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THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT IN POLITICS¹

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Comparison between the methods prevailing in science and in politics began as early as the presidential campaign of 1872. Already there was a distinctly recognized scientific world which was demanding recognition in colleges and universities. The terms scientific spirit and scientific method were becoming clearly defined. The men who were at the time responsible for the conduct of public affairs were in a better position to appreciate the change involved than any after generation can be. To those abreast with the times, Darwin's *Origin of Species* came as a great revelation. They themselves actually experienced the transition from dogmatism and authority to experiment and demonstration. For the first time in history men had planted their feet firmly upon the solid earth; and they refused to be moved. Scientific devotees became informally pledged to each other to use their utmost endeavor to know all that man may know in the realm of nature, regardless of any moral, religious or extraneous influence of any sort. In this limited field they made truth, or actuality, their single goal. All liars, all blunderers, and all who had a disposition to believe a false report, disappeared from the ranks of the promoters of science. The discipline main-

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tained was effective. It involved an early form of the death penalty. He who would tell a lie in the interest of a preconceived theory, or through prejudice should fail to perceive all that was visible in the work in hand, was banished or excluded from the charmed circle. Of all races, those and only those were admitted to membership who manifested superior ability in the mastery of material phenomena.

There was no lack of controversies among men of science, as among statesmen and politicians. They were divided into different schools, but scientific debate was strictly limited to the few points upon which greater light was required. The generally accepted theory of evolution involved a belief in spontaneous generation. It was natural that an aspiring young biologist should wish to be the first to demonstrate that theory. Reported discoveries were numerous. Much time and attention were being wasted with false reports on the subject. Finally Huxley and Tyndale made such an exposure of the errors of the *pseudo* discoverers as served to give notice that until something really important had been ascertained there was to be no further trifling with the subject. This did not mean that the theory had been rejected; it meant simply that discipline should be maintained and human effort economized; distracting use of words was suppressed. Scientific debate thus became the model as a method for dealing with all questions on which men differ in opinion.

Statesmen and teachers of the period following the civil war remembered a time when practically the same methods in debate prevailed in both science and politics. To those who approved the new method, it seemed evident that that which had wrought a beneficent revolution in science if applied to politics would be even more effective in the promotion of human welfare.

In the light of the new revelation, the civil war appeared as a veritable tragedy. Good men through lack of a spirit and temper already achieved in science had been thrown into hostile camps and had become victims of the great war. After the war events seemed to indicate that the differences had been imaginary. Nearly all in both sections seemed to rejoice in the fact that slavery had been abolished, and that the union was saved.

The campaign of 1872 seemed to exemplify the new spirit. Liberal republicans united with liberal democrats on the policy of universal suffrage and universal amnesty. The official democratic party accepted Horace Greeley as their candidate. The regular republican party was induced to promise a more generous policy towards the south. The war was to be a thing of the past, and all were to unite on the basis of a good understanding between the two sections.

The spirit of the new science seemed at the time to have actually taken possession of politics. The chief of the corrupt Tammany ring was consigned to prison, *crédit mobilier* iniquities were exposed; reforms in the spoils system were inaugurated and the injustice of the war tariff was made known.

Our federal form of government seemed well adapted to facilitate the extension of the scientific method to politics. The ordinary citizen begins formal education as a member of a public school. It seemed an easy matter to cultivate in him a habit of observing the operation of the school district, the town, county, state and nation. Associated with each political institution are activities which any beginner in geography or United States history may know at first hand. Through these agencies every citizen may form a life-long habit of observing political, social and industrial phenomena. A parallel thus appears between two fields of science—one dealing with oxygen, hydrogen, and gravitation; the other with cities, states, and numerous other political and social institutions. Both furnish occasion for the exercise of the same spirit and method. Each county, each city is but an experiment station for the guidance of all others. Politics, like chemistry, might in this way be made an experimental science.

Actuated by this ideal the generation which experienced the civil war and the revolution in the methods of scientific education did make instruction in civics an integral part of the public school system, and two generations of citizens have been subjected to the new system. And besides, the increased attention given to history, economics, politics and sociology in colleges and universities has been as conspicuous as that given to science.

Innumerable organizations have been called into existence having for their object the promotion of a better understanding of human relations.

In many ways the new science has come into politics; it has brought its own spirit and method into industrial, social and political activities. Medicine is being revolutionized, changed from the occult and the empirical to the scientific; and as it becomes scientific it is more social and more political. Agriculture is becoming subject to the guidance of state, nation and international organizations of applied science. Such examples are innumerable. Applied science everywhere tends to lay heavier burdens upon political and social institutions. On the administrative side of government there has been a tendency to follow the scientific method; but on the side of partisan or contentious politics, that from which most was expected, there has been little apparent gain. The new science has even given aid and comfort to the enemy.

Political scientists have themselves fallen into the habit of accepting Machiavelli as the founder of the modern school of politics. To the general public Machiavelli is chiefly known as one who justified lying and deception in politics. He gave support to the system in vogue in his own despotic state. He rid himself of ordinary notions of morality and religion and viewed political operations as they appeared. There is a superficial resemblance between the Machiavellian method and the modern scientific method. In a despotic state falsehood and deception do hold a cardinal place, similar to that of gravitation in physics. In a despotism the people must be deceived, they must be induced to accept as true that which is dictated by their rulers. They must be trained to believe not according to evidence, but according to teachings imposed by force.

Frederick the Great, writing to his prospective successor, speaks of the great importance of religion as a means of controlling the minds of subjects; but he states explicitly that it is not wise in a king to have any religion himself. "The true religion of a prince," said he, "is his own interest and his own glory. He ought by his royal station to be dispensed from having any

other. He may, indeed, preserve outwardly a fair occasional appearance for the sake of amusing those who are about him. . . . All popes who have had common sense have held no principles of religion but what favored their aggrandisement. . . . It is silly for a prince to confine himself to trifles contrived only for the common people." The following is his definition of politics: "Since it has been agreed among men that to cheat and deceive one's fellow creatures is a mean and criminal action, there has been sought for and invented a term which might soften the appellation of the thing, and the word which has undoubtedly been chosen for the purpose is 'politics.' "

Present day successors to Frederick the Great have added science to religion as a supporter of the policy of government by force. Bernhardt quotes Heraclitus of Ephesus as saying, "War is the father of all things," and adds, "The sages of antiquity long before Darwin recognized this principle." In the name of science sheer brute force is given first place in the state. It is made the primary duty of the state to rule the world to the extent of its ability. The state is not bound by any moral considerations which are contrary to its own interests. Ability to conquer and rule carries with it the duty to conquer and rule; and all this in the name of science and religion.

Before the advent of the theory of evolution all the operations of nature were accounted for by reference to personality. The final cause was God or beings having will or choices like ourselves. From time immemorial this had been the common conviction of mankind. Evolutionists did not deny the existence of God, but without attempting to throw any light on final cause they devoted their energies to the study of the processes of nature. The validity of scientific conclusions rests upon the assumption of uniformity in the so-called laws of nature. To admit personal interference would strike at the foundation of certainty. The accepted rule of the new order was to ignore personality; but some form of words had to be used to take the place of the earlier time-honored belief. Mere agnosticism proved inadequate. The phrase "the unknown and the unknowable," as a description of final cause, was equally unsatisfactory. The word force

was permitted to assume a new meaning; force became apotheosized. To the orthodox man of science, force as a final cause of phenomena was an absurdity; but to others force became a real entity having in itself the faculty of affecting the senses. Herbert Spencer perceived the tendency to put force in the place of God as a cause of phenomena, and he labored diligently to stem the tide against it. He taught that it was more rational to believe in spirit or personality as final cause than to attribute final cause to force; that both force and matter were beyond the reach of scientific knowledge. Despite the efforts of Spencer and other scientists, force has become very generally accepted as the God of nature. Thus exalted, force plays into the hands of the supporters of despotic government. It gives to despotism the specious claim to scientific sanction. Science thus becomes divided against itself, in one field upholding an ideal spirit of truth, in another supporting a system of falsehood and deception.

The association of truth with righteousness in government is as old as human history. From an inscription on the tomb of Darius, the ancient Persian king, the following translation is found in the *Records of the Past*: "Ormazd brought help to me and the other gods which are (because) I was not wicked, nor was I a liar, nor was I a tyrant, neither I nor any of my race. I have obeyed the laws and the right customs, I have not violated. Thou, whoever may be king hereafter, exert thyself to put down lying; the man who may be a liar him utterly destroy. If thou wilt thus observe my country will remain entire." Similar ideas find expression in all the great religious and moral codes. Especially rich in this regard are the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Not only is telling a lie condemned, but a disposition to believe a lie is equally condemned. The righteous man is one who keeps an open mind to all truth; the lost soul is one who rejects the spirit of truth. The modern scientific spirit is simply the Christian spirit realized in a limited field of experience.

There could be no science worthy of the name until generations of martyrs to the cause of truth and righteousness had weakened the forces of tyranny. Science and democracy have

come into the modern world at the same time. They are mutually related as cause and effect.

Truth, righteousness and justice are related terms expressing fundamental qualities which are essential to human well being. Truth at first denoted what one thinks or firmly believes. That has been accepted as true which accords with common belief. Righteousness denotes a common belief respecting correct or right human relations. Justice is righteousness made visible in forms of external conduct. Truth expresses the correspondence between righteousness and justice; it is realized by harmonizing external conduct with a subjective state of mind. In modern science truth is realized by harmonizing the state of mind with the impressions received through the senses. Political institutions are the embodiment of a state of mind in visible form. They are all, however, dependent upon external phenomena known only through the senses. The state is, therefore, the meeting place for both the subjective and the objective movements for the realization of the truth. Righteousness remains an aspiration or a mere dream until it is realized in just human relations. The men of science become traitors to the spirit which gave birth to their order if they stop short of carrying their devotion to truth into every field of human relation.

A former president of this association has said that he regarded literature as a branch of politics. Of course, nothing which is of general human interest can be regarded as foreign to a righteous order in society. But we have a right to make a special demand upon the promoters of modern science for effective assistance. My wrath has often been kindled against some men of science who through a temporary accident have found themselves in the one easy place in the universe for maintaining a truth-loving and truth-telling spirit, a place where there is no rational motive for either telling or believing a lie; and from this secure position they have reviled those who are laboring in another field, where to tell the truth, to believe and act in harmony therewith may mean, poverty, shame, persecution, or death. Until the men of science make good their spirit and method in the citadel of contentious politics they remain in the

infantile or kindergarten stage of development. It requires no high moral character to excel in physics. But to excel in the building of a righteous state involves a corresponding excellence in character. Only those who have the will to render social justice can have the mind to perceive the truth in social phenomena. Until the two fields of science have become harmonized in a righteous state there can be no fully grown men and women in either field. Science is strong where politics is weak; politics is strong where science is weak; each has need of the other.

There must be agreement in definitions, else there can be no proper debate. For a brief period forty-four years ago agreement had apparently been reached on the fundamental principles of free government, and upon general lines of policy. This proved to be illusive. The civil war was not really over. The last troops were withdrawn from the south in 1876. Bitter hostilities had been aroused and prejudice reestablished. Men were driven to the polls by the million by appeals to prejudice or fear. In the midst of the confusion a bipartisan system of government grew up engaged chiefly in transferring property from the rightful owners into the hands of the few. Many billions of dollars of ill-gotten gain became dependent for its security upon the ability of the political machine to carry elections upon false issues. Falsehood and deception in political controversy became institutional. To make a fair and candid statement, during the political campaign, as to the position of the opposite party was a thing not to be tolerated by the party committees. So soon as the so-called "bloody shirt" issue had lost its force, the republican machine was ready with the plea that England, having failed to destroy this country in one way, had formed a plot to ruin our industries by a system of free trade. This was followed by the plea that the peculiar brand of a protective tariff which republicans favor carries with it the potency of insuring prosperity. Even after the exposure of the fraud and injustice of the republican tariff which drove a leading senator into private life the old plea for the innate virtues of any sort of a republican tariff has been revamped and utilized in the late campaign. The principle, however, still holds that there can be no enlightening debate

unless there is agreement upon clearly defined grounds of difference.

The difference may be clearly defined and yet may be of such a character as to exclude debate. Nothing can be clearer than the distinction between a government imposed by force and a government achieved by the cooperation of citizens treated as equals. Yet between the holders of these opposing views there can be no debate because the difference involves a flat contradiction. Such a difference involves war and not debate. A labor organization whose program is the annihilation of the capitalist class means war also rather than debate. A capitalist class whose program involves the destruction of labor organization likewise indicates war. There must be common agreement as to the essential objects to be gained before there is a proper field for debate. Each must maintain a sympathetic attitude towards the other's point of view. Each must maintain the open mind and be ready to accept the other's conclusions if a preponderance of evidence is found in its support. One who argues against socialism should be in a state of mind to become a socialist if his arguments are effectively answered. It was this quality in scientific debate which was so impressive to those who first experienced it.

During the last half century there has been immense advance in the professed belief in democracy. Leaders of thought in all countries render at least lip-service to the cause of free government. The world is apparently committed to a trial of government by the people. As it has taken many thousand years to reach a conclusion in condemnation of despotism, there is no reason to believe that the competing system can be fully tried in less than one thousand years. Democracy incurs serious limitations on account of the presence of enemies to the system, who presume to take part in political debate. Despots have had a simple method of disposing of corresponding disturbers; they have killed or silenced them by force. For democrats to do that violates one of their fundamental principles; for in theory all have an equal right to participate in the government. But during the transition period it is extremely important that the up-

holders of democracy should fully appreciate their right for a fair trial. They cannot destroy fellow citizens who conscientiously believe in a government imposed by force, but they can exhort them to be honorable and refrain from disturbing opposition. A believer in despotism as such cannot properly take part in political debate in a democracy.

There is, however, this possible middle ground which such a citizen may hold. He may recognize the fact that democracy is going to be tried, and that it is entitled to a fair trial and that he may render honorable assistance to that end.

We have a right to assume that all who take part in American politics either believe in democracy or at least are favorably disposed to give it a fair trial. This furnishes ground for agreement on the main lines of public policy.

Our biparty system has served to foment discord and prevent agreement; it has created the appearance of disagreement where none existed. From the records of the voting in recent elections it would appear that a large proportion, if not a majority, of the voters have no distinct party affiliation. The times are again propitious, as they appeared to be forty-fours years ago, for the inauguration of a new and better order.

Again the political parties are subjected to radical readjustment, giving rise to an opportunity to get rid of former prejudices and misunderstandings. If party government is to continue, each party should be recognized as equally patriotic, equally devoted to the good of the country, and as having no other reason for existing except service to the country. Membership in a party does not imply divided loyalty. If one's party goes wrong loyalty to the party as well as loyalty to the country may call for the defeat of the party. As far as possible the parties should seek to eliminate disagreement on a variety of subjects, reserving as questions for discussion only those which Mr. Gladstone used to describe as "ripe for action." There should be no more dragnet political platforms whose object is the confusion of the voters. All political parties profess to have the good of the whole country as an object of endeavor; if they champion a particular interest they do it with the plea that the special interest

is in harmony with the general welfare. Political parties conducted in this spirit may exhibit all the admirable qualities which are observable in scientific debate, and in addition others of a higher moral character. A debate on an issue in biology is limited to the ascertainment of the truth about some external phenomena. A political debate generally pertains to policies involving gain or loss to individuals. Conducted in the scientific spirit the debate promotes a willingness to surrender individual gain for the sake of the general welfare. Political parties themselves, if they are to be justified, are teachers of self-sacrifice for a worthy object. This ideal is not at all beyond attainment. Parties in Switzerland are already fulfilling the ideal. But there parties do not govern; they simply assist the body politic in reaching agreement on public policy. The field is yet open for Americans to take a leading place in the more difficult task of maintaining the scientific spirit in the conduct of parties which assume the responsibility of governing.