

## 15. EDITORIAL: What is Political Behavior?

Some men who are referred to as Jews rarely call themselves such, because, at the same time that they are proud of the fact, they see nothing but misunderstanding in the semantics of the name. Some men, in the present instance the editor, have the same attitude toward the term "political behavior." Though we have been called a "political behaviorist" frequently, we rarely call ourselves one.

Political behavior is not quantification of political propositions: the extreme "right" derives a malicious pleasure from asserting so in order to demolish theoretical advances, while the extreme "left" suggests this in order to be intellectual bohemians.

Nor, for that matter, is any specific effort at new method in political study to be termed political behavior. For, if so, most quantitative studies of voting behavior would be excluded because they are tiresome repetitions of 25-year-old techniques. Nor is it the fulfillment of the theories of the behaviorist school of psychology, to which, in our mind, it would be fatal for political scientists to subscribe.

Political behavior is not realism, as opposed to idealism or falsehood. Indeed, some works reputed to be of the species, political behavior, are far more abstract than the traditional books on the same subject. Furthermore, some of the writings of "political behavior" realism are nothing but gross distortions of reality, the ashcan school of political literature, responsible for such perennial idiocies as the belief in the pervasiveness of boss rule in American local government.

Nor is political behavior an empiricism that contrasts with a deductive political science. Who among the "behaviorists" can match the empiricism of L. D. White's administrative histories? Who can match the deductiveness of Lasswell's theory of values and classifications of political practices?

Neither is political behavior the study of voting behavior. Here the trick of the "right" is to limit by definition: Let one course in political behavior suffice for a department because "Who needs more than one course on how people vote?"

Furthermore, we would not be true to our theory of language --nor would we have much effect-- if we said that "political behavior" is this or that.

Therefore, we merely prefer that political behavior be regarded as nothing save political science as some of us would like it to be. Any other view is more a hindrance than a help to political science.

Then might political behavior be a type or set of types of subject matter: party discipline, social stratification, political roles, decision-making, elites, rank-orders J-curves, policy science, informal organization, attitude-clusters, power, human relations? Behind these names lie fields of age-old interest to political scholars; in themselves the names may mean only a striving for a new grasp on the subject, or worse, a desire to make a wind tunnel to simulate rapid progress.

Is political behavior a question of interdisciplinary study, so that whatever work cites a sister social science is ipso facto qualified? Then the ticket of admission is cheap indeed, and, for those who do not even wish to pay the trifle, counterfeits are free.

We do not deny that some excellent political scientists and good students have allied under the term, to the gain of political science as a whole. However, apart from the ethical question of using means that create important misunderstandings as a by-product, this practice may only serve to isolate the progressive element in the profession.

We think, therefore, that "political behavior" can be a mask for somebody with a claim or gripe. It can furbish the propaganda of academic struggles. It can collect crowds, paltry as scholarly crowds are. It bears the same relation to political science as the term "behavioral science" does to social science--a synonym in fact, a propaganda tactic otherwise. Whoever wants to make more of it is welcome to do so, and may use our columns for the purpose. But we advise one and all to forebear the distinction so that we can apply ourselves to the greater task of creating a better political science on whatever subject and with whatever skill and imagination we may command.

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