



Horizons of Politics
2013, Vol. 4, N° 9

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Exploring the Future

Summary

More than 125 years ago the Academy of Political Science published the first volume of the "Political Science Quarterly," focusing mainly on defining the nature of political science and its importance for the future of the mankind. Since 1886 the world have faced more than just one revolutions, two world wars, growth and decline of fascism and communism. Historical events should lead us to another questions: what is (or should be) the relationship between history (as academic science) and political science? and how important is the understanding of the past for envisioning and building better future?

KEYWORDS

political science, history, Africa, international powers, USA

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Streszczenie

Ponad 125 lat temu pierwszy rocznik amerykańskiego czasopisma "Political Science Quarterly" próbował odpowiedzieć na pytanie, jaka jest rola nauk politycznych i do czego mogą się przydać ludzkości. Po roku 1886 ludzkość przeżyła niejedną rewolucję, dwie wojny światowe, wzrost i upadek faszyzmu i komunizmu. Te wydarzenia skłaniają do kolejnych pytań: Jaka jest i powinna być relacja pomiędzy historią, jako nauką, a politologią? Na ile zrozumienie przeszłości jest niezbędne, byśmy mogli zaplanować lepszą przyszłość?

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politologia, historia, Afryka, potęgi światowe, USA

The second issue of "Horizons of Politics" was published March 2011, exactly 125 years after the first issue of the "Political Science Quarterly." The American academic journal was an initiative of the Academy of Political Science, a scholarly organization, founded in 1880 to promote "objective, scholarly analyses of political, social, and economic issues" [APSA 2013]. For more than a century "Political Science Quarterly" has been stimulating discussions that shapes our understanding of "the relations of man in society; or more precisely, with all the relations that results from man's social life" [Smith 1886] and enjoys a long list of prominent and distinguished contributors, including, among others: Woodrow Wilson, Robert A. Dahl, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. A careful reading of the articles of the first volume of the "Political Science Quarterly" provides not only sophisticated entertainment for intellectuals but it can inspire our own, 21st century, understanding of the politics and the role of political science today.

The other inspiration for careful investigation of how the past and the future intermingle in modern political science is the issue of yet another prestigious academic journal, "Political Studies," published by British Political Studies Association. In 2010 (the very same year in which the Jesuit University Ignatianum launched "Horizons of Politics") "Political Studies" presented a special issue on *Dialogue and Innovation in Contemporary Political Science*. As Martin J. Smith explained, "Political Studies" focused on "dialogue and innovation"

because it is the duty of political scientists to explore new developments in the field, but their duty is also to remember the past; otherwise our knowledge would be useless and misleading [Smith 2010].

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Two of the articles published in the special issue of “Political Studies” deal directly with history, which was in 1886 described as “the most important of all auxiliary sciences” [Smith 1886, p. 5]. Anne Norton (of the University of Pennsylvania) in her article, *Politics against History: Temporal Distortions in the Study of Politics*, explains why examining actual history can stimulate the development of political science. She is, however, well aware of the deficiencies of historical approach:

Historically oriented political scientists have been at their best when they refused historical conventions. This is particularly true with regard to American political development, where political scientists forced a rethinking of American exceptionalism by turning to comparative history, an enterprise that had been impeded by the discipline of history’s insistence on specialized regional and period expertise [Norton 2010, p. 342].

Norton points out that historians, as part of their work, deal with stories that organize the events into linear structures. Therefore both a historian and a history-oriented political scientist have to analyze narratives which are not accurate accounts of the facts. The narratives are always structured and have their own logic, so the main task of the researcher should be to discover these kinds of structures. The events of the past and the way our understating is organized and expressed in academic work constitute the basis for further exploration of political scientists because:

[t]he past does, as we commonly assume, constitute the present. The present is rooted in the past. The language that we use to describe events, the meanings we look for within them, the patterns that we trace in events, belong to the past. The horizon of meaning is behind us. The present grows from that past and bears the mark of its authority. But that past is authored by the present. Each successive future rewrites the past [Norton 2010, p. 345].

In the vision of Anne Norton contemporary political research is more a critique than an appraisal of the past. The aim of investigating the past is to understand the “horizon of meaning,” which, in turn, is a necessary means of analyzing the present and predicting the future. This is the moment when the historian and the political scientist should meet: by blurring once clear borders they both can acquire a better knowledge of an ever changing past, present and future.

The text of Anne Norton stimulated an instant comment published in the very same issue of “Political Studies” by Oxford University professor, Iain McLean. His article starts with an elaborate analysis of Thomas Jefferson’s letter in which the dying author of the Declaration of Independence expressed his appreciation of the foundation of American democracy. McLean sets some of the phrases Jefferson used in his last letter, e.g. “monkish ignorance and superstition” or “the rights of man” [Jefferson 1826] in a broader context of English, Scottish, and American political history. These phrases cannot be properly understood by a mere historian; they call for political and legal analysis, otherwise Jefferson’s thought would receive too modern an interpretation, closer to a 20th century perception of civil rights [McLean 2010].

McLean firmly states that the real collaboration of a historian and a political scientist is not the result of a simple crossing the borders. In his own work, focusing on researching politics, he finds out that “the most useful historical contribution” is the “understanding the improbable and avoiding forward-marchism”. In other words, history cannot be considered as a series of rational events that inevitably lead to a better end: “It is one damn thing after another” [McLean 2010, p. 359-360]. And vice versa: a historian can profit from a political science perspective because “the archives that survive are a biased sample of everything that was written”. In the 16th, 17th and even early 19th centuries it was impossible for an archivist to be unbiased. Everything he (of course “he”; this was centuries ago) archived was done for some political purpose. This is the moment when the political scientist, who is able to use quantitative methods, can test the validity of the data collected or (as Norton would say) to extract the truth out of the narratives [McLean 2010, p. 363-364]. Only by a common effort of separate but cooperative fields of studies “political scientist and historians can help turn untested assertions into either verified or falsified claims” [Rybkowski 2012, p. 192].

These rather recent publications of Anne Norton and Iain McLean validate the assumption that studying articles of the first volume of “Political Science Quarterly” is a legitimate research approach. Careful examination of these texts helps us to understand late 19th century narratives as well as enables 21st century researchers to find out precise way of naming the most important challenges of the present. Actually, political science should be an increasingly important field of studies because

real world problems cannot be solved by technological solutions alone; they need social and political adaptation, and a pluralistic, open and innovative political science can make a significant contribution to helping the world resolve the key challenges of this century [Smith 2010, p. 237].

In 1886 American authors were not only interested in examining past events and current political issues. They tried to envision the future and after more than 125 years we are able to see which of the problems are solved and which still cause much tension and wait for useful solutions. Or, maybe, we keep on trying to resolve exactly the same problems.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

The opening text of the first issue of the “Political Science Quarterly” dealt with the understandable question of the definition of political science as a field of academic inquiry. In March 1886 Munroe Smith wrote that

[a] neat definition is a very attractive thing. It seems to offer the conclusion of wisdom in portable form. It is, in fact, the condensed result of a great deal of hard thinking; but to understand it, to appreciate what it includes and what it excludes, the thoughts of the definer must be thought over again until the disciple has gained the same outlook over the subject as the master – and then he no longer needs the definition [Smith 1886, p. 1].

More than a century later, the very first issue of the “Horizons of Politics” faced a very similar task. Our Editor in Chief, Father Wit

Pasierbek, described the aim of the “Horizons”: “Achieving a refined political anthropology is a firm basis for an appropriate political life. And vice versa: a just, moral, and well-grounded basis for political life improves the quality of human life” [Pasierbek 2010, p. 7]. Thus the goal of the “Horizons of Politics”, as a new academic journal, was once again to define the nature of politics, the place of individuals in political life, and the role of political science in 21st century. The enduring dream of presenting a neat definition of political science proves that there are no stable and undeniable limits of the field and every now and then we must face this task. This was the reason why the first issue of the “Horizons of Politics” opened with the text by Bogdan Szlachta, *Nature (Human) as a Problem of Political Philosophy*. By referring to old masters from Plato to Aristotle and to Cicero and St. Thomas Aquinas, even a modern political scientist can test the accuracy of definitions delineating the field and explaining the role of the individual human being as the actor and the subject of political dramas [Szlachta 2010].

In the early 21st century (as it was in the late 19th century) the stage for political dramas is the state. Therefore Munroe Smith reasoned that political science signified “literally, the science of the state. Taken in this sense, it includes the organization and functions of the state, and the relations of states one to another”. Careful examination of the state requires the existence of some “subdivisions, or special branches of the science of state” [Smith 1886, p. 2]. For researchers of the 19th century these subdivisions were: politics, economics, and law. Surprisingly, Munroe Smith’s position was astonishingly close to the conclusions of Anne Norton and Iain McLean:

Each of the three sciences we are now considering holds a large proportion of its territory in common with one or both of the others. Law and politics have common ground in the organization and operation of government in the single state. Law and economics are both concerned with all commercial transactions. The theory of governmental administration is largely economic; and state-finance is a part of the administrative system of the state, is based on economic theory, and is regulated by law [Smith 1886, p. 3-4].

The difficulty in setting the frontiers of the subdivisions of political science was also discussed in the article of Frederick Whitridge,

Legislative Inquests, in which the author pointed out that the traditional divisions into three branches of government should be questioned in the American political tradition:

The legislative, executive and judicial departments, it is argued, are distinct and exclusive. No one of the three ever exercise any of the power of the others. (...) In nearly all of the American colonies the upper house of the colonial legislature acted as a court [Whitridge 1886, p. 84-85].

Politics and law were so closely connected that they became inseparable. The culmination of such connection was the constitutional power of state legislatures (expressed in state constitutions) to punish for contempt. Therefore the separation of powers was not an ultimate law since: “the legislature may punish its members of other persons for contempt in case of disorder in its presence, and in order to enforce obedience to its process [Whitridge 1886, p. 89]. Therefore these two fields: of politics and of law cannot be analyzed and explained separately.

Smith and Whitridge’s perception of the complexity of the state resembles a modern approach reflected in the publication of the “Horizons of Politics”. After three years of our activity we have a long list of articles on the politics or the state [Deneen 2012; Constantelos, Diven 2013]; on economics [Godowska 2011; Wach 2011] and on law [Riedel 2013]. Such variety proves that the 19th century advice is still valid and the question of the “domain of political science” is still open. Hopefully, it will remain open for many years to come because, against some once popular claims, history has not yet ended.

THE FUTURE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The first article of the fourth issue of the “Political Science Quarterly”: *The Future of Banking in the United States* dealt with an issue important for 19th century prospects of American economic system. After the 2008 banking crisis in the United States, the problem still seems to be of the greatest importance for the US economy and global economic stability. But the starting point for the 1886 article is “the so-called surplus resolution.” In the 1880s, the US government had

“too much money.” The whole congressional and public debate focused on the question of whether the government should spend more than necessary and how to reduce the amount of money available in the market. This question led to yet another problem, concerning the issuing of bank notes under the governmental control and the predicted interest rates of government bonds. The solution suggested by Horace White was rather simple: “better leave commerce to find its own media of exchange under present arrangements” [White 1886, p. 532]. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of White’s paper, but the most important outcome of modern reading of his article is that problems of the past can easily reappear after 125 years. In the 21st century the economy affects international affairs in the same way as in the late 19th century [Adams 1886] and the banking system still has an impact on the lives of common people [Spahr 1886]. There is no doubt that economics must be part of the research interest of any reliable political scientist. As it was in 1886, it is now the only way of envisioning future.

There are two other articles in the 1886 volume of “Political Science Quarterly” that discuss problems of great importance for international affairs: one deals with West Africa (nowadays Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the other discusses Egypt. These regions attracted the attention of the whole of the “civilized world” in the 19th century. After instances of unrest and turmoil the Western powers wanted to stabilize the situation, mainly because of the political and economic interests of the West. Although West Africa and Egypt do not face the same problems today, both regions still remain an important question in international relations, and the people living there still dream of better, prosperous future.

The Conference at Berlin on the West-African Question provided a complex analysis of the negotiations during the 1885 Berlin Conference that eventually called for the “effective occupation” of Angola. The reasoning that stood behind the final statement was expressed in article 35 of the General Act:

The Signatory Powers (...) recognize the obligation to insure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them (...) sufficient to protect existing rights, and, as the case may be, freedom of trade and of transit under the conditions agreed upon [General Act 1885].

The occupational powers had to protect the freedom of trade for all other signatories. As the author pointed out, although the final resolution was “diplomatic in form, it was economic in fact” [De Leon 1886, p. 103].

The conference was also important from the US point of view because “for the first time in history, a delegation from the United States took their seats with those of European powers at diplomatic conference in Europe” [De Leon 1886, p. 128]. And for the author it was obvious that the Berlin Conference marked a substantial change in US relations with foreign nations. It signified that Washington could no longer pretend that there is nothing outside of the Americas and had to accept more general responsibility:

In view of the traditional foreign policy of the United States, towards Europe especially, it was singular to behold this country, of a sudden, not only participating in a conference called into being by European rivalries, but going so far as to endeavor to lay the foundation for future international entanglements of the most serious nature [De Leon 1886, p. 137].

In 1886, when compared to the situation since 2010, Egypt seemed to be more complicated on the one hand (because of the Mehmet Ali’s uprising in Sudan) and less complicated on the other (because there was rather stable presence of the British there). John Eliot Bowen, the author of a lengthy analysis: *The Conflict of East and West in Egypt* wrote in favor of the British:

England has the single-handed control, and she means to maintain it. The welfare of Egypt rests on this resolution. Many people, who claim the divine right of judging the motives of an action and who fail to see so far as its results, urge that England is actuated solely by selfishness and the greed of power in asserting her control in Egypt, and that she is merely fortifying herself against that certain day when some protruding arm of Russian territory shall reach a southern sea [Bowen 1886, p. 675].

The possible gaining of power by Russia was one of the main concerns for both the 19th century politicians and political scientists. For the American author, sharing common values with the British, the civilizational mission of the West in Egypt was beyond any question.

Although “England, on the other hand, makes her furthestmost territory British in reality as well as in name; ignorance, superstition, and savagery melt away under contact with the Anglo-Saxon influence. That England, in spite of all her mistakes, has had a beneficent influence upon Egypt...” [Bowen 1886, p. 675]. Unfortunately, history has proved how deeply that optimistic vision was wrong.

THE BEST OF TIME IS NOW

The 20th century saw many definitions of state, the human race faced but too many social experiments that had promised a bright future. But the first article of the “Political Science Quarterly” still has its powerful calling not for revolution but for social advancement:

The conception of the state as a mere protective association against external force and internal disorder is antiquated. The state is everywhere exercising other functions than the protection of person and property and the enforcement of contract. Whether the increasing importance of the state be deplored or applauded, the fact remains that it is rapidly becoming, if it is not already, the central factor of social evolution [Smith 1886, p. 8].

In the 1886 vision of Munroe Smith our field of studies (i.e. political science) was very practical because it focused on the nature of the state not simply to explore its nature *per se*. Today, our explorations should always prepare the grounds for the progress of the human race. The selection of articles published in this issue of the “Horizons of Politics” proves that this is a consistent goal: to explore the past and the present in order to prepare “just, moral, and well-grounded basis of the political life.”

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