Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science

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American political science is a congenitally unsettled discipline, witnessing a number of movements designed to reorient its fundamental character. Four prominent movements are compared here: the statism accompanying the discipline's early professionalization, the pluralism of the late 1910s and early 1920s, behavioralism, and the Caucus for a New Political Science (with a brief glance at the more recent Perestroika). Of these movements, only the first and third clearly succeeded. The discipline has proven very hard to shift. Despite the rhetoric that accompanied behavioralism, both it and statism were revolutions without enemies within the discipline (other than those appearing after they succeeded), and therein lies the key to their success.

Many have tried to change the character of American political science, but few have succeeded. The revolutionaries in question are those who have sought in a group enterprise to set the agenda for the discipline in conscious rejection of most or all of what has gone before. In these terms, the discipline has seen five revolutionary movements. (Proclamation and establishment of a new research program, such as structural functionalism or biopolitics, does not qualify, and "paradigm shift" in Kuhn's [1962] sense is generally not an appropriate frame.) First came those who founded the discipline in the late nineteenth century as a professionalized state-building science in a seemingly recalcitrant polity—and against amateur political analysis. Next came the pluralists, who in the early twentieth century took up arms against the monistic state and its disciplinary handmaiden. Third came the behavioralists of the mid-twentieth century, who revolted on behalf of the study of actual behavior, science, the political system (as opposed to the state), and (again) pluralism. Fourth came the Caucus for a New Political Science in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which rejected behavioralism's alleged complicity in the status quo of American politics in favor of a politically committed political science oriented to the social crisis of the times. Fifth came the Perestroika movement of the early twenty-first century, targeted against perceived hegemony of formal and quantitative approaches, in favor of methodological pluralism, qualitative inquiry, and again an orientation to pressing public problems.

Because Minerva's owl has yet to take flight over Perestroika, I will say little about it, but of the previous four movements, only two succeeded. A successful revolution may be defined in terms of resetting the discipline's agenda, as validated by the recognition of practitioners, whether or not they shared the movement's commitments. Practitioners then have to position themselves in relation to the new understanding, even if they do not share it. Success must be recognized as such; this may seem like an obvious criterion, yet it rules out at least one alleged revolution, as we will see. What is most striking about the two movements that did succeed, the statism of the disciplinary founding and behavioralism, is that they did not have any serious enemies inside the discipline who could articulate opposition to the rise of the new persuasion. These enemies only appeared *after* the movement's success, and so paradoxically validated the transformation in question. Although one should be cautious about generalizing on the basis of four cases, these are the only cases we have. The lesson would seem to be that the discipline can be transformed in revolutionary fashion only by movements with no existing enemies prepared to resist. To put it another way, in a century and a half of American political science, no reform movement has ever succeeded if it opposed the *actual* practice of the discipline in a way that met with explicit resistance from practitioners. American political science may be just as hard to reform in fundamental ways as the American political system that has so often frustrated reformists from within our discipline's ranks, from Francis Lieber to Theodore Lowi.

I focus here on developments in the study of United States politics, sometimes integrated with, though more recently separated from, political theory. Much could be said about comparative politics and international relations, but it is orientation to the study of American politics that defines the American discipline's basic identity and normative purpose.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE STATE

The concept of "the state" was cemented into American political discourse by figures who were to become central to the new discipline of political science in the late nineteenth century (though the concept had found mention as far back as the arguments of the Federalists in the constitutional debates; Farr 1993, 69). From Francis Lieber, appointed to the first American professorship in history and political science at Columbia in 1857, to Woodrow Wilson and well beyond, the main practical task of political science was seen as the establishment of a unitary national state accompanied by a virtuous national citizenry. Wilson was far from alone in envisaging a political system with disciplined parties presenting well-reasoned policies to informed

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voters, enacted by Congress, and implemented by an expert bureaucracy practicing the best in administrative science. This administrative state would "breathe free American air" (Wilson 1887). Such normative advocacy was linked to a host of empirical studies of American institutions exposing fragmentation, sectionalism, parochialism, and corruption. Wilson's (1885) own *Congressional Government* exemplified this genre.

For over half a century, the central purpose of political science was seen as the establishment of a unified state, supported by a unified and competent nation. In the first presidential address to the new American Political Science Association (APSA), Frank Goodnow (1904) spoke of the role of political science in assisting the "realization of State will." Occasionally political allies could be found for this project—especially in the Progressive Movement. More often the project foundered in the face of the corruption, patronage, party machines, parochialism, and regionalism that the statists sought to supplant, and the recalcitrance of the Madisonian system that the discipline's leaders believed was inadequate for a dynamic modern industrial economy and society. Some, though not all, opposed federalism in the name of a unified national state.

The discipline was, then, founded not only to study politics but also to advance a political agenda—and all subsequent revolutionary movements share this feature (though in the case of behavioralism it was not initially admitted). The founders were of course engaged in establishing the discipline rather than changing it, but they consciously rejected a particular kind of amateur political analysis; they were in this sense intellectual revolutionaries. The amateur approach to the study of politics was manifested in the American Social Science Association (ASSA), founded in 1865 and finally put to bed by the establishment of APSA in 1903 and the American Sociological Association in 1905. ASSA was largely reformist, Christian, activist, and oriented to public welfare (Seidelman and Harpham 1984, 20), and not conducive to the serious study of politics that asked hard questions about the fundamental character of American political reality. The founders of the professional discipline of political science did, then, establish a radically new intellectual agenda, and the concept of "the state" was professionally central in establishing the new discipline's identity (Gunnell 1995, 21). There was no resistance to this project from inside the nascent discipline because those supplanted remained firmly on the outside.

THE PLURALIST REVOLT

The United States had always been a more plural polity than the discipline's statists desired; they recognized pluralism as a fact, but were likely to call it fragmentation, a problem to be overcome rather than a condition to be valued. This was true even of Arthur Bentley, whose 1908 book *The Process of Government* was treated as a precursor by behavioralism's pluralists. In his later unpublished work *Makers, Users and Masters*, Bentley actually condemned the domination of American politics by groups (Seidelman and Harpham 1984, 77–78). The same was true of that other ancestor of behavioralism, Charles Merriam, who in the 1920s still sought "national democratic consolidation and social control" (Gunnell 1993, 105). Though stripped of its more organic associations, the centralizing state remained alive as normative aspiration in the 1920s.

Normative pluralism arrived with Harold Laski (1917), Mary Parket Follett (1918), and their sympathizers. Laski and Follett were influenced by the philosophy of William James, who stressed the variety of ways in which individuals could experience the world; so their pluralist ethics was rooted in diversity of experience rather than in diversity of interest. Follett valued the organization of society from the bottom up in groups, not the social engineering from the top down that the discipline's statists always favored. Follett (10) famously asked, "What is to be done with this diversity?" The statist answer was clear: erase it. Beyond valuing it, her own answer was less clear in its implications for political reform.

According to Gunnell (2004), the rise of pluralism in the 1920s constituted the only true revolution in the history of American political science. Gunnell's key figure is George Catlin (1927), not Laski or Follett. Catlin was influenced by Laski, but rejected Laski's ethics in favor of disinterested science. Unlike Laski and Follett, Catlin's pluralism was based on the self-interest of groups, not on their diversity of experience—and in this he was followed by the pluralists of the behavioral era, who to Gunnell were not revolutionaries at all, but mere successors to Catlin's paradigm shift.

Yet if we look at the substance of Catlin's work, we see an explanation of politics that the statists could accept without too much difficulty—remembering that they had often recognized plurality, but saw it as a problem to be overcome. Thus Catlin's pluralism as empirical reality was hardly revolutionary. Even William Yandell Elliott, identified by Gunnell as the leader of the statist opposition to pluralism in the 1920s, could accept pluralism as explanatory theory, as Gunnell himself admits (Gunnell 1995, 36). It was only normative pluralism that Elliott opposed. Thus it is only in its normative aspects that pluralism could be truly revolutionary—and in this sense Laski and Follett were better placed to lead a revolution than Catlin. But clearly their work did not reorient the discipline—which adopted normative pluralism explicitly only in the 1950s, and then in very different terms, stressing interest rather than experience as the root of plurality (see Schlosberg 1998 on differences across generations of pluralism).

The main reason we cannot categorize the dispute of the 1920s as a revolution is that it was not validated as such by disciplinary practitioners in the aftermath, and so was not in a position to orient the work of the discipline thereafter. Can a revolution happen without anyone noticing? Gunnell's (2005) solution to this problem is to quote Kuhn (1962) on the "invisibility" of revolutions as the new understanding comes to dominate. But here Kuhn is referring to the tendency

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of adherents of a victorious paradigm to rewrite the past so as to recast their predecessors as precursors in a cumulative history; and nothing like this actually happened in political science between the 1920s and 1940s. Moreover, on Kuhn's account those responsible for the breakthrough would be recognized and praised for their achievements, elevated to the disciplinary pantheon. Catlin was not recognized in these terms. The only attempted revolution of the 1920s was that of the normative pluralists; and that did not succeed. Resistance within the discipline was stiff, including Charles Beard, Walter Shepard, Francis Coker, and William Yandell Elliott, among others. Laski was stigmatized as a radical socialist, and pluralism itself was characterized by Elliott (1928) as related to Italian fascism. Normative statist aspirations remained, though they were subsequently to diminish (before revival in Theodore Lowi's [1969] *The End of Liberalism,* linked to the earlier statists in what Seidelman and Harpham [1984] call the "third tradition" of centralizing and reformist political science). Language changed, and by midcentury "the state" had almost disappeared from the disciplinary lexicon, except in international relations.

BEHAVIORALISM

Behavioralism may be defined in terms of its commitments to "(1) a research focus on political behavior, (2) a methodological plea for science, and (3) a political message about liberal pluralism" (Farr 1995, 202), as well as the organizing concept of a political system (Easton 1953). Although behavioralism emphasized the individual, there was no problem in studying ". . . individuals acting in groups to realize their collective interests" (Farr, 204). The two most prominent group theorists of the early behavioral era, Robert Dahl and David Truman, were also committed behavioralists (Truman chaired the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Political Behavior in the 1950s). The pluralism in the political message was based on economic interest rather than on experience, and on an underlying consensus on fundamentals across different interests that in the United States could be assumed, rather than struggled for (see, notably, Dahl 1956). By the early 1960s many works were appearing that celebrated behavioralism's triumph (notably Dahl 1961). This certainly felt like a revolution, recognized as having reoriented the disciplinary agenda—by those who eventually criticized behavioralism, as well as those who supported it.

But what exactly did behavioralism oppose? The rhetoric of the revolutionaries was directed against formal, historical, and, in Easton's (1953) words, "hyperfactual" work, defining something called "traditional" political science. But who exactly was practicing traditional political science, and what was it? The behavioralists were strangely silent on the identity of their opponents and the actual content of specific pieces of work. Garceau's (1951) *Review* manifesto contained no references at all, positive or negative. The most sustained attack on the alleged status quo was Easton's (1953) self-consciously revolutionary *The Political System*, characterized by Farr (1995, 207) as "the single most important manifesto lodged against traditional political science during the behavioral revolution." Easton is lauded by Gunnell (1993, xi) as "the movement's most significant theoretician." Chapter 2 of *The Political System*, "The Condition of American Political Science" (with a section on "The Malaise of Political Science") is the most polemical. The chapter contains 28 footnotes, *none* of which names a contemporaneous American political scientist guilty of the alleged sins of hyperfactualism and failure to theorize. Names that do figure in these footnotes are Key, Simon, Merriam, Herring, Appleby, Lasswell, Gosnell, and Eldersveld, praised for being exceptions. In the section of Chapter 3 on "Hyperfactualism," the only sustained critique is of the writings of James Bryce, works by then half a century old. In Chapter 10, Easton criticizes political theorists for retreating into the history of political thought; but of his main references, only George Sabine remained active.

Much later, Easton (1993, 292–93, originally published 1985) describes "traditional political science" of the 1920s to 1940s as focusing on parties and pressure groups (NB: not on the state). His references on pressure groups are Bentley (1908) and Pendleton Herring (1929). By 1953 Bentley had passed from the scene—and was also revived as a protobehavioralist, especially by Truman (1951). Herring was alive and well, and had in 1949 been instrumental in establishing the Committee on Political Behavior of the Social Science Research Council (of which he was president), one of the institutional sponsors of the behavioral revolution. Easton (1993) reiterates the behavioralists' contention that the traditionalists mixed facts and values, had too much description and too little explanation, and offered few overarching theories. But Easton then identifies Merle Fainsod's "parallelogram of forces" as the main "latent theory" of the traditionalists. In this parallelogram, policy decision was explained as the resultant of the various forces pulling in different directions. If this is the essence of "traditional political science" of that era, there should have been no reason for its practitioners to object to anything in behavioralism; and they did not. Fainsod himself became president of the APSA in the behavioral era, and as president in 1968 was instrumental in defending the discipline's establishment against the Caucus for a New Political Science by restricting access to the Annual Conference's program.

Nor could any hostility to behavioralism be found in any alleged practitioners of formal institutional analysis as opposed to science. Criticism of excess formalism and advocacy of science had been in place since the discipline's founding. Formalism had been attacked by Bentley and Wilson, among others (Seidelman and Harpham 1984, 75). And nobody was against science. Throughout the discipline's history, criticism of the preceding generation for its want of science is a constant refrain. The constitution of the APSA adopted at its founding in 1903 proclaimed its main objective as "the encouragement of the scientific study of politics."

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If the behavioral revolution's main tenets are behavior, science, pluralism, and system, then "traditionalists" had little reason to oppose it. Research on behavior at the individual level was already being done in the 1930s and 1940s (by Herring, Gosnell, Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, and others)—and those who did not do it had little objection to those who did. The commitment to science was of long standing, though as Easton (1991, 209–10) points out, an emphasis on basic science as opposed to social problems served the discipline particularly well during the McCarthy era of political witch-hunts. (This consideration may also help explain the lack of traction of Lasswell's policy science approach, developed in that era.) Pluralism as empirical theory was hardly new—indeed, the "latent theory" of the traditionalists as characterized by Easton sounds a lot like pluralism. Easton's own "political system" concept was more novel—though its main function was to provide a new vocabulary (inputs, outputs, and feedback) rather than a comprehensive theory of politics.

What, then was the behavioral revolution? The answer is that it was a selective radicalization of existing disciplinary tendencies, especially when it came to behavior, science, and pluralism as description and explanatory theory. Behavioralism led to more survey research being funded and published, an increase in the relative frequency of quantitative studies in the discipline's top journals, and a relative decline in work addressed to public policy. The emphasis on science facilitated access to new funding sources such as the National Science Foundation. Behavior overshadowed institutions, though institutions were never forgotten. Most of these changes involved shifts in emphasis rather than radical novelty.

The kind of work that behavioralism was most clearly a shift *from* was a relatively new sort of political theory, which had the effect of crystallizing political theory as a separate and marginalized subfield. Prior to the behavioral revolution, theorists (pluralists and statists alike) were central to the discipline and debates about its identity. But by the early 1950s, emigré scholars such as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and Eric Voegelin were lending a decidedly antiliberal cast to political theory. The solution, on Gunnell's (1988) account, was a divorce between political theory and the new mainstream that suited both sides. Behavioralists could distance themselves from any political critique of American liberal democracy. The only kind of broad-gauge political theory that could stay within the mainstream was the liberal democratic work of scholars such as Dahl (1956).

Beyond shifts in disciplinary emphasis, the only truly novel aspect of the behavioral revolution came in interest-based pluralism as normative theory (despite the ostensible commitment to value-neutral inquiry). By the 1950s the old normative theory of the state had few disciplinary advocates. Even Elliott, who in the late 1920s had on Gunnell's (2005) account organized resistance to pluralism and in the 1950s remained an important presence in the discipline, did not come to the state's defense. The state, it seems, had withered away (at least in the discipline). In a political context defined by the recent defeat of two absolutist states in a World War, and a Cold War against a third, it was hard to argue for anything that looked like an overhaul of American politics along statist lines.

None of this meant that behavioralism had a completely easy ride. Easton (1991, 208) complains that in the late 1950s behavioralists still felt excluded from the *Review* and the Association—though that may have been a matter of institutional inertia rather than policy. The complaints should not have been too loud, for in 1951 the *Review* had published Oliver Garceau's (1951) behavioral manifesto, and by 1955 Angus Campbell, James C. Davies, Samuel Eldersfeld, Heinz Eulau, V. O. Key, Avery Leiserson, Warren Miller, William Riker, and Herbert Simon had all published in the *Review*.

Behavioralism did have its critics, but these did not arrive until the 1960s; indeed, their arrival confirmed behavioralism's success in setting the discipline's agenda, as recognized even by those who opposed it. Contra Farr (1995, 216), the opponents were not "those stigmatized as 'traditionalists'" (Farr provides no names). One set was composed of Straussian theorists (Storing 1962). The Straussians did not represent any prebehavioral disciplinary orthodoxy; their school developed alongside the rise of behavioralism, and was doubly isolated as a minority sect within the newly marginalized subfield of political theory. The other set was composed of those on the discipline's left (Charlesworth 1962, Bay 1965) whose heat was turned up in the late 1960s. The left critics did not defend any "traditionalism" (though historians of political thought were among their number). Rather, they sought a more critical and committed political science as an alternative to behavioralism's alleged ideological complicity in an unjust status quo in politics in the United States.

CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION: THE CAUCUS FOR A NEW POLITICAL SCIENCE

The left's criticisms of behavioralism coalesced in, and helped define, the next movement that tried to reorient American political science, the Caucus for a New Political Science. The Caucus was organized at the 1967 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Prominent members included Peter Bachrach, Christian Bay, Theodore Lowi, Michael Parenti, Alan Wolfe, and Sheldon Wolin. Room was also found for the international relations realist Hans Morgenthau (who opposed the Vietnam War), the Caucus candidate for APSA president in 1971. Among their number were political theorists keen to bring the critique of U.S. liberal democracy into the disciplinary center from the margins of the subfield to which it had been exiled in the early 1950s. In step with the dissident politics of the late 1960s, the Caucus demanded everything that behavioralism was not: an orientation to the social problems and political crises of the time and a discipline that would take collective stands on controversial political issues (Bay 1968). The Vietnam War, race, and poverty loomed especially large at the outset, and environmental and feminist concerns were soon added. Though not unanimously opposed to the

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scientific study of politics, Caucus members believed that science should take a back seat to commitment and relevance and that the explanation of political behavior was definitely not the proper center of gravity of the discipline. Like its three predecessor movements, the Caucus combined intellectual and political aims, though its political aims were much more explicit than those of behavioralism.

Much of the energy of the Caucus was devoted to reform of the APSA itself. It ran candidates against the official slate for both President and Council, and although never successful in electing a president, did get several members on the Council. (After the passage of several decades, erstwhile *Caucusistas* such as Theodore Lowi and Ira Katznelson could become Presidents via the official slate.) Resistance from the now mostly behavioralist APSA hierarchy could be fierce: at the 1968 Annual Conference, panels proposed by the caucus were frozen out. David Easton in 1969 was more conciliatory, offering in his presidential address a "New Revolution in Political Science" that would essentially put behavioral techniques in general and his systems model in particular in the service of social problems. But the new set of dependent variables offered by Easton did not assuage the Caucus or heal the split (though it did help legitimate the development of the subfield of public policy in the 1970s; see Torgerson 1995, 229–30). The behavioralist hierarchy was still firmly in place (even if its confidence was shaken), resolutely opposed to politicization of the discipline. As Eulau (1972, 438) put it in his presidential report, "we are not set up or organized for political action, or the propagation of political points of view." Upon completing his term as editor of the *Review* in 1971, Austin Ranney recalls that in helping to appoint his successor "I was very clear in my mind that it wasn't going to be any caucus type" (Ranney 1991, 230), and it was not.

Rather than develop links with the social and political movements of the counter-culture, the Caucus soon invested most of its energies in more professional endeavors. As Lowi (1973, 43–44) lamented, it became "the Caucus for a New Political Science Association." Its assault on the commanding heights of the APSA having failed, the Caucus settled down to life as one of the APSA's ever-proliferating Organized Sections, sponsoring its own (eventually quite small) set of panels, and publishing a journal, *New Political Science*, largely ignored by the rest of the discipline (it did not appear in the ranking of 115 journals in political science compiled by Garand and Giles [2003]). Many of the younger members of the Perestroika e-mail list in the early 2000s were apparently unaware of this last attempted reformation of the discipline, and needed reminding that once there was the Caucus, and indeed that it lived still (Swidorski 2004).

The Caucus carried out a full frontal attack on behavioralism, but met substantial resistance. Applying the test for a successful revolution with which I began, the Caucus did not re-set the discipline's agenda in a way recognized by all practitioners. In particular, those who rejected the Caucus program could simply and safely ignore it.

PROLIFERATING RESEARCH PROGRAMS, BUT NO FURTHER REVOLUTION

Much has changed in the discipline in the postbehavioral era. During the 1980s, the state was brought back in (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985), suggesting a cycle within the discipline (for an explanation of such cycles in terms of changing political problems, see Dryzek 1986). However, the state returned in a form far different than that in which it left. Gone was the comprehensive normative statism of the discipline's founding. Reacting against alleged societal reductionism of the behavioral era, the new statists saw the state as an independent variable in the sense that public officials could have interests of their own that did not simply reflect social forces. This was no revolution, just a highlighting of particular kinds of actors and motivations; behavioralists such as Truman happily recognized public officials with interests determined by their institutional home as participants in pluralist interaction. As Almond (1988, 858) put it (referring to the work of Eric Nordlinger, but the point is more generally applicable) "... there is no change in paradigm here but rather a research program of considerable promise intended to distinguish among polities according to which state (governmental) personnel take the initiative in the making of public policy..." This new statism could be ignored by non-practitioners of its program, and the language of "the state" still does not come easily to most American political scientists.

By the 1990s it was much harder for American political scientists to avoid taking a view on rational choice theory. This approach had been present for a long time, beginning in earnest in the 1950s with work by Kenneth Arrow, Duncan Black, Anthony Downs, and William Riker. Its territory, and share of the *Review*'s pages, subsequently expanded to the point where it appeared to constitute the discipline's most popular research program. But rather than revolutionalizing political science as a whole, rational choice stood alongside established sorts of behavioral scholarship, the new statism, cultural analysis, new institutionalism (of the nonrational choice variety) and other research programs in an increasingly diverse discipline. Some rational choice practitioners presented their approach as an advance on atheoretical behavioralism, ignoring the sorts of theory that were present in behavioralism (such as Dahl's liberal democracy and Easton's systems theory). And even if they fell short in practice, behavioralists had always proclaimed a belief in cumulative explanatory theory.

CONCLUSION

Reorientations of the American discipline of political science have been rare, with only two clear episodes in a century and a half. This rarity has not been through want of trying. The discipline has been very hard to shift. If a movement takes direct aim at established practices and understandings and meets with explicit resistance, history suggests it does not succeed.

Because successful revolutions re-set the discipline's agenda, they define the terms of their opposition, which

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appears only after the movement has succeeded. (It is in this sense that the Caucus was constituted by children of the behavioral revolution.) But even successful revolutions can find their agenda-setting ability fading with time. So by 1950 the normative statism that dominated the discipline in its early decades was exhausted. Behavioralism's legacy of methods, techniques, and research topics persists to this day, perhaps most strongly in the subfield of political psychology. But its capacity to set the disciplinary agenda has faded since the 1970s in the face of a proliferation of research programs, as confirmed by the laments of prominent behavioralists such as Eulau, Almond, and Easton about disciplinary drift, fragmentation, and loss of purpose (Farr 1995, 220). Indeed, it has become harder even to speak of an agenda for the discipline that could be re-set.

Perhaps with Thomas Kuhn (1962) in mind, many scholars view disciplinary history in terms of eras set apart by revolutions. However, pervasive evolution may matter just as much. Gradual change produced the slow decline of the state from the 1900s to the 1940s and the proliferation of approaches that characterized the postbehavioral era.

The success of the early focus on the state owed less to its normative commitments, always anomalous in the American political system, than to its association with professionalism and science. Behavioralism could reset the discipline's agenda because it entailed the selective radicalization of existing commitments and practices. Both were revolutions without enemies, and to date that seems to be the only kind of revolution that can succeed in reorienting American political science.

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