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BOOK REVIEWS

Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry. By Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950. Pp. xxiv, 295. \$4.00.

Of all political scientists, Harold D. Lasswell has turned most vigorously from the shadows of the cave. Working now alone, then again with extraordinary associates, he has produced a series of remarkable studies over twenty years. The terms "challenging," "exaggerated," and "unusual,"—with a grudging, querulous air about them—have often been applied to his books by illustrious men who ought to know better. When one thinks of that strange compote which has been political science—demi-law, quasi-history, semi-morality, and metaphysics, with many seeds of empirical generalization—and then examines Lasswell's works, he must perceive that they deserve the highest admiration and respect. It may be that the science of human relations will be

forever beyond us, and that Lasswell will one day resume his place among us gibbering at the shadows, but he will have reached *there*—almost. And that is the act that divides the men from the boys in the history of the intellect.

Now Professor Lasswell, in collaboration with a philosopher of the Viennese Positivist School, gives us a book of political theory, general and systematic. We wonder about it. Will it be ingenious, convenient, a self-summary, a jogging in place, like his *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1936), his *Power and Personality* (1948), and his portion of the *Language of Politics* (1949)? Will it be brilliant, but in a tradition, like his *Democracy Through Public Opinion* (1941), or his *World Politics Faces Economics* (1945), or his *National Security and Individual Freedom* (1950)? Or will it be a pioneering study, startling in its findings and bold in its method, as were his *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930), *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935), *World Revolutionary Propaganda* (1939), and several of his papers in *The Analysis of Political Behavior* (1947)? This reviewer places *Power and Society* with the last group of Lasswell's works. The authors have stated the elements of political science better than they have ever been stated before. This I think it fair to say, although many great problems yet obscure the way to a new order of political science.

The new work differs from all of Lasswell's work to this point, save his *Politics*, in that it gives a complete presentation of the basic principles of political behavior, and it differs from his *Politics* by treating formal political structures as well as political behavior. Thus it is the most general of his studies, and the only one which undertakes the Herculean task of joining behavioral and formal concepts. Some one hundred and fifty-one major definitions and some ninety-six propositions are stated about the important areas of political science. The scope of political science is the struggle for power (participation in the making of decisions) for the sake of power itself and of various other basic values (desired events). The base values are conceptualized as power, respect, rectitude, affection, well-being, wealth, skill, and enlightenment. Since greatest power is centered in political institutions, political institutions remain, with the authors as with tradition, the center of attention in political science.

The various chapter titles indicate the scope of political science in detail. A proper conceptualization of the field requires definitions and propositions in the several areas of Persons, Perspectives, Groups, Influence, Power, Symbols, Practices, Functions, Structures, and Process. An example of a major definition in the area of Persons is Catharsis, which is defined as "a reduction of intensity (of the actor) with a minimum of change in the factors determining intensity." An example of a proposition regarding Persons is: "The probability of catharsis varies directly with the extent of conflict and inversely with the intensity of the situation."

An example of a definition in the field of Structures is: "A rule is *egalitarian* in the degree to which elite recruitment is based on values to which there is

equal access." And a proposition in the same area is: "The stability of democratic rule varies with the democratic features of the social order." One hastens to explain, in connection with these examples, that the terms employed in major definitions and propositions are defined in preceding major definitions. Thus, the words "rule," "democracy," and "social order," in the last proposition, have been previously defined. Following each major definition and major proposition is a paragraph or more of explanation, comment, minor definitions, and related propositions.

A consistent, interlocking set of major definitions is a difficult achievement. The authors seem to have accomplished the feat. The reviewer carried one major definition through perhaps two dozen related meanings without detecting circularity, essential redundancy, or inconsistency. Doubtless, certain of the definitions will turn out to be unnecessary; that is, they will factor out into other definitions and the things to which they refer can be as easily manipulated through the use of the other terms. An easy example of such a word is "statesman," which, I believe, forms a relatively useless contrast to "politician."

Also, certain definitions will be found to be non-operational and must be dispensed with or modified. For example, I do not see the particular utility of many of the concepts in the tables on social process and forms of influence and power, though the finesse of the authors in building these tables of interrelated concepts relating to basic values is amazing. This is the second time these tables have been printed, once before in *Power and Personality*. I hope that their third appearance will be marked by a detailed demonstration of their operational utility. In treating of the forms of government, too, the authors cannot resist the rich and vague vocabulary of traditional political writings, and produce a masterpiece of baroque semantics. Again we are given little idea of what concretely can be done with these terms. Perhaps here, however, I underestimate the value of having somewhere to turn for precise usages of well-worn words.

I would point out, however, that the free coinage of special meanings for terms having ancient histories may be correct in principle but wrong from the standpoint of the sociology of establishing a science. When the authors rework words like "democracy" and "tyranny" and go on to others more strange, like "gangster," "pundit," and "approbation," and give them special meaning, they walk straight into the war of words. The chance of a vocabulary of this sort acquiring fixity and employment among social scientists is nil. The economists have not even been able to keep "price," "supply," and "investment" stable in meaning. Perhaps the authors only prolong the grief of political scientists as they encounter politicians and public. It might be better to convert these couple of hundred words into constructed words or symbols, no more difficult to memorize or refer to than common words with special meanings, but less confusing to political scientists and less subject to misinterpretation and abuse by laymen. The present effort at precise terminology, it is fair to say, will

rest as the best available. If a symbolic logician were to work them over, we might fall into his debt.

The stress on terminology has its effects on the propositions of the book. The propositions are neatly and simply stated, though they will have an unfamiliar ring to most readers and, indeed, most political scientists. Some of the propositions will disappoint readers who will find them to be disguised versions of common-sense expressions. Take the proposition, "Ruling practices are limited by the social order." In loose form, this means that the customs of a people influence the actions of officials. Nothing new or striking here. In one sense, such banalities are necessary parts of a work that aims to give the most important propositions of political science. Obvious truths are part of any system of truths. Only literature, with aesthetic motive, may exclude the banal. On closer sight, however, we are not so sure that any principle may be termed banal when it is accurately stated, its terms are definite, and especially when it is part of a system. It belongs, it hangs together with other major propositions, it is not a separate, clumsy witticism.

This "banality" of some of the propositions is not a bad effect of the novel terminology in any but a minor sense. More serious is the occasional failure of the authors to pursue the elaboration of propositions as the major task of the work. In various places, one gets the impression that the authors, though claiming a non-Aristotelian approach, outdo the Master in their profusion of classifications. The remarkable seductiveness of definitions may be at the root of the authors' inattention to a major objective—to substitute for a science of species "a science of functional co-relations."

Few major propositions in the work are compound propositions. That is, the bulk of propositions are simple—they state one important co-variation. For example, the proposition is stated that "In a society with a stable social structure, the ideology is a matter of consensus, not of opinion." An earlier compound proposition reads: "An opinion aggregate is the more likely to attain solidarity the more highly controversial the opinion, and the more the aggregate is in a minority." The book lacks propositions of a character to bridge these two propositions, such as would be the one: Solid opinion aggregates and minority opinion aggregates are unlikely to be found in societies with a stable social order. As a matter of fact, the last proposition could have been selected in the first place in lieu of either of the others.

We conclude, therefore, that many important propositions are missing from the book, and that the authors have selected major propositions with some degree of intuition, rather than according to some master reasoning or natural cause. Hundreds of other propositions might easily be added to those presented in the book without significantly decreasing the validity, reliability, and degree of generality of the average proposition. Yet, this writer could make no better defense of such new propositions than may be made for the present ones. Per-

haps the only utility of my remark, then, is to indicate that the authors have only sampled the universe of propositions, that individual substitutions might be made, and that there is yet no unshakable central foundation for holding only a certain kind of proposition and grading such propositions into a hierarchy.

Power and Society follows Lasswellian and Positivist precedent in avoiding commitments to stipulated "goods" or values. Political science is to be the theory of human political relations, not the theory of the good state. The latter is political doctrine. The "amoral" approach, now one of the strongest in American political science, owes something to a facet of Aristotle, but relates more closely to Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Roberto Michels, and Charles E. Merriam. Jeremy Bentham, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, G. E. G. Catlin, Charles Beard, and Harold J. Laski also play a part in the establishment of the tradition. The "objectivity" of this powerful group of Continental and American writers is to be construed as presenting propositions about political events that may be true and meaningful to Chinese or Americans, communists or capitalists. The findings are to rest upon facts, not beliefs.

However, the authors' goal of fact objectivity is not completely attained. An uneasiness grips certain statements, causing them to border upon values rather than facts. As with the "objectivity" of Machiavelli, Mosca, Pareto, Dewey, and the other writers in the "scientific" tradition, the "objectivity" of Lasswell and Kaplan remains conditional and imperfect. There is a poet in Lasswell that marks his work as not pure within its premises. He extols (xxiv, 14, *et passim*) humanism and the use of political science for establishing "human dignity and the realization of human capacities."

And here, as in other works, Lasswell implies a huge proposition that he never states but always skirts: "The problem of politics may be less to solve conflicts than to prevent them; less to serve as a safety valve for social protest than to apply social energy to the abolition of recurrent sources of strain in society (p. 15)." There lurks within this kind of statement a whole philosophy of moral-factual identification, a natural law theory, a belief in the "balanced, normal" man as the objective of social science. To this point in time, however, such remarks are to be considered intrusive in Lasswellian theory; they are unassimilated and abashed.

A final major methodological characteristic of the work is its insistence that a theory which rests on facts must be testable by facts. "Theorizing, even about politics, is not to be confused with metaphysical speculation in terms of abstractions hopelessly removed from empirical observation and control." Theory must be operational. It must be phrased as hypotheses which can be proved or disproved, as generalizations which may acquire status as more or less valid, more or less reliable. Parts may have to be canceled out, parts negated, without the

whole structure of theory falling to pieces. Furthermore, no essential part must have to rest always on faith, thus contaminating the whole system's validity.

Obviously, showing just how operational the theory of *Power and Society* can be is beyond a single work. The authors indicate that the theory is so by illustrating their propositions profusely from existing general works in political science. In fact, there is a startling amount of relevant material in the literature of the field and a notable contribution of this study is its translations of the fact statements of classicists, who have been relegated to oblivion by most contemporary empiricists, into terms conforming well to the theories of the book. The authors might, with several more years of work, have fitted into their theories the multitude of "minor" articles and monographs written, principally in America, over the past half century. These myriad and scintillating fragments have already given us a political science in America, capable, when properly stated, of far surpassing the political science of the Greeks, Italians, Englishmen, Germans, and Frenchmen.

Ultimately, and this is too much to demand of a single work, the theories of the book should be subjected to the crucible of practice; seminars should be devoted to designing studies, using the theories of this work, and to preparing empirical reports on the results of the studies. Only then will we truly begin to know how deep, how strong, and how useful is the structure of Lasswellian political science.

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