

# RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Work of the Panels of the  
Research Committee, American  
Political Science Association

*Edited by*

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## Chapter X

## POLITICAL THEORY

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE POLITICAL THEORY PANEL met in Washington, D.C., during November, 1943. Extensive correspondence preceded this meeting. The panel presented its findings in symposium fashion in the *American Political Science Review*, August, 1944. This symposium is reprinted here, with only minor changes.

Subsequent meetings of the panel were held in connection with annual meetings of the Association.

Participants in the panel correspondence and discussion which resulted in the chapter that follows were:

William Anderson, University of Minnesota; Charles A. Beard, New Milford, Conn.; Everett S. Brown, University of Michigan; Francis Coker, Yale University; Kenneth C. Cole, University of Washington; Thomas I. Cook, University of Washington; Guy Howard Dodge, Brown University; Peter F. Drucker, Bennington College; W. Y. Elliott, Harvard University; Carl J. Friedrich, Harvard University; R. G. Gettelle, University of California; Walter F. Gouch, Johns Hopkins University; Ernest S. Griffith, Library of Congress; Waldemar Gurian, Notre Dame University; John H. Hallowell, Duke University; R. C. Hartnett, S. J., Detroit University; Earl Latham, Amherst College; Arnaud B. Leavelle, Stanford University; Max Lerner, New York City; John D. Lewis, Oberlin College; H. M. McDonald, University of Texas; Charles H. McIlwain, Harvard University; R. M. MacIver, Columbia University; Charles E. Merriam, University of Chicago; Paul A. Palmer, Kenyon College; Wilfrid Parsons, S. J., Catholic University of America; J. Roland Pennock, Swarthmore College; C. B. Robson, University of North Carolina;

Carlton C. Rodee, University of Southern California; George H. Sabine, Cornell University; Mulford Q. Sibley, University of Illinois; T. V. Smith, Syracuse University; Carl B. Swisher, Johns Hopkins University; Eric Voegelin, Louisiana State University; Rene deVisne Williamson, University of Tennessee; Benjamin F. Wright, Harvard University; Francis G. Wilson (chairman), University of Illinois; Charles R. Nixon (secretary), Cornell University.

## I. THE POLITICAL THEORY PANEL

Francis G. Wilson

Broad differences as well as agreements on essential principles characterized the membership of the political theory panel. One would expect this. 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 continuous 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 uni-

versal 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. If it is said, for example, that political science is the study of power, can one in good and scholarly conscience avoid the issue of what power is for, and why it makes a difference whether one group or another has in fact the control of the state? It is certainly one theory of politics to say that a descriptive study of power is the full content of political science, but most political theorists accept the burden of formulating a theory of political ethics. Such a theory, in turn, provides a set of criteria for judging the exercise of power and for saying whether it is better to have one group or another directing the vast control over individuals that is within the grasp of the modern state. Yet it can be said that in defense of democracy against totalitarianism during the last twenty years there has been a constant tendency to evade the ultimately inescapable moral issues that such political systems present. One may well cite the twisting uncertainties of the discussion during this recent period of the basis upon which rights may be claimed by an individual citizen.

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 attempts 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 discussion 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. This argument arises from the belief that the political interpretations of the late medieval period, notably the thirteenth century, offer the sharpest possible contrast with the nineteenth century. The thirteenth century is viewed, in this line of thought, as the culmination of a long development in Christian, or theological and ethical political ideas. In contrast, the nineteenth century was the period in which the full force of the implications of secular and scientific thought as applied to politics was felt. It was in the nineteenth century, therefore, that rationalist liberalism, which attached itself strongly to the ideas of science and progress, came to be offered as a complete alternative to the more ancient moral tradition of the West. The principle of a continuity between sound medieval ideas and modern democratic thought accepts, likewise, the proposition that, though Protestantism broke from Catholicism on many doctrinal points, there is a deep and underlying continuity in the appreciation of man as a rational and moral creature. 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 focuses the research that political scientists may undertake on the history of

democracy in the West. The historian of constitutionalism, who combines history, law, and philosophy in his work, may well come to the conclusion that the Anglo-American insistence on a bill of rights and the protection of the minority is the only basis on which the defense of majority rule in other respects is tenable. He may likewise argue that bills of rights emerged slowly from medieval experience and theory, and that modern continental liberalism has often failed because it has rejected one-half of the democratic tradition itself. 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, which suggests process and inevitability in the pattern of historical events, is thus balanced against the notion that history is made freely by freely willing men. Ends and means are thus chosen voluntarily, and though the results of such free action never quite conform to the ends accepted in the beginning, such results do conform in part. These freely chosen ends and similarly chosen means give history the meaning that it has, and history is thus in large part the expression of the aspiration of men. It has been argued that a philosophy of history has usually relied on factors outside of human choice, and in the extreme even to an exclusion of any significant human choice in the course of history. If there is to be meaning in political principle, it must involve choice and results flowing from that choice. In other words, the important factor in social history is not the objective conditions of life, however forceful they may be, but the selection of ends and the selection of means for realizing ends. To some of the panel, it was clear that research in political thought has been governed to some extent by assumptions that relate either to the philosophy of history idea, or, in

contrast, to the free choice of ends and means, though often they have been confused. It is the system of inevitabilities in a researcher's mind that reveals him most clearly. Is progress inevitable? Is war unavoidable? Was our political system, or any other, always embryonic in history? Or, is progress the result of conscious and intelligent purpose? May we eliminate war by taking thought? Does democracy exist because people decided it should be?

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 interpret the background of their own political life. They must not only trace specific American ideas and institutions since 1776, but they must put these same ideas and institutions into their pre-independence history, and they must see all of this in the context of modern political culture as a whole. There is little room for a simple-minded provincialism in the study of political theory, whether American or otherwise, and such an effort to surmount the inevitable narrowness of specialized research will necessarily involve a consideration of Western tradition, and its relation to other cultures. The panel seemed to be agreed that the future organization, for example, of democracy or constitutional government on a broad scale must rest on the recognition of well-understood traditional diversity, yet with agreement on primary political values. One might call to witness the current efforts to establish through the United Nations an international recognition of human rights.

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 theorists 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 re-statement 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 arrangements in relation to values obviously is another version of the end-means versus the philosophy of history problem. For the political theorist must consider principles or values, and he must view them as having arisen from institutional patterns on the one hand; and, on the other hand, he must regard institutions as directed, controlled, or developed from the force of values themselves. The crucial question is, however, whether either institutions or values arise from the free determinations of rational thought. Yet on many issues the range of useful descriptive research for the analyst of ideas is sufficiently wide. Fiscal policy and the money issue in American politics, to mention only one such question, 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. The political theorist, so most of the panel believed, must interpret institutions and values, in both the past and the present, on both the large and the small canvas. Questions of world organization, its history or its evolution, its changing spirit and its values may command his attention. But the architectonic force of political theory must express itself in the study of the small, and the seemingly insignificant. The small dissentient group in the past may have left its imprint on the latter course of ideas, and so the contemporary group that rejects the major assumptions of, for example, industrial society may have its value for the future. 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 believe 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 cooperative 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, for both 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.

After careful study in the political theory panel, the committee<sup>1</sup> 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.

As a result of the work of the committee, it is clear that there is marked interest in improving the available teaching materials

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).

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 to bring about the publications 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 Social Science Research Council's 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, 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

Benjamin F. Wright

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 thirtieth *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 none has imitated it with complete fidelity to detail. We have, then, in this country the arch-type of modern federalism, and it might be reasonable to suppose that we should find here a considerable body of literature discussing the history and theory of such a system. There is, in fact, surprisingly little literature on the theory, or even the history, of American federalism, although a good many books and articles dealing with certain of the problems growing out of the federal distribution of powers have appeared. The subject cries for further analysis, and no single study will close off the field for those students who

are interested in the theoretical problems of federal government.

Somewhat the same thing can be said about the separation of powers. True it is that the Founders acknowledged their indebtedness to Montesquieu, to Locke, to Blackstone, to Harrington, and to others who had written on this subject. But again it is apparent that the system worked out in this country bears but slight resemblance to that described by any of the preceding philosophers or jurists. There have been excellent discussions of several aspects of this general problem, e.g., the recent studies of presidential powers and the numerous writings on judicial review, but the general problem of the separation of powers is still lacking an interpreter. Nor is there any history of the theory of the separation of powers in America.

The principle of representative government was certainly not originated in 1787, nor first discussed in the *Federalist*. It is nevertheless true that there is room for a very considerable amount of further analysis of the assumptions underlying representative government as applied in this country and as debated in many constitutional conventions and in a variety of writings. The vastly increased complexity of modern government is a truism with which everyone agrees. It is not apparent that our theory of representation has been clearly analyzed with a view to the consideration of the relative functions of representatives and voters in modern society. It is ridiculous to suppose that Burke or John Stuart Mill said the last word on this subject, and it is unsound to assume that theories applicable to other countries are applicable here, at least without some modification.

The whole cluster of questions which gather about the problem of individualism offers many opportunities for further discussion, and not only such traditional topics as the relation of the individual to various political communities, or of the position of the individual in industrial society, but also the status and political relationships of the individual as a member of various non-political groups. The subject has, to be sure, been attacked in a piecemeal fashion by several scholars, but I should suppose that no one of them has thought that his own contribution was inclusive or, perhaps, even final within the limited range of his objectives. At the present day, the problem of minority rights,



and particularly of the civil rights of minorities, seems of particular importance. Several scholars are at work upon some aspects of this subject. Whether any will deal with the general over-all theoretical issues involved, I do not know.

Scholars dealing with American political thought have been inclined, like most of those about whom they were writing, to steer away from many of the relatively abstract subjects. It is easy to understand why this has been the case; the nature of their materials has inclined them away from the major terms. I venture to suggest that we have made a mistake in avoiding such conceptions as justice and such great problems as the principles of political obligation. Even though the more significant American writings rarely do more than mention them, if they do that, there are assumptions in those writings which need further analysis, and those assumptions should be discussed in terms of the classical concepts of political thought. There are great possibilities for scholars who have the patience and the capacity to probe into the vast area of the implicit in American political thought. Such discussions would, I believe, serve to throw a great deal of light upon the nature of American political thought. We have had too little basic analysis.

There are opportunities for further study dealing with the influence, or lack of influence, of various English and continental movements of thought in the United States. This has recently been illustrated by articles on Benthamism,<sup>2</sup> and on German idealism.<sup>3</sup> These were, of course, major movements in England and Germany; in this country their influence was relatively slight, and the very slightness of that impact is itself a fact which helps to illuminate the nature and development of American thought. There have been many studies of socialism in America, and especially of Marxist socialism, but all, or nearly all, of them, at least so far as my observation goes, have dealt with the economic aspects of such movements. To be sure, the impact of socialism has been greater upon economic than upon political

2. Paul A. Palmer, "Benthamism in England and America," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, pp. 855-871 (Oct., 1941).

3. Thomas I. Cook and Arnaud B. LeVelle, "German Idealism and American Theories of the Democratic Community," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, pp. 213-236 (Aug., 1943).

thought in this country, but again there is an opportunity for a consideration of the non-influence of Marxism upon American political thinking.

And if there is opportunity for a variety of studies dealing with the impact of the European thought in America, there is at least as great an opportunity for studies of comparisons or contrasts between European and American developments. There are undoubtedly many areas in which the native doctrinal developments have been both vigorous and important, and where the possibility of comparative study of political ideas has been largely neglected. It has been a serious mistake to write about American political thought as though, after the Revolution or the adoption of the Constitution, it had a being which was not only independent of, but not even comparable with, the various developments of political theory in the remainder of the Western World. There may be similar opportunities for a study of comparative political ideas based upon the writings of the Orient, but of this possibility I cannot speak with any authority.

A committee of the American Political Science Association has been working on a plan with the University of North Carolina Press, which originally proposed the scheme, for the publication of a Library of American Political Thought. The plan is that a series of volumes should be published to cover the major American political writings. Each volume would have a special editor, and each would ordinarily be devoted to a single writer. Since few of the major political thinkers in America have written books, it is now extremely difficult for the student and teacher, and particularly for those who do not have a large library close at hand, to consult most of the writings which are of primary importance for their subject. A collection of from fifteen to thirty volumes of this kind, each of substantial size, would go far toward making a large part of the raw material of American political thought readily available. It is unnecessary to emphasize either the importance or the difficulty of selecting from the writings of most of the political thinkers. It will be equally important for the editor of each volume to write an introduction which not only will give the setting of the theorist's work, but also analyze that writing and offer an estimate of its significance.

It is to be hoped that the funds to finance this important project can soon be raised.

While I have high hopes for this project, I think that it should also be pointed out that, no matter how successful it may be, it will leave a great wealth of material unconsidered. There are many sources which cannot possibly be compressed within the covers of such volumes as these. Let me give two illustrations.

Many of those who have worked in the field of American political thought have had occasion to make some use of state constitutional convention debates. I think it unlikely that these rich mines will be worked out within the foreseeable future. On most of the major issues that were discussed during the nineteenth century, and for some which are being debated in the twentieth century, they furnish source materials which are as important as they are difficult to get at. But the difficulty of working such mines, and the sheer mass of low grade ore that must be sifted through in order to find the occasional pay dirt, can be no justification for failure to make use of them.

There are many movements which have scarcely been studied at all from the point of view of political theory. Everyone is familiar with at least the general outlines of the slavery arguments, although even this material has by no means been exhausted, but relatively few have done much work in the many lesser reform movements of the same period, even though it must be evident by now that the effect of these humanitarian crusades was materially to alter the conception of democracy in the United States. There have been studies of the political ideas and agitations of labor groups in recent periods; there has been much less attention to the political thought of the labor organizations before the Civil War; and there are numerous other groups not so easily classified which have at least attempted to affect the course of political action and political thought in the United States.

I hope that I have been able to make it clear that, in my opinion at least, there are great opportunities, that the field is open to the talented. It seems to me that more needs to be said about the way in which these various research tasks are to be carried out. We still suffer from the blight of the descriptive textbook.

Too many scholars have assumed that they had fulfilled their mission when they wrote summaries of the ideas expressed by the various political thinkers and then put these summaries together in a volume which sometimes resembles a football program containing "the names and numbers of all the players." It may be assumed that accurate summary and description has its place. We do need to know something about the players in the game. But such descriptive listing is at best scarcely more than a beginning. If the study of American political thought is to have the importance either for students or scholars, or for the entire course of political thinking, in America that it deserves, we certainly cannot stop with description or with the cozy task of compilation. The charge of thinness has sometimes been brought against writings on American political theory. It is not a charge lightly to be ignored.

It is a severe, but, I am afraid, a just criticism of the writings of political scientists dealing with this subject-matter that the most stimulating and, taking it all in all, the most valuable history of American thought was written by a professor of English. Parrington's book has many defects, but instead of resting content with pointing them out, we would be much better advised to take both his limitations and his merits into account in our own work. Where, for example, he had almost no understanding of the constitutional tradition and of the history of constitutional institutions in America, where he largely disregarded economic history, where he was frequently neglectful of the many currents which went to make up the climate of opinion in the various periods with which he was dealing, we can, it is to be hoped, improve upon his lack of thoroughness. If his treatment of John Adams is misleading, his discussion of the Federal Convention both inadequate and misleading, and his few pages on the *Federalist* almost a travesty, that is not a sufficient justification for relapsing into dullness. It remains true, in my judgment, that Parrington did give an over-all picture of the character of American political thought which has vitality and meaning. He had a point of view, one that he frankly stated in his Foreword, and he viewed the entire course of American political and literary thought from that location. His point of view today may seem somewhat naive,

but it had the tremendous merit of being an attitude which was firmly grounded in the thinking of his period. He was a child of, and a vigorous spokesman for, the Progressive movement of the early part of this century. It does not need to be stressed that this movement has been one of the most influential in American thought since the establishment of the Republic. Had he written a purely descriptive (I am afraid this is what too many students mean by "objective") book, it would have been as quickly forgotten as have the many other histories of American literature which are frequently more accurate and invariably less important.

Perhaps I might be excused for taking one additional illustration from the writings of a man who was not a political scientist. I should suppose that many would agree that America's greatest historian was Frederick J. Turner. Turner's interpretation of American history has profoundly influenced, not only the thinking of historians, of political scientists, and of economists, but also the thinking of publicists and statesmen. It is, and always was, a partial and one-sided interpretation. It is of less value today than it was a generation ago, but it still contains, and will continue to contain, elements of importance for any student of American life and thought. Had Turner been content to write monographs, or had he, like so many of his unimaginative followers, been satisfied to repeat the words of the wise men who came before him, he would have been a figure of the second magnitude. Being a man of imaginative power, as well as of great scholarly ability, he left an impression upon American thought which has been equalled by no other historical writer. I am not arguing that every student or teacher of political theory should instantaneously attempt to write essays in the manner of Turner, much less that they should proceed imitatively along the paths that he marked out. I do mean that he furnished an example of the possibilities for the interpretation of the past which few others have had the courage or the ability even to attempt to imitate.

I very much hope that what I have been saying will not seem to be a justification for the free and easy expression of prejudice,

or that I am not suggesting that scholars concerned with American political thought are relieved of the necessity of hard and intensive research. Quite to the contrary, my criticism would be that we have usually published before we had done nearly enough hard work. There has, for one thing, been an insufficient utilization of the materials commonly thought of as belonging to other disciplines, particularly economic history, constitutional history, and sociology. I know of no general rules which seem to be applicable here except that I should think it a defensible proposition that almost any subject in the general area with which I have dealt above needs to be considered in the light of materials drawn from several fields of study. We have all heard much about the breaking down of departmental lines. I wonder whether this cannot be done most fruitfully in terms of particular topics and research problems.

All subjects need to be considered in the light of their times. In the study of American political thought, the climate of opinion in which nearly any problem lives and has its being almost invariably includes the institutional background as well as the intellectual history. The fact that virtually all American political writings that have counted have proceeded out of controversy, that none of great stature has been a detached, systematic, philosophical study (Calhoun's *Disquisition* was both significant and systematic, but it was certainly not detached), makes it even more important that materials drawn from political, constitutional, and economic history be considered along with the ideas that are there being expressed.

A book which illustrates, in one fashion, the sort of writing that I have in mind is A. V. Dicey's *Law and Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*. That work, in large measure because of the breadth of its coverage, because it ignores ordinary professional boundaries, and because it deals with ideas in their setting, has a lasting value and a pertinence to the problems of a century with which it does not deal far in excess of most of the books written about current problems. Somewhat the same kind of treatment is found in two quite different articles published within recent years in this Review. Professor F. W.

Coker's "American Traditions Concerning Liberty and Property"<sup>4</sup> and Professor A. T. Mason's "The Conservative World of Mr. Justice Sutherland, 1883-1910,"<sup>5</sup> bring to bear upon a particular problem a very considerable variety of factual and theoretical data. The result is, in each case, far more enlightening than it would have been had the author merely summarized a particular book or document. I certainly do not mean to imply that there have been no other and not less worthy examples of a method characterized by breadth of research combined with a discriminating selection of relevant materials. But this paper is not offered as a bibliography. It is a statement of possibilities and needs in the field of American political thought, and the few citations here included are merely illustrative of the rich opportunities which the subject-matter affords.

What I have been saying has also been strongly influenced by my conviction that the greatest need in this country today is a statement of objectives in terms of ideas and ideals. We lack any clear conception of what we are fighting for, or what goals we should seek to attain, even in this country, after the war.

It may be assumed that scholars who are concerned with the study and teaching of political theory cannot themselves supply all of the needed answers. It does not follow that they are justified in dodging the attempt to aid in this all-important enterprise. The work of the student of political theory must, in part, be a work of selection and interpretation. I do not mean to argue that we should substitute prejudice for objectivity. Objectivity, properly used, is necessary to scholarship; abused, it leads to sterility. The scholar must attempt to discover all of the facts that are pertinent to his problem. He should never neglect materials or data which are not in line with his own inclinations. It does not follow that he should not begin his work with an hypothesis, much less that he should have no conclusions, or that he should not feel free, indeed obliged, to express them. We have been too inclined to hide timidly behind the excuse of objectivity.

Interpretations of the history of political thought and analysis

4. *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 30, pp. 1-23 (Feb., 1936).

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, pp. 443-477 (June, 1938).

of current winds of doctrine can alike make great contributions to the future course of American democracy. Here lie an opportunity and a challenge which we cannot shirk and yet fulfill our obligations as scholars. So long as research and teaching remain free, we need have no fears of the old bogeymen, propaganda and indoctrination. The only test of political truth in a free country is that stated by Mr. Justice Holmes in his great dissenting opinion in the Abrams case: "the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." A truly free market includes the study and the classroom. Scholars also are citizens, as are their students. It has been said that "to teach is to affirm." It would doubtless be unwise, probably even dangerous to the best interests of scholarship and of teaching, to apply the maxim literally and without qualification. It is just as harmful to the best interests of both of these to neglect the important truth which it contains.

### III. CONCEPTS AND INSTITUTIONS AS FIELDS FOR RESEARCH

Ernest S. Griffith

Research in political theory hitherto has been largely synonymous with searches for the origin, growth, and decline in ideas, principles, and doctrines. Sometimes such research has concerned itself with individual theories; sometimes with periods. Less frequently, it has explored the basic concepts which underlie all theory. Yet it is with these concepts in their various aspects that researchers in theory must inevitably come to grips if they are to obtain precision in their findings. For example, principles to govern the relations between church and state, between business and government, between law and opinion, rest upon precise definitions of the concepts involved. The principles may indeed be found to be corollaries of such definitions. So also in the more elaborate analyses of democracy, or political processes, or the structure of the good society, or the several elements in an ideal constitution, concepts precisely used are basic.

It will be noted that the adjective used is "precise," rather than "correct." There is a reason for this. More frequently than not, it will be discovered that the creative political theorist has imparted new meanings and new insights to many, if not most,