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Introduction

We dedicate this volume to the memory of
Professor Giovanni Sartori
(1924-2017)

The editorial staff of the **Central European Political Science Review** received notice just before the editorial day's end that Giovanni Sartori died at the age of 92, who was already considered for a long time the classic expert of contemporary political science. He was our regular reader as well as our author.

Our Editor-in-chief invited him to the “Ten Years of Freedom in Central Europe” international conference in fall of 2000 and he accepted the invitation as well as gave the opening lecture for the conference. Two years ago we invited him again to the “25 Years of Freedom in Central Europe” conference, but due to his health conditions unfortunately he was unable to participate.

We will initiate the **CEPSR Vol. 18. No. 67** with the lecture that political scientist Professor Sartori presented to us 18 years ago. We regard his lecture as a message for the contemporary social scientists, especially for the young researchers.

János Simon
Editor-in-chief

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**Quarterly of Central European Political Science
Alliance**

PROFILES AND LACK OF LAW





Giovanni Sartori
(1924-2017)

**Where is Political Science Going
in the 21th Century?**

Introduction

Without wasting other precious seconds, the title of my paper in English is: “Where is Political Science Going?” And, well, it’s not a small subject. So to squeeze it in half an hour means that I will leave 95% of the subject out of my talk, but that’s the organizers’ fault, not mine. I could have talked on and on for hours and days.

The reason, really it’s my fault. I imposed the title at the last minute, because this is a special occasion for you/me. Political science as we currently understand it now in early, very early 2000, was born, or if you prefer, reborn in Western Europe in the early 50’s, in the aftermath of World War II. And I was at the time one of its founders, for the good or the bad. And I’m thus a sort of living... still living witness of what the young Turks of the time had in mind of how we conceived and promoted political science. I’m now, as anybody can see, an ancient sage instead – I’m no longer a “young Turk”.

And it pleases me to reflect half a century later in the heartland of *Mittel Europa*, Budapest, on where... in what direction political science has gone, and whether it has taken the course that we had in mind 50 years ago.

Hence, to ask where political science is going is to ask whether your new beginnings in Eastern Europe should or should not follow the track, well, the track started earlier in Western Europe, and I would say the track dictated currently by mainstream political science, which basically is American political science. I told “American” because the U.S. dominates the field both in numbers and resources, and if you have both numbers and resources, you usually win. Unless you’re very stupid, but that’s another matter.

So I'll make reference here to American-type political science, obviously to the "normal" science, in Coombs' sense.

If anybody feels offended here, obviously he does not belong to the normal science, he belongs to the super-normal science, and Philippe Schmitter should know whom I am speaking about... So no personal offence taken.

So, the paradigm

I hate the word, but it's very popular in the United States. The paradigm of current, present day, normal political science, is the American one. And no, I cannot complain, I have chosen to go to the United States. I have been teaching there for 25 years because I too am attracted by the resources and the facilities of American political science.

Yet perhaps I'm a stubborn Italian – I have resisted. I have not managed to "Americanise" myself. And in the United States, although I've been teaching there for the last part of my teaching experience, I am a very feeble voice. I'm a very, very, very strong minority, which doesn't trouble me at all. I have a theory that minorities have to be right in the long run, for a number of reasons which I cannot explain here. But this is my opportunity to say, and to explain why I am unhappy about American political science.

So if the question is, "Where is political science going?" in American terms, I am inclined to reply, "Nowhere." I'm a nasty person. And I won't have time of course to warrant, to buttress the statement – just take it for its nasty niceness. And let me start with this crude question, just to begin with my complaints. Do you find the American political science to be legible? Interesting? Relevant? Maybe again I'm a very strong minority, but I'm unable to read it. I don't find it legible – well, if I really want, you know, with the help of my assistants etc. I'm capable of understanding it – but in simple terms, I don't find it legible, I don't find it interesting, and I don't find it relevant. Whereas in the 50's, 60's and 70's I myself wrote on the American Political

Science Review, and therefore at least read myself, and other colleagues that were very good. So something has happened there, over the decades, this, you know, important review – the whole American profession receives it, 15,000 copies, something like that, that’s a lot – receives this book which at least none of my friends read either. Unless they have an article, but then they’re not my friends, generally. So really the sense of what normal American political science is – that’s my point – you get from reading, or non-reading the American Political Science Review. And if you don’t read it, then you’re coming over to my side perhaps.

“Know-how deficit”

And this brings me to, you know, to the basic, to the mother of all questions, to the brutal question: Science for what? What is the purpose? What the hell are we doing? For what? It’s the Juan J. Linz question of, well, quite some time ago.

Well, let me just preface this question by saying that we’re dealing obviously not with an exact science, not with a physics-like science – we’re dealing with an empirical science, a soft science. And it is my argument, it always has been my argument that any empirical, soft-like science, “softish” science, develops along two tracks.

One is the theory-research track, that is, we have some theories, something in our minds, and we put it on the table, we *apply* it to the finding of data, to the search for evidence. We want to know exactly what is there – so, theory-research dimension, or track.

And the other, in my mind, is, instead, the theory-practice dimension. So there it’s not data finding, but knowing how to do: “know-how”. Knowledge for application; theory for practice. We want to be able or capable, otherwise our *raison d’être* becomes rather feeble. We want to be able or capable, to some extent, to predict, to give advice, and to implement reforms, if reforms are the case.

Now what has happened? And I think this is where we went astray. What has happened is that in the search of

becoming more and more scientific. American political science first, but then many of us in the wake, has developed almost exclusively (the normal science) along the theory-research track, and forgotten quite extensively about the theory-practice track. So we have a lot of research, enormous masses of data, however, “*non-cumulative*”. So there’s something wrong even there, but anyhow, we have evidence... It doesn’t add up together, but it allows any normal scientist with a computer to produce a paper. The computer works for him, and he makes a brief, more or less stupid comment, or intelligent comment. But the theory-research track has been largely neglected. And this means that we have a science without practical know-how. We have then, as I say, a “know-how deficit”.

The applied science, the theory-practice dimension

To the question “What is science for?” much of the profession does not answer “It is knowledge for application,” where by “application” I mean that we have projects, programs, that succeed in application – that perform as predicted, as desired, as willed. That seldom happens. And it seldom happens, in my analysis, because we haven’t worked hard on that, we haven’t tried enough. Not because, and this is my further point, not because we are defeated by so-called unintended consequences. Unintended consequences are our by now standard alibi. We say, “Yes, you know we try, but we are defeated by human erratic behaviour, and so by unintended consequences. We do our job, but we do not succeed.”

Now I really think that the first step of the new profession should be to write... establish a course on the history of error in political science, and to say, “These are all the failures in applications of the profession over the last 50 years. Were they predictable or not?” Now we ask that “*ex post*”, but even “*ex post*” you would find that nine times out of ten they were perfectly predictable. And since I have... you know this is a statistic that I apply for myself,

because I've always been doing it, and nine times out of ten I've been able to predict – you know, with some imperfection, certainly not on the timing – but if something works or doesn't work, it's not terribly difficult to predict. In constitutional engineering, in electoral reform, in a number of areas. It's not terribly difficult. And the reason, as I say, why we simply do not succeed, is that we do not have a science with practical legs to walk on.

But clearly if we take the notion of unintended consequences – incidentally, unintended has two meanings, one is “not foreseen, not predictable,” the other is “unwanted,” of course. But if you predict correctly, obviously you will predict something you want – so let's say that the primary meaning of the notion of unintended consequences is precisely that we are almost invariably wrong in predicting. We are incapable of predicting. Now... I'm skipping mentally because I'm looking at the watch. Let me then from this premise, which I cannot buttress any further... just, you know, write a book on history of errors – look at the record of the American Political Science Association recommendations for a more responsible two-party system from the 50's onward.

They said that was wrong, I mean, now they've discovered it – but it took them thirty years, but would have known “*ex ante*”. And on any electoral system I unfailingly predict when it's right or wrong, for instance. I have my rules for that, and so far they have not let me down.

The “if-then” types of questions

Now, if we take this notion seriously, that we are blocked by unintended consequences, then I say – let's be serious, let's not even try. We just sit down and leave it, as in the good old days, to the acts of God. History flows, and we assist to the acts of God, there's nothing we can do about it, because we cannot predict, and therefore we cannot foresee, and therefore we cannot intervene intelligently. But if this is wrong, then we are really wrong, and the way

in which I have tried to develop. I and a few others – but certainly a strong minority – develop the applied science, the theory-practice dimension of the discipline. Well, I'll just mention it in brief: if anybody has anything of mine, you will find it between the lines in all my writings, and then it will become a little bit clearer. But I have always recommended, to begin with, means-ends analysis. The calculus of means, which is specified in a number of steps which I will not rehearse here, but you know it's nice, the calculus of means. These are the means: are they adequate, are they sufficient, material, non-material, do they overstep the mark... it's a nice little exercise.

Then the other thing that I've always been very keen about is to raise continuously "if-then" types of questions. If these are the premises, if these are the conditions, if these are the means... then what? Now again, if you know how to do it, and you have information. You need information to do this. Young political scientists have very little information you know, they work with figures, machines..., but his substantive knowledge is very poor – and if you don't have substantive knowledge here, you fail. But if you have information, and you have nice explanatory generalizations, if-then, out of ten you can get a sensible answer which might work in the real world.

Condition analysis and the comparative control of generalizations

And then of course the other way of handling applied knowledge is condition analysis, because nothing applies in a vacuum. You must say "under these conditions" – that was typically Bob Dahl /Robert Dahl/ who developed this track magnificently in his work on oppositions. Condition analysis. Under these conditions – then. So the question is not only "if – then," but also "under these conditions – then."

And finally I have been insisting very much on the comparative control of generalizations. And again, it's very

strange – recently, well some time ago, but still recently – I wrote a piece on comparative politics, and I noted that most American comparativists, to the question “Why compare?” say that the purpose of comparing is not comparing. It is to explain. Thank you very much. I mean the purpose of any knowledge is to explain. I don’t name names, but I can give you the quotations.

So we have, to the extent to which we have comparative politics, and certainly American politics is not... but to the extent to which we have it, we are told that, you know, to compare is to understand. Thank you very much. Any knowledge gets to that conclusion; but instead, to compare is to control. If you say that all revolutions result from deprivation, you take revolutions, you look at deprivations, you define deprivations, and you see if this tests... this generalization holds. And of course it does not. If you say that all presidential systems produce efficient government, you take presidential systems, and those are easy to define indeed, and you will see that they do not, and so forth. Comparative control is very important.

Then now comes the beauty

Now I cannot explain this any further in the time I have, but I just wanted sort of to inject a few doubts in how well we are doing, and to make suggestions about how we could do better. Then now comes the beauty. Because not only do we have the, that would be the second part, with an hour I would have had a third one, and then with two hours all the explanations and illustrations... but, the second part.

Now my further point, one is that we have a science without practice. Marxism strangely had the philosophy-praxis formula, but of course that was philosophy... it didn’t work. It worked in the reverse. But political science is largely a theory without practice. It is also another thing. It is a science without method, which is again pretty bad.

Of course you will be struck by this assertion because I have myself shelves of books – social science methods,

sociology methods, political science methods – all filled up with titles that speak of method. But method basically is methodology, so it's the method of the "*logos*", and in all those books, the "*logos*" is remarkably absent. So we have splendid books of statistical techniques, research methods, how to search for the data, how to treat the evidence and what not, but this is not methodology in the basic sense of being a method of the "*logos*".

It is a method of research, and of treating research data – which you know is necessary, and that is excellent. But I'm simply saying it's only part of the method if you want, or really it is not methodology in the traditional sense of the term. Because finally, methodology is method of thinking, and here my grievances are enormous, "*vis-à-vis*" of the normal profession.

NS: "non sequitur"

You know, some people are born intelligent, and no university can spoil them. No professor can spoil them. They're born intelligent – fine. But the normal scientist is not born intelligent and has not been improved by what they have been taught. And what I find... what really bothers me now in reading recent books, the flow of books that endlessly come out in the United States, is that most of my young colleagues really ignore the very grammar of logic, and of a logical treatment. When I was a "young Turk", the dissertations... I had students... I always put "NS" – which means "*non sequitur*". But that was applied to my students, it didn't follow that that premise... it didn't follow that it had that conclusion. Now I apply it to my colleagues: "*non sequitur*".

I read books in which in every page, every five lines, I put "NS." Or I just put a dot, which means "NS". You know now I'm technologically more advanced. Because the imperative has been to do away with "What is?" questions, and to replace them with "How much?" questions. To replace them with "How much" questions, that has been

the point. Because certainly I say we need both, but to say that “How much?” questions can replace “What is?” questions – I think this is logically ludicrous. And simply is something that can be explained by the three principles of the logic of Aristotle, which tell you already when you have a continuum, and when you have a dichotomy. *Why* you have a continuum, and why you have a dichotomy. What is the purpose of the one, and what is the purpose of the other. It’s already in Aristotle, but political scientists no longer have to read, unfortunately, Aristotle.

So the disappearance of methodology in the proper and full sense of the term has really to do with what I have said before. The urge of becoming a science by becoming more and more quantitative. The more the figures, the more the numbers, the more, ha, the more you generally have false precision, partly because the data are not cumulative – so there we have a problem, if we collect from many baskets. But partly because numbers, in the social sciences (yes, I’m closing) are imputed numbers, roughly. It’s not like in economics. In economics we count with money, so the numbers are real. In the social sciences they’re imputed. And the amount of manipulation that enters into that is quite fantastic – necessarily so, but this should make us suspicious.

So we have what I call “degreeism”, continuum-mania, model-mania – but we don’t have in present day political scientists, methodology. Our scholars do not know even how to classify; they confuse classifications with typologies; they don’t know how to construct a law-like generalization; they are uncertain as to how much an exception cripples a generalization – one kills it, no, ten – I mean they don’t understand anything of the canons of proper methodology, which is... *und so weiter*.

So I’m concluding on this very swift and nasty little attack of mine – we have, in my estimate, a giant with feet of clay. And Western Europeans to some extent have resisted the American appeal – we are not altogether Americanized.

But my hope, and this is why I am saying this here, is that “Eastern Europeans” will resist it even more.

Because as it is, political science is going nowhere. *Finito*. That’s it.

Paper presented at the “Ten Years Freedom in Central Europe” international conference, Budapest, 30 of October, 2000 (Organised by XXth and XXIth Century Institute) –