Where is Political Science Going?

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Political science, as we currently understand the label, was born, in Western Europe, in the early Fifties. One may say that it was "reborn"; but that would be inaccurate, for in the nineteenth century and until World War Two the label indicated a captive discipline largely dominated by juridical or historical approaches (as in the case, e.g., of Gaetano Mosca). So political science had a new start and became a field of inquiry in its own right about half a century ago. I was, at the time, one of its founders (with Stein Rokkan, Juan Linz, Mattei Dogan, Hans Daalder, Erik Allardt, S. N. Eisenstadt, and others. See: *Comparative European Politics: The Story of a Profession*, edited by H. Daalder, 1997). I am thus one of the witnesses of what the "young turks" of the time had in mind, of how we conceived and promoted political science. I am now an "ancient sage" and it now pleases me to reflect, some fifty years later, on where political science has gone and on whether it has taken the right course, the course that I had wished for and expected. Thus to ask today, in the middle of *Mitteleuropa*, where political science has been heading is also to ask whether the new beginnings of the discipline in Eastern Europe should or should not follow the path entered by our "big brother," I mean, by American-type political science. I too have been somewhat swallowed by our big brother (to be sure, a benevolent and well meaning one) in the sense that I have been teaching in the United States for some thirty years. Let me add that I have largely benefited from my American exposure. Yet I have always resisted and still resist the American influence. And I take this occasion to say why I am unhappy about the American molding of present day political science.

Let me first go back, for a moment, to our beginnings. In the Fifties and to this day the British have generally dismissed the notion of political science; they cling to the label political studies and/or government. What was the bone of contention? In retrospect, and in the face of the quantification of political science, I have some regrets on having fought on the side of "science." Yet at the time it made sense to do so. To say political studies leaves us with an ordinary language, normal discourse that gives no distinctiveness to the endeavor. In particular it does not separate narrative from cognitive inquiry. In the second place it does not bring about a "specialized" language (as any scientific inquiry is required to do). And, thirdly, "studies" does not call for ad hoc methodological foundations. For all these reasons we were right in upholding the banner of science. For we could not foresee the narrowness that the notion of science would acquire on American soil.

The foregoing leads me to the question: what kind of science can and should political science be? I have always maintained that our "model" was economics. However, economists have an easier task than others. For one, economic behavior abides by a criterion (utility, the maximization of interest, of profit), whereas political behavior does not (political man displays a mixed bag of motivations). Secondly, economists work with real numbers (monetary quantities) embedded in the behavior of their economic animal, whereas social scientists work with assigned and often arbitrary numerical values. Furthermore, the science of economics developed when it was well understood that a science does need precise and stable definitions for its basic terminology, and by the same token stable "data containers" that allow for a cumulative build-up of information, whereas American political science—arriving some 150 years later—quickly stumbled into Kuhn's "paradigms" and scientific revolutions, and happily entered the exciting but unsubstantial path of revolutioniziong itself every fifteen years or so in search for new paradigms, models and approaches.

Overall, then, I take the view that mainstream political science has adopted an unsuited model of science (drawn from the hard, exact sciences) and has failed to establish its own identity (as a soft science) by failing to establish its own, distinctive methodology. To be sure, my shelves are inundated by books whose title is "methodology of the social sciences"; but these works simply address research techniques and statistical processing. They have almost nothing to do with the "method of logos," with the method of thinking. So we now have a dismal science that lacks logical method and indeed ignores pure and simple logic.

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Be that as it may (I shall exemplify later), let me first identify the main characteristics of the state of the art, that is to say of how political science has established itself in the American Academia and, under its mighty influence, in most of the world. Our discipline has sought its identity, I submit, as being:

i) anti-institutional and, by the same token, behavioral;

ii) as becoming as quantitative and as statistical as possible;

iii) and in privileging the theory-research path of inquiry at the expense of the theory-practice nexus.

My quick reaction to the above is (i) that politics is an interplay between behavior and institutions (structures), and therefore that behavioralism has eliminated with the dirty water also the baby, thus overshooting the mark; (ii) that quantitativism is in fact driving us into a march of either false precision or of precise irrelevancy; and (iii) that by failing to confront the theory-practice relationship we have created an useless science.

Since the first two indictments are familiar ones, they do not need to be explicated. I thus propose to dwell on the third one. The question is: knowledge for what? Just for the sake of knowledge? In part yes; but in part no.

Most sciences divide themselves into two branches: the pure science and the applied science. The pure science is not concerned with practical matters. It unfolds along the theory-research dimension seeking data and engaging in evidence-finding. The applied science unfolds, instead, along the theory-practice dimension and therefore as a knowledge for application, and indeed as a knowledge verified (or falsified) by its success (or failure) in application. And the fact that our discipline has missed, or even dismissed, its applied branch entails that political science is a theory without practice, a knowledge crippled by a know-how void.

I was asking: knowledge for what? The answer is that political science cannot answer this question. Practice-wise it is a largely useless science that does not supply knowledge for use. Furthermore, in neglecting the application it also deprives itself of its best truth-test. For the notion of truth is, in science, a pragmatic one. Something is true when it "works."

In order to justify our practical and predictive failings we have invented the theory of unintended consequences. But this is very much an alibi for covering up the fact that we have not developed an applied knowledge hinged on "if . . . then" questions and on means-ends analysis. While unintended consequences are always in the cards, their inevitability has been largely overstated. In the field of reform policies and of institutions building most of our predictive failures were easily predictable and most unforeseen consequences could have been easily foreseen (as *ex post* analysis almost invariably reveals). But let me leave this matter at that, because I now want to pursue the point to which I had earlier promised that I would return, namely, that we have a methodology without logic, that has lost sight even of logic.

Take, to illustrate, the manner in which the topic of our meeting—democracy—is generally discussed in the discipline. What is democracy? If this is a request for a definition, then the reply is likely to be that we should not worry about defining and that definitions are to be kept loose. Otherwise the reply is likely to be that this is an ill-formulated question that leads to an ontological discussion, whereas the correct question is: to what degree is a polity and/ or a democracy democratic? I take it, however, that both replies misconstrue the argument.

The belittlement of definitions is wrong on three counts. First, since definitions declare the intended meaning of words, they ensure that we do not misunderstand each other. Second, words are also, in our research, our data containers. Therefore, if our data containers are loosely defined our facts will be misgathered. Third, to define is first of all to assign limits, to delimit. Hence the definition establishes what is to be included and conversely what is excluded by our categories. If democracy is defined as a system in which leaders are elected, most countries currently qualify as democracies; but if it is defined as a system of "free elections," then the countries included in our list would be halved. How can one say, then, that definitions are unimportant?

The degree argument is even more arguable. Its familiar and endlessly repeated premise is that all differences are differences in degree. But no. There is nothing in the nature of things that establishes that differences are of degree, just as there is nothing that establishes that they are intrinsically in kind. Differences are continuous if so treated (logically). Likewise differences are discontinuous under the classificatory *per genus et differentiam* treatment. Whether differences are quantitative or qualitative, of degree or of kind, is a matter of logical treatment and thus a matter of deciding which handling is appropriate for what purpose.

If defined, democracy must obtain, by definition, an opposite, say, non-democracy. Question: how does democracy relate, logically, to its opposite? Well, in two ways. We may hold—applying Aristotle's principle of the excluded middle—that democracy and non-democracy are contradictories and thus mutually exclusive terms. If so, any given polity is either democratic or not. But we may also conceive democracy and non-democracy as the polar ends of a continuum that admits, along the way, intermediate possibilities and thus many different degrees of democracy. In this case the principle of the excluded middle does not apply; and that is all there is to it. We are thus equally entitled to ask what is, or what is not, a democracy, and to ask to what degree a democracy is more or less democratic (with respect to which characteristics). Both are perfectly legitimate questions that are best asked, it seems to me, in that order. The first question establishes the cut-off points. The second one deals with within-democracy variations. But this is hardly the argument that you will find in most American textbooks. There you are likely to learn that dichotomous thinking is obsolete, that measurement replaces definitions, and so on and so forth. A sequel of slogans that attest in my opinion, to logical illiteracy.

I must conclude. Where is political science going? In the argument that I have offered here, American-type political science (to be sure the "normal science," for intelligent scholars are always saved by their intelligence) is going nowhere. It is an ever growing giant with feet of clay. Visit, to believe, the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association; it is an experience of unfading dullness. Or read, to believe, the illegible and/or massively irrelevant *American Political Science Review*. The alternative, or at least, the alternative for which I side, is to resist the quantification of the discipline. Briefly put, *think before counting*; and, also, *use logic* in thinking.

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