



Political Science in the United States: Past and Present

Author(s): David Easton

Source: *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol. 6, No. 1, The Future of the State (1985), pp. 133-152

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1600975>

Accessed: 25/05/2009 06:34

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sageltd>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

Past and Present

DAVID EASTON

The *International Political Science Review* had originally planned to include an article in each issue on some aspects of the state of political science generally and also in specific countries. Severe space constraints and the sloth of the general editor have conspired to leave this intention unfulfilled, although an excellent review by Pierre Favre on the discipline in France did appear in 1981. The idea still strikes me as a good one and we shall try to include discipline reviews from time to time at least.

The present issue contains an interesting look at political science in the United States by one of its most influential practitioners. The article by David Easton that follows was prepared for an audience that has had little exposure to American or Western social science. This gives it a quality making it particularly attractive for the international perspective of this journal. We have decided to print the article despite the fact that a version has been published elsewhere because of its interest and because we know that virtually none of our readers will have had the opportunity of seeing it in its original "home," *Political Science and the Law*, the journal of the Shanghai Academy of Political Science.

John Meisel

Before we begin this overview of political science in the United States, it would be helpful to have some idea of what this discipline covers. How are we to describe its subject matter?

Political science has been defined in many ways—as the study of power, the study of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force, the study of the good life, of the state, and so on. If there is one thing that distinguishes Western political science, it is that it has not yet arrived at a consensus on how to describe its subject matter at the most inclusive level. For reasons that are elaborated at length elsewhere (see Easton, 1981a), I have chosen to characterize political science as the study of the way in which decisions for a society are made and considered binding most of the time by most of the people. That is to say, to seek to

understand political life is to address oneself to the study of the authoritative allocation of values (valued things) for a society.

Political scientists are, therefore, different from economists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists. As political scientists, we are interested in all those actions and institutions in society more or less directly related to the way in which authoritative decisions are made and put into effect, and the consequences they may have (see Easton, 1981b). In effect, this is a description of what we may call any and all political systems. It is probably fair to say that this way of identifying political systems seems to have won the favor of many political scientists over the last quarter of a century.

With this conception of the study of politics, let us now turn to an examination of what has been happening in Western, especially American political science, during the twentieth century. It has passed through four stages. Each of these has been distinctive. Each has been incorporated in and, we hope, improved upon by each succeeding stage. I shall give the following names to the various stages: the formal (legal), the traditional (informal or prebehavioral), the behavioral, and the postbehavioral. I propose to discuss each of these in turn.

THE FORMAL AND TRADITIONAL STAGES

Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, political science started out with the conviction that once we have described the laws governing the distribution of power in a political system, we will have obtained an accurate understanding of how political institutions operate. Students of politics assumed that there was a reasonably close fit between what constitutions and laws said about the rights and privileges people held in various political offices and the way in which they acted in those offices (see Eckstein, 1966).

Late in the nineteenth century, Walter Bagehot in Great Britain, followed by Woodrow Wilson in the United States (when he was a student and later a professor), made a major discovery. To everyone's surprise, they found that around the formal structure of political offices and institutions there were all kinds of informal behavior and organizations in which power over decision making might lie. Bagehot, Wilson, and others discovered them in the informal committees of their respective legislatures and in the political parties. Later scholars added interest or pressure groups to a growing list of informal institutions to be taken into account.

These findings introduced a new stage in the development of political science. They diverted attention away from the formal, legal structures to the informal practices surrounding them. This change, which had occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century, was in full swing by the 1920s. People who trained in the United States from the 1920s to the 1940s were exposed largely to what has come to be called traditional political science, the name for the second distinctive phase of political research in the twentieth century. During this period, training included a great deal of attention to the operation of political parties and their effect on Congress or Parliament and to the growth, in the United States, of pressure groups and other types of groups. The latter were drawn to our attention and analyzed in depth, initially by Arthur Bentley (1949) who was ignored at the time, and later, in new ways, by Pendleton Herring (1929) and David Truman (1951).

Methodologically, this traditional period was one in which more attention was paid to mere description and the collection of information about political processes than to overarching theories about how they operate. In fact, however, a latent theory unobtrusively guided research. Even though most of the scholars of that period were not conscious of it, they really saw the political process as a giant mechanism for making decisions. Decisions were, as one scholar, Merle Fainsod (1940: 298), put it, a product of a "parallelogram of forces." This meant that when decisions were to be made, whether at the legislative or administrative levels, they were seen as being subjected to a vast array of pressures from groups in society—from political parties, from other parts of the bureaucracy itself, from interest groups, from public opinion, and so on. These pressures played against each other, developing a parallelogram of forces that, through bargaining, negotiation, adaptation, compromise, and adjustment (terms commonly used to describe the process), would arrive at some equilibrium point for that time and place. This equilibrium point would yield a particular policy, or the policy could be called the point of equilibrium among the various competing forces pressing against decision makers. If at some time one of these social forces should change for whatever reason—as for example because of a change in the economic structure or in social attitudes, or in the occupants of decision-making roles—demands for modification of old policies or for the introduction of new policies might arise. Competition among the various groups for influence over the policy would then begin again, and a new point of equilibrium might be achieved (see Easton, 1981a). As I have indicated, for the most part, this equilibrium theory remained only latent in the literature.

The characteristic methods of research during this traditional period were no less informal than their theoretical base. Little by way of special methods was used for the collection of data or for their analysis. Methods were not considered to be problematic, that is, as areas that required special attention or skills. Everyone was equally well equipped to collect and analyze information about politics. As a result, there were no formal or specified methods for testing the reliability of information acquired or of findings and interpretations based upon such information.

In addition, it was often difficult to distinguish whether the research worker was expressing his or her own preferences or was, in fact, describing how institutions operate and how people behave in political life. Statements relating what should be and what is were often almost inextricably intertwined. Facts and values played havoc with each other.

Finally, my own experience as a graduate student reflects the lack of theoretical coherence of traditional political science. At Harvard University, I took many different courses in political science. They covered the history of political thought, municipal or local politics, constitutional law, foreign policy, government regulation of industry, interest or pressure groups, international relations, the governments of specific foreign countries, and the making of laws in Congress. At the end of my graduate training my head was in a whirl. No one had ever tried to help me understand why my interest in politics required me to be exposed to such a wide variety of subject matters aside from the fact that, loosely, they all had to do with something called government. I gained no sense of a basis upon which I could argue that political science formed a coherent body of knowledge. There was no theoretical framework into which I could place all these courses or by which I could check their relevance.

Political theory might have been an area in which, because of its name, I might have expected to find the opportunity to address an issue such as this. But theory turned out to be devoted largely to the study of the history of political thought. Such history was, of course, interesting and important in itself, but it did not fulfill what might have been one of the functions of theory in, say, economics, chemistry, or physics, namely, the conceptualization of the discipline in part or as a whole.

The traditional stage then was one in which political science discovered the rich body of informal activities out of which public policy was formed. Yet it was a period during which description was often hard to distinguish from values, when theory did not measure up to the

promise implicit in its name, and when method was so taken for granted that it was nonproblematic.

THE BEHAVIORAL STAGE

The formal-legal and traditional periods were the first two phases of recent times. They were displaced by the so-called behavioral revolution in American political science, which rapidly spread to many other parts of the world. This third phase began after World War II though it had its roots in the earlier period. Without question, this is the central transformation that has occurred in Western political science in this century.

Despite the common root in the English terms, behaviorism and behavioralism, the two words have little in common and ought not to be confused. Political science has never been behavioristic even during the height of its behavioristic phase. Behaviorism refers to a theory in psychology about human behavior and has its origins in the work of J. B. Watson. I know of no political scientist who subscribes to this doctrine. Indeed, I know of no political scientist, although there may be the occasional one, who even accepts the psychological theory of B. F. Skinner, the founder of the "operant conditioning" school of psychology and the modern successor to Watson.

The only real relationship between the terms, behaviorism and behavioralism is that both of them focus on the human actor and his or her behavior as the appropriate source of information about why things happen in the world as they do. Both also assume that a methodology based upon that of the natural sciences is appropriate for the study of human beings. Aside from this acceptance of the individual as the focus of research and of scientific method, there is little resemblance between these tendencies. It would be a mistake therefore to confuse behavioralism in political science with behaviorism and its derivatives in psychology.

Behavioralism in political science had the following major characteristics. These distinguished it from earlier stages in the study of political science (see Easton, 1962).

First, behavioralism held that there are discoverable uniformities in human behavior and second, these can be confirmed by empirical tests. Third, behavioralism showed a desire for greater rigor in methods for the acquisition of data and for their analysis. Methods themselves became problematic. They could no longer be taken for granted.

Courses and books on methods for acquiring and analyzing data became commonplace. Quantification, whenever possible and plausible, assumed an important place in the discipline. As a result, during the 1950s and 1960s, political science became adept at using a vast array of increasingly sophisticated empirical techniques—questionnaires, interviews, sampling, regression analysis, factor analysis, rational modeling, and the like.

Fourth, the behavioral movement committed itself to much greater theoretical sophistication than in the past. The search for systematic understanding, grounded in objective observation, led to a marked shift in the meaning of theory as a concept. Traditionally, in the distant past, theory had been philosophical in character, asking questions about the nature of the good life. In more recent times, it had become largely historical, seeking to explicate and account for the emergence of political ideas in past centuries. Behavioral theory, on the other hand, is empirically oriented. It seeks to help us explain, understand, and, if possible, predict the way in which people behave politically and the way political institutions operate.

A considerable amount of the energies of theoreticians in this period went into the construction of empirically oriented theory at various levels of analysis. So-called middle range theory has sought to build theories about large segments of the discipline, as in the case of power pluralism, which offers a theory of democratic systems, or of positive theory, which is found in game theory or public choice theory (see Riker and Ordeshook, 1973).

In part, however, theory has been of the broadest character, called general theory. This type has sought to provide an understanding of political systems at the most inclusive level. Structural-functional theory and systems analysis represent two major theoretical efforts of such broad scope.

Fifth, many behavioralists felt that values of the research worker and of society could be largely excluded from the process of inquiry. Ethical evaluation and empirical explanation were viewed as involving two different kinds of statements that clarity requires us to keep analytically separate and distinct. Behavioralism adopted the original positivist assumptions (as developed by the Vienna Circle of positivists early in this century) that value-free or value-neutral research was possible. Although some of us, including myself (Easton, 1981a: chap. 9), did not share this point of view, it is nevertheless correct to suggest that it was a dominant one during the height of the behavioral stage. As a result,

moral inquiry receded far into the background among the priorities of interesting things to do.

Sixth, behavioralism represented a new-found emphasis on basic or pure theory as against applied research. Its assumption was that the task of the social scientist was to obtain fundamental understanding and explanation. It was felt that only after we have reliable understanding of how political institutions operate and people behave politically would it be possible to apply such knowledge, with confidence, to the solution of urgent social problems. Understanding and explanation of political behavior logically precede the utilization of knowledge for the solution of practical social problems. The period of behavioralism, therefore, helped to divert the interests of scholars from social reform and encouraged them to set their sights on the needs of scientific development as a guide to research.

How can we explain the behavioral revolution of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States? It was clearly a product of a number of complex tendencies. It was part of the natural evolution of the discipline. The common sense, proverbial style of traditional political science, with its dependence on historical description and impressionistic analysis, had simply exhausted itself. A developing mass industrialized society could not cope with its social problems with the degree of unreliability attached to explanations offered by traditional research. Too many difficulties in understanding political institutions and processes had been left unresolved. The epistemic successes of the natural sciences and of other social sciences such as psychology and economics, using more rigorous methods of data collection and of analysis, left their impact on political science as well. They suggested alternatives that led political analysis away from "common" sense to "scientific" sense where theoretical rather than social criteria set the problems of research and where technical skills took the place of mere description and common sense methods.

In addition, however, there were social forces that encouraged a commitment to the introduction of science into the study of politics. During the cold war period in relationships between the United States and the Soviet Union, especially during the Korean War (1950-1953), Senator Joseph McCarthy inaugurated and led a reign of psychological and legal terror against liberals and others in the United States. Scholars were selected as particularly vulnerable targets for attack. McCarthyism succeeded in driving underground an interest in social reform and critical theory.

From this perspective, objective, neutral, or value free research represented a protective posture for scholars. It offered them intellectually legitimate and useful grounds for fleeing from the dangers of open political controversy. This is perhaps an instance in the evolution of knowledge in which inadvertent gains may have been won for the wrong reasons. McCarthyism, of course, had nothing to do with the emergence of behavioralism as a new approach to political research. It represented simply a historical circumstance that drove an interest in social reform underground. In doing so, it led scholars into the politically less dangerous grounds of basic research, an area that, as it turned out, had major benefits to offer for the development of political science.

In addition to McCarthyism, there was another important social condition that contributed significantly to the sustenance of behavioralism. Post-World War II prosperity, with its associated conservatism of the 1950s and the early 1960s, led to the prevalent view that ideology had indeed come to an end in the United States. Rapid economic growth offered material benefits to all segments of the population, even to the poorest. Critical social thought, including critical liberalism itself, all but disappeared in the United States and with it, all semblance of ideological conflict. D. Bell (1960) wrote a distinguished book entitled *The End of Ideology* that expressed this conviction.

In retrospect, it is clear that ideology had not disappeared. It seemed to have ended only because mainstream, liberal-conservative ideology was dominant and unchallenged for the moment. There were no major contenders. This situation, of course, changed during the late 1960s with the rise of the civil rights movement on behalf of the blacks. But prior to this period, contending ideologies did recede or go underground. The lack of challenge to established ideologies turned the social sciences away from social problems as a source of inspiration for its research toward criteria internal to social theory, derivative from the logic of the development of social science itself. This gave social science the appearance of withdrawing from society into an ivory tower of scientific research, at least if one took the rhetoric of social research at its word.

It is clear that what from a social point of view could be interpreted as a retreat from social responsibility by social scientists, from the point of view of science could be interpreted as a breathing spell free from social involvement. This had the effect of enabling political science to address, in a relatively undisturbed atmosphere, many technical aspects that

have become central to its development—such as the place of theory in social research, the need for rigorous methods of research, the refinements of techniques for acquiring and analyzing data, the establishment of standards of professionalism among political scientists and social scientists in general, and so on. In short, we can now recognize the behavioral phase as one in which the social sciences, for whatever historical reasons and fortuitous circumstances, were busy strengthening the scientific bases of their research. The cost was a significant withdrawal from an interest in social criticism and social involvement.

THE POSTBEHAVIORAL STAGE

What I have called the postbehavioral revolution—a name now generally used for this next phase—began during the 1960s and is still with us today (see Easton, 1969). It represents a deep dissatisfaction with the results of behavioralism. It has not led to the abandonment of scientific method in political science. It is, however, leading to a substantial modification of our understanding of the nature of science and it is a movement that is still evolving.

Why did the postbehavioral movement arise? What were its sources? This movement accompanied the so-called counter-cultural revolution in the United States that, of course, has no direct relationship to the Cultural Revolution in China. The counter-cultural revolution arose in the West, and touched the East as well, during the later 1960s and early 1970s. It represented a period of world wide social change. Much of the leadership came from large masses of students congregated in rapidly growing colleges and universities throughout the world. In the United States, it had its origins in the civil rights movement, especially after the 1954-1955 Supreme Court decisions against educational segregation of blacks. It was accompanied by the growth of demands for the improvement of the condition of blacks and other minorities and by widespread protests against the Vietnam War during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. It was most clearly evident in new attitudes toward forms of dress, sexual behavior, the place of women and minorities in society, poverty, respect for the physical environment (pollution, atomic waste, the dangers of nuclear energy), and social inequality. In its broadest meaning, it represented the awakening of the modern world to the dangers of rapid and unregulated industrialization, ethnic and sexual discrimination, worldwide poverty, and nuclear war.

This is not the place to describe this movement in detail. All we need to do is to draw attention to the impact that the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s had on the social sciences in general and on political science in particular. For the social scientists, it raised the question as to why we were unable to foresee the kinds of problems, just mentioned, that became salient in this period. In addition, even if the social sciences did foresee some of these problems, how did it happen that they did nothing about them? It appeared that the social sciences had simply withdrawn into an ivory tower. These kinds of questions led to large-scale debates on the nature of our discipline and what it ought to be.

From these debates several things are now clear. The original commitment to science during the behavioral period, that is, during the 1950s and 1960s, has been seriously questioned. Some of the criticisms of scientific method reflect well-known arguments inherited largely from the nineteenth century: Human behavior is composed of too many complex variables and therefore we are not likely to be able to discover any law-like regularities; unlike atoms, human beings are not determined. They have free will, and therefore can never be predicted even on a probable basis. Even if the methods of the natural sciences have manifested great epistemic success, this was a product of the fact that they deal with inanimate matter. Atoms, however, do not have feelings or intentions that, by their very nature, are unpredictable or inaccessible to observation or prediction.

Other criticisms of science were directed at its positivistic claims that behavioral research was value free. As I mentioned earlier, some social scientists had proclaimed the "end of ideology." With the counter-cultural movement came the argument that all social research is, on the contrary, really shot through with ideology. The point was advanced that the claim that social science was valuationally neutral was possible only because social science had assumed the ideological coloring of the status quo (bourgeois liberalism) and the existing power structure. Its ideological premises were at one with those of the establishment and disappeared into the received views of the day. This claim to false objectivity was seen as serving the interests of the establishment. It seemed to justify or excuse the withdrawal of social scientists from involvement in social issues, to divert social inquiry from urgent social problems, and thereby to allow the status quo to go unchallenged.

This attack on the ideological presuppositions of scientific method in the study of society broadened into a wholesale challenge of the

epistemological and ontological bases of social research. In a widely read book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by T. Kuhn (1962), the view was advanced that all science, natural as well as social, is essentially an irrational process. In this book, scientific change is no longer seen as the product of a gradual accumulation of knowledge and understanding; change now represents only the shift of scientists from an existing paradigm or set of ideological and other presuppositions to a new one, for a variety of explainable reasons. The history of science, from this point of view, appears as a random shift from one set of premises (paradigms) governing research to another.

Despite the initial impact of this book, it is now realized that this criticism, in denying the possibility of any objective knowledge, went far beyond the realm of necessity or plausibility (see Suppe, 1977). The criticism did however draw attention to the need to reconsider how we do manage to acquire valid understanding about the real world despite the fact that research may be saturated with evaluative presuppositions.

I have touched only briefly on the fierce attacks that have been launched against scientific method since the 1970s. They have, however, led to serious reassessments of the original commitment to the positivistic conception of scientific method prevalent during the behavioral period of the 1950s and 1960s. We can see the results of this in the far more diverse approaches to political inquiry available today than during the behavioral period. The earlier impressionistic methods have even regained some plausibility, as has the method of interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) put forward at the turn of this century by Max Weber. We have also witnessed the reemergence of proponents of Marxism as an alternative way to develop a social science (see Poulantzas, 1973; Ollman and Vernoff, 1982).

Indeed, there are now so many approaches to political research that political science seems to have lost its purpose. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the behavioral phase, there was a messianic spirit and collective effort in the promotion and development of the methods of scientific inquiry even while there continued to be opposition to it. Today, however, political science has lost this sense of united purpose. There is no longer a single, dominant point of view or one that unmistakably catches the imagination, especially of younger members of the profession. Nor is there even a single defensive adversary. The discipline is fragmented in its methodological conceptions even though it is probably fair to say that scientific inquiry still represents the mainstream. However, it is not, as we shall see in a moment, only science in the old

positivistic sense. Instead we are adding a new and more relaxed understanding of the nature of science itself.

In addition to losing its sense of a dynamic purpose concentrated on the pursuit of scientific validity, political science seems to have lost its core. There was once agreement that political science was a study of something, whether it was of power or of the authoritative allocation of values or of the good life. Also, if it will not seem self-serving on my part to say so, there was a dominant point of view. If there was any single comprehensive description of the subject matter of political science it was to be found in the notion that it studied the authoritative allocation of values for a society. This was a conception that I had put forward in my book, *The Political System*, in 1953, and it had found widespread acceptance.

Today, however, students are no longer so certain about what politics is all about. They may even be less concerned than they were in the past. Political science as a study of the state, a conception that, after World War II, had been driven out by the idea of the political system, has now been revived. It has accompanied the reemergence, in American political science at least, of Marxist and quasi-Marxist points of view (see Easton, 1981c) and in them, of course, the state is a central concept.

What, however, is being offered today to draw the discipline together, to give it a sense of common purpose, and to provide alternative methods, if any, for inquiry? Here is where the real difficulty arises. Political science is still trying to develop a new sense of its identity and a new drive or sense of purpose. We are clearly still in a transition phase, and it is difficult to predict just where we will end up. We look fragmented and display a great variety of objectives for the very reason that theories, methods, and perspectives are still being questioned, that is, they are still in the process of change.

We can get some flavor of the reconstruction taking place by recounting the different interests and approaches of American political science, at least at the present time. Marxism, after lying dormant in American social science since the 1940s (even though very much alive in Europe), was reintroduced during the 1970s. However, there is no single orthodoxy in the Marxist methods or theories that have been adopted. The fragmentation of European Marxism is reflected in its American renaissance. We find represented all schools of Marxism—critical theory, humanist, cultural, structural, as well as orthodox. These have all had some impact on American political science though structural Marxism as developed by Althusser and Poulantzas has probably been the most influential.

What is clear, however, is that in being absorbed into American social research the various schools of Marxism have been attenuated; most inquiry is only quasi-Marxist in character. Even in that form, however, the revival of Marxist thinking has brought to political science a renewed awareness of the importance of history and of the significance of the economy, social classes, and ideology as well as of the total social context (the social formation, as Althusser would phrase it).

The mainstream of American political science has, however, moved off in a variety of other directions. The interests of the behavioral period in voting, judicial, legislative, administrative, and executive behavior as well as in interest groups, parties, developing areas, and the like have continued. During the postbehavioral period however, new topics of political research have arisen to satisfy the desire to understand the new concerns typical of this period—about environmental pollution, ethnic, racial, social and sexual equality, and nuclear war, for example.

In the search for answers to urgent social issues such as these, political science in this period has joined all the other social sciences in making an extraordinary commitment of its resources to the application of knowledge. We witness this in the rapid and widespread growth of the so-called policy analysis movement. Literally hundreds of institutes have arisen not only for the understanding of the way in which policies are formed and implemented but for the formulation of policy alternatives to help solve the urgent social problems facing all societies at the present time. These institutes ring the changes on all questions of policy creation and execution: What are the policies in various areas, how are they formed, what alternatives are neglected or rejected and why, what are the consequences, direct or indirect, of any policy, how do these compare with the ostensible objectives of the policies (contributing to the emergence of a vast subfield of policy evaluation), how does a given set of present policies influence subsequent policies (the feedback process), and so on. Because the effects of any policies are felt not only in the political sector but also in most other areas of society, policy institutes have typically been built around interdisciplinary curricula. In this way policy research has reawakened the hope of an earlier day for integrating the social sciences, at least in the application of its knowledge.

Another shift in interest that is part and parcel of this new policy orientation is reflected in the rebirth of the field of political economy. In the nineteenth century, as modern political science was evolving, economics and politics had already shown a close and natural affinity, as revealed in the work of John Stuart Mill, which he explicitly called

political economy, and of Karl Marx. The revival of this link today is in part attributable, of course, to the revival of Marxist thought. But it has also blossomed independently through efforts to show the numerous relationships between the state of the economy on the one hand and political events and institutions on the other (see Frolich and Oppenheimer, 1982; Monroe, 1983).

Political economy is a return to a traditional combination of interests common in the nineteenth century. But perhaps the most dramatic shift in perspectives has occurred today in a different area, in what I shall call cognitive political science. The emergence of this approach reflects a movement away from the attempt to understand political phenomena as exclusively a product of nonrational processes, that is, as a product of social forces that influence decisions and actions of political actors and institutions.

The starting assumption of cognitive political science is that there is a strong rational component to political behavior. This can mean one of two things: that human beings do act rationally, or that we can better understand their behavior if we adopt such rationality as an assumption.

Whereas the outcome of empirical scientific research consists of generalizations about behavior that are grounded in observations, the products of the cognitive approach are models about how human beings would or should act under varying circumstances if they were to act rationally. The product of inquiry takes the form of rational choice models, game theories, or other kinds of so-called rational actor models (see Riker and Ordeshook, 1973; Taylor, 1975; Kramer and Hertzberg, 1975; Downs, 1957). For some, these models only tell us how persons might behave if they acted rationally. They are of value insofar as we can compare actual behavior with the model in order to try to account for the deviance from the model. For others, however, these models represent the way in which people actually do behave. The assumption of rationality becomes a reality (Riker and Ordeshook, 1973). For still others, however, the rational models represent ways in which people should behave if they are to conform to rational norms, and such norms are assumed to be desirable in themselves. Rational models may, therefore, depict formal calculi of rational behavior, actual strategies of choice, or preferred strategies if one values rational behavior.

Not only empirically oriented research but political philosophy also has been a major beneficiary of the rational approach. Rational modeling has breathed new life into political philosophy. During the behavioral period, moral research had all but died out for reasons

already mentioned. Values were sometimes thought to be mere expressions of preferences, as in economics to this day. In the current postbehavioral period, renewed efforts are under way to demonstrate that there is a rational basis for moral argument and judgment. Most of the work in this area has been inspired by John Rawls's (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, itself influenced by economic modeling and game theory. In this book, the author attempts to develop valid and demonstrable criteria of justice derivable from the assumption of rational action. Using a similar convention about rational behavior, others have turned to the task of developing moral theories about equality, freedom, international justice, legitimacy, and the like (see Fishkin, 1982; Beitz, 1979; Lehrer and Wagner, 1981).

Political philosophy is not alone in this new approach. It was preceded by and has in turn reinforced the application of rational actor approach in the area of voting behavior and public choice, and is spreading as a technique to other fields of political inquiry. In its essence, it reflects the theoretical approach of contemporary economics and in fact even borrows economic theories for application to political situations (see Downs, 1957; Kramer and Hertzberg, 1975).

In substantive areas such as those just mentioned—policy analysis, political economy, and what I have called cognitive political inquiry (rational modeling and the new political philosophy)—there has been little difficulty in going beyond the range of interests characteristic of the behavioral period and in adding to its methodological perspectives. However, in the matter of actual methods of empirical research and in the fundamental premise that human behavior is subject to scientific inquiry, despite the current pervasive criticism of scientific method, much less success has been met in finding an alternative.

Few people believe any longer in the value neutrality of science. That scientific concepts are value-laden can no longer be denied. But that this does not invalidate the search for objective knowledge and understanding is equally undeniable. Just how both these statements can be true is still the subject of much debate (see Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970; Suppe, 1977).

What, however, do the critics of scientific method offer as an alternative to the methods of science? This is where the real difficulty for the critics arises. The only formal alternative, that is, the only alternative that involves something that looks like a method that can be articulated, formalized, and communicated to succeeding generations is Weberian interpretive (*verstehen*) or empathic understanding. This method has

been and continues to be discussed, and the interest in the writings of Max Weber has increased enormously in recent years. As yet, however, no one has been able to formalize, systematize, or standardize it in a way that makes it readily communicable to those who would seek to learn it. Despite this irreducible inexpressibility, strangely enough, many radical critics of conventional social science have adopted this method, implicitly or otherwise. This is especially strange as its inventor, Max Weber, has been called "the Karl Marx of the bourgeoisie."

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

These many, often conflicting tendencies in post behavioral political science in the West make it difficult to draw general conclusions about the state of the discipline. For the very reason that political science is still in process of change, we cannot speak of a single, dominant tendency or direction. If there is one, however, we can probably find it in the fact that most leading members of the discipline continue to accept the appropriateness for social inquiry of the scientific methodology found to be so successful in the natural sciences.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that our understanding of scientific method today is the same as it was during the behavioral period. Our conception of science has not stood still; it is itself undergoing change, wittingly or otherwise.

We no longer cast ourselves in the image of the positivist ideal of science. An incipient transformation is under way that may well displace that image with a new one. If so, this is probably the most dramatic thing that is happening in the social sciences though most social scientists may not be aware of it as yet.

Positivism as represented in the thinking of the Vienna Circle during the 1920s was largely subsumed, if not consciously articulated, as behavioralism took shape, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. In this image, the ideal product of scientific inquiry would be a body of knowledge, based on axioms, with statements of relationships or generalizations that could be ultimately formalized, especially through the use of mathematics, and that would be well grounded in objective observations.

This model is still entertained by many social scientists. This is especially true for those who happen to be in an area where it can be either achieved or approximated, as, for example, in the areas of public choice and rational modeling. There, formal mathematization of

propositions works well if only because it is intrinsic to the method of analysis in those areas. There are vast fields in political science, however, indeed most of political science to this point, that have not yielded this kind of intellectual product. Yet these areas of political science are clearly subject to rigorous inquiry through the use of the normal rules of logic, through careful acquisition of data consistent with the canons of science, and through equally sophisticated analysis of these data. The outcomes, though, do not measure up to the positivistic ideal of an axiomatized and mathematized set of propositions. Does this mean that they are not acceptable as scientific conclusions?

During the positivistic behavioral phase of political science, the answer might have been in the affirmative. Today, under the more relaxed understanding of science that is in process of growth within philosophy of science, a different answer can be offered, one that accepts nonaxiomatized and nonmathematical statements as an integral part of scientific knowledge even in its ideal form.

Philosophy of science is that special discipline in the West that is concerned with understanding the nature of science—how it acquires knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of the world we wish to know and understand (ontology). As a discipline, the findings of philosophy of science itself are subject to change and, hopefully, improvement, no less than are the findings of any other discipline. Like other fields of inquiry it grows and changes. Although at one time philosophers of science, under the sway of early positivism, did indeed conceive of the appropriate outcome of scientific inquiry in the manner of the positivists of the Vienna Circle, today, most recent findings are moving in a far less monolithically mathematical direction. No longer do all philosophers of science see science as restricted to a single kind of formalized product in the image of classical positivism of the Vienna Circle. Rather, in a more skeptical mood, philosophers of science are now beginning to recognize that if we are to understand science we ought not to accept some abstract analysis of the nature of science as an adequate description of the way it operates to acquire valid knowledge. Rather, we are better advised to look at what scientists actually do.

When we do indeed look at the history of scientific practices we find a larger variety of research products that are accepted as useful and necessary than we would have guessed if we confined ourselves to the positivistic interpretation. Philosophy of science is now discovering that there are many varieties of outcomes with which scientists seem to be satisfied. These outcomes seem to answer the kinds of problems that are

being asked in a particular area of science even if the outcomes do not look like the formal or mathematical models of early positivism. For example, systems of classification, taxonomies, conceptual frameworks, and qualitative generalizations about evolutionary processes that do not permit prediction need have little to do with formal models or mathematized propositions. Yet in the various sciences in which they are found, such as botany and biology, they are just as acceptable as final products (see Hanson 1969; Toulmin, 1972; Shapere, 1974; Suppe, 1977).

If this is so in the natural sciences where the success of their methods cannot be denied, then it ought not to be any less true in the social sciences. In this view, then, systematic classifications of political phenomena, for example, or conceptual frameworks, as developed in my own thinking in systems analysis, would be just as normal a product of scientific inquiry as any generalization about politics or any mathematical model. The only question one must ask is whether at the time, the intellectual product satisfies the needs of a would-be scientific discipline, such as political science, in terms of rigorous and testable understanding. That is to say, if the knowledge we acquire seems to help us in attaining satisfactory explanation or adequate understanding of an empirically grounded sort, then that is the most that we can ask of the methods of science. The history of inquiry in the natural sciences now seems to reveal that there is no single fixed kind of intellectual product, as classical positivism would have us believe, that can be designated as appropriate and necessary to achieve understanding of any given phenomena.

As I have suggested, the postbehavioral state that we have just discussed is still evolving. It will be some time before a definitive statement can be made about how it finally differs from behavioralism and about the new direction in which it may be leading political science. One thing is clear, however. It had its birth in efforts to cope with some of the unresolved problems generated by behavioralism: the indifference to moral judgments, the excessive commitment to formal mathematized statements flowing from the use of scientific method, the focus on theoretical criteria to the neglect of social issues, the preoccupation with social forces as determinants of behavior, overlooking, in the process, important cognitive (rational) elements, and a profound forgetfulness about the history of political systems that helps to shape their present.

In trying to cope with these kinds of problems bequeathed by behavioralism, however, we can assume that postbehavioralism is busily

generating its own difficulties. Some of these are already obvious; others will undoubtedly emerge as new contemporary explanations exhaust their own potential. For example, in emphasizing the need to apply whatever knowledge we have to the solution of urgent social issues, we have already run into major difficulties in trying to reintegrate the various highly specialized disciplines. Descartes taught us that understanding requires decomposition and analysis of a subject matter. Application of knowledge to the solution of social problems, however, requires the reassembly of the specialized knowledge of the various social sciences. We are still at a loss about how to do this. Application of knowledge has also diverted scarce resources from the continued search for fundamental knowledge so that we are already being called upon to reassess the appropriate division between applied and so-called pure research. Computer technology will clearly change the character of major aspects of research in all the social sciences, including political science, in ways that we can only guess at the present time. And finally, the growing international character of research raises fundamental issues about the universality of concepts in the social sciences as contrasted with the culturally conditioned nature of most thinking about social problems. Can we develop a genuinely transnational social science when different national cultures approach problems of understanding social phenomena in such transparently different ways, often with such different concepts?

To enter into a discussion of issues such as these would, however, take us too far afield from our present purpose, an analysis of the four basic stages—formal-legal, traditional, behavioral, and postbehavioral—through which American political science has passed in the twentieth century. These issues may, however, foreshadow a fifth stage that we have not yet begun to enter.

REFERENCES

- BEITZ, C. R. (1979) *Political Theory and International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- BELL, D. (1960) *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- BENTLEY, A. (1949) *The Process of Government*. Bloomington, IN: Principia. (originally published in 1908)
- DOWNS, A. (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- EASTON, D. (1981a) *The Political System*. New York: Knopf. (originally published in 1953)

- (1981b) *A Framework for Political Analysis*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. (originally published in 1965)
- (1981c) "The political system besieged by the state." *Pol. Theory* 9: 303-325.
- (1969) "The new revolution in political science." *Amer. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 68: 1051-1061.
- (1962) "The current meaning of 'behavioralism' in political science." *The Annals of the Amer. Academy of Pol. and Social Sci. Monograph* (October): 1-25.
- ECKSTEIN, H. (1966) *Division and Cohesion in Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- FAINSOD, M. (1940) "Some reflections on the nature of the regulatory process," in *Public Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.
- FISHKIN, J. S. (1982) *The Limits of Obligation*. New York: Yale Univ. Press.
- FROLICH, N. and J. A. OPPENHEIMER (1982) *Modern Political Economy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- HANSON, N. R. (1969) *Perception and Discovery*. San Francisco: Freeman Cooper.
- HERRING, P. (1929) *Group Representation Before Congress*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.
- KRAMER, G. H. and J. HERTZBERG (1975) "Formal theory," chap. 7 in *Handbook of Political Science*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- KUHN, T. (1962) *The Structure of the Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- LAKATOS, I. and A. MUSGRAVE (1970) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- LEHRER, K. and C. WAGNER (1981) *Rational Consensus in Science and Society*. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel.
- MONROE, K. (1983) *Presidential Popularity and the Economy*. New York: Praeger.
- OLLMAN, B. and E. VERNOFF (1982) *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- POULANTZAS, N. (1973) *Political Power and Social Classes*. London: New Left Books; Sheed and Ward.
- RAWLS, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.
- RIKER, W. H. and P. C. ORDESHOOK (1973) *An Introduction to Positive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- SHAPER, D. (1974) "Discovery, rationality and progress in science," pp. 407-419 in K. Schaffner and P. Cohen (eds.) *PSA 1972: Proceedings of 1972 Biennial Meetings of Philosophy of Science Association*. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel.
- SUPPE, F. (1977) *The Structure of Scientific Theories*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press.
- TOULMIN, S. (1972) *Human Understanding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- TRUMAN, D. (1951) *The Government Process*. New York: Knopf.

David Easton is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine. He is Co-Chair of the Western Center Executive Council, American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Toronto and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has written numerous books and articles in the field of political science.