

The American Political Science Review

Vol. XXIII

FEBRUARY, 1929

No. 1

PERSPECTIVES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, 1903-1928¹

JESSE S. REEVES

University of Michigan

The American Political Science Association was founded December 30, 1903, at New Orleans. Its organization was the outgrowth of a movement looking toward a national conference on comparative legislation. A group having the matter in charge held a meeting in December, 1902, at Washington, the call for which stated that the formation of an American Society of Comparative Legislation had been suggested as "particularly desirable because of the complexity of our system of federal government." Interest in legislation in general and in the problems presented by the law-making activities of the federal and state agencies in particular was, therefore, the starting point from which proceeded the wider range of interests which gave rise to this Association. The preliminary meeting in Washington indicated that if a new national society were to be formed it might be well to enlarge its scope so as to embrace the whole of political science, of which comparative legislation is an important part. A year later, thanks to the coöperation of the American Historical Association and of the American Economic Association, which were having joint meetings in New Orleans, opportunity was given to the group to form an organization, the members of which were in large part members of one or both of the older Associations. The adoption of the constitution

¹ Presidential address delivered before the American Political Science Association at Chicago, Ill., December 27, 1928.

of this Association was the result. In a way, therefore, the American Political Science Association is the god-child of the American Historical and the American Economic Associations. All but two annual meetings have been held jointly with one or both of the older bodies, indicating not only a factor of common membership but also a large measure of common interests and kindred endeavors.

In the first presidential address, Professor Goodnow admirably set forth the aim of the Association: "to assemble upon common ground those persons whose main interests are connected with the scientific study of the organization and functions of the state."

I

The current of the past quarter-century has shown in greater and greater degree the interdependence of the social sciences, as well as new dependence upon the results gained in other fields of learning. All of the social sciences, save history, if history be one of them, labor under the common difficulty of having a terminology derived largely from popular usage, so that much of the discipline of each has consisted in the endeavor to impart to words and phrases of popular speech an exact, consistent, and logical content and implication. From this distance in time, to one who admittedly has not kept pace with the development of economic thought, the economics of the earlier period remains in the memory as a more or less confused logomachy of a long series: wealth, capital, rent, and value. In political science there has been a similar one: the state, nation, government, administration, and, above all, sovereignty. Not being an economist, I assume that by this time these fundamental ideas have reached a fairly determined stage of exactitude and general agreement, although now and then one may seem to hear reverberations and echoes of the earlier disputations. If one were impatient with the iron law of wages, he found little solace in the Austinian theory of sovereignty. If he has been wearied by an Austrian theory of value, he may now seek refreshment in an Austrian theory of sovereignty.

History, however, has had none of these hurdles of terminology to overcome. Twenty-five years ago the controversy was still on as to whether or not history was indeed a science. How, if at all, this dispute was settled is not clear. During the decade now derisively called the "Gay Nineties," but which called itself *fin de siècle*, Clio was forsaken and even relegated to the lumber-room. She has now been restored and not infrequently decorated in colors, which, if not in the Greek manner, are at least challenging to the eye and stimulating to the imagination. If not always upon a pedestal, as of yore, it may be because of her movement in a syncopated rhythm, the name and nature of which were unknown to her sister muse.

Every generation undertakes to write history in its own image, but the present economic interpretation of history is not original with this acquisitive generation, nor with Karl Marx, but it may be ascribed to that more understandable, because more human, philosopher, Sancho Panza, who perceived an everlasting dichotomy of mankind among those who have and those who have not. Following a pragmatic lead, Panza ranged himself upon the side of those who have. We moderns, in this respect seeking justice rather than advantage, rather more generally incline to the other side; yet some are like Simeon Stylites, who, according to the Pilgrim's Scrip, "saw the hog in human nature and straightway took human nature for a hog."

The economic motive has assuredly made its impress upon all of those subjects which are grouped as political science, but our twenty-five years have witnessed a succession of other influences upon them, affecting partly their conduct, partly their methods, and partly their theory. If we regard political science as that body, or rather mass, of specific descriptions of those phenomena of human relationships called political (not even yet very accurately defined or determined) plus the generalizations sought to be drawn from these descriptions, we are admittedly in a field of very ancient origin. Political self-consciousness began with the Greeks, and probably little of its expression has been lost. Yet, beginning with Aristotle, one seeks vainly for any generalization to be drawn from the great range of these

phenomena which at all approximates the universality of a natural law in the physical world. The state which we know is not of ancient but, considering the age of mankind, of recent appearance, not more than four centuries ago. The whole edifice of political theory is modern because of the new institution. Those processes and conclusions of thinkers which have gone to make up political theory have ranged about momentous changes, desired or accomplished, which have demanded justification or invited attack. Aristotle's generalizations were from the whole of the political world, it is true; but that world was Greece. Bodin's theory of sovereignty was a juristic rather than a political apologue for the new territorial and national state. The state of nature, basis of a restated law of nature and of natural rights, was variously described, depending upon successive relations, fanciful or real, of contemporary travellers in the New World. The social compact doctrine, corollary of the state of nature, was a justification of revolution, either after the fact, as with Locke, or before it, as with Rousseau.

Even those two so-called American inventions in political theory were set forth in order to solve a specific problem, that of a divided sovereignty, to support the institution of a national state of a new kind, and that, ascribed to Calhoun, of concurrent pluralities, for the more effectual protection of minorities in such a state. The tripartite division of governmental functions, which has had such far-reaching effects that it has produced a distinct system of government, afforded a practical method of adjusting and compromising divergent plans in the federal constitutional convention. It was justified, it is true, by appeals to Montesquieu's famous passage, but, as is well known, the exposition of the French jurist and historian had a definite purpose and was based upon a misapprehension, or misstatement, of English conditions, then undergoing fundamental changes. This doctrine of Montesquieu, once a dogma of constitutional liberty, has come to be, in the minds of those who in these days look for administrative excellence, a serious impediment to governmental efficiency in the circumstances of democratic incompetence. The doctrine of natural rights,

first a program of radicalism and a valuable *modus vivendi* in a pioneer era and then imbedded in many state constitutions, has not infrequently appeared as the last refuge of privilege and reaction in a society of increasing social and industrial complexity. The absolutist theory of the state, which so dominated German thought throughout half a century, and the usually accepted academic doctrine as taught in the United States, was the expression of the hope and realization of a new German national unity, the clue to which had been given by German philosophers of an earlier time. The conceptions of democracy and of nationality have had no fixed content. Each has varied in time and in space as the innumerable factors have varied. Progress itself, tending to be viewed by each people in terms of its own desires and ambitions, has no fixity as a concept, and its recent historian seems to find in it little more than an optimistic synonym for change.

How remote seem the days when Freeman's dictum, "history is past politics and politics present history," was painted in letters large upon the walls of Adams's seminary-room at the Johns Hopkins University! The first part was long ago discarded by historians. History is as much more than the record of political happenings as it is the recounting of military campaigns or of dynastic arrangements. Economics and sociology, in so far as they attempt the understanding of the present, are as much of present history as is politics, unless, indeed, we give to politics the comprehensive meaning which Aristotle gave to it. What distinguishes history from the social sciences that deal with the present is that history deals with events which are fixed—with the past which is irrevocable. It is true that the record may never be complete; it is always subject to revision. The variation, however, is in the observer and interpreter of the record as well as in the record itself. The effect is that each generation rewrites history.

In the social sciences, movement and change take place while the observations are being taken, and while these phenomenal changes are occurring, the observer changes. He changes as to what he desires to see, and these desires have no

common denominator. It may be for the purpose of correcting error due to this shifting base that in political thinking there has for so long a time been an appeal to, or dependence upon, some body of thought outside that which we call political. These would tend to hold the observer fast. Or, to put it in another way, political science has never been a self-contained body of thought, but has sought outside itself its primary assumptions and major premises, from religion, ethics, philosophy, or from the current *clichés* of natural science. Such tendencies are of such long standing that we may almost call them traditional.

Jeremy Bentham, philanthropist in the literal meaning of that word, was one of the most successful reformers in history; for hardly a reform in Great Britain during more than a half-century but what can be traced to him and his influence. But he was in no sense "historically-minded." An accurate perspective is at once a requisite of historical-mindedness and of a sense of humor. Both of these may be handicaps to a reformer. They are sometimes paralyzing to the reforming effort. Bentham's success as a reformer may have been due in part to his freedom from these handicaps. He was wholly occupied with the shortcomings of his present, which were not to be justified merely because "they had come to be." In a generation still describing political phenomena in terms of Newtonian physics, it was he who directed attention to the dangers of reasoning from analogy in politics.

This way of thinking is as old as the art of government itself, for the very word *to govern* comes in by analogy from navigation. The body politic gave rise to all sorts of analogies to the human body which have been as assumptions changing, according to the accepted criteria of anatomy and physiology, from John of Salisbury to Herbert Spencer. We smile now at Bluntschli's insistence that the state is a man, the church female. Woodrow Wilson was fond of calling attention to the dependence of the framers of the Constitution upon the cosmic theories of their age. Newton is reflected in our federal Constitution, as he is in Addison's *Spacious Firmament on High*. The hard-headed

Bagehot of Lombard Street undertook the task of interpreting politics in terms of the new Darwinism. Political thinking, playing round the idea of progress, has for over half a century sought support in certain assumed principles of organic evolution. But while it was doing so the doctrines of evolution have been recast. "Struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest" are phrases which have furnished many an argument, imperialist as well as egoistic. Today, reasoning from fancied analogies to biological evolution is out of style. No one appears as yet to have applied to politics the mutation theory of De Vries.

In these days "everything is relative." I confess inability to assess the responsibility for this so readily accepted proposition to Einstein, for I do not know what the Einstein theory is, further than that it is said to disturb somewhat the Newtonian statement of gravitation: *de minimis curat lex naturae*. The writings of Haldane, however, indicate the implications outside the realm of physics which the philosophical statement of relativity has produced. A popular stereotype has not been long in making its appearance.

Political science always has its theory, and no doubt that theory usually seeks its metaphysic. Political theory is not identical with political philosophy, but has always to some extent rested upon it, just as jurisprudence rests upon legal philosophy and both political and legal philosophy spring from philosophy without an adjective. What is called pragmatism (lacking, we are told, a metaphysic) is with many an avenue of escape from metaphysical implications, if not from philosophical starting-points. The Great Cham himself might have been a philosopher, Boswell tells us, but for the fact that cheerfulness was always breaking through.

Sociology, endeavoring to find an orderly arrangement of all human activities, not only has effected an enormous influence upon our ways of viewing political phenomena, but it has helped to create a school of political science and a system of jurisprudence. Anthropology and folklore have undoubtedly thrown great light upon the origins of political association, as a result

of which certain political scientists have made generalizations dangerously broad as to the origin of the state.

More significant for the record of the past quarter-century is the influence of psychology upon ways of thinking in political science. To appraise this influence is not altogether easy. One is confronted at the outset with the divergences among the psychologists themselves, among the behaviorists (of whom there seem to be distinct varieties), the functionalists, and the *Gestalters*, so that it is well for the political scientist to be upon his guard. The solid substance of so-called "mass-psychology" can hardly as yet be called impressive and it is unsatisfactory to interpret political actions in terms of it. Many political scientists are inclined to think that the most effective political psychologist is a certain type of practical politician who has never heard of Wundt, or James, or Freud, or Watson.

The years since this Association was founded have seen a vast increase in the number, kinds, and complexities of the functions of the state and of government. During these years there has intervened an era which has disturbed the course of political ideas among professional and lay thinkers to an extent comparable only with those of the Reformation and the French Revolution. While the sphere of government was increasing throughout the world for more than a generation before the beginning of the Great War (a process reflected in the increasing bulk of the statute book on the one hand, and of the budget on the other), political theorizing was attacking the traditional formulas of sovereignty. Just before the World War broke out Ernest Barker wrote a brilliant essay called *The Discredited State*. His conclusion was that the "discredit" of the state was a sign that it had done its work well and was doing its work well. Duguit had indicated a substitute for sovereignty in the rendition by the state, through government, of general services. Syndicalists had affirmed a pluralistic state, or else had denied the reality of any. The law of nature had had a rebirth, which was itself, by implication if not by direct averment, a challenge to the absolute state. Just before the war one might have concluded from much of the literature of internationalism that the

claims of nationality were upon the wane, and that the Nineteenth Century was the century of the rise and fall of nationalism.

Barker's essay was printed in 1915, with a note not without historical value, re-reading it at this distance of time. "It is curious," he wrote, "how differently one would have written in January, 1915. Germany has shown that the Sixteenth Century has not been altogether overpast—at any rate in her own case. And yet the fundamental questions remain, and will re-emerge when the waters abate. Meanwhile the State is proclaiming 'It is necessary to live.' We have forgotten that we are anything but citizens, and the State is having its high midsummer of credit." Nearly four years were to pass after this note was penned, during which the state asserted itself as never before. "The high midsummer of credit," if one may look back upon those years with the feeling that this was a phrase of enduring significance, involved the assertion of state-will and state-intolerance, expressed in governmental regulation and exaction to an extent never before dreamt of. During the war all theories went by the board, and the "state mobilized for war" was a fact before which constitutional guaranties and restraints simply faded away. The war revived nationalism, and the peace was settled upon the basis of an alleged nationalistic *status quo*.

Yet the war also produced opposite effects. In Russia a political organization came forth, and still exists, impossible to define according to the older categories of the state. Along with the new nation-states appeared a new internationalism expressed in the League of Nations Covenant. New theories of sovereignty and of law have sought to find the basis of a single legal order in the world. On the one hand, autocracies have given way in favor of new constitutional democracies, but on the other, new autocracies, appealing at once to nationalistic exclusiveness and greater governmental efficiency, have, at least for a time, silenced the claims of democracy. From both sides we are treated to new theories and new philosophies of the state and government.

We find ourselves, therefore, in a difficult and very perplexing situation. During the past twenty-five years every assumption of political theory, of the claims of democracy, of limitations upon government, even of the right of the state to be, has been challenged. During the same period, however, the claims of the absolute and intolerant, but not "discredited," state, have been made effective in action as never before.

For political science it might appear that this is a record of confusion worse confounded. Clarification is admittedly no easy task. We have become freed from that traditionally enthralling illusion—the illusion of finality. *Tempora mutant*, not only, but equally important, *nos mutamur in illis*—these are fixed in our consciousness. Not even the theory of a rigid constitution withstands them. If no major premises remain universally valid as to state and government, it is because, notwithstanding Machiavelli and Bacon, we have not been able to discover and to formulate any universally valid dogmas. Although political phenomena have been observed, recorded, discussed, theorized upon, and philosophized about for nearly three thousand years, we have even yet no unvarying generalizations akin to natural laws in the physical world. It is in this sense that we may interpret the opinion of John Adams as expressed in 1813 to Thomas Jefferson: "While all other sciences have advanced, that of government is at a stand, little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago." In this respect the political scientist is in a worse situation than the economist, who, as soon as he discovers a natural law in the economic world, seems to set about to abate its operation through human enactment.

The sphere of state action and governmental function touches every sort of human interest and activity. Now the services of the state require a multitude of different and specialized agencies which have little in common except that they perform state services. At least so far as our own experience goes, we have largely committed the direction of these agencies to those whose discipline has been that of the law.

II

In a recent presidential address to this Association, the speaker, with that brilliance which we have long been led to expect from him, deplored the lack of creative work in our field. He found us under "a heavy burden of acquired rights and servitudes," first, that of the lawyer; second, that of the historian; third, that of our universities, affecting the present quality of research. "The lawyer is always looking backward," he said, and, also, "the historian looks backward even more intently than the lawyer." The universities do not appear to him to look at all, while research looks with myopic vision. As was said, the habit of thought in politics, in the United States at least, is largely of legal derivation. Yet, judging from results, those American lawyers who have most molded that thought have not been without vision. Hamilton, Webster, and Lincoln were more than lawyers, but so were John Taylor, Calhoun, and Douglas. To stop, however, with this confession and avoidance would be somewhat unfair to those who are giving direction to the course of legal thought in this country—Holmes and Cardozo, to name but two—and to those also who are seeking to free legal education from its heritage of scholastic thought. Insisting upon a background of social science, and with the idea that the law is social engineering in its best sense, several law schools, with the coöperation of many of the leaders of the American bar, may well interpose a caveat to Mr. Beard's spritely generalization.

The assertion is made that the historian, "looking intently backward," makes but few weighty contributions to political science. But if, as he says, "with the possible exception of John Taylor's monumental *Inquiry*, no single immortal work in political science has been written in America since *The Federalist*," the indictment against the historians does not seem severe. Just what makes a work immortal, or even "monumental," cannot be objectively and definitely determined. A political scientist may nevertheless be excused for placing Thucydides and Plutarch alongside of Plato and Aristotle, and the *History of Florence* and the *Observations on the Decades of Livy* by the

historian next the *Prince* by the realist-politician, both the work of the same many-sided Machiavelli. While the immortal *Federalist* was the work of three lawyers, Bryce's *American Commonwealth* came from a scholar at once lawyer and historian. And, after all, one can hardly impute to the historian an obligation, either professional, artistic, or moral, to make contributions to political science. If the historian should succeed in doing so, so much the better for political science, not necessarily so for history. If he does not, it is rather our misfortune than his fault, for he has his own job to do, whether it be an essay upon the administration of the Petty Bag Office, or on the social history of a Nebraska township. With these the political scientist has no more quarrel than with an anthropologist's inquiry into the contents of a kitchen-midden, or the philologist's researches into the Semitic elements in the Bantu dialect, if there be such.

With economics the situation is different. The relations of government with agriculture, industry, and commerce bring political science and economics upon common ground. Taxation, the regulation of public utilities, and transportation are but three of the many subjects which invite approach from both sides. The increasing importance of this type of question is of itself enough to account for the added dependence which political science has upon economics. From the standpoint of administration, the relation is the other way, so that the dependence is mutual. What is true of economics is true also of sociology. The statistical method so largely adopted by the economist and sociologist is recognized by the political scientist as an important instrument in certain of his fields wherein phenomena are observable in the mass. Business has no doubt much to learn from economics, but administration has still much to learn from business, to the extent that the ideals of efficiency in governmental administration are largely the standards of the modern world of business.

A comparative study of the catalogues of American colleges and universities during the past quarter-century reveals the condition of disjointedness which political science presents

today. Twenty-five years ago what courses there were in political science were not only relatively general in content, but more or less related. Considering only curricular offerings to the undergraduate, a chair of political science extends beyond the settee to the bench, nay, to a series of benches. The curriculum will provide courses in government: American, federal, state, local, municipal, British, continental European, and comparative; then in administration: federal, state, local, municipal, and comparative; with, in addition, law: constitutional, international, administrative, with international relations, international organization, and international administration; with courses in political parties thrown in for good measure, in every case with a text-book in the offing. Our college and university catalogues run to seed with courses in political science. No one can be expected to profess them all. The man who is engaged in some of them may have little in common with him who is pursuing others. Municipal administration, for example, has less kinship with international law than it has with taxation. The principal bond of connection is that both are traditionally branches of political science. The conclusion may well be that here, as elsewhere, the French are more logical than we in placing all of these studies in a group as *les sciences politiques*.

The graduate schools follow the system of diversity of courses still further—courses and more courses—with a doctoral dissertation into the bargain. We are, indeed, under no delusions as to the latter. It is a form of exercise, the purpose of which is to ascertain the ability of the relatively mature student to investigate and report through independent exertions upon a self-contained topic. The results may at times be depressing to the reader, and even deadening to the imagination of the author. But even more deadening is that long range of courses taken for credit, by graduates, as well as by undergraduates, with the approved apparatus of text-books and collateral readings. The impact of educational administration has resulted in a system in which semester-credit-hours, of a certain quantity and reputed quality, are sought for *ad nauseam*. The system deprives

the student of the opportunity for broad and leisurely reading, even if the succession of many courses has not already killed his desire to read. An inquiry among doctoral candidates as to what books of known high quality they have read through while graduate students, simply because they wanted to read them, might elicit some surprising answers. If the man responsible for the training of graduate students can, by example and precept, by allusion rather than by direction, create an appetite for reading, he might stimulate the constructive imagination which a certain type of research tends to deaden. In addition, the beginner may be brought to the realization that the great minds are not necessarily wholly of the present, and that *le dernier cri* is not the same thing as the last word.

The past twenty-five years have witnessed great changes in the attitude of universities toward advanced students, actual or prospective. At the beginning of this century, the number of fellowships and scholarships offered was comparatively small. In most of the universities offering graduate work, the man receiving pecuniary aid was the exception, the majority were not dependent upon the university for their maintenance. Today, with the great increase in the number of fellowships, with assistantships, with part or full time instructorships, the graduate student who is wholly dependent upon himself is a rarity. It is not at all for the purpose of decrying a system of substantial aid to the unusually promising mind that this observation is made. It is said because there is great danger in this country in that, by subsidizing so generally all aspirants to advanced study, the graduate schools may find themselves in the situation of some theological seminaries, which have come practically to assure financial aid to every applicant—a policy which is far from one attracting the best minds.

While graduate schools have been developing according to their own ways, bureaus of research have made their appearance, frequently independent of universities, and generally operating in a special field, as in municipal, state, or federal administration. Independently organized, separately financed, and skillfully*conducted, such institutions would no doubt gain

little, and lose much, through university support. A sound university policy toward them would seem to be one of sympathy and coöperation, but not of control. Such bureaus, being usually those of applied research, should stimulate pure research in the universities and not lessen it.

Another great change is to be seen in the recent and apparently limitless aids given to research by the various foundations. If in each year the Social Science Research Council can start one genius along the pathway of fearless inquiry it will have done well. It would, however, be disastrous if the generosity of the foundations should tempt the universities to abdicate one of their primary functions. So far, aids to research projects have been given in the main to younger men. If the universities should in any large measure unload their responsibilities for the prosecution of research by their respective staffs upon the foundations, so that the younger men come to look principally to an outside agency for substantial encouragement, the effects will be deadening to the true spirit of universities. With the constant pressure upon university budgets by administrative needs and velleities, such a situation is not altogether improbable, if indeed some indications of the kind are not already observable.

Looking over the list of eminent American historians, it is to be noticed that few have occupied academic positions. Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, Rhodes—none of them professed history. But it is also true that none of these lived in an environment wherein a heavy "teaching-load" (phrase of iniquitous import, as smug sounding as foot-pounds or ton-miles!) and a small salary would have made anything more than a desire of accomplishing a *magnum opus* a bitter irony.

III

Those who have labored in the ever-widening field of political science during the life of this Association may not have achieved immortality by their efforts. The record is not to be despised on that account. In the face of bewildering changes, in widely divergent fields, with greatly different interests, with methods

which vary as the fields are different—with all of those shortcomings, as to which many may feel that too much stress has been laid—the contributions of American scholarship to the political sciences have been as substantial as they are various.

The American Political Science Association, as an unofficial national agency for the meeting together of those whose main interests are connected with the scientific study of the organization and functions of the state, has, it is believed, justified the hopes of its founders. Its scope has widened as the fields of interest have widened. It has sought to provide a meeting-ground for those within and without the academic profession. Each group has something to give and something to receive from the other. It has no cause to promote except the search for and entry of truth. "I like better that entry of truth," said Bacon, "which comes peaceably with chalk to mark up those minds which are capable to lodge and harbor it, than that which cometh with pugnacity and contention." It has no creed other than that of tolerance in matters so largely of opinion. It enters upon its second quarter-century modestly proud of its past and grateful to those who, having encouraged and sustained it, have made its past possible and its future certain.