



SOCIAL SCIENCE AT CROSSROAD: ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN CHANGING TIMES

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Introduction:

This timely and pertinent theme which has immense significance considering the future impact of Political Science, has staged a number of debates in the academic and professional world. At the outset, one must be reminded of the good old days, when Political Science was regarded as 'the science of sciences and art of arts'. Not only Political science but also epoch making branches of social sciences like History, Philosophy and even Economics were put under the overarching nomenclature termed as 'Humanities'. It's apt to recall that subjects of humanities were regarded as the cradle of human civilisation and such subjects produced series of thinkers, statesman and nation builders. Now we are passing through a period of turbulence where overdose of quantification characterising subjects of commercial significance is ruling over the scenario of higher and professional education and the great subjects of humanities dwindling in to oblivion of despair. With this predicament as the backdrop, we need to delve deep for analysing the subject referring to contemporary research works attempted on the subject. Allan Bloom put his finger on the problem in his famous book from the late 1980s: "A few words about political science and its peculiarities might help to clarify the problems of social science as a whole. To begin with, it is, along with economics, the only purely academic discipline that, like medicine, engages a fundamental passion and the study of which could be understood as undertaken in order to ensure its satisfaction. Political science involves the love of justice, the love of glory and the love of ruling. But unlike medicine and economics, which are quite frank about their relations to health and wealth, and even trumpet them, political science turns modestly away from such avowals and would even like to break off these unseemly relations."¹

Relevance of Political Science:

Political science is being growingly acknowledged today as the study of political values, institutions, processes, and policies. Political scientists seek to understand the underlying ways in which power, authority, rules, constitutions and laws affect our lives. The study of political science prepares one for life as an informed citizen, ready to participate in political activities within interest groups or political parties; related to community organisation and political advocacy; or even service as an elected or appointed official. Political science is the study of people and societies struggling with great and enduring issues such as war and peace, order and freedom, and justice and equality. Understanding how and why those issues are resolved, or fail to be resolved, is at the heart of education in political science. Studying politics encourages the development of both specific and transferable skills. We gain a clear understanding of politics, whether it is domestic, international or a combination of both. Political science helps us to develop reasoning and analytic skills, and to arrive at decisions based on the analysis and synthesis of information and data, build competence in oral and written expression, research and evaluation skills, which are valued in a wide spectrum of potential career areas.

The overall impression one gains is that the discipline has been developing in an incremental manner during the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first century. As we have seen, there has been a steady expansion of political science around the world; an increase in its depth as a collective enterprise

and profession; improvements in empirical methodology; and a flowering of research models. Nevertheless, political science around the world still seems to be looking for itself. In fact, what was said of IR seems to apply to all of political science: the community has rejected 'great debates' and settled down for Kuhnian 'normal science', each researcher 'self-encapsulated' within one of a broad range of coexisting theoretical perspectives. It has been called 'analytical eclecticism' based on a self-consciously 'agnostic methodological stance'. The basic impression is still one of a discipline in search of its soul and out of touch with the real world of politics.

Political science is a broad and inclusive discipline. Some political scientists want to understand the political behavior of individuals or why they act the way that they do. Others study institutions such as legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies. Still others examine the causes of war (and peace), foreign political systems, and how the public sector really works. This list does not exhaust the specialties and areas of interest included in this diverse discipline. Amid this diversity lies a common concern with anything "political," including issues, political institutions and behavior, power, and public goods. All political scientists are concerned in one way or another with promoting the goal of understanding politics. Political science is the only subject where we can obtain practical knowledge and at the same time gain insights into the great issues of our age. What, for example, are the causes and institutional forces behind a conflict between the President and leaders of congress? If nations are threatening armed confrontation, what lies behind the conflict? What is the individual's place in the political system? With a degree in political science you will be able to answer these and many other politically oriented questions. The knowledge and critical skills gained from the study of politics will enable you to be a more informed and rational citizen, a more constructive participant in public affairs, and a better professional. As Andrew Martin and Morgan Hazelton point out in the article 'What Political Science can contribute' in the publication of American Association of Law Schools "Despite an inherent kinship, the studies of political science and law spent many decades isolated from one another. In recent years the two fields have become more and more integrated, with an increasing number of political scientists collaborating with law professors and joining law school faculties. Political science is a rigorous discipline that can benefit both legal scholars and lawyers. Public Law, the subfield of political science that studies law and court has much to offer in understanding how judges make decisions and how larger political and institutional contexts affect the legal system. Furthermore, law students can only benefit from exposure to the methodological approaches that are standard in political science. Enhanced integration of political science and law will inherently expand the knowledge and reach of lawyers and legal scholars due to the important contributions."²

Political Science and Governance:

As one example of the rejection of 'great debates', we may refer to the fiftieth anniversary presidential address that Thomas Weiss made to the 2009 International Studies Association Convention in which he contrasts notions of world government and global governance. While global governance is a useful heuristic device to understand what is going on in the world, it lacks prescriptive power

to point to where we should be headed, and where agency and accountability are absent. Turning to the concept of world government, ³ maintains, 'We analysts of international organizations have strayed away from paradigmatic thinking. We have lost our appetite for big and idealistic plans because so many previous ones have failed'. Therefore, blame can be apportioned to scholars for their lack of imagination. He says, 'It is humbling to realize how much our aspirations have diminished, how feeble our expectations are in comparison with earlier generations of analysts' ⁴ Even worse, academic analysis can have a harmful effect because 'pragmatism also reflects an assumption that no powerful global institutions will appear any time soon, a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts' (ibid.: 264). He calls for more passionate advocacy, vision, a quantum shift in thinking.

As we have seen, two common themes in our body of evidence on the development of the discipline are the significant influence of change on the political science and the lack of representativeness of the discipline. The two are linked. One can safely claim there is no end in sight of challenges to security, the environment, equality, democracy and economic stability. And yet, we are limited by the realities of the sociology of science, which, it is said, are based on the dominance of national disciplinary structures that are self-absorbed with research agendas that reflect national conditions including male dominance and tend, at the most, to still be Western. What is the current perspective from which political scientists will be able to deal with these challenges? We have seen the lengthy list of problems that face the discipline. But, is there not also a serious disconnect between political science, politics and the public? Are we listening to politicians and the media, and do they listen to us? Do we address ourselves to the general public? In short, is political science out of step with the world?

Admittedly, we must be very careful when we use a term such as 'relevant'. This is not a call for turning universities into trade schools or changing professors into functional sycophants. Nor is it a desire to see each individual researcher being hauled before the bar of popular culture or political suitability. Rather it is a claim that the political science profession as a whole has a social responsibility that includes, but goes beyond, empiricism and the search for knowledge. The discipline, or at least a significant proportion of it, must be pertinent to students and their liberal education, but also to public issues and the future as well as the present. As Oscar Wilde wrote, 'A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth looking at' (1954/1891).⁵

The question that strikes first is whether social sciences are withering away with growing hegemony of management and allied subjects. Louisa Hotson from The London School of Economics and Political Science befittingly comments, "Just like cigarettes and air travel, the social sciences were much more glamorous in the 1960s than they are today. In the 1960s social science faculties were generously funded and scholars were well-represented among the upper echelons of policy makers. Today we live in a different age, one marked by increased introspection and uncertainty about the prospects of the social science profession. Some have warned that the rise of think tanks and increasing complexity of the policy making professions has presented a severe challenge to the role of academic social science. Others have advocated ways in which their professions might overcome a widening gap between policy makers and academics. But both critics and optimists agree that the social sciences are at something of a crossroads, and the question of what role the social sciences should play in advising democratic societies across the world have never been more important."⁶

The main debate is with regard to audience. Some will maintain that our main obligation is towards the discipline, that is, to the production of more and better knowledge. In his book entitled, *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution for Science and the Humanities*, the philosopher of science, Nicholas Maxwell, ⁷ contends that intellectuals must do better. They must have as their basic aim to enhance personal and social wisdom. They have to give

priority to personal and social problems, to what is desirable and of value. He makes a fundamental critique of the underlying empiricism of the philosophy of knowledge. Further, problems of knowledge, while important, become intellectually subordinate and secondary. Thus, knowledge is a tool to an end. In such a context, one would have to argue that the relevance of political science goes beyond the discipline and policymakers to include citizens, the media and society. This is what I mean by relevance. I assume that political scientists will always have to continue to be relevant to students, educational authorities, research funders and policymakers because they give us our mandate and our salaries. But in a more profound sense, it is the public and the political class, society and democracy, to which political scientists must be responsible.

Political Science: How far Scientific?

Society is changing, so also politics, so social scientists argue, how can Political Science stay aloof from such radical upsurge? We are now passing through an era of 'impact phases' Matthew Flinders⁸ writes in the trendsetting Blog of Oxford University Press, which is appropriate to be mentioned here. Flinders stresses on the fact that the 'impact phase' is not an unknown professional space for political science. From the emergence of political science as a self-standing discipline, many of its leading exponents were public figures who were able to combine their academic duties with public service. If anything, the evolution of mass-marketized higher education squeezed-out any capacity for significant non-academic public service, as the role of a university professor became more internally focused. Even then many sub-fields, notably but not exclusively gender studies, did remain both socially embedded and socially aware. Learning from the past may therefore offer some clues for the future. Flinders suggests that the challenge of the 'impact phase' is to set out the political relevance of your work without being politicized; to be 'political' in the 'small 'p'' sense of the term without dirtying your hands in the worldly art of politics; to craft a new politics of resistance against the instrumentalization of academe, whereby every new idea and finding must be translated into some dubious new 'product' or 'output', while acknowledging the need to demonstrate some broader form of social value; and to walk along an ambiguous and increasingly frayed professional tightrope while a multitude of hands reach-up from the 'big 'P'' political abyss and attempt to pull you down.

We have seen that among the most significant issues facing political science circa 2010 are the problems of fragmentation and specialization. Of course, these are intimately related to the scientific method just discussed. Fragmentation encompasses all the divisions in political science that have been mentioned in our evidence, the separation of IR and public administration and some other sub-fields, competing theoretical and methodological approaches, and a myriad of other splits over language, centre versus periphery, ethnicity, country-specific education systems, etc. Specialization is another form of fragmentation. By specialization, while not disputing the contributions of specialization, several authors worried that it has become 'excessive'. By this, we may presume they have in mind scholars whose research focuses on ever-more narrow subjects that absorb their whole career and generally exclude any attempt at linkage with other sub-fields or with social problems. It cannot be doubted that the power to concentrate on a subject has led to many of the breakthroughs in science. The capacity to know all about a specific research area, to be in contact with colleagues at the cutting-edge of the field, and to focus one's research on new developments can offer inspiration and save time and energy. Specialization is an integral part of scientific progress. The questions are whether specialization also leads to human progress and whether its excesses can be counteracted? It seems that each time we learn of a new scientific advance, we also hear about examples of related, uncontrolled technologies despoiling our environment and communities.

Is the scientific method too constraining for the study of politics? As long as science means searching for the rigorous, viable and

verifiable means of knowledge, it is an aid to the study of politics. But when it becomes pure methodologism, computerization and quantification, does it not constrain the analysis of the complex diversity that is politics and government? In *Political Psychology* (Linda Shepherd ed.) 9, there is a fascinating article on computational, experimental (i.e., laboratory) and data set approaches to the study of foreign policy decision making. While quite positive about the benefits of the studies, Sylvan and Strathman (2006: 96) 10 nevertheless also note that computational and specifically hermeneutic models 'do not directly address "real world" political concerns, but rather engage in academic discourse .After such a litany, can we expect politicians to listen to us or pay for our work? Should we not be concerned that quantitative scientific methodology only lends itself to a small portion of the political world?

Political Science in Changing Times:

It is necessary here to point out that the future of Political Science as the master social science is not that bleak. Today Bachelors or Masters in Political Sciences analyse the fundamental problems in human society such as world peace, economic crisis, globalisation, international trade, and more. A political sciences programme can help us better understand how governments operate and interact, the impact of government policies upon economic stability and growth, and how laws affect social and political change. Politics influences every aspect of our lives and contributes to the wellbeing of a nation, including education, employment, healthcare and even housing. Dana Vioreanu¹¹ puts forth some promising careers for Political Science Students. One can't resist the temptation of looking at them as per her depiction that follows:

- Lobbyist – Here we get an opportunity to meet Members of Parliament and have discussions about introducing legislation and encourage them to vote in a way that will benefit their clients.
- Political campaign manager – Can be responsible for all aspects of promoting a political party or candidate for local or national elections. By analysing political polls, one can organise the strategy that involves marketing, communications, PR and fundraising.
- Career politician – If one manages to gather enough support for her/his ideas then she/he can run for a place in Parliament or Provincial Assembly.
- Political consultant - Government officials can't take all the decisions. They need advice from experts. This is where Political Consultants can come in and make strategies

Surprisingly Political Science as Vioreanu argues, also works well with Business studies. By understanding national or international policies, as well as global trends you also better understand consumers and how the economy works. These are great insights for future managers interested in having a broad view on global business. A degree in Political Sciences will help in careers like:

- International business specialist – Can identify and handle issues that involve promoting or defending the interests of the company, conduct discussions and sign contracts that would bring benefits and profit to a company.
- Market researcher – Can collect information on customer opinions about services or products, assess research projects, and coordinate research projects.
- PR specialist – Would have to draw attention and interest to a public or well-known personality or a company. One should be able to identify the proper means of communication and the specific targets.

Given that political science is about understanding and analyzing decisions made for allocation of power and resources, the field will always be there as long as we live as communities of some type. However, how and what is analyzed may change. Political scientists are already using big data analytic tools to identify political and social trends to advise leaders. As technology changes business, society and all types of activities from education to commerce, political scientists may need to focus more on the rights and

responsibilities questions, as well as systems of accountability and responsibility. 50 years from now when people are jetting in driverless cabs and pilotless planes, who is responsible in case of an accident? How should political leaders respond to protect citizens' rights in such situations? Then the political scientists as Aydin argues will need to be able to analyze social and political implications and generate advice for political frameworks and decision makers to protect those not artificially enhanced. Political scientists will also need to become advocates of equality more than at present and make sure politicians understand the importance of it for a healthy society. Politicians and decisions makers need to worry about and make laws to combat growing inequality as there will be more and more technology haves and have-nots with the former living longer, healthier, with access to more information, money and power relative to the latter group. But political science will continue and likely to be one of the jobs not threatened by rapid technological changes around us until there is an algorithm for such analysis as well.

Lastly a degree in Political Science can be a great introduction to legal studies. One can understand how international laws shape government policies as well as be aware of the common set of rules politicians worldwide should operate by. We will also understand the differences between diverse systems of law countries have and how they interact on the global stage. By mixing law studies with Political Science, we will get the tools we need to work on projects for new laws or making changes to older laws that are no longer effective. It becomes pertinent to affirm our firm conviction that Political Science has a great future if we breathe the spirit of time. Everything happens in a historical context. It is wise to be sceptical about articles on politics that never mention individual politicians. Specific leaders do make a difference. What if Gore not Bush had been adjudged the winner in 2000? What if Blair had yielded precedence to Brown in 1994? No numerical approach will explain the impact of Churchill in 1940 or of Kennedy in the early 1960s. The run of history is not inevitable." To recapitulate the immortal words of Mahatma Gandhi who said that a student who is devoted to the purpose and finds realisation of rights in fulfilment of duties finds the gloom is transitory and light is near. There is no better statement to this in my knowledge that explains rightly the future of social sciences and especially Political Science that injected within us the very fundamentals of rights and duties also the concepts hovering around life, sensibility and sincerity.

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