

Political Theory and Political Science

Can This Marriage Be Saved?

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The marriage of political theory and political science has been a long and too-often unhappy one. Each partner has what marriage counsellors and therapists call 'issues' with the other. From the heyday of the behavioural revolution to the present, political scientists have objected that political theorists are not 'scientific', by which they mean that theorists do not deal in data drawn from the 'real world' or use quantitative or statistical methods to analyze and explain those data. In so far as theorists study the history of political thought, they belong in departments of history. And in so far as they study and practice political philosophy, theorists belong in departments of philosophy. In either case theorists do not belong in departments of political science.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s (when I was a graduate student at Berkeley) the marital war was raging and rumours of divorce were rife. It never quite came to that, however, and the once-fractionous and now middle-aged partners remain married, albeit none too happily. Can this marriage be saved? And, more importantly, *should* this marriage be saved? I believe the answer to both questions is yes. In reaching this conclusion I propose to proceed as follows. Playing the part of therapist rather than theorist I shall begin by looking backward to the early years of the marriage, which began happily enough, and ask how and why differences between the partners began to arise. I trace the partners' troubles to the post-World War II origins of the behavioural revolution in American political science (which was later to spread, in a diluted and much-muted form, to Anglophone political studies). The militancy of the early behavioural revolutionaries put a fright into political theorists, leading them to mount a counter-revolution of sorts, which further fuelled the animosity between political scientists and political theorists. The animosity took several forms and erupted on several occasions. Since I cannot recount all of these occasions in a brief essay, I shall select several episodes in which the partners came into conflict.

The first of these formative episodes is the great *methodenstreit* (or, more precisely, *Positivismusstreit*) of the 1960s, which had several aspects. One concerned competing theories and conceptions of explanation. Political scientists subscribed, by and large, to a positivistic conception of explanation, whilst theorists countered with claims that positivism was already a passé philosophy of science and its conception of explanation outmoded and ready for replacement by a more interpretive or hermeneutical model of inquiry and explanation. Another aspect of this animosity had to do with competing conceptions of language and conceptual analysis: should concepts be tightly (re)defined to make them fit for scientific analysis (as behaviouralists contended) or should their porosity and contestability be accepted and even embraced (as many political theorists averred)? If the former, the main (or only) role for theorists is as humble ‘under-labourers’ toiling in the field of conceptual analysis. If the latter, the behaviouralistic and positivistic dream of a science of politics is radically misconceived and something of a chimera.

I next consider the sociopolitical context within which political theory was declared to be ‘dead’ and why that declaration was without warrant or justification, as subsequent events—the protest movement against the war in Vietnam, the civil rights and women’s movements, and others—fuelled a revival of political theory. I recount a number of developments that resulted in the increased independence of political theory from political science. My contention throughout is that political theory thrives on conflict and contestation—whether methodological, epistemological, conceptual or political—and that its conflict with behavioural political science proved beneficial to both. I conclude by suggesting that present-day political theory’s near-independence from its erstwhile partner has come at a high price. And I suggest that if there is a threat to political theory in the early twenty-first century it comes not from behavioural political science but from within academic political theory itself.

I

Before the behavioural revolution of the 1950s and 1960s there was no strong and irreconcilable split between political ‘science’ and political ‘theory’. Indeed, a number of eminent American political scientists, including Charles Merriam, had themselves made conspicuous contributions to political theory and the history of political

thought (Merriam 1936 [1903]). All the major departments of Political Science offered courses in political theory. Many of the first generation of behavioural revolutionaries—Robert Dahl, David Easton, Heinz Eulau, David Truman, and others—had begun as students of political theory and some of their earliest published work dealt with thinkers in the tradition of Western political thought (for example, Heinz Eulau's first scholarly publication was an essay on Henry David Thoreau). As undergraduates and postgraduates they had read Dunning's *A History of Political Theories* (1902), McIlwain's *Growth of Political Thought in the West* (1932), and especially Sabine's *A History of Political Theory* (1937). But later, as budding behavioural revolutionaries, they rejected the backward-looking 'historicism' of their elders. 'Political theory today,' David Easton complained in 1953, 'is interested primarily in the history of ideas' (Easton 1953: 236). If political science is to be a science, this preoccupation with the pre-scientific political thought of Plato and his progeny must cease.

How political theory moved from centre to periphery and came to occupy a somewhat marginalized position within political science is a long and rather convoluted story. Each partner tells a different version of the story. As narrated by behaviouralist critics of 'traditional' political theory, the story goes something like this: In the United States the hope of making political science a truly 'scientific' discipline was advanced with a vengeance after World War II. And this is because there was amongst many American political scientists—and especially those who had worked in wartime Washington D.C.—a sense of dissatisfaction with 'traditional' political theory that focused on major thinkers and texts in the history of political thought and on the concepts of consent, citizenship, the state, obligation, authority, liberty, and the like, and seemed more interested in prescribing how people ought to behave than in describing how they actually do behave, and explaining why. Traditional political theory also appeared to be more concerned with the past than with the present—with those 'old books' called 'the classics', than with pressing problems of the post-war period. Instead of consulting these old tomes political scientists should study the 'real world'. Instead of relying on the outmoded and prescientific theories of yesteryear, we should at least attempt to theorize about politics in a more modern, and preferably more scientific, fashion. We should take care to separate facts from values, description from prescription, ideas and ideals from interests, 'is' from 'ought'. We should discover and use universal laws of human behaviour to explain why people act as they do in

political settings and situations. This was the impetus for, and the promise of, the post-World War II ‘behavioural revolution’ in American political science.

To be sure, the behavioural revolutionists were not hostile to all forms of political theory—on the contrary, they readily acknowledged that the close and careful analysis of political concepts such as ‘power’ could be very valuable—but they *were* hostile or at least antipathetic to political theory, construed as the study of the history of political thought, for this reason: If political science is to be a science after the fashion of physics or any of the other natural sciences, then there is no legitimate place for the history of earlier theorizing. After all, aspiring physicists study physics, not the history of physics. One can be a very fine physicist but be utterly ignorant of the theories propounded by the Ionian nature philosophers, or by Aristotle or any other major figure in the history of science. Indeed, to study the history of science would be a distraction—interesting in its own right, perhaps, but irrelevant to current research and theorizing. And, as in physics, so in political science: one need not study the theories of Plato or Locke in order to be a good political scientist; indeed, the time and effort spent in studying them would detract from research into, and theorizing about, present-day politics.

Theorists, for their part, retorted that the idea of a ‘science’ of politics is as old as Aristotle and thus that political science, however conceived, should be viewed as a branch or tributary of political theory. There are many different approaches to the study of politics and all of us—self-described theorists and scientists alike—should adopt a tolerant ‘big tent’ attitude and learn to live with each other despite our differences. And besides, political theory is in important ways a backward-looking enterprise. A very considerable part of its subject matter is its own history, which consists of classic works from Plato onward. In this respect political theory is quite unlike (say) physics. Theorists agreed with behaviouralists that one can be a very fine physicist without ever having studied the history of physics or having read Aristotle’s *Physics* or Thales and the Ionian nature philosophers or, for that matter, the works of Galileo and Newton. The same simply cannot be said of political theory. A student of political theory must have read, re-read, and reflected upon the works of Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Mill and many others if he or she is to be competent in his or her chosen vocation. But there is of course more than one way to read, interpret, and understand the works that comprise the canon—changing and contested as

it is—of political theory. Thus Straussians contend with Marxists, Cambridge ‘new historians’ with both, feminists with ‘masculinist’ readings of the canon, and so on, through a rather long list. What to behaviouralists appears to be chaos and cacophony is music to the ears of political theorists who tend to value variety and diversity. Political theory thrives on conflict and contestation—methodological, conceptual, epistemological, and political—and, once its partner turned behaviouralist, the battle was on.

II

The overriding aim of the behavioural revolutionaries, repeated to the point of tedium, was that what had previously passed for ‘political science’ was not really scientific. It was high time, they said, to make political science into a real science and to relegate political theory to an even more peripheral position within the discipline.¹ For their part, political theorists were determined to resist what they saw as a shaky ‘scientism’ – behaviouralism’s misguided attempt to model political science on a particular philosophical reconstruction of the natural sciences—and thenceforth went on the philosophical offensive. The result, not surprisingly, was still more strain on an already troubled marriage. Or so it might appear. Appearances notwithstanding, my main contention is that since political theory thrives on conflict this particular conflict was actually beneficial to both partners. Moreover, the conflict over positivism and its relation to behaviouralism proved to be a formative moment in the revival of political theory and its staking of a claim to intellectual independence from political science.

Among the noteworthy disputes that helped to define academic political theory as a discipline more or less independent of its erstwhile partner political science was the great *methodenstreit* of the 1960s, which centred on the shakiness (or strength) of behaviouralism’s philosophical foundations. That philosophy was, in a word, positivism (or, in two words, logical positivism). Most behaviouralists signed on to positivist philosophy of science and, in particular, to its conception of language and of scientific explanation. And these they used as a stick with which to beat political theorists and to berate them for being backward looking and unscientific.

I should perhaps pause here to say something about philosophical positivism, which some people (and particularly political theorists) use almost as a swear word. This I have always refused to do, despite

being highly critical of positivism. I agree with G.A. Cohen: ‘Anglo-phone philosophy left positivism behind long ago, but it is lastingly the better for having engaged with it’ (Cohen 1978: x).² So too with political theory’s engagement with positivism and its stepchild, behavioralism. In what follows I propose to use ‘positivism’ to refer to a particular philosophy of science. Very roughly, this philosophy holds that there is a single scientific method that unites all the sciences, natural and social; that the natural sciences supply a model or standard for the social sciences; that the social sciences should seek to emulate this model; that all scientific explanation conforms to the deductive-nomological or ‘covering-law’ model; and that the language of science must be purged and made cognitively meaningful by being shorn of ‘metaphysics’, muddle and ‘values’.

Behaviouralism borrowed many of its key categories and distinctions from the lexicon of logical positivism or logical empiricism. First, in its account of language and meaning, logical positivism distinguished three sorts of statements: ‘synthetic’ statements of empirical fact (‘The cat is on the mat’ was a favourite); ‘analytic’ statements of logical necessity (‘All bachelors are unmarried males’, another favourite); and a residual catch-all category of ‘normative’ utterances that neither describe some state of the world nor state logically necessary truths, but serve only to express attitudes, feelings, preferences, or ‘values’. Second, this theory of meaning supplied the basis for an ‘emotivist’ theory of ethics which holds that ethical utterances are cognitively empty and meaningless; they are merely (in A. J. Ayer’s colourful if slightly salacious term) ‘ejaculations’ expressive of nothing, save, perhaps, the speaker’s feelings or state of mind. Thus the statement ‘Stealing is wrong’ says nothing at all about the world, nor anything about relationships of logical entailment, but merely expresses the speaker’s disapproval of stealing (Ayer 1946: 107-12). And third, as a philosophy of science, positivism provided criteria for demarcating between science and non-science. Science, it was said, is not about any particular subject-matter but about meaning and method. There can be a science of politics just as surely as there can be a science of chemistry or physics, provided that its statements are cognitively meaningful (i.e., synthetic) statements of ascertainable empirical fact and that its explanations conform to the requirements of the deductive-nomological (D-N) model. According to the latter, we can be said to have explained some phenomenon X if and only if a statement describing X (the *explanandum*) is deducible as a conclusion from premises

containing one or more general laws, along with statements of initial conditions (the *explanans*).

Philosophical positivism performed a normative or regulative function for behaviouralism in that positivism defined for behaviouralists what ‘science’ is, and what political science ought to be, if it is to be a science. First, political science ought to distinguish between ‘facts’ and ‘values’. Second, it should be ‘empirical’ instead of ‘normative’. And third, it ought to be explanatory in the aforementioned sense. All genuinely scientific explanation, according to positivist criteria of explanatory adequacy, depends on the discovery and deployment of timeless universal ‘laws’. Because most of ‘traditional’ political theory did not conform to positivist criteria of cognitive meaningfulness and explanatory adequacy, it was dismissed as unscientific or, at best, prescientific and therefore destined to be superseded in due course.

From a positivist perspective political theory appeared to be an odd, not to say incoherent, admixture of the analytic, the synthetic and the emotive (or evaluative). From Plato to the present, the ‘classics’ of political theory are marked—and indeed marred—by muddle: ‘facts’ and ‘values’ are jumbled together; persuasive definitions are misleadingly made to appear in value-neutral guise; and fictions, metaphors and other tropes abound—states of nature, social contracts, original positions, and ideal speech situations.

From a behaviouralist and positivist perspective, the only hope for political theory lay in purging its language—and the language of political science—to make its concepts cognitively meaningful. The language of political theory should be purged, whipped into shape, and made to aspire to the transparent clarity of the language of science—at least as the natural sciences were conceived and idealized by the logical positivists. Behaviouralists accordingly assigned to theorists—or at least to theorists who wished to be useful—the task of clarifying and defining the terms of political analysis. The primary purpose of political theory, as a committee of the American Political Science Association once put it, was to ‘define the concepts of political science’ and provide precise ‘definitions of political terms’ that political scientists could use (Wilson et al. 1944: 726, 729).³ Theorists were relegated to the role of humble under-labourers toiling in the vineyards of political science.

In so far as political theorists were concerned with explaining political behaviour, they did not accept the D-N or ‘covering law’ model of explanation, with its view that any behaviour (human or

otherwise) is neither more nor less than the result of antecedent causes. To put the point crudely, political theorists during the period of the *Positivismusstreit* turned to an anti-positivist philosophy of *action* as an alternative to the then-orthodox positivist philosophy of *behaviour* that undergirded and legitimized behaviouralist social and political science. It was in the course of exploring an alternative *verstehende* or ‘interpretive’ or ‘hermeneutical’ model of social-scientific understanding that theorists came to see how deeply and decisively language shapes and colours the self-understanding of the people whose behaviour we wish to explain. Very crudely, actor A cannot understand himself to be engaged in an activity or practice *x* (e.g., voting) without possessing the concept of *x*. Moreover, *x* is typically part of a network of concepts—a conceptual scheme—which gives *x* its point and meaning. To explain why A engages in *x* requires that we know what A believes about and understands by *x* and what *x* means to A and others like him; it requires that we understand something about the conceptual scheme or language to which *x* belongs and within which it functions.

A next—and very short—step was toward the philosophy of language, or, more particularly, toward the ‘ordinary language’ philosophy of Wittgenstein and Austin, amongst others. No doubt many political theorists found ordinary language philosophy particularly attractive because it was highly critical of its positivist predecessor and decidedly less critical of political theory, past and present. The language of the natural sciences was no longer to serve as a standard of meaning or precision. We use language, as Austin famously put it, to *do* things—to describe, explain, excuse, endorse, appraise, warn and to perform numerous other ‘speech acts’ (Austin 1970; Searle 1968). None of these utterance-types is privileged, much less a model of cognitive meaningfulness. We analyze words and concepts, not by looking for their meaning *per se*, but for their *use*—they are meaningful only in the context of the uses to which they are put. Even the most descriptive or ‘empirical’ of the concepts employed in ordinary discourse are not amenable to strictly drawn definitions; they are ‘porous’ or ‘open-textured’. To the degree that their porosity is ordinarily no hindrance to communication, concepts do not need to be reformed, redefined, or made more rigorous than such communication requires. We achieve as much clarity as we need by noting ‘what we [ordinary speakers] say’ in certain situations and contexts. Not surprisingly, ordinary language philosophers took a much more tolerant view of political theory than their positivist predecessors did. In the

spirit of Aristotle they seemed almost to say that one should look for only as much precision as the subject admits of—and that if the language of politics often seems vague and imprecise, then so be it: that is a defining feature of political discourse.

Political theorists' interest in ordinary language philosophy proved fruitful but fleeting. It soon became apparent that ordinary language analysis had its shortcomings; it was, among other things, parochial and ahistorical. For in emphasizing the minute analysis and clarification of 'the' meaning and use of particular concepts, ordinary language philosophy or 'conceptual analysis' tended to focus upon the language of one age and culture, namely our own. This narrowing not only blinded political theorists to the fact that meaning and usage change from one age and generation to the next but it also led them to believe their enterprise to be a politically neutral one of clarifying and analysing what 'we' say, as though 'we' were a single speaking subject, undivided by partisan and perspectival differences (having to do with race, ethnicity, social class, gender, etc.), and employing concepts whose meanings did not change over time. In thus assuming that there is a unified, or at any rate undifferentiated, 'we', ordinary language philosophy largely ignored the twin issues of political conflict and conceptual contestation. Which is to say, with only slight exaggeration, that linguistic analysis largely ignored or was blind or indifferent to politics itself—which is not a good thing for *political* philosophy to be.

There is also the obvious historical fact that previous political philosophers almost never took 'what we say' (or what the people of their age and culture said) as sufficient or satisfactory in settling conceptual quarrels; indeed, they typically took issue with the ordinary language of their day, attempting to alter or reform the vocabulary of politics by criticizing commonly held views about 'power', 'property', 'liberty', and the like. That is to say, the history of political thought is in large part the history of conceptual contestation and change. Political conflict and conceptual contestation are indelibly intertwined, and any political theorist—or political scientist—who ignores this feature of political life is bound to miss much of what is most important in the subject-matter he or she studies.⁴

In attempting to make the language of political analysis more rigorous, behavioural political scientists had merely opened their object of study to rigor mortis. That *homo politicus* is a language-using animal makes him utterly unlike the objects that (say) physicists study. To explain his behaviour is, in part, to understand its meaning or point

as he sees and frames it within a larger language or conceptual scheme. It was this dimension of political behaviour that was largely missing in the positivistic programme of the behaviouralists. As if that were not defect enough, it soon became clear that almost all of what passed for ‘empirical’ or ‘scientific’ political science did not conform to those positivist criteria on the basis of which political theory had been criticized and dismissed as meaningless because ‘normative’. It required no great semantic skill to show that ‘values’ lurked in the shadows of even the most sanitized ‘scientific’ statements: there were in fact no normatively neutral or non-theoretical descriptive statements (or ‘protocol sentences’, as earlier positivists had termed them). Even the most sanitized descriptive statement could be shown to have its own ‘value slope’ (Taylor 1967). Worse still, there turned out to be no genuine ‘laws’ of political behaviour. None—not even the oft-touted ‘laws’ propounded by Michels and Duverger—could pass muster under positivist criteria (Farr 1987).

In the philosophy of science, meanwhile, the critics of positivism had carried the day, and by the mid-1970s all but the most die-hard positivists had conceded defeat. Asked by an interviewer in 1977 what had been the main defects of positivism, one of its earliest champions, A. J. Ayer, replied with admirable candour: ‘Well, I suppose the most important of the defects was that nearly all of it was false’ (Ayer 1978: 131). Beholden as it had been to one particular philosophy of science, behavioural political science’s fortunes could not but be affected adversely by the demise of positivism. It would however be wrong, or at any rate one-sided and simplistic, to suggest that the resurrection of academic political theory can be traced exclusively to the declining fortunes of philosophical positivism and the allied decline of behaviouralism. There were other forces at work outside of and beyond the rarefied confines of competing philosophies of science: in politics, for example.

III

When the behavioural revolution began in the mid-1950s there was much talk of the ‘decline of political theory’ (Cobban 1953), or at any rate of ‘traditional’ or ‘normative’ political theory, and its replacement by ‘systems’ theory or some other (and supposedly non-normative or ‘value-free’) empirical theory. Even as the American state became an ever more powerful player on the world stage, ‘the state’ was deemed

an outmoded concept, unfit for scientific use and overdue for replacement by the 'political system' in which competing interests were 'inputs' and laws and public policies 'outputs'. No longer about conflict between classes, movements, parties and other groups, politics was reconfigured as the bloodless 'authoritative allocation of values' and political science as the study of allocative processes (Easton 1953). This meliorist view of politics was complemented and reinforced by those who touted 'consensus history' (which downplayed the role and importance of conflict in American history) and by those who announced and celebrated the 'end of ideology' in the West. As the 1960s commenced, the major social problems, some claimed, had either been solved or were well on the way to being resolved. A widespread normative consensus was said to pervade the western democracies, and the United States in particular. Indeed, it had always been so, and thus the dreams, schemes, and 'theories' of 'utopian' thinkers and 'ideologues' were doomed to fail in a quintessentially pragmatic culture. The United States was acclaimed as 'the good society itself in operation' (Lipset 1960: 403). (Never mind that the American South was then as racially segregated as South Africa.) In America, at least, the end of ideology—and of speculative theorizing—had well and truly arrived.

It was in this climate of complacent self-congratulation that Peter Laslett had announced that, '[f]or the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead' (Laslett 1956: vii). (How political theory or anything else could be temporarily dead was not explained.) And even those unwilling to write its obituary were wont to lament political theory's precarious position. Isaiah Berlin began an influential essay on the fate of political theory, 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', with a question. 'Is there', he asked bluntly, 'still such a subject as political theory?' Before going on to answer in the affirmative, Berlin voiced an oft-heard suspicion that his opening question had posed so directly. 'This query, put with suspicious frequency in English-speaking countries', Berlin wrote, 'questions the very credentials of the subject; it suggests that political philosophy, whatever it may have been in the past, is today dead or dying' (Berlin 1962: 1). Berlin argued that as long as human beings disagree about ends, political theory will continue to exist; if however we all agreed about ends, leaving unsettled only questions about means, those are technical questions that can in principle be answered by the empirical social and natural sciences. Under such conditions political theory could conceivably cease to exist. (Berlin was surely mistaken on

this score: for even if we all agreed about ends—full employment, for example, or ending poverty—we could and probably would still disagree about, say, the *justice* or *fairness* of alternative means to these ends; and these are no less ‘normative’ or ‘theoretical’ questions than are questions about ends.)

Questions about the end of ideology and the decline or even the death of political theory were answered less by arm-chair philosophizing inside the academy than by events outside, in what behaviouralists liked to term ‘the real world’. It is a truism that political theory thrives on and is in part a product of and response to political conflicts and crises. The lassitude of the late 1950s began to give way to increasingly intense political and ideological conflicts that soon produced what Alasdair MacIntyre termed ‘the end of the end of ideology’ (MacIntyre 1971: ch. 1). From the mid-1960s on, it became quite clear that ideology had not ended, nor was it likely to. New political movements—among students, blacks, women, anti-Vietnam war activists in America, the anti-Apartheid campaign in South Africa and beyond, and others—were raising new questions and setting new agendas. From the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in 1964 to *les événements* of May 1968 in Paris (which came close to toppling the de Gaulle government), old orthodoxies and new visions—including the end of the ideology thesis itself—were being questioned and ‘unmasked’ as ‘ideological’ in their own right. But in America, at least, the leading catalyst was the Vietnam War. For Vietnam raised anew and brought to the forefront exactly the sorts of ‘normative’ questions that political theory was supposed to address—questions about the rights and duties of citizens, about one’s obligation to fight (and possibly die) for the state, about just (and unjust) wars, about active and passive resistance, and related matters.

Under these contentious conditions political theory not only survived but flourished. By 1972 the editors of the distinguished series *Philosophy, Politics and Society*—in whose first number Laslett’s obituary had appeared—acknowledged that

we were never right to think in terms of such pathological metaphors, and it is clear in any case that they are no longer applicable. It has now become a commonplace that both the intellectual movements prevailing at the time of our first introduction [in 1956], in terms of which it looked plausible for sociologists to speak of “the end of ideology” and even for philosophers to speak of “the death of political theory”, were themselves the masks of disputable ideological positions (Laslett, Runciman and Skinner 1972: 1).

Political theory, like Lazarus, had been brought back from the dead.

Political theory thrives on conflict and flourishes to the extent that it deals first and foremost with real political problems and the movements that raise and address them. The task of political theory, then as now, is to reflect upon the sources and meaning of political problems and issues. When the world seems systematically disordered, when it is turned upside down, political theory attempts to envision the world turned rightside up. It is surely no accident that the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971)—which is often credited with outsized influence in 'reviving' political theory—coincided with the appearance of new threats to the welfare state (Goldwater and Nixon) and the height of the anti-war movement, the (not unrelated) civil rights movement, and the fledgling women's and environmental movements. Contrary to some accounts, Rawls did not single-handedly revive political theory. But his thinking about justice had a special importance and appeal for those who had lived through, thought about, and participated in the civil rights and anti-war movements. Despite its abstract formalisms—the 'original position', the 'veil of ignorance', 'minimax regret', and the rest—Rawls' theory was nevertheless closely connected with real-world politics. It dealt incisively and ingeniously (if not always persuasively) with pressing questions of rights, duties, and obligations; with the justification of civil disobedience; and, with his wholly original inquiry into intergenerational justice, Rawls spoke to the concerns of the emerging environmental movement (Rawls 1971: 284-93). It was precisely because philosophers and political theorists subjected Rawls's theory to a good deal of critical scrutiny, commentary, and attempted refutation that its publication and reception proved to be an important factor in the revival of political theory within the academy.

Other factors in political theory's remarkable revival include the rediscovery of and increased interest in the 'young' or 'humanist' Marx; the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and the revived Frankfurt School, and the criticisms advanced against their views; the role of H.L.A. Hart, Ronald Dworkin and others in renewing interest in philosophy of law; Michel Foucault's seminal studies of the institutions (prisons, clinics, asylums) and other means by which modern men and women are constituted and disciplined (or, as Foucault often put it, 'normalized'); the historical and historiographical inquiries of Peter Laslett, John Pocock, Quentin Skinner, John Dunn and others among the so-called 'new historians' of political thought and the criticisms levelled against their views; the emergence of feminist theory

which questioned many of the basic assumptions, concepts and categories within which political theory had heretofore been practiced; and, not least, the rediscovery and recovery of the 'republican' tradition of political theorizing which has helped fuel the 'liberal vs. communitarian' debate of recent years. Another important factor in the revival of political theory in the early 1970s was the appearance of several specialized journals. These included, preeminently, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, a journal predicated on the idea that issues of public concern often have important philosophical dimensions, and *Political Theory*, a journal generally devoted to the sort of political theory done not by philosophers but by those who plied their trade within departments of political science.

But it is perhaps too easy to overlook what was arguably one of the greatest single factors in the revival of political theory, from the 1950s to the present: the arrival in the 1940s of European, and more particularly German-Jewish, refugees. It is worth pausing at this point to reconsider their remarkable contribution to political theory in general, and to American political theory in particular.

IV

In their own initially quiet way Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and other eminent emigrés left a lasting impression on American political theory. They brought with them their own concerns and their own history, both philosophical and political. Philosophically, they had been educated in the tradition of German idealism and its critics. Politically, and regardless of their partisan allegiances, all were heir to the horrific history of early twentieth-century Germany. The Weimar Republic had failed to stem the Nazi tide, not only because it was politically weak, but even more fundamentally, because it was philosophically bankrupt. The easygoing, tolerant liberalism of Weimar was no match for the ferocity and fanaticism of fascists, communists, and other extremists of the left and right. A regime armed only with a philosophy that professes political neutrality can stand for nothing and can tolerate almost anything, including its own demise. The lesson learned, and later taught, by the emigrés and their students was that liberalism is a singularly self-subverting political philosophy. The two-fold task of twentieth-century political theory must accordingly be to criticize liberalism root-and-branch, and to find or construct a more robust and well-grounded alternative philosophy.

Virtually all the emigré theorists, in their oftentimes quite different ways—and quite unlike their American hosts—viewed the history of modern Western liberal political thought not as a narrative of progress but as a story of degeneration and enfeeblement. They contrasted the vigour of classical Greek and Roman political thought with the resigned *ennui* of slack-minded modern liberal thinkers who preach tolerance and emphasize individual rights rather than duties.

Strauss in particular contended that modern liberalism is a philosophy without foundations. Having eschewed any grounding in nature or natural law, modern liberalism, from Hobbes to the present, is reduced to a spineless relativism and is therefore without the normative foundations and philosophical resources to resist the winds of twentieth-century fanaticism blowing from both right and left. The ‘crisis of the West’, as diagnosed by Oswald Spengler and Carl Schmitt, amongst others, was said to have deep philosophical roots. ‘The crisis of our time’, Strauss announced, ‘is a consequence of the crisis of political philosophy’ (Strauss 1972: 219). The decadence of the West was perhaps particularly evident in the United States, with its naïve faith in liberalism, democracy, and the common man.

Another singular and especially noteworthy voice was that of Hannah Arendt, whose star is perhaps now more ascendant than ever, some three decades after her death. Arendt drew upon themes and topics taken from the history of political thought in order to illuminate the human condition in the modern world. The world in which we now live—disenchanted, scientized, bureaucratized, routinized—is indeed Weber’s iron cage, in which modern men and women are largely confined. The affluence and comfort of modern consumer society masks and conceals our true condition, which is one of interconnected crises—political, educational and cultural (Arendt 1961: ch’s 5-6). We have failed to ‘think what we are doing’. And one corrective to this thoughtlessness is to be found in the study of the past, and the history of political thought in particular. That history provides material for thinking about and reflecting upon our present predicament. Contrary to Easton and other behaviouralists who decried political theory’s ‘historicist’ tendency to study its own past, Arendt vigorously and unapologetically reaffirmed not only its importance but its indispensability.

With some few exceptions, Arendt claimed, modern man has lost the sense of what it means to act politically. The Greeks had a vivid sense of acting in public, of distinguishing themselves through words and deeds. The desiccated sensibility of modernity makes room only for ‘work’—the making of material things—or ‘labour’, i.e., attending

to the endless cycle of biological necessity (eating, sleeping, procreating, etc.). To the extent that our species' capacity for 'action'—that is, for acting politically—is what makes us uniquely human, we moderns suffer from the greatest loss of all: the loss of our very humanity and our freedom, in the now largely forgotten sense of that term (Arendt 1958). The growth of science, and especially the behavioural sciences, has helped to further diminish our already much-diminished humanity. The 'social sciences,' she laments, 'have decided to treat man as an entirely natural being whose life processes can be handled the same way as all other processes' (Arendt 1961: 59). We are thereby led to view ourselves as so many quantifiable and interchangeable units, and not as unique human beings; as capable only of predictable 'behaviour' but not of inherently unpredictable 'action'; as parents, spouses, and employees, but not as robust and active citizens. A 'behavioural' political science is made possible by our all-but-lost capacity for action.

Arendt held that one of the chief tasks of political theory is to help us to remember (if not necessarily to recover) what we have lost. Arendt's theorizing was, to a great degree and in different ways, concerned with loss. She lamented the 'lost treasure' of the revolutionary heritage, the loss of (positive or political) 'freedom' ('What *was* freedom?') and 'authority' ('What *was* authority?'), and the loss of our capacity to act politically (Arendt 1963, 1961). Those living in 'dark times' will seek illumination and light from other times. Once again, and contrary to Easton and other behaviouralists (against whom Arendt and Strauss were often in overt or covert intellectual combat), to study the history of Western political thought is decidedly *not* a dusty antiquarian exercise but is a source of illumination and perhaps even inspiration for those living in dark times.

The German-Jewish emigrés made a deep and lasting contribution to political theory. Their root-and-branch attack on liberalism (and their doubts about the unalloyed value of democracy) provided a salutary shock to their complacent American counterparts—both behaviouralists and theorists alike—who tended to be liberals of one or another stripe with a largely unexamined faith in liberal democracy. American political theory—and perhaps liberal theory in particular—continues to be invigorated by its critical encounters with the theorizing of these eminent emigrés. Out of these and other conflicts came a new and growing sense of political theory's vitality and its identity independent of its partner and sometimes rival, political science. I have tried to suggest that the road to intellectual independence was a

rather rocky and winding one that, once travelled, benefited both partners—and particularly political theory, which (to say it again) thrives on conflict and contestation.

V

Political theory's newfound sense of independence has not been not without its pitfalls, however.⁵ Chief among these is political theory's increasing isolation from its own subject-matter, which it supposedly shares with its partner political science—viz., politics. The best and most profound political theories have been closely connected with politics and have generally been born of crisis. And in today's world there is no shortage of crises. But if one takes the table of contents of successive issues of almost any political theory journal as any indication of where political theory is or might be going one is bound to wonder what is even remotely 'political' about political theory (one can of course say much the same about political science's relation to real-world politics). One would never suspect that there was a world outside its pages, afflicted with problems of unprecedented scope and severity. One would not know, for example, that the various strategies and tactics employed in the war on terror—including torture—are of questionable moral legitimacy and legality, and threaten to compromise or undermine human rights and civil liberties. Nor would one ever guess that there is an environmental crisis of global proportions that raises troubling questions about the rights of, and our duties toward, future generations.⁶ Amidst real destruction—economic, environmental, ethical—we engage in deconstruction. One does not have to be a Straussian to say of much of political theory what Leo Strauss once said of behavioural political science: 'One may say of it that it [like Nero] fiddles while Rome burns. It is excused by two facts: it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns' (Strauss 1962: 327).

Another closely related concern is the growing specialization and professionalization of political theory. The isolation of political theory from politics—and from its partner political science—doubtless has a good deal to do with the dynamics of professionalization in the American academy. Political theory shows every sign of ceasing to be a vocation and of fast becoming a 'profession', with all that this entails about the division of labour, the specialization of functions, and the like. Already we 'theorists' have 'our' specialized organiza-

tions—including the Foundations of Political Thought group and the Conference for the Study of Political Thought—and ‘our’ journals, including *Political Theory*, *History of Political Thought* (inaugurated in 1980), *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *The European Journal of Political Theory*, and, for the Straussians, *Interpretation*. And we have ‘our’ panels and roundtables at the American Political Science Association and other professional meetings. Such specialization is not altogether a bad thing; it has its advantages but also, and no less importantly, its disadvantages. Professionalization is a little like moving from the exciting if dangerous inner city to the suburbs: one is less likely to be mugged; but one is also less likely to meet new people and more likely to talk only to people like oneself about a narrowly circumscribed range of topics. Soon enough the suburb becomes its own little self-contained world—safe, secure, familiar, friendly, and utterly predictable. Perhaps we were, without knowing it, better off when we feared being mugged by behaviouralists. At least they kept us on our toes. Without conflicts to challenge us we turn our gaze inward toward ourselves and lose sight of the larger world outside the academy.

To put it simply, the questions with which political theory deals (or ought to deal) are not merely academic and are too important to be left to those who call themselves, or are conventionally classified as, political theorists. We theorists have no monopoly on wisdom or insight. If we are to think and speak knowledgeably about and intervene intelligently in the crises of our time, we will need at least some of the sensibilities of those among our fellow political inquirers who are conventionally classified as ‘empirical’ political scientists. The partners in this oftentimes contentious marriage are in desperate need of each others’ talents, techniques, and sensibilities. But if we are to stay together in this sometimes troubled partnership then we must overcome a number of old obstacles, many of which are legacies of the older behaviouralism and of the anti-behaviouralist backlash. Old rifts are not bridged easily or without effort. But then, every marriage requires sustained attention and extended effort.

And the effort appears to be well underway. We see this, for example, in some political theorists’ inclusion of the history of political science within their historical purview (the ‘disciplinary histories’ narrated in the work of James Farr, Stephen Leonard, John Dryzek, John Gunnell and others exemplifies this new and encouraging development). The effort is even more evident in the so-called ‘Perestroika’ movement within American political science, with its scathing

critique of conventional empirical-quantitative political science. This dissident movement within political science has aided and abetted a turn away from purely quantitative research methods and approaches toward 'qualitative' ones.⁷ In these and other ways the marital conflicts of the past are proving fruitful—though perhaps more so, alas, for political science than for political theory.

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NOTES

1. There are several ways to explain behaviouralism's rather sudden shift away from traditional political science and its partner, political theory or philosophy. One explanation, which I have adumbrated at length elsewhere (Ball 1993), is that the move toward 'science' and the critique of 'normative' theory was not directed primarily against political theory but was a legitimating move, made for the sake of securing scarce research funding in post-war America. Because the natural sciences were the social or behavioural sciences' chief competitor for funding, the latter took on the protective colouration of the former.
2. Cohen was criticising Louis Althusser, whose *Lire le Capital* he found 'critically vague. It is perhaps a matter of regret that logical positivism, with its emphasis on precision ... never caught on in Paris' (Cohen 1978: x). One could now say

- the same about Derrida, Lacan, and other (mainly) French theorists whose work has been embraced by (too?) many academic political theorists.
3. Six years later, at a 1950 American symposium on 'The Semantics of Political Science' critics charged that the advance of the social sciences, and political science in particular, has been retarded by the pernicious presence of political theory, with its 'teleological, normative, or even moralistic terms'. Many, if not most, of 'the propositions of political theory have a character of "unreality" and futility'. As long as 'traditional' or 'normative' political theory exerts its pernicious influence, political science will consist 'mostly [of] history and ethics'. Political theory 'belong[s] to a subjective or fictitious universe of discourse quite inappropriate to a general science of society' (Perry 1950: 401).
 4. This conviction informs and is at the centre of Anglophone 'conceptual history' and the German genre of *Begriffsgeschichte* or 'history of concepts'. See, respectively, Ball (1988), Ball, Farr and Hanson (1989), Brunner, Conze and Koselleck (1972-92), and Koselleck (1985).
 5. Parts of this concluding section are adapted from chapter 2 of Ball (1995).
 6. There is, however, a small but growing subfield within political theory—green political theory—that represents a welcome turn away from this dismal development. The work of Andrew Dobson, Robyn Eckersly, Robert Goodin and other green political theorists tends not to appear in the flagship journals of political theory, however, but in even more specialized journals such as *Environmental Politics*, thereby further confirming and illustrating my subsequent point about political theory's increasing specialization and professionalization.
 7. The American Political Science Association has officially recognized this turn and has inaugurated a new journal, *Perspectives on Politics*, spun off from the more quantitatively oriented *American Political Science Review*, and a new section on Qualitative Research Methods at its annual meeting. There is also a newly formed Consortium for Qualitative Research Methods based at my university and co-directed by my colleague Colin Elman.

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