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**Author:** Benjamin R. Barber

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## The Politics of Political Science: “Value-free” Theory and the Wolin–Strauss Dust-Up of 1963

BENJAMIN R. BARBER *University of Maryland*

*Political theory's relationship with political science over the last 60 years has been fraught with ambiguity and weighed down by epistemological tensions in a manner that suggests an old and extremely prickly marriage. To some, political theory has been nothing less than the theoretical foundation of political science as a discipline—the conceptual and epistemological ground for each and every subfield, cherished and nurtured by tolerant, even ecumenical political science departments. To others, it has been merely a distraction, a needless normative diversion from the empirical responsibilities of hard social science by those who do not understand its rigors. As was perhaps more common in the first half of the twentieth century, some have continued to see in political science and political theory complementary perspectives that need and entail one another, two sides of how we establish and balance the human sciences, doing empirical science even as we assess its epistemological standards and methods. But others have regarded the two as preternaturally antagonistic. At the height of the behavioral revolution in the 1960s, a few self-styled “hardboiled” scientists dismissed theory altogether as little more than mythology: moralizing fairy tales dressed up as a kind of prescriptive philosophy that confounded facts and values. But the real crux of the debate between political theory and political science has been the relationship of political science to politics, as exemplified in historian Alfred A. Cobban's scathing comment excoriating political science as mostly a device for avoiding politics without achieving science<sup>1</sup>. Cobban's challenge was taken up by many theorists, including Leo Strauss, whose blunt rebuke to the “new” political science suggesting that it was doing little more than fiddling while Rome was burning inaugurated a debate that in 1962 set this mostly fire-proof journal aflame.<sup>2</sup>*

Leo Strauss was hardly the only political theorist to insist (in the spirit of Aristotle) that whatever else it is, political science must be the study of politics, and that political scientists ought to seek out methods appropriate to their subject rather than methods dictated by some appealingly “scientific” epistemological paradigm. In the ensuing debate, although political science sometimes insisted on making formal science the measure of its scholarly soundness, political theory more often argued the case for political relevance. Among theorists, there was also a debate about whether theory was something less pure than philosophy—theory understood as a kind of *doxa* or opinion that was more practical and worldly as compared to philosophy's search for *episteme* or pure knowledge, which could seem subversive to the world of the cave (politics, as both Plato and Strauss saw it).

Yet if political theorists and philosophers sometimes argued their own methodological differences, the issue for political theorists in training in the late 1950s and early 1960s was not so much whether theorists and philosophers could both be said to eschew the empirical but whether social science was eschewing

the political. Neither claim was wholly compelling, but that did not really matter because despite or perhaps because of its foundational claims and its vivid essential contestability, political theory had long served as political science's useful provocateur: a permanent drawing card at American Political Science Association conferences where theory panels regularly appeared among the most popular and well-attended; a source for political and epistemological self-criticism among social scientists; and an unrelenting scold about what it meant for the discipline to call itself *political science*.

Theory has in fact been the designated arena of contestation in the discipline. The controversies over methodology, positivism, systems theory, counterculture, the canon, legitimacy—and that social constructionist trilogy (now much expanded) of class, race, and gender—have been left to theorists to debate. The debates have often been more political than methodological. Whenever social scientists have disagreed on the game they are playing, although many of them (including distinguished scholars with empirical concerns such as David Easton, Karl Deutsch, Robert Dahl, Theodore Lowi, and Carl J. Friedrich) have participated vigorously in the debate themselves, they have often punted the ball to theory. Conflicts over epistemology, ethics, or the nature of the field were and are theory's provenance, which makes theory a particularly fascinating lens through which to view the last half-century of our discipline. For political theory has been where the politics of political science has been both debated and manifested.

My story here pivots around the 1962–1963 academic year, which marked the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*—the book that instructed us that even hard science had a politics—and

Benjamin Barber is Distinguished University Professor, The Department of Government & Politics, 3140 Tydings Hall, College Park, MD 20742-7215 (thebnx@hotmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> “The political scientist, in so far as he wishes to remain a scientist, is limited to the study of techniques. A good deal of what is called political science, I must confess, seems, to me a device, invented by academic persons, avoiding that dangerous subject politics, without achieving science” (Cobban 1960, 240).

<sup>2</sup> “One may say (of the new political science),” wrote Strauss, “that it 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).

the year in which this journal published a review essay of Herbert J. Storing's Straussian collection *On the Scientific Study of Politics*, the match that ignited the intellectual firestorm I portray.

Throughout the 1950s, a period during which both hard social science and normative political philosophy made major inroads in the discipline, the debate about the nature of science and its role in the study of society was already growing. In the wake of World War II and its twin nightmares of totalitarianism and the holocaust, politics remained crucial to social science. But in the space of a single decade, the attractions of a political science that acquired its scientific credentials by moving away from the messiness of politics and embracing the seeming exactitude of terms such as "behavior" and "system" came to dominate, and methodology appeared to displace politics as the focus of political science. The kind of political science taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science (where I had studied in the late 1950s) paid scant heed to the claim that humanistic and scientific social science were to be sharply distinguished from one another, or that political science could embrace politics only at the expense of its scientific credentials. The great Burkean philosopher Michael Oakeshott was a true philosopher, yet deeply engaged politically; the philosopher of science Karl Popper became a champion of fallibilism, the notion that even hard positivistic social science could at best hope only to *falsify* empirical claims but never to prove or definitively verify them; the abstract Marxist theorist Ralph Miliband pursued an empirical agenda, whereas eminent ethical theorists like Morris Ginsburg and K.B. Smellie were also practical men enjoying the politicized environment (this was not a pejorative in that era!) established earlier by political eminences such as Lord Lionel Robbins (who left his LSE post to become chairman of the *Financial Times* in 1961) and Harold Laski (the great socialist thinker who had died in 1954), as well as by the lingering political impact of the two great wars and the tyrannies of fascism and communism.

In what was perhaps the most creative if problematic scholarly paradigm of the 1950s, those two distinctive tyrannies had been bundled in the heavily freighted term "totalitarianism," which Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, Carl Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski, J.L. Talmon, and Barrington Moore, Jr. (among many others) were employing to argue that England's and America's erstwhile fascist enemies had been succeeded by an evil communist twin whose seemingly divergent ideology was belied by systemic and behavioral similarities to fascism of a kind Brzezinski typically summarized as "a new form of government falling into the general classification of dictatorship . . . a system in which technological advanced instruments of political power are wielded without restraint by centralized leadership of an elite movement, for the purpose of effecting a total social revolution . . . in an atmosphere of coerced unanimity of the entire population" (1967, 46–47). Both political theory and political science were at that moment profoundly political in their outlook.

Postwar defenders of liberalism took totalitarianism as their point of departure in a spirited defense of "negative liberty" against social democracy's "positive liberty" for which Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* [1958] became an almost overnight canonical text. At the same moment, an epistemology rooted in skepticism and fallibility championed by Karl Popper in his *Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (first published in 1945) became an essential methodological redoubt for social scientists taking on both fascism and communism. To Popper, these extremes found their intellectual forebears in the metaphysics of Plato, Hegel, and Marx. There is a great deal to disagree with in Popper's actual interpretations of theory, but his work was intended as a response to totalitarianism rather than a careful account of historical political theory, his decision to write having been made (as he reports in the preface) "on the day I received the news of the invasion of Austria." Popper's influence on America, however, took a rather different turn. In a delectable historical irony, the military victory of America over Nazi Germany had entailed a parallel intellectual victory of émigré German social thought over the British and American mind. The highly politicized New School for Social Research (the "University in exile") was but the tip of an intellectual iceberg that in the post-war years was to spread glacier-like across the academic landscape. By the early 1960s, the American debate had changed in critical ways, increasingly dominated by the application to American social science of German émigré empiricism, British analytic philosophy of a kind associated with Wittgenstein (T.D. Weldon's 1953 *The Vocabulary of Politics*, for example), Continental systems theory, and a deep war-weary political skepticism about the "value-laden" character of traditional European theory. The new political science had obvious American roots, but it was also a result of work being done by European trained scholars such as Karl Deutsch and Karl Popper himself, theorists who blamed Continental metaphysical and historicist traditions for the calamities of the war and the holocaust. Although Harvard (where I did my graduate studies in the early 1960s) featured prominent theorists such as Carl J. Friedrich and the young Judith N. Shklar (whose staunch liberalism would label cruelty the foremost of political sins), whose European political concerns with totalitarianism kept their work political, elsewhere those concerns seemed to ignite a flight from politics. Even the Government Department at Harvard was developing an ever more American focus, more preoccupied with American exceptionalism and its parochial domestic agenda than the European past.

My thesis advisor, Louis Hartz, who combined a love of European theory with an affinity for American practice, had offered a novel argument in his 1953 *The Liberal Tradition in America*, holding that the absence of feudalism in the United States had imprinted it with a centrist Lockean character and inoculated it against the kinds of zealous ideological arguments for socialism and communism that had dominated Europe. Extremism could purchase no foothold in so centrist

a society. Hartz's notion of a consensual American politics offered, if only inadvertently, a special haven to behavioralism's argument about value neutrality, in an atmosphere far from Europe's cauldron of political turmoil. Consensualism nicely accommodated both the vaguely liberal inclinations of 1960s social science and the behavioral revolution's scientific aspirations—its focus on the careful measurement of opinion and voting and on the quantification of political indicators by which cross-polity surveys could be conducted among nations that once would have seemed too culturally disparate to warrant comparison at all. In Hartz's liberal view, radical politics flourished at the extremes and vanished as one moved to the center. A centrist politics was no politics at all, which accounts for the seemingly apolitical nature of liberalism in the late 1950s (against which the 1960s counterculture was to revolt). How appropriate this apolitical view was to the Eisenhower 1950s, which had left America a seeming sanctuary of depoliticized bourgeois stability and system equilibrium in an otherwise tumultuous world of Cold War, nationalist revolution, and postcolonial unrest. In that sense, apolitical behavioralism reflected rather than challenged the politics (or, better, the apolitical politics) of the time.

Yet it was that very value neutrality—forced and unconvincing, if not explicitly hypocritical, from the point of view of many theorists—that incensed Leo Strauss and those of his colleagues and disciples represented in the Storing (1963) volume; for they believed that behavioralists had rendered their version of social science “value-neutral” at the cost of depoliticizing their subject matter—a dangerous move in a Cold War era where liberal democracy's triumph over totalitarianism was by no means assured. As Steven B. Smith argues in his new study, Leo Strauss was himself a liberal, indeed a liberal who was “deeply skeptical of whether political theory had any substantive advice or direction to offer statesmen” (Smith 2006) (take note, critics today who want to saddle Strauss with putative “Straussian” disciples in the Bush Administration). But he was also a liberal who worried that a methodological evasion of the political by wannabe value-neutral liberal social science would endanger liberal politics in a world of totalitarian temptations.

The publication then in this journal of the stinging debate between Leo Strauss, (1962, 1963), Herbert J. Storing, (1963), and their proxies and Sheldon Wolin and John Schaar (1963) who were ostensibly offering a standard *Review* review essay of *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* both set the stage for and managed to upstage the epistemological debates over the behavioral revolution that constituted the positivism battles (what German philosophers had dubbed the *Positivismsstreit*) of the 1960s and 1970s.

Storing's (1963) intent was to criticize scientism through a series of specific critiques of the new political science's favorite fields: voting studies (critique by Walter Berns); public administration on the model of Herbert A. Simon (critique by Herbert Storing himself); Arthur Bentley's “group approach” (critique by Leo Weinstein); and Harold Lasswell's concept of sci-

entific propaganda (critique by Robert Horwitz). A closing polemic by Leo Strauss (1963) rounded out the volume. The essays emanated from a common critique of the new political science, whose “result,” wrote Walter Berns, “is the sacrifice of political relevance on the altar of methodology. The questions asked and pursued are determined by the limits of the scientific method rather than by the subject matter . . .” (Berns 1962, 55). Storing's colleagues agreed that behavioralism's dogged determinism relieved its subject matter not only of politics but of choice—of the liberty and free choice that defined politics, or at least pretended to. Thus Arthur Bentley, the notable scholar of group interest, urged social scientists to view data concerning the activity of people in groups “as impassively as we would the habits or organic functions of birds, bees, or fishes.” Yet, as Leo Weinstein insisted in his contribution to Storing's volume, Bentley's obsession with interest was hardly compatible with “the pursuit of objectivity” for Bentley could offer us only “an invitation to a Babel where many interests replace many tongues as the insuperable barrier to the erection of a tower of human achievement, whether of scientific description or of practical reform” (1962, 221). Nor was the determinism of interest politics fully compatible with the idea of political autonomy that lay at the heart of liberalism.

What was perhaps most startling about the Wolin/Schaar critique of the Storing essays was that the emerging battle over method was being fought not between representatives of normative and empiricist perspectives (Weinstein vs. Bentley or Horwitz vs. Laswell), but between two sets of *normative* critics of behavioralism, both highly political—Wolin versus Strauss and Schaar versus Storing; between methodological cousins who disagreed on political substance even though they agreed that politics was the ineluctable core of the human sciences. Cynics had to believe that it was a remarkable tactical achievement that the *Review* had somehow enlisted theorists deeply unsympathetic to positivism of the kind featured in the *Review* to savage one another rather than the methodology they disdained in common—a classical example of divide and conquer. Although all the protagonists shared the belief that positing value neutrality in the face of totalitarianism's ongoing challenge to liberal society was foolish, mischievous, and perhaps even suicidal, their political differences over democracy set them against one another, leaving the new positivists complacent in their methodological triumph over the discipline.

The real methodological issue was of course focused on the entailments of scientific method, properly understood, for political science. Karl Popper was being read by the new methodological zealots as a fellow positivist, even though his was in fact a fallibilist positivism intended to challenge the rigid philosophical metaphysics he read into Plato and the historicist dogmatism he associated with Hegel and Marx. Popper understood that social science, properly understood, could no more promote apolitical, value-neutral truth than could metaphysics. In contrast to historicism's

deterministic metaphysic, the fallibilist liberal promoted openness in society, skepticism in methodology, and pluralism in politics—each one related to the next. He insisted that falsification rather than verification was science's strong suit, a robust guide for sound but ever-evolving empirical work whose status always remained provisional, rather than a permanent foundation for dogmatic claims about epistemic truth. In the same spirit, he understood fallibilism to be the only secure ground for democratic politics, as Bertrand Russell before him had associated philosophical skepticism with democratic tolerance.

Tellingly, Popper's champion today is the engagingly political financier and philanthropist and former student of Popper, George Soros. As Soros explained in a plenary conversation at the American Political Science Association in Chicago a few years ago, he has used Popper's fallibilism both to question economic dogmatism in international financial affairs and to root his philanthropic work for civil society in his aptly named Open Society Institute.

Popper was not the only critic of philosophical perspectives hostile to liberal foundationalism. Equally relevant to the new positivists were theorists such as J.L. Talmon, Hannah Arendt, and Bertrand Russell, who worried about whether Enlightenment philosophers who had been heroes of empiricism, rationalism, and democracy such as Rousseau were not also proto-totalitarian—the Jacobin Terror understood as the Rational General Will run amok (they were not, but that is another story). As early as 1932, the historian Carl L. Becker had seen rationalism as a new form of dogmatic “naturalism” of the kind underlying medieval religion in his *The Heavenly City of Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (1932), popular in the 1960s, at the same time Hannah Arendt had begun to read the French Revolution as a “social” (economic) revolution preternaturally inclined to extremism, while the American revolution remained a “political revolution” that was prudent and safe.

Whether these decontextualized portraits of historical political theorists such as Rousseau did justice to their subjects (and they generally did not), they allowed political theory to join the political debate facing liberal societies over the origins and nature of totalitarianism—above all the question of whether fascism and communism represented an antipodal and illiberal challenge to liberalism or were products of liberalism's own defects. Were they liberalism's antithesis or liberalism run amok—unhappy consequences of its assault on *Gemeinschaft*, of its deracination and distillation as ‘thin’ representative democracy, and of its bourgeois, conformist “culture industry”? (see Adorno and Horkheimer 1972 and Marcuse 1964).

It was into this already agitated intellectual setting that the confrontation between Wolin et al and Strauss et al was thrust in 1963. The political debate over totalitarianism in effect morphed into a methodological debate over positivism—which, however, continued in reality to be a debate among theorists about politics. Strauss and his colleagues continued to see in totalitarianism certain features of modernity itself: the aban-

donment by modern political theory of the ancient conception of political man (Aristotle's *zoon politikon*) in favor of *homo economicus*, as well as a move away from the ancient ideas of the well-ordered commonwealth and of political justice toward a modern “state of nature” on which—paired with an apolitical theory of individualism—social contract theory could be made to rest. For Strauss, the quarrel between ancients and moderns underlay the quarrel between liberals and totalitarians in as much as liberals had been effectively disarmed in their confrontation with totalitarianism by salient aspects of modernity they shared with totalitarianism. Their accommodation with value-neutral positivism was a part of the problem. Strauss and his followers not only wanted a political science that accounted for politics, they wanted a particular kind of politics mandated by their political theory—which in due time (our time!) they got, some would argue, with a vengeance.

The methodological confrontation between classical political theory (or some caricature of it) and modern social science (or some caricature of it) featured in Storing's collection of essays was then to draw the new behavioral methodologists into an ideological and political contest. Rome (a metaphorical capital of modern liberal society) was burning, warned Strauss, vulnerable from without to communist totalitarianism, vulnerable from within to liberalism's own dialectical weaknesses. Affinities between Strauss's critique of modern liberalism and the Frankfurt School's critique of modern capitalism did not escape students in Europe, where “left Straussianism” quickly found a home.

Today it is fearful “realist” liberals such as Paul Berman who are joining neoconservatives in arguing that the Rome that is Paris and London and New York is vulnerable to international terrorism, whose full measure old left liberals (unlike the neo-con White House) have yet to take. In this view, Islamic terrorists are quite literally the new totalitarians, and must be treated accordingly. Berman hence warns against the “willful delusions about totalitarianism and its demise” among liberals that “came into focus on September 11, 2001” (2003, 174). Sounding remarkably like Strauss back in 1962, Berman declares that “we are beset with terrorists... who have already killed an astounding number of people,” blaming their success on (among many others), “a political left that, in its anti-imperialist fervors, has lost the ability to stand up to fascism” (2003, 206–207).

Back in the 1960s, the crisis had a methodological dimension. At the very moment of crisis, there had appeared an aggressive scientific methodology wedded to value free social science, an approach to the study of politics whose epistemology seemed to void it of everything essentially political and render it especially vulnerable. Positivism was not only methodologically suspect, Strauss, Storing, and their colleagues inveighed, it was politically disastrous, disarming liberalism in its moment of greatest need. It was certainly astute of the then editor of the *Review* Harvey C. Mansfield—the father, for those who enjoy such accidents, of one of today's leading ‘Straussian’ political

theorists, Harvey Mansfield Jr. of Harvard University, who recently published a book commending “manliness” to today’s faint-hearted liberals—to commission the long and vitriolic review essay of Storing’s own vitriolic and unsparing collection *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*. Why he chose John Schaar and Sheldon Wolin to undertake the essay remains a puzzle. More puzzling still, at least to a then apprentice of political theory like myself, was why Storing’s Straussian critique of behavioralism should excite such rage in these two eminent (and unapologetically leftist) scholars from Berkeley. Mansfield certainly knew that Sheldon Wolin, like Strauss, had himself been deeply critical of the depoliticization of man that came with liberalism’s celebration of *homo economicus*. In his then already influential *Politics and Vision* published in 1960, in the chapter entitled “Liberalism,” Wolin had described the “decline of political categories and the ascendancy of social ones” as leading to a “situation where political philosophy has been eclipsed by other forms of knowledge,” and where it is the “sociologist or economist” who “supply prescriptions for society’s ills” (2004, 262).

Did this lead Mansfield to anticipate a more sympathetic review? Or was he counting on a political confrontation between the Straussian version of liberalism (conservative in the best sense) and Wolin’s democratic liberalism (radical in the best sense)?

Like Arendt, and for that matter like Strauss, too, Wolin had argued that modern liberal thought had inverted public and private, giving the private household (the Greek word from which our term economics is derived) pride of place over the public polity (*polis*). Might not, then, have Strauss and Wolin, for all their differences, forged a minimalist alliance when it came to positivism, if only on the premise that my adversary’s adversary is my ally? After all, Wolin and Schaar in time would leave—flee?—Berkeley, some claimed because of the inhospitality of a department increasingly under the sway of behavioralism. Yet Schaar and Wolin ignored critical methodological affinities, because they had deep political differences with Strauss, Storing, and company. They wrote bitingly about the temper of the Storing volume as “unrelievedly hostile and destructive” and labeled the collection “a deadly serious, a fanatically serious book . . . [one that] carries us back to an earlier day . . . [when Manichean forces of] light and darkness . . . struggled for supremacy in the world,” a book that employs “the violent language” of “the fanatic,” who must “expose the personal weakness of his enemies” (1963, 126). Strauss and company, Wolin and Schaar declared, were finally inviting readers to “choose between two stark alternatives: either a morally corrupt and intellectually sterile scientism or a version of political philosophy distinguished by moral fervor and an intellectual certainty that the essential nature of all political situations has been revealed long ago” (1963, 150).

Now between the bookends of their own extreme rhetoric, Wolin and Schaar (1963) offered careful and mostly sensible criticisms of the individual essays by the trio which Storing had assembled (along with Strauss)

to skewer the specific subdisciplines under scrutiny. But the sizzle was not in the prudent methodological critiques Wolin and Schaar cooked up but in the flaming political grease they slathered over the meat of their analysis. They were far more disturbed by the political entailments of what Strauss and company were saying about the new political science than they were about what the new political science was saying about method or, for that matter, anything else.

Strauss and Storing and their colleagues fired back in kind, volleys of high-velocity political rhetoric aimed as much at the authors as their arguments. Storing opened the counterattack with a rhetorical flourish: “If the *Essays* were as unrelievedly hostile, as intemperate, as extreme, as full of devils, as devoid of explanation of crucial terms, as poorly reasoned, as unfairly argued as Wolin and Schaar contend, the authors of the *Essays* would nevertheless have to concede themselves outdone here” (1963, 151). Strauss notes that Wolin and Schaar’s attack on his epilogue is “the most acrimonious critique hitherto written of what I stand for” (1963, 152).

What probably incensed Wolin and Schaar (1963) most was the claim by Strauss in his Epilogue that the new value-free social science is actually liberal democratic because democracy is “the tacit presupposition of the data.” After all, Strauss had assailed not just method but democracy, writing that “the new political science puts a premium on observations which can be made with the utmost frequency, and therefore by people of the meanest capacities.” Driving in the blade, Strauss adds “thus it frequently culminates in observations made by people who are not intelligent about people who are not intelligent” (1962, 326). This is not only a caricature of democratic theory—there is no theorist of democracy from Pericles to Rousseau or from Jefferson to Dewey who does not couple the defense of democracy with advocacy for education—but was a rehash of old and tired aristocratic complaints about democracy as the rule of unreason. Yet although the Straussians are forever worried about the alleged lynching of the virtuous Socrates by an ignorant Athenian mob, democracy is not the rule of the mob, but the rule of educated citizens.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the liberalism with which Strauss was associating value-neutral social science was itself more Madisonian than Jeffersonian, as skeptical of Jeffersonian “strong” democracy as Strauss himself was.

My aim here is not to refight these now ancient and perhaps stale battles. Indeed, the real irony of the breathtaking 1962 dust-up, one which was the more thrilling for taking place in the staid pages of the *Review*, was that both sides preferred to debate politics with one another rather than to challenge behavioralism’s putatively (and hypocritically) apolitical methodology. Their quarrel with one another could only

<sup>2</sup> Socrates was actually condemned by an entirely legal and very narrow verdict of a 500 man jury, and as I.F. Stone wrote in his remarkable book *The Trial of Socrates* (1989), there was considerable evidence that Socrates was guilty of sedition. See also Brickhouse and Smith 2001.

empower that vulgar vision of behaviorist positivism that both disdained and which many sound empirical social scientists roundly rejected. Strauss worried that the discipline fiddled while Rome burned, but it looked rather like the would-be firemen were content to skirmish noisily with one another while the fiddlers fiddled at liberalism's pyre.

Times change, of course, and my critical student's view of Wolin's disdain for what I thought were his methodological allies is today tempered by the fact that Wolin's political vehemence now has acquired a certain prophetic aspect. For it was not the Straussian commitment to political pertinacity that Wolin and Schaar worried about, but the seemingly dogmatic, intolerant, and antidemocratic tone of the commitment, which, if politically manifested and actualized, might turn out to be dangerous to liberalism and the open society. In recent years, in a story nicely told by Anne Norton, the children and grandchildren of Straussian political theory, some students and others self-styled disciples of Leo Strauss, have found their places in Washington and New York in the media and in the Pentagon, at State and in the White House (Norton 2004; see also Halper 2004 and Barber 2003). We will each have our own view of whether this has been a good or a bad thing, and defenders of Strauss himself such as Steven Smith will continue to remind us that Strauss's focus on political philosophy (rather than political theory) was rooted in prudence and restraint when it came to offering democratic leaders political advice. After all, Plato's political advice was anything but prudent, and Socrates was condemned to death for supposed meddling in Athen's anarchic democratic affairs. Unfortunately, Strauss's disciples have had fewer such scruples. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1988) was perhaps the most influential and intemperate polemic of the 1980s. And though little of what is advocated by third generation neo-conservative disciples of Strauss can actually be found in Leo Strauss's own reticent political writings, Sheldon Wolin will certainly feel vindicated in the fears he expressed 43 years ago about the perils of Straussian orthodoxy in those who claim his tradition.

I myself remain critical of Straussian political esotericism, which argues that the intent of classical political philosophers is to speak in a kind of code to certain elite audiences while misleading or confounding more vulgar constituencies in order to avoid their wrath (Socrates' fate). Hence, for example, Allan Bloom postulated that Plato's apparent embrace of philosophical rule in his *Republic* was actually intended as a kind of parody warning philosophers to avoid politics altogether. But I have much less to quarrel with in the Storing essays (1963) and the Strauss epilogue (1962). If wrong-headed about democracy, Storing and his colleagues were methodologically astute, and their substantive critiques were worthy of careful examination by those who want to do sound social science. They were hardly tolerant critics of behavioralism's limitations, but they took on the naively scientific pretensions of that first generation of positivists with an audacity shown by few others.

Nobody talks much today about value-free methodology, and meta-debates over epistemology no longer obsess the discipline—except perhaps in the arena of rational choice theory, where not all of the lessons of the 1960s seem to have been fully absorbed but where common sense seems slowly to be prevailing over economic reason. Methodological solipsism is certainly no longer in fashion, and most political scientists seem interested in things political. The methodologism of the 1960s exposed by Storing and his colleagues had obviously taken the politics out of political science without endowing it with anything resembling objectivity. Equilibrium and systems theory preoccupied empirical theorists even as actual political systems collapsed all around them. Cross-polity survey research contrived formal indicators for supposedly common features of cultures across the world even as spectacular cultural differences emerged in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East that would haunt America for decades to come. Cultural area studies and mastery of foreign languages went out of fashion, pushed aside by methodology and statistics, in ways for which America would pay much later in Somalia, Libya, Indonesia, China, and the Middle East (only a handful of Arabic or Farsi speakers were to be found in official Washington on September 11, 2001). Arguments for liberalism's historic legitimacy were being complacently advanced by a detached political science discipline even as the authority of every argument for legitimacy was being called into question in the streets of Los Angeles, Paris, Newark, and Prague. Kennedy had been assassinated, the civil rights revolution and the antiwar movement were in full swing, Martin Luther King and dozens of other civil rights leaders had been gunned down and liberalism was in crisis—yet much of the new positivist social science went on fiddling.

Not any more. Just last year, an APSA taskforce chaired by then APSA President Theda Skocpol completed a careful but influential study of political and economic inequality in America and its insidious impact on political voice. Value free? Hardly. Prudent sound research and scholarship? Definitely. A model of sound political science? Surely. With thanks due both to Schaar and Wolin and to Storing and Strauss. From their debate I derive one lasting lesson: the real strength of democracy is that it rarely takes the voices of scholars too seriously, and the real strength of scholars is that the prudent among them recognize that nobody has elected them to anything and that their work demands a certain autonomy from practical politics on which both their credibility and perhaps even their safety depend. What is important is not for political scientists to become politicians but for political science to remain politically relevant. The human race being what it is, Rome is always likely to be burning, whether Rome is Baghdad or Paris or Kabul or Dafur or Bali or Casablanca or New York. Students of politics, "scientists," "theorists," and "philosophers" alike, must learn how to stand close enough to comprehend what is happening—pure objectivity is neither desirable nor even an option; but not so close as to be consumed by the flames.

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