empirical focus. Under Merriam's leadership the "Chicago school" stressed the need of "science" in political

science. For Merriam the need was essentially for what came to be called "policy science."<sup>8</sup> Attacking the traditional political approach, Lasswell argues:

Many of the most influential political writings - - those of Plato, Locke, Rousseau, the Federalist, and others - - have not been concerned with political inquiry at all, but with the justification of existent or proposed political structures. We say such works formulate political doctrine rather than propositions of political science.<sup>9</sup>

This standpoint represents "a fairly explicit revolt against the established tradition."<sup>10</sup> Debates that have taken place since that time have rallied primarily around the banners of "the behaviorists" and those with whom they do battle, "the institutionalists" or "anti-behaviorists."

Both the behaviorists and the institutionalists agree that the decline of modern political theory is a fact, but they do not agree as to the causes. The controversy focuses on two major issues: One is methodological in character, that is, the question of the application of the scientific method of the natural sciences to the study of politics. The second is derived from the first, that is, science vs. values, stated in other way, the question of the total removal of ethical elements from politics.

Behavioralists share a mood toward "scientific" methods of investigation and analysis.<sup>11</sup> Behavioralists maintain that the chief task of contemporary political science is to provide verified or verifiable generalizations of political behavior through the application of the method of science. Upholding this standpoint, Lasswell asserts:

Theorizing, . . . about politics, is not to be confused with metaphysical speculation in terms of abstractions hopelessly removed from empirical observation and control . . . . But this standpoint is not to be confused, on the other hand, with 'brute empiricism' - - the gathering of 'facts' without a corresponding elaboration of hypotheses . . . . Of themselves, of course, 'facts' are mere collections of details; they are significant only as data for hypotheses.<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to this empirical approach, the institutional approach by its confinement of inquiry to the state, which is comprehensive political institution, restrains itself from touching upon the political reality of human behavior. The confusing variety of concepts of the state is so vast<sup>13</sup> that the state "does not serve to identify the properties of a phenomenon that give the latter a political quality."<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the broadest generalizations provided by the institutional approach cannot meet the tests of scientific method.

In rejecting the reasoning of the behaviorists, the institutionalists argue that

indulgence in the mood of science may cause political research to limit its inquiries to only what lends itself to precise empirical analysis and to eliminate certain highly fruitful inquiries, such as "inquiry into value" and "formulation and exploration of grand hypothesis."<sup>15</sup> The institutionalists go further to a denial of the analogy of the natural sciences by arguing

- (1) that there are no regularities in human behavior (no compulsions which direct and limit human behavior);
- (2) that if such regularities or compulsions exist they are not significant for understanding relationships among men; or
- (3) if they exist and are significant, we do not have the capacity or facilities for scrutiny which would yield sure identifications and dependable descriptions.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, according to the institutionalists, the fundamental weakness of the behavioral science is rooted in a false conception of empiricism which breaks with "common sense" understanding of politics.<sup>17</sup> However, this particular criticism does not define "common sense" for us nor "does science demand the repudiation of common sense."<sup>18</sup>

On the issue of whether ethical values should have a place in politics, the institutionalists believe that politics is simply the study of values and value systems, because politics and ethics always have been closely associated. It is natural for the ethical theorists to express their own preferences about reality in accordance with certain prior standards of evaluation, and, furthermore, to state the ideal goals toward which the state and society ought to be directed. For them, this is well within the tradition of classics of political science. But the behavioralists believe that this very tradition is responsible for the decline of political theory. This tradition, as Lasswell points out, failed to recognize "the existence of two distinct components in political theory - - the empirical propositions of political science and the value judgments of political doctrine."<sup>19</sup> What the political scientists should concern himself with is the empirical propositions, not the value judgments. Value judgments are:

statements not of fact but of meaning, they are statements not of what is but of what ought to be, and it is not possible logically to derive a statement of what ought to be from a statement of what is.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the behavioralists assert, understanding of politics has come to mean knowledge of what actually happens in interpersonal and intergroup relations in society, rather than of what ought to happen.

The two opposing camps wage a continuing battle, and each is struggling not only for survival but also for supremacy. Behavioralism gathered force in the forties, and its status in the fifties was described by Robert Dahl as a "movement of

protest.”<sup>21</sup> In the sixties, behavioralist “succeeded” in reaching high and strategic positions in academic and in the American Political Science Association, and had won “a qualified victory.”<sup>22</sup> An empirical political science has firmly established itself within the mainstream of American political science.

### POST-BEHAVIORALISM

Success brings new problems and expectations in the discipline. In later 1969, David Easton observed that a post-behavioral “revolution” was “underway in American political science.”<sup>23</sup> The beginning of the revolution can be dated back to 1967 with the publication of the *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behavioralism*<sup>24</sup> and with the formation of the Caucus for a New Political Science at the American Political Science Association Meeting in Chicago the same year.<sup>25</sup> The challenges came from a large group known as the “New Left” and was directed against behavioral orthodoxy. The “revolution” was motivated by a deep dissatisfaction with the contemporary political science as a discipline and as a profession. As a discipline political science has failed to design a plan for development. Its “abstraction-analysis” oriented research loses touch with realities of politics; its ideology of “empirical conservatism” confines the political scientist exclusively to the description and analysis of the established order. Because of his irrelevant research and non-involvement in the real political life, the political scientist becomes apolitical. Political science as such is unable to anticipate either domestic or international crisis.<sup>26</sup> To change the discipline’s basic orientation post-behavioralists all require “active political involvement.”<sup>27</sup> Political scientists should, as Christian Bay argues, “become participating citizens of our societies and of the world,” and take a more active role in politics for the solution of urgent contemporary social problems.<sup>28</sup> The post-behavioralists believe that it is impossible to maintain a value-free position; that it is the moral obligation of the political scientist to take positions on public issues about which his competence may give him special knowledge. In other words, “to know is to bear the responsibility for acting and to act is to engage in reshaping society.”<sup>29</sup> Political science with such an action-orientation should also “politicize” the professional association.

Easton’s response to these criticisms seems to reflect the majority attitudes of the behavioralists. Political scientists do need to be more relevance-action oriented, but there should be no compromise on value-free research. Easton argues: The normal ideal commitments of science are “technical proficiency in the search for reliable knowledge, the pursuit of basic understanding with its necessary divorce

from practical concerns, and the exclusion of value specification as beyond the competence of science. It is these ideals that behavioral research of political science has sought to import into the discipline."<sup>30</sup> In the past decades, behavioralism "has shifted the balance of concern from prescription, ethical inquiry, and action to description, explanation, and verification."<sup>31</sup> Startling from the interwar years, interest within the discipline has moved "from structure and policy to process".<sup>32</sup> The fields and foci of political science have also changed. Waldo's survey data on articles published in "general political science" journals during five selected periods (1909-1914, 1925-1929, 1939-1941, 1952-1954, 1969-1971) indicates that among thirteen categories the two dominant fields in all five periods were normative and descriptive theory, and comparative government and politics. Public policy had been one of the dominant fields until 1969. In the recent period (1969-1971), public opinion, elections, voting, parties, and pressure groups also have become dominant fields.<sup>33</sup>

Although political science today is more scientific than it was, it has not yet developed a single theory of politics which commands the allegiance of most leading political analyst. Among various competing paradigms in political science, Easton's systems analysis and Gabriel Almond's structural-functionalism have permeated the fields widely.<sup>34</sup> However, "the prospects for an early resolution of our paradigmatic perplexities are not bright."<sup>35</sup> The attitudes of political scientists toward post-behavioralism today can be seen from Kendall L. Baker and associates' survey of 176 political scientists in the Mountain West. They found that behavioralism has far more adherents within the political science profession than does post-behavioralism "Over a third of the respondents scored high on behavioralism scale, while only slightly over a fourth scored low. In contrast, less than a fifth of the respondents were relatively positively oriented to post-behavioralism, while almost 40% opposed."<sup>36</sup> The primary problem of the "New Left" as pointed out by Glendenski and associates is: "It is not altogether clear what directions its new political consciousness will take."<sup>37</sup> Within the discipline there is a consensus on more involvement and action. What concerns most political scientists is: A political scientist may engage in three kinds of activity: teaching, research, and practical politics. If a political scientist brings his knowledge to bear on political and social issues, what criteria shall guide his choice: What degree of involvement and in what styles will that involvement appear? Christian Bay suggests a simple resolution: "His own mind and heart and his own experience and study and reflections are his ultimate guideposts."<sup>38</sup> This approach attempts to impose one's own value on political issues and is obviously biased and unwanted.

At present behavioralism in the American Political science discipline is dominant; the post-behavioralists have been absorbed in the main stream of political science -- behavioralism. Roettger's survey of political scientists, who have made the most significant contributions to the discipline during the periods 1945-60, 1960-70, and 1970-Present, provided evidences of "the triumph of behavioralism" and "the acceptance of quantitative techniques."<sup>39</sup> Looking ahead we are sure that the main lines of development in the political science will continue. American political scientists are always to "stand ready to preserve what is working and change what is not."<sup>40</sup>

### FOOTNOTES

1. Leo Stauss, *Thought on Machiavelli* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1958), pp. 9, 261.
2. George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (Rev. ed., New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1958), p. 342.
3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1st ed., New York: Collier Books, 1962).
4. Andrew Hacker, "Capital and Carbuncles: The 'Great Books' Reappraised," *American Political Science Review*, 48 (September, 1954), 775-86.
5. Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (3rd ed., New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1921), Introduction.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Author F. Bentley, *The Process of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908), p. 162.
8. Charles E. Merriam, *New Aspects of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925). See also G. E. G. Catlin's *Science and Method of Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1927) and Stuart A. Rice's *Quantitative Methods in Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1928). Both Catlin and Rice emphasized the need for more "science".
9. Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (5th ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. xi.
10. David Truman, "The Impact on Political Science of the Revolution in the Behavioral Science," in Stephen K. Bailey and others (eds.), *Research Frontiers in Politics and Government* (Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution, 1955).
11. Robert Dahl, "The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Movement to a successful Protest," *American Political Science Review*, 55 (December, 1961), 763-72.
12. Lasswell and Kaplan, *Power and Society*, p. x.
13. Charles H. Titus, "A Nomenclature in Political Science," *American Political Science Review*, 25 (February, 1931), 45-60. In this article Titus claims to have collected one hundred and forty-five separate definitions of state.
14. David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (3rd ed., New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1960), p. 113.



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15. Charles S. Hyneman, *The Study of Politics: The Present State of American Political Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), p. 153.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
17. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, tr. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936). See especially the last chapter, and also his "An Epilogue" in Herbert J. Storing (ed.), *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962).
18. John H. Schaar and Sheldon S. Wolin, "Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics: A Critique," *American Political Science Review*, 57 (March, 1963), 125-60
19. Lasswell and Kaplan, *Power and Society*, p. xiii.
20. Arnold Brecht, "Beyond Relativism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review*, 41 (June, 1947), 740-88.
21. Dahl, "The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: . . . . .".
22. Dwight Waldo, "Political Science: Tradition, Discipline, Profession, Science, Enterprise" in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Political Science: Scope And Theory* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 1-130.
23. David Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science", *American Political Science Review*, LXIII, December 1969, pp. 1051-1061. This was Easton's *APSR* presidential address. So far, this article is the best on post-behavioralism.
24. Charles A. McCoy and John Playford, eds. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.).
25. According to Theodore J. Lowi, there were "two elements to the revolt represented by the Caucus. One was concerned with the question of scientific pseudo-neutrality and was at bottom an intellectual revolt. The other was concerned with organizational non-neutrality and was obviously a question of organizational revolt." The policy of the Caucus has moved toward organizational. To Lowi, the failure of the Caucus is the "intention of the Caucus, as spelled out in the letter and spirit of its platforms, was simply to take over the Association in order to have it serve a different set of masters." See Theodore J. Lowi, "The Politics of Higher Education: Political Science as a Case Study," in George J. Graham, Jr. and George W. Carey, (eds.), *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science* (New York: David McKay Company, 1972) and Alan Wolfe, "Unthinking about the Thinkable: Reflections on the Failure of the Caucus of a New Political Science," *Politics and Society*, I, No. 3, May 1970, pp. 393-406. Both Lowi and Wolfe were members of the Caucus Executive Committee of the Caucus for a New Political Science in 1967. Also see Henry S. Kariel, *Saving Appearances: The Reestablishment of Political Science* (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1972), Herbert Reid, "Contemporary American Political Science in the Crisis of Industrial Society," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (August 1972), 339-366, Marvin Surkin and Alan Wolfe, (eds.), *An End to Political Science: The Caucus Papers* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), and the *Politics and Society* which is a five year old journal and reflects the new currents.
26. David Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science:" See also H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) and C. A. McCoy and J. Playford, (eds.), *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behaviorism*.
27. Robert T. Golembiewski, Charles S. Bullock, III, and Harrell R. Rodgers, Jr., (eds.), *The*

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- New Politics: Polarization or Utopia?* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970).  
p. 1.
28. "Law or Justice? An Emerging Conception of Citizenship," in Glembiewski and associates, (eds.), *The New Politics*, pp. 32-48.
  29. Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science."
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Ibid.*
  32. Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus, *The Development of American Political Science: From Burgess to Behaviorism* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), p. 133. Also see Waldo, "Political Science: Tradition, Discipline, Profession, Science, Enterprise."
  33. See Waldo, "Political Science: . . . . ."
  34. David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Wiley, 1965); Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, (eds.), *Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: System, Process, and Policy*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 2nd ed., 1978).
  35. Alvery Leiserson, "Charles Merriam, Max Weber, and the Search for Synthesis in Political Science," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LXIX, 1 (March 1975), pp. 175-185. This article was Leiserson's *APSA* presidential address.
  36. "A Note on Behaviorists and Post-Behaviorists in Contemporary Political Science," in *P. S.*, Vol. 5, 3 (Summer 1972), pp. 271-273. *P. S.*, the American Political Science Association's professional journal, is published quarterly.
  37. Golendieski and associates, (eds.), *The New Politics*, p. 9.
  38. "Law or Justice? . . . ." in Glendienskinand associates, (eds.), *The New Politics*.
  39. Walter B. Roettger, "Strata and Stability: Reputations of American Political Scientists," *P. S.*, Vol. XI, 1 (Winter 1978), pp. 6-12.
  40. Austin Ranney, "The 'Dine Science': Political Engineering in American Culture," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LXX, 1 (March 1976), pp. 140-148. This article was Ranney's *APSA* presidential address.