

RESEARCH IN POLITICAL THEORY: A SYMPOSIUM*

I. THE WORK OF THE POLITICAL THEORY PANEL

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The members of the American Political Science Association probably know that the Research Committee is divided into panels for the consideration in detail of special fields in political science. Not all of the panels have been organized, but for some time the political theory group has been at work, attempting the formulation of its particular research needs. During November, 1943, part of the panel was able to meet in Washington. The work of the panel leading to this meeting was based entirely on correspondence, and, owing to the pressure of war work, a number of persons who otherwise would have been interested were unable to take part in the preparatory tasks. The minutes of the November meeting have been distributed to the panel. But it was thought by the sponsor of the meeting (the Committee on Government of the Social Science Research Council, under the chairmanship of Professor William Anderson) that a report should be made to the Association; and it is presented herewith. Such a report should indicate, if possible, the major trends in the thought of the Political Theory Panel and the research needs which these students of political theory have emphasized.

Among members of the panel there are broad differences, as one would expect, but there are also agreements on essential principles. Since political theory is in part a philosophical consideration of the field of politics, these differences and agreements are, we think, more explicit than in other areas of our discipline. It is, indeed, one of the duties of the political theorist to point out and analyze the principles upon which further discussion is organized. Teaching and investigation in political theory must and does concern itself with metaphysical principles embedded in the work of those who study primarily political institutions and processes. In any case, a political theorist is such in measure because of his insistence on the central character of principles in the study of political science.

But granting that the study of principles commonly used throughout political science is the primary teaching and research field of the theorist, we must recognize the deep cleavage among theorists in the area of primary ideas. Such differences concern the arguments that have gone on for centuries among the philosophically literate. But each generation of social thinkers must come to these questions with insights freshened by continu-

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ous historical and research experience. The discussions within the Political Theory Panel make all this abundantly clear, but the panel would like also for all political scientists to share its concern.

The ultimate issue may be stated in several ways. It may be that one's work in political science proceeds from the metaphysical principles accepted by the investigator as to the nature of man and society, and of the relation of man and society to the universal order, or to God. One group of theorists contends that the great political thinkers have dealt clearly with these issues, while another group would say that metaphysics is little more than a name given to logical thought. Thus some would urge that the essential philosophical position of the student must determine in the end both the kind of investigations undertaken and the character of the results. Not only must the individual study his own framework of thought, but considerable research may be done in showing how conclusions or institutions are correlated with the metaphysical starting point. Those who favor more metaphysical concern in the social sciences would argue that much of the thinness of social science arises from the attempt to by-pass the philosophical issues latent in the examination of social questions. In other words, much of the so-called detachment of social scientists is a product of philosophical ineptitude.

Another facet of this problem is the clash between those who would favor broadly a "theological" approach to politics and those who would accept the now traditional "positivistic," scientific, or liberal technique of social study. One group of theorists would say that a political theorist must be a reasonably good theologian, not only because so much of the history of social discussion has been written in the theological framework, but also because the theological approach clarifies fundamental issues of the nature of man, society, and the universal order. These members offered varying ideas as to what constituted an essentially theological approach to political theory. Their general view was variously challenged by others who held to the traditional approaches of idealist and rationalist liberalism.

However, neither the theological nor the empirical theorist will deny the importance of the study of ethics, values, or principles in politics. Indeed, one of the major tasks of the theorist is to study political ethics, that is, to formulate and criticize values and principles. It is one thing to say that ethics and principles exist, and it is another to say that valid principles or a valid system of ethics can be attained. It appears that most of the panel will agree that valid social and political principles may be attained. Thus the panel for the most part would agree that we can get beyond affective motives in thought to the validity of thought. This proposition is obviously central in the method and purposes of the study of political theory. It is a criticism of that scientific method which rests content after the operations of thought have been described, or which at-

tempts to invalidate an argument by showing that the proponents of an idea are either opportunistic or neurotic. Such a statement is not a criticism of clinical work in the field of politics; it is an assertion that there is more in politics than simply clinical observation.

Some theorists have stressed, in our deliberation, the place of value-free discussions in political science. There was no disposition to deny that value-free inquiry may take place, and one member insisted, for instance, that when one discusses the conditions necessary for the existence of society, i.e., Aristotle's emphasis on political stability, values are not involved. Such conditions for the existence of society are precedent to the realization of any values that may be attained in society. Here is certainly a principle to guide research, but agreement that any particular discussion is "value-free" is not likely to be reached. Much of the same type of argument concerns the issue of recurrence in historical behavior. What does one get when it is shown that in human behavior certain actions tend to recur? It hardly needs to be pointed out that much of the Italian tradition in the study of politics from Machiavelli to the present day operates on the principle of value-free interpretations.

Some contended that the issue in research and teaching discussed by the panel could be described as a choice between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Others challenged both the suggestion that political theorists are limited to that sort of choice and the assertion that there is so sharp a contrast between medieval and nineteenth-century approaches to political theory. Thus, more specifically, if we argue that there is a moral order in the universe, i.e., natural law, and that out of this order the natural rights of individuals emerge, we cannot but regard the nineteenth century as the rejection of the foundation of legitimate government. The democratic tradition, for example, is divided, in this view, between those who would argue that the minority must always bow before the omnipotent majority and those who would see democracy in the self-limitation of the majority and the guarantee of individual rights. The French Revolution, it is argued, has resulted in a perversion of the medieval and Anglo-American tradition of democracy. Such a discussion naturally bears on the type of research that political scientists may do on the history of democracy in the West, or on the problem of reconstructing intelligent political régimes in Europe after the war. We must ask: What is legitimate political democracy?

A further division of thought related to the fundamentals of political theory research concerning the "philosophy of history." Some theorists contend that we need in America a consciousness of the meaning of our history; we need an examination of the American philosophy of history. None of the panel would deny that the individual researcher must know the principles he uses for the interpretation of history, but a difference of

opinion exists as to whether it is proper to state it, for ethical purposes at least, in terms of a philosophy of history. The philosophy of history is thus balanced against an ends-means relationship. In the latter statement, it is argued that a philosophy of history has usually relied on factors outside of human choice, even to an exclusion of any significant human choice in the course of history. If there is to be meaningful political ethics or principles, it must involve choice and results flowing from that choice. In other words, the important factor in social history is not the objective factor but the selection of ends and the selection of means for realizing ends. To some of the panel, it has been clear that research in political thought has been governed to some extent by assumptions that relate either to the philosophy of history or to the choice of ends and means. Often they have been confused.

One way of summarizing the discussion of basic issues is to say that the political tradition of the West must be subjected to close scrutiny in political theory research. The present-day interpretations of democracy, for example, grow out of differences of opinion as to the traditional roots of democratic government. Significant work has been done in recent years which throws light on the continuities of history. While it is obvious that students of political theory will applaud such work, they will likewise insist that more must be done. Whether the post-war reconstruction of Europe is involved, or the relation of Western society to the East, understanding must be based on the intellectual and institutional tradition of these areas. Both a philosophy of history and the issue of ends and means run deep into the tradition of which the student is heir. Americans, of course, must consider and interpret the background of their own political life, but in the future the organization of the world may depend upon a well-understood traditional diversity and upon similarity in primary political values.

The Political Theory Panel agreed generally that there should be usable definitions of political terms. It was agreed that one of the functions of the theorist is to define the concepts of political science. The panel agreed that there is unfortunate confusion on the use of the common and necessary conceptions of the discipline. Some members of the panel thought that there might be, on the analogy of contemporary work in the field of law, a Restatement of Political Science. Others thought of the possibility of a Dictionary of Political Science, though some believed that such would not differ widely from the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*. The examination of this subject, however, led to the question of the relation of concepts and institutions. The development of modern constitutional theory, the structure of modern ideologies, and a large number of common American political conceptions might be studied in relation to institutions. What relationship is there between concepts, or interpretations of

concepts, and the political arrangements or institutions which have been set up? Likewise, concepts have varied in different philosophical systems, and there is a large field for investigation in the relations of systems of thought, political concepts, and specific institutions. Institutional arrangement in relation to values obviously is another version of the ends-means or philosophy of history problem. On the other hand, issues like fiscal policy and the money issue in American politics, to mention only one, should give political theorists ample opportunity to make a contribution to political science.

The use of concepts or ideas presents another issue which has perhaps as much to do with teaching as with research. Most of the panel would agree that we should study the ancients because they are really modern, because they have something to say to the present generation in the solution of its problems. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Cicero, and scores of others must be studied because they tell us something about ourselves, because they make us conscious of the content of our own minds. In other words, because of historical continuity, or because of the essential nature of moral man or the moral universe (or even Satanic man and the Satanic phase of the universe), we must regard the great political thinkers of the past as timeless—at least in part. To show wherein these thinkers are timeless, and wherein they are not, involves the metaphysics we adopt; but it also involves research in political theory for every generation. Modern scholarship continues its labors, and we can almost see a year-by-year change in the appreciation of the past.

Certain members of the panel, however, were careful to insist that there is danger in work of this character. We may take our modern concepts and re-interpret the past simply in terms of what we think today. We may, therefore, as in some works on the Middle Ages, get a fictitious continuity of concepts and theory. We must be sure we understand the relation between concepts and institutions at the time they were developed. It is especially true, according to some, that the study of medieval ideas has been falsified by projecting modern conceptions into the past; the state of medieval times has been discussed as if it were the state of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The considerations mentioned above suggest that we need today both an integrated vision of society and a more particular examination of the lesser movements in political thought. That the political theorist has a duty in this respect has been repeatedly stressed, and in particular the theorist should analyze other phases of political science for their contribution to the larger end of a comprehensive picture of value and principle in modern politics. Some would say that such an understanding of our times will not come from the method of the positivists; only a theology or a metaphysics of politics can supply it. Certain members of the panel be-

lieve that along with a much greater emphasis on religious thought there should be closer attention to the political utopia as a means of criticism and integration. The political thinker should even undertake the writing of utopias. But no theorist would say that the careful collection and organization of the facts of modern society can be eliminated. The issue arises over the place of such necessary labor in the total scheme of scholarly enterprise.

The integrated view must be related to a variety of views. Smaller or less significant movements in political thinking need, in the opinion of the panel, to be studied carefully. Many movements need monographic studies; the ideas of church groups, of labor organizations, the evolution of the ideas of long-established journals, and those who favor the agrarian or coöperative movements should be studied for their interpretation of political values and principles. In other words, there should be a frontal attack by political theorists and their graduate students on tracing the emergence of interpretations and values in American political society.

In a more specific vein, the Political Theory Panel has concerned itself with the lack of suitable texts of great thinkers, both for teaching and research. The teaching of political theory is dependent on suitable texts in the American and European fields, to say nothing of the problem presented by Oriental and Near Eastern political thought. There is already a committee of the American Political Science Association working on the publication of usable volumes from the writings of distinguished American political thinkers. The panel decided that a small committee should be appointed to draw up a list of the most needed texts from the European field. It is to be noted particularly that changing interpretations of history have brought to light what scholars of previous generations did not do. The older writers neglected by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will get their due, let us hope, from those who are students of political philosophy in the twentieth century. The changing but continuous character of social questions makes writers of the past rise and decline in their importance to contemporary life. For example, a number of the panel felt that texts from the ninth and sixteenth centuries were especially needed at the present time. It is hoped, in any case, that the Executive Council of the Association will take some suitable action on the report of the committee of the panel. There should no doubt be a committee of the Association to encourage the publication of European texts in the field of political thought.

After careful study in the Political Theory Panel, the committee¹

¹ The Committee on European Texts is composed of Paul A. Palmer, Kenyon College; Father Wilfrid Parsons, Catholic University of America; Eric Voegelin, Louisiana State University; and J. Roland Pennock, Swarthmore College (chairman).

has brought together a report which indicates the more important and immediate tasks in the publication of European sources. A meeting of the committee was held in Washington at the time of the annual meeting of the Association in January, 1944. A report on the replies received to the committee's questionnaire was considered and actions were taken which may be summarized as follows: (1) The committee tentatively decided to confine its activities to works published before the middle of the nineteenth century. (2) The committee decided that among single treatises the most important for our purposes are: (a) a translation of Bodin, probably abridged; (b) a translation of Marsiglio in condensed or abridged form; (c) a popular edition of the Nugent translation of Montesquieu. (3) The committee also looked with favor upon the proposal to reprint Sidney's *Discourses* and Harrington's *Oceana*, but it felt these to be of distinctly secondary importance as compared to the editions previously mentioned. (4) Under the general heading of "Selections," the committee favored publication of the following: (a) a volume of selections from Bentham's works; (b) selections from medieval political theorists; (c) selections from Occam, Wyclif, Luther, Calvin, and others, appropriate to a volume on the Reformation; (d) a similar volume on the Counter-Reformation; (e) possibly a volume on the theory of absolute monarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; (f) selections from writings on the theory of toleration.²

As a result of the work of the committee, it is clear that there is marked interest in improving the available teaching materials in political theory, and there is also a notable concentration of interest upon a few basic publications such as a translation of Bodin, a popular edition of Montesquieu, a volume of selections from Bentham, and a volume of selections from medieval political theorists. It is to be hoped that the Association and the Research Committee will be able, at least after the war, to bring about the publication of these needed volumes.

Part of the work of the meeting of the Political Theory Panel was a short joint discussion with representatives of the Special Committee on Civil Liberty of the Committee on Government. This discussion emphasized the inadequacy of an approach limited to constitutional law; the problem of civil liberty runs back to the fundamentals of man and society. The defender of civil liberty must examine the principles on which the rights of an individual may be based, and he must defend an order in which it is valid that individuals have civil liberty. Thus civil liberty should be regarded as a special application of many of the problems so far discussed in this report. A number of specific subjects for research were,

² The committee discovered that two scholars have been working on material for a volume of readings in medieval political theory, and has been able to bring the two students together, one of them generously agreeing to assist the other.

however, brought before the panel and the representatives of the Special Committee on Civil Liberty. It was suggested that political theorists might examine the conditions of society and government under which men have civil liberty; that the history of the theory of civil liberty might be examined with profit; and that the Christian and other elements in civil rights should be studied, with some attention to the differences between Protestant and Catholic thought. In addition, examination should be made of the changing content of civil liberty, the relationship of property rights and other civil rights, the effect of industrialism on civil liberty, the supremacy of the civil over the military authorities, the effect of war on civil liberty, the civil rights of members of the armed forces, and the freedom of the press under conditions of press monopoly. These suggestions must be regarded, of course, as illustrative of the general problem, and not as an exhaustive statement of needed research in the relations of political theory and civil liberty.

II. RESEARCH IN AMERICAN POLITICAL THEORY

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It is not difficult to list a considerable number of subjects on which further research is needed. The simple fact is that almost none of the great subjects has been adequately dealt with, even for this generation, and the same can be said for most of the lesser ones. The difficulty lies not so much in an enumeration of worth-while subjects as in consideration of the methods of attack to be employed by the researcher, and even more in the problem (the difficulties of which can be no more than suggested in this article) of the equipment of the researcher.

Modern federalism is peculiarly the contribution of the United States. When Madison and Hamilton were defending the proposed constitution against its critics, one of the major arguments which they had to meet was the contention that the Fathers had created, not a federal system, but a national or consolidated one. So far as recorded history went, the argument of the Anti-Federalists was correct. And when Madison came, in the thirty-ninth *Federalist*, to analyze the nature of the proposed constitution, he freely admitted that the new system was not strictly federal within the traditional meaning of that term. Rather, it was a system partly national and partly federal. But from the point of view of later times it was a federal system, because the term "federal" has come to be attached to the distribution of powers between central government and states which was worked out by the Convention in the summer of 1787. Many other countries have taken this work as a model upon which to build, although