

## 2 THE TEMPLE OF SCIENCE

We live in a populist age; it threatens vital elements of American democracy; it encourages us to reconsider fundamental political principles; some scholars should relate to those principles in their work, and some political scientists should do that by focusing especially on the destructive side of creative destruction.

These are complex propositions, which we may begin to explicate by considering what political scientists are now doing, roughly speaking. What are we studying and teaching, and how does that reflect our present understanding of what political science is for, even in a populist age?

### Scope and Methods

In truth, political scientists haven't decided exactly what political science is for. That is, they do not agree, except in very general terms, on what they together are doing, or should be doing. Therefore, when they discuss what are sometimes called "scope and methods" for their discipline, entire books may treat the subject of methods,<sup>61</sup> whereas matters of scope often warrant no more than a few pages. In those pages, colleagues usually focus on "politics," which involves "power," but they cannot define precisely either the term or its locus.<sup>62</sup>

So terminology is one problem for political science. Another is that when members of the discipline choose research topics and thereby demonstrate their preferences on scope, they divide up among themselves by investigating many different realms where people confront one another. Thus, they study a

wide array of people who exercise many kinds of power (verbal, social, economic, physical, sexual, and more) in order to shape relationships in favor of this group or that.

Bewildering variety in research and teaching therefore shows up, for example, when the 2018 APSA's Annual Meeting in San Francisco scheduled over several days the presentation of papers, many simultaneously, in fifty-six "Divisions" of interest ranging from "Formal Political Theory" to "Comparative Politics," from "Legislative Studies" to "Race, Ethnicity, and Politics," from "Information Technology and Politics" to "Sexuality and Politics," from "Migration and Citizenship" to "American Political Thought."<sup>63</sup>

The same diversity emerged recently in an edited volume based on asking 100 political scientists which research questions should be raised in their fields and which earlier findings are especially noteworthy. Each colleague was invited to address these two questions in 1000 words or fewer. The answers, collected in *The Future of Political Science: 100 Perspectives* (2009), agreed neither on what should be done nor on what has already been done especially well.<sup>64</sup>

This situation – cacophony, really – is not new. Years ago, leading political scientists already threw in the towel on issues of scope. Thus Leon Epstein, in his 1979 presidential address to the APSA, admitted that "I find it difficult to offer general advice now that political scientists identify with increasingly specialized subjects and employ more disparate methods."<sup>65</sup> And thus Gabriel Almond, the APSA president in 1966, described various political science approaches in a 1988 essay entitled "Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science."<sup>66</sup>

For my purposes, pluralism within political science is useful because I propose that only *part* of the discipline, or only *some* political scientists, in effect only a *sector* within the many "Divisions" at the annual APSA meetings, should relate in a special way to events and circumstances in our populist times. There is no need to sweepingly revise current disciplinary

interests and practices. Whatever most political scientists are doing – and many of them are doing it well, I believe – they will continue to do. There is the pluralism I just described. In my opinion it cannot, and should not, be discouraged.

Accordingly, some qualification is in order. In present circumstances, I propose a project of only partial extent, which flows from a realization that, as an adjunct to our talk about scope and methods, some of us should begin – professionally, voluntarily, rigorously, and responsibly – to become more involved politically than we used to be. This is, after all, an era more dangerous and frightening than the one which we, our students, and the public lived in previously.<sup>67</sup>

In short, I propose that a fraction of the total discipline should commit to a particular strategy and principle. Therefore, in this matter, unlike in some others, I will decline the advice of a distinguished forerunner. Lucien Pye, president of the APSA in 1989, recommended that his colleagues should pay special attention to a particular situation in his time, and which he described as a crisis undermining authoritarian regimes such as that in the Soviet Union.<sup>68</sup> I think, however, that such a collective commitment is neither necessary nor desirable. The American Political Science Association, within whose professional warrant our scholars work, is a big tent or, in sociological terms, a community rather than an organization, serving to collect colleagues rather than to point them in any particular direction.<sup>69</sup> I have no objection to it remaining so.

## **Procedure and Substance**

Nevertheless – and here content is important – even though pluralism befits the discipline, many American political scientists come together in a practical rather than theoretical way, in that they direct much of their research and teaching to two cardinal subjects, which are “democracy” and “citizenship.” Like other scholars, political scientists are active members of a society that values both of those matters highly, and they live in places where state and local governments encourage and

may even mandate grade-school and college courses in “civics” and government.

It makes sense, then, that political scientists will participate in what amounts to a nation constantly renewing and improving itself along these two lines. To that end, colleagues talk to each other often about how to conduct their participation most effectively.<sup>70</sup> For example, Margaret Levi, APSA president in 2005, called upon her colleagues to fashion a new theory for government that should be democratic, representative, responsive, fair, and so forth.<sup>71</sup>

Democracy and citizenship are patently worthy ends, especially when times are fairly quiet and stable or, as economists might say, when *ceteris is paribus*. But in the Age of Populism *ceteris* is not *paribus*, and that is a situation which obliges us, I think, to consider that political science teachings on democracy and citizenship are mainly *procedural* rather than *substantive*.

These terms are straightforward. We may describe democracy as a set of techniques, such as national elections and town meetings, and we may think about citizenship as a matter of who belongs to the state – for example, who can carry its passport and enjoy the civil rights it grants. Together, such techniques (what citizens *do*) and matters of membership (what citizens *are*) generate procedural democracy.<sup>72</sup> That sort of democracy touches upon important affairs. But it also leaves open large questions about substance – that is, about what *should* be done with the powers of citizenship beyond just maintaining them, and about where the ship of state *should* sail rather than how it might just stay afloat.<sup>73</sup>

For example, Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens discuss democracy and citizenship in their *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It* (2017).<sup>74</sup> They describe democracy as “majority rule,” and they insist that policy makers should serve voter preferences as expressed objectively in polls. To reach such a desirable state of affairs, they recommend public policies to provide citizens with more personal resources, education, and information than they possess today,

all of which can challenge, and perhaps even reduce, the influence of money, advertising, and lobbying over American politics.<sup>75</sup>

This view of American democracy amounts to strengthening its procedures, to enabling “the people” to express fully their opinions, and then to hoping for the best.<sup>76</sup> It is a commendable but incomplete vision, because in difficult times we need – I think very urgently – to supplement procedural arrangements with at least some acts of substance. On this score, present circumstances call for recommendations that will go beyond even an admirable concern for democratic machinery.

Happily, scholars can be not just specific but also patriotic to this end. Therefore, in line with my recommendation that some of us will engage with large political ideals promoted by great thinkers, let us note what gets slighted when we concentrate, even commendably, on repairing democratic *practices*. At that point, what can get overlooked are the *purposes* for which such practices can be used. And those purposes include the *public goods* envisioned – but not in modern terminology – when the Founders, in their electrifying Preamble to the Constitution, declared that “the People of the United States, in order to establish a more perfect Union,” created the Constitution “to provide” for “justice,” for “domestic tranquility,” for “the common defense,” for “the general welfare,” and for “the blessings of liberty.”

With such goals in mind, it seems to me that, in hard times, the bottom line is that America needs not just excellent trappings of procedural democracy but also, on occasion, constructive acts of substantive citizenship.<sup>77</sup> That is why I will propose, in later chapters, that some scholarly research and teachings will recommend such acts designed explicitly to mitigate the social and economic damage caused by creative destruction.

## Universities

Meanwhile, let us return to what political scientists are doing now, even before they might consider my proposition. I have

suggested that, lacking clear agreement on *scope*, my colleagues do not know exactly *what* they are doing together. But they know *where* they are, which is mainly in American universities. And that is a context worth considering here at some length.

Universities are modern America's intellectual lynchpin. They are where most formal knowledge is generated, where it accumulates, where it is discussed, and where it is promoted for use elsewhere. In America, millions of people who want to become engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, chemists, ministers, journalists, programmers, psychologists, teachers, managers, nurses, pollsters, accountants, physicists, advertisers, meteorologists, biologists, bankers, brokers, and more pass through universities to become skilled thinkers and workers. In short, men and women in many realms of American life are affected by how they are informed and trained in the country's system of higher education.<sup>78</sup>

In that system before the Civil War, America built colleges, and those had fairly narrow philosophical schemes of organization. That is, the founders who ran the colleges – who were usually devout – adhered to mission statements which indicated what was to be studied, and which often aimed at renewing the supply of ministers needed in the New World. For instance, Harvard turned out Puritan ministers, Rhode Island College (later Brown University) educated Baptist ministers, the College of William and Mary produced Anglican ministers, and the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) trained Presbyterian ministers. Elective courses were rare and, in these small institutions, with no more than hundreds of students, if politics was studied at all it likely appeared in the guise of “Moral Philosophy.” This was an Enlightenment compendium of moderate theological and secular maxims, fit for the Age of Reason, designed to promote a decent social contract, and usually taught in the senior year of studies by someone of wide horizons, such as the president of the college.<sup>79</sup>

After the Civil War, while an industrial revolution unfolded in America, science rather than theology gradually became the

rule in higher education, and some colleges expanded into, or were superseded by, private and public universities crowned by professional schools and going beyond bachelor degrees to offer master and doctoral studies. In these new entities, it became common for professors – as experts in their fields – rather than founders to shape the curriculum, so that academic disciplines rather than mission statements set the tone. The result, after 1900, was to turn growing universities into intellectual smorgasbords, bringing together “departments” and institutes, with greatly diversified scholars and research centers, where “the sum of the parts added up to a nominal whole joined by no organizational principle or rationale other than administrative and financial convenience.”<sup>80</sup>

## Multiversities

In 1963, Clark Kerr, Chancellor of the University of California, called these conglomerations “multiversities.”<sup>81</sup> Because such entities aspired to promote expertise in many fields, professors had much to do with deciding what was investigated and taught. However, as years passed, all this became increasingly expensive, to the point where financial officers became a dominant feature of university life.<sup>82</sup> Then, more than ever, each university president became less a leader of the whole institution – which in the post-college era anyway no longer had a preconceived aim – than a competent broker, smoothing out balances of power among professors, students, parents, alumni, townspeople, grant agencies, corporate sponsors, foundations, sport fans, and other interested parties.<sup>83</sup>

Generation after generation, critics have called for Kerr’s kind of universities to emphasize education more and training less, and to promote humane values along with valuable skills.<sup>84</sup> Their voices have not reduced the influence of money in higher education – after all, one cannot run a school without substantial budgets – but they do indicate that important questions can be raised about the purposes that universities serve in a complex world. And those questions, in turn, bear on what we

have been asking, which is what political science is for, in that same world.

As Kerr pointed out, apart from dormitories, stadiums, shuttle buses, alumni reunions, and the like, but in relation to what people know about the world and our place in it, modern universities are collections of departments (plus institutes containing related departments and scholars)<sup>85</sup> where professors, divided more or less into academic disciplines, investigate various parts of nature and our lives, after which those professors teach students whatever it is, practical or theoretical, that their disciplines manage to discover. This means that one department teaches economics, another teaches physics, one teaches history, another teaches mechanics, one teaches statistics, another teaches accounting, one teaches entomology, and so forth. In those circumstances, universities will occasionally establish new departments dealing with new knowledge – say, with conflict resolution or nanotechnology. On that score, universities are admirably flexible instruments, able to create new workspaces for intellectual pioneers who seek breakthroughs in modern knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

In Kerr's world, all that is clear. In a nutshell, modern universities are congeries of departments, first investigating and then teaching. What is not clear is who decides on the distribution of departments, or fields of knowledge, in each university. For example, who decides which professors will address what? That is, who decides that there will be a department treating this subject but not that one? Or, who decides that this department is doing its job but that one is not? Or, who decides when a new department is needed while another would be superfluous? Or, in the final analysis, who in the university decides if its sum total of existing departments is adequate, in the sense that they cover all the ground that should be covered so that the nation's citizens will learn, from this great knowledge institution, what they need to know in order to live well?

That is, (1) who decides on the institution's overall mission, in the service of which a compendium of academic disciplines work simultaneously, and (2) who decides whether or not a



particular department, or all of them together, are serving that mission faithfully? Who, in short, in this very large entity where each department is doing its own thing, is in charge of holding all this activity together or, in effect, herding these cats?

To rephrase these questions in social science terms, we might ask where is the standard “model” that, more or less, explains the shape and character of the university as a singular institution in modern society – which it certainly is – at a time when scholars have, roughly speaking, fashioned models for other singular institutions such as churches, towns, tribes, armies, factories, nations, big box stores, and platform companies? And if there is no standard model, can it be that the eminent university where I studied years ago, where I stood one afternoon before Widener Library while bells tolled to mark the passing of President John F. Kennedy, where in hundreds of classrooms today, thousands of professors teach 20,000 students – can that institution have no plan or organizing principle at all?

Clark Kerr wrote about universities more than fifty years ago. Since then, many of the schools he described have grown and innovated, and most of them, large and small, while serving a diverse population, are led by officers who feel they must respond to budgetary imperatives and marketplace considerations. In practice, this means that American universities are constantly evolving, sometimes adding new programs and departments, sometimes cancelling others, occasionally going online, looking for and relying heavily on adjunct teachers, offering practical training in many fields, and providing space and staff for groundbreaking research.

Despite this increasing complexity, Kerr’s concept of a “multiversity” is still useful, because it can still serve to denote an institution that has no particular shape or inherent goal. Consequently, many thinkers, for or against Kerr but not always explicitly so, raise questions about universities and how they work, about where the money for higher education comes from and who will spend it, about what resources

should be allocated to this end or that – often to more or less liberal arts or business administration – and why. To make a long story short, we may conclude that the conversation about such things is interesting but inconclusive, because a significant reconstruction of universities, away from their present muddle, is unlikely to occur for so long as parties to the conversation have material and ideological interests that they prefer not to compromise.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, for political science to deal with problems that arise in a populist era, it does not matter if modern universities will or will not change their line-up of departments, institutes, and schools. That is, we don't need to fight to reconstruct Kerr's universities. We need simply to think about them in a new way, and especially about how their departments are distributed and what they do. That question we can address without reference to whether or not the present configuration of academic interests and resources is satisfactory in a general sense. We need only to observe that political science departments, in every university, are already equipped to perform a special function, directed at the Age of Populism, which scholars in other departments are not now performing consistently and effectively.

This point is worth repeating. There are excellent fields of interest in Kerr's multiversity, and various departments there house disciplines that are commendably expanding the available sum of knowledge about many things and creatures – about what Lewis Carroll called “cabbages and kings.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, something very important is missing from Kerr's schools. And political science, as I will explain later on, is in a position to compensate for that.

## The Temple of Science

To portray the missing element clearly, I want to suggest a higher-education model that resembles, metaphorically, a Grecian Temple of Science, where the term *science* is used in

the European sense as a field of knowledge, as in the French *sciences politiques*, the Spanish *ciencias politicas*, and the German *politologie*. We can think of this model, which is only suggestive and not precise at all – I repeat, only suggestive and not precise – as a sort of Athenian Parthenon, with fluted columns marching around a rectangular sanctuary, and above those an architrave, frieze, and pediments linking the columns to support the temple's roof.<sup>89</sup>

If we use this Temple model to stand for an intellectual edifice representing the world of academic knowledge,<sup>90</sup> we can see, in our mind's eye, many scholarly columns, located figuratively in universities today and housing various "sciences," such as physics, history, biology, philosophy, political science, and electrical engineering. The model says nothing about how big or important its various columns are. But that they are physically separate helps us to understand immediately that, in the real world, most professors work only in their columns and know little or nothing about what people study and teach in other columns.<sup>91</sup>

This isolation is obvious with regard to subjects, from sociology to chemistry, from immunology to accounting, and so forth. But it is not just subjects that inhabit different columns, because many scholars in those columns use research methods that are little understood by their neighbors. For example, in the economics department, scholars may deploy statistics; in area studies, they must use foreign languages; in astronomy, mathematics is a necessary tool; and in anthropology, some practitioners will become embedded observers.

To continue the metaphor, if the Temple of Science's columns were to stand only by themselves, they might fall down. But they are capped and held together by architraves and friezes which, by analogy, we can regard as the academic world's management sector consisting of deans, provosts, chancellors, trustees, and the like.<sup>92</sup> In most cases, these people are not directly involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. But the administration they provide – a sort of centripetal

force – enables the university to generate that scholarship which is, after all, the Temple's signature function.

## The Temple's Roof

There remains, in this modern Parthenon, a roof supported by pediments. And there, as Hamlet said, is the rub. Because the striking thing about the roof is that, unlike in the Temple of Science's columns, there are no scholars there. That is, no modern scholars are sitting on the Temple of Science's roof collectively, distilling there lessons derived from various Temple columns together and teaching, for example, that climate change (in meteorology's column) has something to do with marine extinctions (in biology's column), with hurricane damages (in the accountancy column), with community breakdowns (in anthropology's column), and with populist politics (in political science's column).

The bottom line here is that, by displaying an empty roof, the Temple of Science model shows us graphically that modern universities are missing a very important capacity. This occurs because, while departments are producing *experts* in this field or that, and while administrators are helping them to do so, the same departments are usually unable or unwilling to produce *generalists* who will integrate expert knowledge from different realms (columns) and provide wide-ranging advice to students and the public at large.

Let us restate that point. In the Temple of Science, there are departments that, as we saw, reside in columns that stand pretty much alone. But there is no department that consists of professors whose task it is to sit, figuratively, not in a column but on the Temple's roof, to study from there what is known in many columns, combine the available facts and insights, and pass on teachings that will help us all live together.

In other words, America finds itself in the Age of Populism, where events and inclinations investigated in many columns threaten to destroy exactly that sensible democracy and moderate citizenship that, in theory at least, embellish American

exceptionalism. But universities do not squarely confront this situation, because they do not provide a department or discipline – again, figuratively on the roof – that would collect what we know from wherever knowledge resides, distill this information, and explain to students and the public how it shows the way to progress and prosperity.

Thus in the Temple mode, the Age of Populism as a whole is not on the scholarly agenda, although parts of it may be. And this is because what we call populism, and even its obvious avatar Donald Trump, represents a *general* calamity, flowing from many trends interacting with one another, rather than a *specific* issue of one dimension, to be analyzed and resolved comfortably – academics as usual – within a particular Temple of Science column.

## Limitations

Yet many scholars are outraged by Trump. Why, then, are there no teachers on the Temple's roof? One reason is difficult to name, but we may regard it as “cultural” because, since the late nineteenth century – after Darwin's theory of evolution appeared – Western societies essentially decided that *the scientific method* can produce knowledge more useful and valuable than any other sort of knowledge, bringing great improvements in medicine, agriculture, industry, transportation, communications, commerce, and so forth.

The result was that many scholars came to believe that science is the main or only road to progress. And since professors, each in his or her own field, first investigate and only afterwards teach, it followed that their work at universities, discipline after discipline, came increasingly to emulate science. In department after department, professors fashioned hypotheses, searched for evidence, and hoped to find law-like regularities. Therefore, what they knew and taught appeared to be more certain than what was being done less scientifically, say by professors of philosophy or by theologians at divinity schools. Consequently, when fields were compared, knowledge

that could not be cast as scientific was widely regarded as somehow imperfect, somehow dubious, somehow less reputable than science, i.e., the real thing.<sup>93</sup>

So here is the first reason why few professors aspire to sit on the Temple of Science's roof, handing out general advice based on various disciplines simultaneously and therefore not possibly clear and exact enough to warrant respect for being "scientific."<sup>94</sup> But there is a second reason why the roof is empty, and that is the fact that the Temple's columns are so full of information that most human beings, including professors, cannot get a grip on all that is known in any one column and certainly not all that is known in two or more columns.<sup>95</sup>

In other words, no one can sit on the roof and reasonably claim that she knows what is going on below, when the sheer amount of stuff in several columns is so great that she cannot conclusively argue that she knows enough to connect all the available "facts" (which she cannot entirely assimilate) to any sort of definitive advice. A professor who would try that could easily be challenged by sceptics who might ask: "Sure! But have you read the articles relating to that subject by Professors Smith, Chang, Khouri, Cohen, Lombardi, Patel, and Gesundheit?"

## Economics

From the metaphorical Temple of Science, then, a paradoxical syllogism emerges. (1) We see that, with no scholars on the roof, the university is not adequately confronting our populist era.<sup>96</sup> (2) We see also why the Temple's professors, including political scientists, for quantitative and qualitative reasons, cannot expect that they will sound persuasive if they will offer general advice about that era or any other. Accordingly, (3) we understand that little or nothing would be gained from their trying.<sup>97</sup>

On the other hand, this story most definitely should not end here. In a sense, it is true that modern people do not seek advice from the Temple's roof. But that does not mean that

political scientists should continue doing only what they have done until now. Instead, in my opinion, they should consider a paramount aspect of learning in universities that we have not examined yet, but which is an open secret, and which is this: Regardless of what appears in the Temple of Science model, in the real world of American sciences there is one discipline – that of economics – which frequently and confidently dispenses advice about how Americans should live together.

Therefore, although they do not use our terms, it is as if economists believe that their discipline is capable of analyzing and assessing what other Temple columns study, to the point where, *in effect*, economists can sit on the Temple's roof and explain to everyone else how to get along efficiently and prosperously. Furthermore, as we shall see in a moment, this advice, especially about the desirability of perpetual economic growth, is accepted by many people.

So here is an oddity. In the Temple of Science, in theory, no one can successfully sit on the roof. But in practice, the economists seem to be up there anyway. What does that mean? Does it mean that, in the real world, there is a blip in the Temple model?

If there were a blip, we could ignore it as a technical trifle if we were convinced that the advice that economists offer to society is satisfactory. But what many economists recommend as social policy – on how we should live together now, and on how we should get through the coming years – is nowhere near satisfactory. Indeed, as we shall see, it fosters dangerous trends that are at least partly responsible for the Age of Populism.

In which case, we have reached a turning point for what I have been proposing all along, which is that some political scientists should begin to criticize part of what economists recommend, which politicians promote, which business people celebrate, and which many ordinary Americans praise but which, for example, has recently automated millions of good jobs out of existence, has destroyed hundreds, if not thousands, of Main Streets in favor of Walmart, Target, Walgreens, Kroger,

and Home Depot, has strip-mined and fracked many vulnerable citizens, has increasingly privatized public services, has neglected enormous swaths of national infrastructure, has addicted millions of citizens to smart phones and fast food,<sup>98</sup> and has hollowed out the middle class.

That is the situation we will turn to now.