Book Reviews

Present Discontents

An End to Political Science. The Caucus Papers. MARVIN SURKIN and ALAN WOLFE, Eds. Basic Books, New York, 1970. viii, 324 pp. $7.95.

Virtually every major scientific discipline is under attack today from dissenting—usually younger—members who claim that what is being carried on in the name of science is at best socially irrelevant and is all too often an expression of the organized learning professions' thralldom to an unjust and repressive social order. But the situations of the natural and the social sciences differ in that in the former the controversy is largely over the uses to which scientific knowledge is put, whereas in the latter the attack is directed also against the basic methodological premises: that quantifiable, extrasubjective, empirical data are the major source of scientific knowledge, and that absolute value-neutrality is the only legitimate stance for the individual practitioner and for the discipline as a whole.

In political science this conflict is already highly institutionalized. Since 1967 the Caucus for a New Political Science has been operating as a subgroup within the American Political Science Association, sponsoring its own panels at association meetings, its own candidates for association offices, and now, in effect, its own learned journal. *An End to Political Science* is its collective manifesto, consisting mainly of papers originally presented under its auspices at professional meetings. According to the editors, "this book more accurately represents an end to political science than the emergence of the 'new' political science," inasmuch as "to change political science will require a critique of the current paradigm and the development of alternative modes of research, theory, and social practice." Whether this volume marks the discipline's "end" can be argued, but it certainly does little to fulfill its secondary objective of pointing the way toward an alternative.

The most ambitious attempts to set forth the direction a successor discipline should take are to be found in the essays by one of the editors, Marvin Surkin, and the caucus chairman, David Kettler. Surkin concentrates his attack on behavioralism, the currently dominant professional paradigm of political science. Behavioralism may be defined as a virtually exclusive commitment to the study of the observable regularities of political behavior, normally by quantitative methods, in an attempt to discover theories with both explanatory and predictive value. Surkin says that this approach cannot come to grips with the "felt knowledge" people possess about poverty, oppression, and war, and argues that "existential phenomenology" provides an equally empirical and verifiable method of social inquiry, transcending both classical subjectivism and classical objectivism in "intersubjectivity"—"the fundamental interconnection between the external, objective world including other people . . . and the internal, subjective world of consciousness"—and that, "aligned with a humanistic vision of social change," it is a "radical alternative to behavioralism." This sounds as though it might offer an exciting new methodological approach to the study of political behavior; unfortunately, neither Surkin nor any of his colleagues demonstrates either how it can be used to deal with any of the concrete problems of social science or how, if used, it would produce results different from or superior to the products of old-fashioned sophisticated empiricism.

Like most of the caucus leaders, Kettler is especially concerned with laying the ghost of "pluralism," the conventional wisdom of the political scientist which postulates that no single elite dominates the government of the United States or of its local subsystems, American politics being controlled by a plurality of competing interest groups. This "theory," its critics hold, is mainly a rationalization for the status quo, where elites do in fact rule behind the masks of meaningless popular participation. Kettler's main concern is not to demonstrate that pluralism is inadequate as a description of political reality (which he holds to be already adequately proven) but to develop an ideologically acceptable alternative. This alternative construct he calls "republican constitutionalism," the belief that society's affairs should be subject to general laws passed upon by popularly elected officials and by the Supreme Court (!) rather than to the pressures exerted by special interest groups. But this is certainly not new, nor is it necessarily leftist. Kettler expends much effort attempting to show that Hegel and Marx were republican constitutionalists but admits that the principle dates back to Aristotle and Cicero. Much of his argument follows that of Theodore Lowi in *The End of Liberalism*, a book sufficiently in the professional mainstream to be quoted at length in the popular introductory text in American government which I use in my courses. Indeed, Kettler's argument sounds much like a call to return to the conception of the workings of government found in high school civics courses, an idealization from which the pluralist group theory of politics supposedly liberated us. His radicalism is really a plea for a return to fundamentals, a plea with which (and he himself knows this, as evidenced by his citations from Friedrich Hayek) many archconservatives could easily agree.

Thus neither Surkin nor Kettler provides a new, radical working paradigm for the discipline; nor do their collaborators. The thesis of Thomas Thorson's recently published *Biopolitics*, calling for a rejection of physics as the model of the social sciences and the substitution of evolutionary biology, contains many more radical methodological insights than can be found in the caucus papers, whose authors do not say much that is radical or new. Marcus Raskin's "The violence colony" is a conventional, quasi-journalistic attack on the war society in which we live, largely valid but hardly trailblazing. The studies by Michael Parenti and Matthew A. Crenson competently demonstrate that pluralism does not always work at the lower level. But again, even my elementary text cites studies on "standing decisions" which tell us in learned fashion what most people have always known, that some groups are so

powerful they don't have to defeat their enemies in overt battle, that to a great extent organized society is one massive preemptive strike against the powerless. The problem is not in discovering this fact but in incorporating it into our general theories instead of allowing our knowledge of it to coexist uneasily with the pluralist formulations which it goes far to undermine.

The volume also includes studies of American policy in Asia and Latin America which offer literate and informed criticism, but neither of these breaks much new ground and, save for their substantive conclusions, could have appeared in *Foreign Affairs* or some other general periodical. David Underhill's study of the Columbia student uprising of 1969 tells us what we should already know, that sometimes you cannot get data on what is really important in social conflicts and that specific problems must be viewed in the context of general "historical" knowledge as well as in terms of available problem-specific data. Insofar as we need to be reminded that this is the case, we are indeed in bad shape intellectually; but however useful the reminder may be, it can hardly be counted as a methodological breakthrough.

Alan Wolfe's concluding essay, an attack on the profession as a whole, epitomizes the strengths, weaknesses, and confusion of the caucus critique. Entitled "The professional mystique," it accuses political science of being dominated by a small professional elite, narrow in its range of ideological viewpoints and overly tied to outside governmental and private interests of a conservative nature. He argues that there is no sense in trying to organize the radicals in the profession (despite the paradoxical existence of the caucus) because there are so few, and notes that political science is the only social science discipline wherein a right-wing group (styling itself as moderate) has organized to counterbalance the new left tendencies represented by the caucus. Ironically, many of the criticisms made by Wolfe and by the left generally parallel those long made by many of the right-wing members of the profession: social irrelevance, formalistic and jejune methodology, dominance of the profession by a narrow, behavioralist elite. Perhaps the real problem is not conservative domination of the profession but the tendency of any social institution to generate a self-sustaining elite, to downgrade dissenting viewpoints, and to ally itself with outside established powers. Indeed, can any organized profession be expected to behave otherwise? Is not a "radical" political science profession a contradiction in terms?

But if Wolfe's criticism of the profession as such is essentially utopian, the volume's attacks on the ways in which political science deals with social reality have more merit. The plain fact of the matter is that the attempt to construct social science, including political science, on the model of the physical sciences—or what some imagine to be the model of the physical sciences—has largely been a failure. One need not be an ideologue of the left or right to discern this in the papers given at professional meetings or published in professional journals, which are in many or perhaps most cases culturally unsophisticated, intellectually vapid, and scientifically trivial. The great issues of politics have been left untouched not so much because of a quasi conspiracy in favor of the status quo as because of a trained incapacity to think in a creative, innovative, interdisciplinary way about social matters, an incapacity fostered by the entire process of professional socialization, now beginning even at the undergraduate level.

Where then does the caucus—and the profession—go from here? In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn argues that new scientific paradigms are not so much the result of the conversion of those committed to the old as of the elders' replacement by the young committed to the new. But by no means all the young are on the left. Of those who are, many will voluntarily abandon the profession in disgust. Others, given present market conditions, will find it difficult to obtain and retain jobs and will be under even greater pressure to conform. Still others may freely decide to adopt the conventional wisdom. The passage of time alone cannot be counted on to guarantee "an end to political science."

But perhaps change will come about in a simpler and more subtle fashion than either the Kuhn or the caucus model implies. Perhaps it is not manifestoes or organizations or the self-conscious establishment of new methodologies that are needed to revolutionize political science. Wolfe concludes his discussion of professionalism by noting that the "true professional . . . has a vocation . . . the promotion of his own radical truth." If everyone concerned would personally search for relevant truth rather than for pseudo accuracy about the trivial, if the discipline as a whole would tolerate a methodological pluralism which recognizes that techniques are instruments, not ends in themselves, present discontents may mark not the end of political science but a radically new and hopeful beginning.

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Great Plains Economies

Northern Plainsmen. Adaptive Strategy and Agrarian Life. JOHN W. BENNETT. Aldine, Chicago, 1969. xviii, 354 pp., illus. $9.75.

The anthropological method of comparing several cultures existing simultaneously in the same laboratory is decades old, yet rarely has it been utilized with the competence and concern for theoretical issues seen in *Northern Plainsmen.* Studying Indians, ranchers, farmers, and Hutterites, John Bennett has described the evolution of the four adaptive strategies used on the Great Plains of west-central Canada. By using the region's history, he reveals the intricacy of changing adaptations to the environment and to surrounding cultures. Bennett presents both an analysis of contemporary adjustment and, more crucially, a model of how the Great Plains cultures became what they are. The static picture that often results when cultural ecology is used as a descriptive device has been largely avoided by Bennett. Furthermore, he actually outlines processes of culture change and generalizes from them, making this one of the few monographs where the dynamics of ecological adjustment are clearly described.

The environment in this study is the semiarid plains, with an economy tied to national, capitalist culture since Anglo settlement. In any era since the settlement, the technology has tended to be modern. From this setting, a number of processes are singled out as having general validity for this and similar agrarian regions. Niche specialization, or the matching of economy to environment, has occurred in this area of the Great Plains during the last 75 years, or three generations. From trial-and-error experimentation throughout the area to the establishment of stable loci of production, the region has moved