

## *The Behaviorist's Persuasion*

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***The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief***, by Marvin Meyers. *Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.*

OUR INTEREST IS ELICITED by *The Jacksonian Persuasion* on at least three grounds.<sup>1</sup> It is presumably a product of the new flight of the behavioral sciences; it is also another contribution to the recent "liberal" and literary enthusiasm for the political leaders of the Jacksonian era. On a third ground, it is a very readable book, a fact which commends the author to our future attention. Some comment on the first two points will be in this review article. One wonders, I think, whether in this devotion to the Jacksonian era much is being written about little, and a sense of urgency and intellectual importance is created by the straining of the author with his subject. Reflection on the ideas on some of the leaders of the Jacksonian era pointedly

reminds one of Mr. Robert G. McCloskey's remark concerning American political thought: "The difficulty, to be downright, is that American political thinkers have not often produced works that rank with the best that has been thought or known in the world's intellectual history."

Mr. Meyers begins with a statement of the Jacksonian persuasion or ideology. He is seeking the "major plot expressed in Jacksonian political appeals." Jacksonian thought has become for him a problem in "political communication." Unlike Tocqueville, he seeks to be an empirical reporter of the American scene. As he avows, he is deeply influenced by Merle Curti, David Riesman, Reuel Denny, and others who advised him during his year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. This Center has been called the "Behavioral Science Monastery," though it is perhaps more leisurely in its pace than life in a monastery of the historical and religious type. But the author is careful also to note the influence on him of some of the more noted liberal

historians, such as Commager and Hofstadter. He writes about ideas, but the evaluation of them is on a simplified level, and the book in general shows a strong sympathy for liberal judgments. It is a behavioral principle that ideas are noted or stated in general terms, and that one does not seek to say whether they are true or false. Ideas are functional and forceful, and they are reflective of interests, classes and groups, but the possibility of theoretical advance outside of empiricism is denied. In other words, an inquiry into a "persuasion" is not an inquiry into the principles of order. One seeks a "type," but not a truth. In the formulation of order, one can sense the conflict between political theory and the behavioral sciences. Existentially, it is the choice of the individual trying to learn political theory while stalled between an intellectuality that is historical, philosophical, and humanistic, and an intellectuality that has been robbed of imagination by the empirical and realistic study of human behavior.

From the formulation of his basic position, the author moves on to a discussion of certain leaders of the movement, some of whom are clearly resurrected from an appropriate historical forgetfulness. Meyers examines the giants with the dwarfs. Tocqueville, Fenimore Cooper, and Van Buren are written about along with Theodore Sedgwick, William Leggett, Robert Rantoul, and other lesser figures. Any political movement is rich in peripheral figures, and few have been more rich than the Jacksonian movement.

On one occasion the author refers to Brancroft's "Transcendental claptrap." If one should ask what is the inarticulate premise through which the author organizes an interpretation of his varied and diverse figures, the answer might be that it could be called Neo-Beardian liberalism, which is to say the examination of the economics of the political man. Or, one might say it involves the construction of molds into which groups, interests, and classes may be poured, in order to create the

ingots of behavioral science. Indeed, for this author property seems to be almost the only common element in either Jacksonian liberalism or conservatism, just as the "monster" of the movement was the Bank which seemed to endanger the property of middle-class Jacksonians. One misses, indeed, a discussion of the intellectual classes, the elites, if one will, and the question arises what difference it might have made in the selection of Jacksonian symbols if intellectuals and religious inspiration had been considered.

Further, it may be asked why the Jacksonians should be considered so progressive, as they seem to be. Meyers makes it clear that democracy had already triumphed before the great Jacksonian political victories. If the liberalisms of the present welfare state are the criteria of the progressive, the Jacksonian adherents of *laissez-faire* and free trade are surely not to be considered precursors of contemporary liberalism. In the end the Jacksonians and the Whigs seemed to come close together, as vitality ebbed from older systems of "political communication," or as the old symbols lost force because of long and deceptive manipulation.

## II

The author has been praised for being well-versed in "the new tools and concepts of the social sciences," and he implies from his time at the Behavioral Center that this study is an example of the new "tools" applied to the study of political ideas. Meyers has written a book that discusses the history of ideas, but it does not engage in a discussion of the symbol and meaning of the existential order. The question one faces, first of all, is this: Is this book the kind we can expect from the scholars who adhere to the revolution of the behavioral sciences, or the new liberalism, or the resurgent positivism of the twentieth century?

Let us be frank: If this is to be the type of political theory book that is produced in view of the inspiration of behavioral sci-

Indeed, for to be almost either Jackatism, just as ment was the rger the propsonians. One of the intelone will, and rence it might of Jacksonian religious in- l. why the Jack- d so progres- yers makes it already tri- sonian politi- is of the pres- criteria of the adherents of re surely not of contempo- e Jacksonians come close to- m older sys- ation," or as cause of long

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ence, then it would not suffer if Meyers did not know the new "tools" of inquiry into political behavior. It is almost as if a label had been attached to it, just as the label of "liberal" was attached to many things deep in the past after it became customary in the nineteenth century to speak of "liberalism." Still, one thing cannot be avoided: existentially, political theory is both a learning and an evaluation of ideas; it is more than description. If the behavioral approach denies theoretical advance to philosophical inquiry, intellectual history and its subcomponent, political philosophy, will be on the way to oblivion as the center of the study of the science of politics. Meyers' book is, in truth, one of the products of the revolution of behavioral science, and here the political philosopher, Meyers, bows to those who have lost taste for a philosophical judgment of values or an inquiry into the symbols of a transcendental order.

The importance of the behavioral revolution in the social sciences, and more especially in Political Science, is not to be denied. Nor is it to be denied that it has evoked intense controversy, and that it will continue to do so. In other words, there is clearly a long engagement and siege ahead, in which those who oppose behavioralism will become better organized, and Foundations that are conservative and theistic in policy will contribute money to balance the foundational colossi who now provide immense sums for behavioral research.

For a starting point of inquiry into the evolution of the behavioral sciences, one would have to turn to that moment in intellectual history when it was said that social study could be modeled on the procedures of science. Obviously, we deal here with "modern" science, and one may start, for convenience, with the seventeenth century when social thought was inspired by a mathematical and a geometrical model. But it was, no doubt, the inspiration of the Newtonian system which suggested the immediate possibility of a science of morality and a science of politics. Indeed, whatever

the dominant form of scientific inquiry may have been, since then there have been social scientists who believed that this method might be applied to the human situation. The rise of biological science in the nineteenth century, the hypothesis of evolution, the emergence of mathematical statistics, and the intuition of Bagehot in *Physics and Politics*, might be called to witness. In America, there has been a more recent combination of philosophy and science which has given rise to the American apostolate in methodology. The philosophical methods of Charles Peirce and William James were related to emergent psychology and to the principles of evolution found in Darwin and Spencer. "Evolution" in Darwin was a scientific theory, however, while in Spencer it was a social theory, a metaphysical venture, which had little foundation in real science.

In a practical sense, the new social science, Spencerian in tone, had to be factual, quantitative; and in theory it was empirical. For the proof of social evolution was not in theory, but in a naturalism in epistemology to support it. Statistical inquiry was to be the crown of the empirical social inquiry. The legal method, the historical study of political life, the use of biology, the theory of physics, all passed before the imperial demands of radical empiricism and the statistical or quantitative advance. And a strange thing occurred, for it was no longer necessary to refute philosophical doctrines that stood in opposition; nor, indeed, was it necessary to know contrary philosophical views. What one had to have was "a commitment to science," and the meaning of science was defined as empiricism and quantity, for it was only in this way that anything might surely be known.

The new surge in method did not have a name. It could be called simply the "scientific method" in the study of politics; it could be called, by analogy and in recollection of Bagehot, the "physics of politics;" but it was first of all the quantitative method. Yet this was not enough. Soon

after World War I, Charles E. Merriam wrote a momentous book called *New Aspects of Politics* in which it was argued that the social sciences had now reached a point where it was possible to have a reorganized and scientific society. One could use psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, and, indeed, all of the social sciences, in a grand synthesis which would spell out the new foundations of progress. Merriam wanted to call it "systematic politics," but to him and to the many students who followed him in their optimism it was the new age of the "science" of politics. While none could say that Merriam had a firm philosophical background, none could deny either the great influence he had on the development of Political Science in the generation between the Wars. While there were some statistical techniques in use, Merriam stimulated the emergence of others, and he led younger men to study psychology, Freudian ideas, and the application of psychopathology to the study of politics.

Several notable streams of methodological thought were brought together in the emergence of a new method. There was a revival of the near-forgotten Arthur F. Bentley, who spoke of a *theory* of group pressures and the *practice* of pressure politics or pressure groups as the substance of politics. While those who did not know mathematics or statistics began the study of pressure groups, and began also to interpret all politics in terms of group pressures, the psychological technique took flight in a manner that had hardly been thought possible. First, there was the study of propaganda in World War I, which was led by Harold D. Lasswell (propaganda is now an outdated word; one should say something like the "engineering of consent"); second, the proliferation of "techniques" for surveying the public mind came into play; and third, the whole personality of the human being became the laboratory of the social scientist. The skilled "interviewer" asked projective questions that did not reveal their import, and the private in-

dividual had no longer privacy against the prying student of the psyche of the common man. In 1950 a peak was reached in the publication of the Freudian and ideologically immature book called *The Authoritarian Personality*.

But there has been much more. The construction of "models" as a device in methodology became widespread, and in a non-mathematical form the model attempts to state a series of value-free propositions, that is, objective propositions, which can be used to guide and to analyze the data that has been collected. Game theory and the analysis of decision-making (which has apparently been developed independently of European theories of decision-making) are related to the idea of the model of the given situation. But one of the most spectacular developments of quantitative technique has been in the area of computer machines. It has been said by one social scientist, perhaps on the over-enthusiastic side, that the digital computer will be to the social sciences what the microscope has been to biology. The ordinary social scientist, of course, does not know the "language" of the computers, and he must be taught how to create problems for computer solution. One assumes, of course, the continuation of the traditional quantitative techniques which are related ultimately to mathematics and to mathematical statistics.

On these bases—the Bentleyian system of groups as a "tool" for political study, the rise of the psychological probings of the individual without his consent or clear knowledge, the theory and practice of contemporary value-free analysis, and the dream of the unlimited potential of the modern electronic computer systems—there emerged the concept of the "policy sciences" and then, in more ambitious vein, the behavioral sciences.

What made it possible for the new Machiavellians, the value-free technicians, the new devotees of the Bentleyian and Freudian *ragioni di stato*, to get off the ground and to assault the citadels of academic power, has been the money provided by the

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Foundations. The Foundations had long been interested in "method," and about 1931 they began to favor projects which were interdisciplinary, but it was not until the emergence of "behavioralism" that their great chance occurred. It would seem that the vast sums provided by the Foundation liberals for the new techniques in social inquiry have made it possible for the revolution of behavioral science to take place. For the first time in history, social scientists had virtually uncounted sums available for distribution, as in the case of the Ford Foundation and the Fund for the Republic. But other Foundations, such as the Social Science Research Council, were directly committed to the new departure. Some smaller Foundations that have been conservative, theistic, and unsympathetic with secularized liberalism, have sought to counter the new power of the leaders of behavioral science. But the behaviorists have all but captured the seats of academic power, and this, indeed, is the revolution of the behavioral sciences.

### III

How did it take place, and in so short a time? It has come about through the selective control of many of the points where academic perquisites are at stake. First of all, the behaviorists, Bentleyian, Freudian, and survey technicians, have had the ear of the more prominent Foundations. This has meant that research grants have tended to stress quantitative techniques, the training of experts in the digital computer, joint or interdisciplinary research schemes, liberal rather than conservative oriented projects, and to offer support to the secular universities. Such a secularist trend has, indeed, existed ever since the first impact of the Carnegie Foundation. In addition to grants to universities for large projects, it has also meant that the avenues to preferred positions for young men have been in the "Foundation circles" where money for research has been available in the largest quantities. In the second place, the revolution has occurred through the appointment

of staff that has been selected with the advancement of behavioral training in mind. Indeed, one might say that in some social science departments no other kind of person will be accepted. Third, in a number of academic departments the graduate curriculum has been radically reorganized to make room for courses in method devoted to a Bentleyian-Freudian behavioral approach, and to include the emergence of statistical and computer techniques for investigating the behavior and motivation of ordinary individuals. In result, graduate students who earn the Ph.D. will be indoctrinated in positivist philosophy, and in the techniques of the "scientific" attitude. The required "core curriculum" is becoming a series of courses devoted to method and to the relationship of various social sciences, all equally imbued with the epistemology of the "new science." Fourth, and finally, the impact on the publishing houses will be immense, since publishers will understandably not be interested in publishing works that will not be used by those of the behaviorist persuasion.

### IV

The continuing theme of the behaviorist persuasion is that, since values and abstract philosophic judgments are outside of the science, they are subjective preferences and it is impossible to demonstrate them. Science itself is based on empiricism; it declines to make any ontological inquiry; and it is asserted that the conclusions from quantitative techniques provide the basis for conclusions on which policy may be made. Other methods of attaining knowledge are denied or reduced in importance. Intuition, revelation, theistic naturalism, and logical demonstration stand at best on an auxiliary footing, without the capacity to compete with the correlation of experienced data. Aside from the philosophical debate between empirical and other intellectuals, the assumption that a policy science is possible on this basis is replete with hazards. It hardly does to say that

those who make policy find their objectives, values, postulates, or their truth where they will. Social scientists do not always simply carry out what a legislator or policymaker has determined; they are often policymakers, and they desire with great energy the right to say which values shall be allocated in public policy. When the social scientist says the derivation of values is outside of the science, it might be said in riposte that the most important aspect of the life of the community is outside of the field of any science of society. The purpose of legislation is, thus, inferior in nature and remote from the truth. If one were to state the problem in Greek terms, might not one say that the behavioral scientists are the new Sophists, the radical immanentists, and Gnostics? They deny the transcendent and any possibility of an order to be based on such truth. In the emergence of behavioral science, we are dealing with the continuation of the great debate which was first firmly articulated by the Socratic-Platonic attack on the Sophistic denial of measure beyond the man.

Yet, there is a possible reconciliation in practice between those who consider ideas and values provable and also as part of the science, and those who rely on technique and merely recognize that values are important in political behavior, while saying that values are themselves irrelevant to the state of the science. The principle of reconciliation is to state without ambiguity the postulates that have been dominant in the mind of the researcher. Techniques are neutral; they provide nothing to judge purpose; they neither prove nor disprove the transcendent order of life. In making postulates clear one is saying what he proposes to use techniques for, and he is asserting clearly whether he believes his judgments that are to be translated into policy are subjective preferences or ideas that are subject to proof on the basis of intuition, revelation, some form of naturalism, or logic. Naturalism, itself, may be found in St. Thomas' observation of human nature, and in the strong empirical

bent found in the Platonic study of the historical order. It may also be found in those who, like John Stuart Mill, were unconcerned with the existence of the Divine order. Even a theist may not be annoyed if the behaviorist makes it clear he is not reading into the limits of his science judgments that are neither to be proved nor disproved by it.

## V

The rise of the behavioral sciences could mean the disintegration of political science. For, first, it may mean that the social scientist, and more particularly the Political Scientist, will cease to represent the public order which supports him. Disintegration comes, as Voegelin has said, when a public order exists in contradiction with the civilizational forces it confronts. In the end either the revolution of behavioral science will destroy the system of transcendent thought that is found in the life of those who cannot be classified as "intellectuals," or a more conservative and humanistic intellectualism will prevail. The symbol is the dialectic of intellectual against mass, where the intellectual become "Sophist" struggles against the *pater familias* as active theist. In a second sense, such a science of politics is destructive because it cannot support the proof of values. In time of crisis it must either desert its position or it must become silent while lesser figures propound the truth.<sup>2</sup>

One is encouraged to believe that the future is not so dark as it might appear. Those who have advocated "the policy sciences" or who have named themselves "behavioral scientists" have often, like Meyers, used the term or lived in the atmosphere of it without being sure of their destination. The liberal has long been an immanentist, who has believed that all things necessary might be found here and now in a material sense. His has been the "spirituality" of the material, rather than the reality of the transcendent. If in time the exclusion of breadth, the failure of

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mation of the possibility that a true hu-  
manistic and religious social order may  
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may come a new burst of the theoretical  
life, and a new profession devoted to the  
science of politics. For new versions of  
positivism, however they may be disguised  
by labels and techniques, are still in nature

the same movements which began the as-  
sault on the Great Tradition, and which  
have proposed its reduction to an inane  
symbolism.

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<sup>1</sup>The author published a short review of this  
volume in *The Southwestern Social Science Quar-*  
*terly*, 38 (March, 1958), 372-373, from which some  
material for this article has been taken. This ma-  
terial is republished with the consent of the *Quar-*  
*terly*.

<sup>2</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Vol. III:*  
*Plato and Aristotle* (1957), p. 140.