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A Philosopher Looks at Political Science

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It has been my fate ever since I degenerated into college administration, which, as you know, is more closely related to politics than to science, to have been assigned pretentious titles that flattered my ego, attracted audiences and had only a remote connection with the speeches I finally inflicted upon those before me. Since my audiences, for good reasons, tend to consist of persons who have not heard me before — a rapidly diminishing group — I am tempted to give the same speech, regardless of assigned title, as a convenient way out of a rather delicate problem.

When Dr. Werner Feld gave me the opportunity to review the imposing list of speakers and the serious themes making up the stimulating program at this session of the Political Science Section of the Minnesota Academy of Science, I decided that the combination of my innocence of the subject and your strenuous intellectual efforts during the conference entitled you to more or less relaxation at lunch time. Therefore, as a philosopher, I will attempt to contemplate upon the field of political science (which means to look it over, or, more exactly, to overlook it) and consider for a few minutes what political science might be like if it had never been separated from its field of origin, philosophy.

Undoubtedly, one of the major divisions of *Philopo*, as freshmen would call it instead of *Polisci*, would be the field of Socio-moral Criticism — one of the more theoretical fields of *Philopo*. Socio-moral Criticism would be founded on three major critical and/or negative premises: (1) that man's attempt at civilization was his first great mistake (and isn't it lucky that it looks like he isn't going to succeed); (2) that education was a close second mistake (and isn't it fortunate that its professional practitioners have kept it from spreading); and (3) that government is as close to the ideal of the rational organization of human affairs as its practice is remote from it (and aren't we reassured when candidates for the highest offices in the land still hold that that government is best that governs least.)

Socio-moral Criticism, on the basis of these three premises, would have as one of its intellectual heroes the twentieth-century political idealist, Tecrodnoc, whose name, coincidentally, is Condorcet spelled backward. (As you know, the latter famous eighteenth-century French materialist completed a book in prison on the infinite perfectibility of man just a few days prior to his death, barely escaping the guillotine — a reform-inspired procedure that has been vastly improved upon in our own century.) Tecrodnoc, with the advantage of modern progress, would base his views on empirical observations that he would extrapolate in the more daring manner associated with philosophical politics, in contrast to the

more confining modesty of political scientists. Tecrodnoc's treatise would be called "The Infinite Human Capacity for Irrational Thought and Stupid Behavior." This work would become so influential that even conservative Southern Senators could quote from it liberally and at length during Senate debate, in order to show their colleagues of the North that even filibusters may be justified.

I would be derelict not to call to your attention some typical chapters in Tecrodnoc's book. For example, "The Communist Aspirations for World-wide Brotherhood," subtitled, "How Mao Tse Tung and Khrushchev Vie to be Their Brothers' Keepers." Another chapter would announce, "Political Semantics During the Roaring Twenties" or "How Socialism Turned Into Fascism and Fascism Turned Into National Socialism." This chapter would demonstrate how five million German voters can't be wrong, but how they can switch votes from Communism to Nazism, back again to Communism in East Germany, and back to Democracy in West Germany. Another chapter dealing with international relations would be entitled, "Changing Partners," and would present a rather confusing account of pre-war, war and post-war alliances too difficult for even the brightest sophomore to commit to memory. A more encouraging chapter of the book would be entitled, "America's Leadership of the Free World" and would deal with this country's persistent efforts to achieve representative government in the remote corners of Asia and Africa and, particularly, in Mississippi and neighboring states.

(Before we leave the teachings of Tecrodnoc and its profound illustrations of Socio-moral Criticism as a theoretical division of *Philopo*, attention must be drawn to the fact that at least our colleges and universities do their part as impregnable intellectual citadels of our civilization to spread the message to Tecrodnoc in enlightening eager students. At a time when all of us are bemoaning the population explosion and the existence of more prospective students than we can possibly admit through the closing college door, college admissions officers opportunely scour the countryside with almost desperate energy and vigor recruiting students with an unprecedented concern for the welfare of *other* institutions of higher education which they want to save from overcrowded conditions by attracting the students to their own campuses. Obviously, Tecrodnoc's next edition of "The Infinite Human Capacity for Irrational Thought and Stupid Behavior" would contain an addendum dealing with our higher mental institutions.)

The next division of *Philopo* we are going to consider is called Analytics. This division is not only less empirical than the previous division, but is also less

speculative. It is concerned with definition as well as logical analysis and empirical considerations or speculative ideas are only incidental, that is, they are contained in the raw or given concepts or propositions to be analyzed. For example, Analytics may deal with 57 senses of the term "democratic," but it is not actually concerned with whether the real world contains any state of affairs that corresponds to this political label as defined in its variety of senses. While Analytics attempts to define concepts such as "state" and "welfare." I should point out that even if agreement is reached on such individual terms, this does not preclude disagreement as soon as the terms are combined. Thus, those who agree on the meaning of "state" and "welfare" may disagree on the meaning of "welfare state." Or again, those who agree on the meaning of the concept of "welfare state" may disagree on the type of social organization and policies in the real world which would exemplify a welfare state (let alone *actually* exemplify this concept with which Analytics is less concerned). Thus, to some *Philopo* scholars, a democratic welfare state is a contradiction in terms and to others it is a meaningful and desirable state of affairs. This last point brings to mind the need for distinguishing between social and moral values on the one hand, and empirical facts on the other — a major concern of political analytics.

As we pursue an understanding of political analytics, we learn that it seeks to distinguish between the moral or social value that is held by a certain political group or person and the question concerning the moral validity of a given political or moral value. In turn, we must distinguish between our agreement with a given moral valuation, our consequent claim that it has validity, how the validity can be proven, the evaluation of the evidence given and finally, the meaning — if any — of moral or political values. These considerations are factual, ethical, meta-ethical and scientific, and on several levels of discourse. In addition to the foregoing complexities of the problems with which Analytics deals, occasional logical and possibly illogical differences of analysis develop between political philosophers which may be traced not only to their own philosophical, but also to their political and cultural points of origin. It is no wonder, therefore, that given a choice, many college students as well as professors prefer the challenges of political science to the tedious strains of philosophical politics. As it is, political science freed itself from its old fetters and the student need no longer make the choice.

Whereas political scientists tend to deal with empirical studies concerning the degree to which totalitarianism may be present in the controls exercised by political parties and government, political philosophers would be concerned, in a combined approach of analytics and sociology of knowledge and politics, with the meaning of such terms as freedom, liberty, totalitarianism, control, etc., in the context of particular sociological and logical frames of reference. Political philosophers would be concerned with understanding the extent to which these terms are relative to cultural assumptions or persuasive intentions. Since, according to Marxian dialectics, for instance, lan-

guage and logic itself are tools of the class struggle, a rational defense or analysis of our terms and assumptions is by Marxian definition impossible because we are class bound. Exceptions to this restriction are extended to those privileged by a kind of classless insight not accorded to ordinary mortals and to those successful in the use of force who leave room only for whatever *they* define as rational.

Thus, while *Polisci* studies empirically the political disagreement between Russia and America, *Philopo* would supplement this study by concerning itself with the conceptual and theoretical bases from which these disagreements follow, in part, even as they occur among political scientists and political philosophers of the two societies.

Inasmuch as this talk is gradually becoming less relaxing and more tedious than initially advertised, let me mention only one more division of *Philopo* — the division of Synthetics — which the imaginative listener may contrast with the division of Analytics. Synthetics is that division of *Philopo* concerned with speculation on where different political values, theories and practices lead us in terms of social, economic and moral philosophy. Indeed, Synthetics provides an opportunity for those interested in constructing normative sociopolitical theories of action for themselves.

An outstanding exponent of the synthetic school of *Philopo* is Bertrand Russell. Although one of the great analytical thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his political writings are speculative as well as analytical, the latter in a somewhat crude sort of way. (Let me qualify the last assertion by adding that I find his occasional confusions and mistakes in political analysis and sociological hypotheses more exciting intellectually than the more accurate findings of some of our contemporary social scientists.)

Having always been of a somewhat impractical turn of mind when it comes to politics, Russell was soundly defeated in a parliamentary election shortly after the turn of the century. The solid citizens, if I may courageously take the academic freedom to use this phrase, who made up the leaders of the British Liberal Party of that time asked Lord Russell (or Earl Russell as he then was) to stand for parliament. To this he consented. At that time, however, he already lacked the uprightness of being willing to indicate affiliation, at least in name, with some organized church group or other, for the ridiculous reason that he did not embrace an official theology. The Liberal leaders tried vainly to reason with Russell that no one cared what his views were on theology, only about his announced church affiliation. Russell would not relent to the practical exigencies of good government and, consequently, Western parliamentary institutions were saved the embarrassment of the analytic and occasionally synthetic *a priori* and *a posteriori* with which he subsequently haunted — rightly or wrongly — the conscience of his fellowmen.

At any rate, Bertrand Russell's critique of the "Practice and Theory of Bolshevism," his pointing out the confusions in Marxist metaphysics in contrast to more sound Marxian sociology, his "Scientific Outlook" that

inspired Huxley's "Brave New World," his fear of doctrinal socialism despite his championing of socialist views, his advocacy of checks and balances in government, his fear of uniformity as found in industrial societies such as the United States — although exaggerated and oversimplified — illustrate a branch of *Philopo* which, potentially, could make significant contributions to speculative study and constructive proposals in the area of political organization and behavior.

I conclude that if political science had not separated from philosophy, its socio-moral criticism, its analytical concern and its synthesizing construction of socio-political world views, as represented in *Philopo*, would have been barren because of its lack of empirical investigation utilizing the scientific method of research into empirical phenomena. Such investigations and research are exemplified by scientific observation and statistical studies in political behavior, systematic studies of political theories

and their applications in practice, and studies in comparative government and political parties and bureaucracy, without which there can be neither perspective nor basis for practical or philosophical judgment.

It would follow therefrom that a philosopher concerned with the analysis of basic political concepts, propositions and theories, as well as a philosopher interested in speculating on the implications of such an analysis, look upon political science as providing them with the refined data both for the analysis and the synthesis that may be projected. Conversely, the political scientist needs a philosopher — or, perhaps, better yet — he turns philosopher as he critically examines the assumptions and basic concepts in terms of which he studies the events, the people, the interrelations and the processes that make up the world of politics.

And this is one legitimate way in which thesis and antithesis may be absorbed into a constructive synthesis.

When Auguste Comte classified the sciences of mankind in his general scheme of philosophy, he placed mathematics and the natural sciences at a lower stage of complexity than sociology or economics. This was not because Comte considered the logical structures of physics or chemistry to be simpler than those of the social sciences. It was because despite their impressive architecture, these structures were founded on the solid ground of nature's dependable regularity and were thus blessedly free of human nature's undependable irregularity. Along the same line of reasoning, what made the social sciences appear so much more difficult to Comte was not their inner structure, their vocabulary, or their techniques. It was the fact that they had to form their intellectual architecture out of the stuff of human behavior itself.

Source: Robert L. Heilbroner, 1962.
The Making of Economic Society, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc.,
pp. xi-xii.