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Behavioral political science: Where is it today

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Abstract

Spectacular rise of science and technology in 20th century allured man to think that human behavior can be controlled and explained in terms of cause and effect. This was a consequence of faith in universal applicability of mathematical and natural science models to the study of various spheres of human society. 'Behavioral revolution' in political science borrowing form it developed a paradigm that believed in studying pattern of political behavior by laying emphasis on technique and quantification. Philosophy also marched in similar direction and also social sciences with it. Winch, Gadamer and Kuhn succeeded in locating limits of such blind faith in rational-scientific explanation of social events or behavior. Finally, post-modernism emerged as a polysemous philosophy that attempted to fuse past and future in an eternal present, aided by technology and mass media. We have now a posthumous modernity legitimating narratives for science-a 'Science' of Dionysian impulse.

Keywords: Behavioral revolution, hyper factualism, value neutrality, Scientificity, positivism

1. Introduction

The period following the Second World War witnessed emergence of various new architectural themes in social sciences; although, its contours were discernible in the interwar period, and also the period preceding it [1]. It was a period, both marked by an urge and enthusiasm to search and formulate new paradigms in various disciplines, and also a period which looked upon any systematic paradigm with suspicion and aversion on the plea that philosophical systems were designed to enslave human beings and were negations of freedom [2]. Thus, in the post second world-war period in Europe, one comes across the development of two different but contradictory formulations leading to diverse ontological, epistemological and axiological universe. The formidable leaps of one school were grounded on embracing scientific methodologies drawn from mathematics and natural sciences and also from other scientifically oriented social sciences like sociology and psychology. It aimed to integrate various disciplines in social sciences and tailor it accordingly to develop models whose soul rested in pure science. This is precisely the quintessential aspect of what is known as the Behavioral Revolution. The other school drew predominantly on the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger which proliferated, a pure contingent view of human existence in the world. The etiology of such a philosophy we find in Dostoyevsky [3] and prior to him in Greek philosophy [4]. Ontological frameworks were not to be construed in the totalizing sense of human life as in Plato and Hegel, but were to be taken horizontally, by 'operationalizing the consciousness in immediacy', in face to face with the world which is explainable not in terms of cause and effect mechanism but through phenomenological reduction [5].

The former attempted to expand instrumental-scientific reason to the realms wherein previously it had little or no acceptability whereas the latter tried to reduce it to a level where it ceased to be a logico-mental phenomenon. These, then were the dominant tendencies of thought leading to the formation of aforesaid intellectual matrix. Euphoria over advancements in the fields of science and technology, and its concomitant sociological manifestations, and a feeling of nausea and unaccommodation in the contemporary world are the two powerful intellectual trends in the European thinking in the 1940s and 1950s, and later philosophical developments that took place within these broader frameworks. These two trends formed 'Junction Concepts' to borrow a term from E.P.

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Thomson from which various other streams of thought marched in diverse directions contributive to formation of multiple philosophical schools. However, equally important were the arguments and advances in Marxist historiography for these not only modified the meaning of the classical writings of Marx but also animated debates, that accelerated the process of unraveling of new dimensions in Marxist thought and provided powerful critiques of philosophy and society in the light of contemporary sociological developments^[6].

2. The Behavioral Revolution

Notwithstanding the debate whether behavioral movement was a revolution or a crude empirical attempt confined to development of techniques and methodologies only^[7], it attempted to change the whole notion of political science as previously and ordinarily understood. As regards the identification of propelling forces behind this movement, various material and intellectual factors converged during the 50s that led to the erection of the behavioral edifice^[8]. Before proceeding to outline the essential components of behavioral movement, it is imperative to distinguish it from 'behaviorism'. Almost all the advocates of the behavioral school have warned against identifying the term with 'behaviorism', a concept developed in the psychology by J.B. Watson (1914) and in whose epistemological framework subjective aspects of human action find no place. Against behaviorism, "modern behavioral sciences eminently concerned not only with the acts of man but also with his cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes."^[9] It "refers not simply to directly or indirectly observable political action but also to those perceptual, motivational, and attitudinal components of behavior which make for man's political identifications, demands and expectations and his systems of political beliefs, values and goals"^[10].

The intellectual origins of behavioral movement in its covert form are traceable in the inter-war period and also in the period preceding the first world war. The scepticism of David Hume, pragmatism of Charles E. Pierce and the instrumentalism of John Dewey are the genetic components of behavioral movement. However, it was the birth and rise of the 'Vienna Circle' whose writings made tremendous and cataclysmic impact on social sciences. Its exposure of the nonsensical character of metaphysics, advocacy of verifiability principle and value-fact dichotomy gave substantial impetus to revolutionize both the central and peripheral tenets in political sciences. The desire to incorporate the philosophy of 'Vienna Circle' was further accelerated with the development of 'Chicago School' in America which adopted empirical and psychological methods to the study of society as a whole. Harold D. Lasswell, Harold Gosnele and Lawrence Lowell were the doyens as well as architects of this school. The impact which this school had on the rise and growth of behavioral movement has been stated by David E. Apter as follows:

"1. It shifted the emphasis away from political ideals and institutions to the examination of individual and group conduct; 2. It favoured a natural science paradigm over a normative one (how people act, as opposed to how they should act); 3. It preferred explanations of behavior derived from theories of learning and motivation other than from models of institutional power; 4. It subdivided behavioral political science into two lines of enquiry; the distribution of

individual attitudes, beliefs, opinions and preferences and models of social learning^[11]."

The study of beliefs, attitudes and opinions, learning and motivations were inspired by psychoanalysis. Human nature, as conceptualized in the traditional philosophical systems underwent a rigorous modification, and Lasswell *et al* were largely influenced by this paradigmatic shift.

3. The Material Conditions

Identification of causative factors behind the rise of behavioral movement reveals that intellectual tendencies per se were quintessential but not totally sufficient to herald this movement. Material conditions as they were developing in the post-1945 period also contributed to a large extent for the growth of the paradigm which the behavioral political scientists aspired to develop and adopt. The rise of computer technology, "rapid rise of national and international air travel," gave great momentum to data gathering, storing and manipulating capacities. Both, time and space were under the control of man. The birth of cold war with its philosophy of 'containment' injected missionary zeal in the world of American academia to search out new contents and methods to explain and predict socio-political change in various countries. Ideological containment carried no less significance than military containment. The word 'State' was replaced by the term 'political system'. While Marx had emphatically predicted the withering away of the State, he 'failed' to realize that the State shall wither theoretically by 'paradigmatic shift' and that the new institution or, the political system which is a set of connected parts would continue through various mechanisms initiated by rule-making authorities.

Such academic activities as would promote status quoist paradigms had generous funding from various foundations^[12] which encouraged political scientists to pull this discipline out of the spheres of 'traditionalism' and 'historicism.' Negatively, such developments in the intellectual area as would lead to the demise of traditional political science and positively, to the construction of models targeted at stabilization of liberal democracies or regimes supported by them, were patronized; and, subsequently new architectural themes were erected and popularized in political science. The "intellectual foundation stones"^[13] of such a paradigm led to a change in the methods of studying political science. The objective of the behavioral theorists was "scientific development of social knowledge by applying the method of empirical research such as devised interviews, survey research, technical methods for measurement and the formalization of analysis in logical and mathematical symbols." Its scope was not confined to the study of the behavior of individual actors alone but also to the study of "small groups and organizations in their internal structure and processes and certain aspects of well defined communities..."^[14] In a nutshell, political systems had multiple parts or sub-structures and every sub-structure had a definite function. Some studies gave importance to structures, others to functions and still others to both.

4. Shift in Emphasis: Post-Behavioralism

Disenchantment with the existing state of behavioral political science in which techniques were being given preference over contents, prompted Easton to warn against what he calls 'hyper factualism'^[15], which characterized

disciplines like sociology and psychology prior to the first world war. Such methods relying exclusively on data gathering lead to crude empiricism and not to the formulation of a general theory. The passion for scientific empirical method and thereby construction of an empirical theory which is "analytic and substantive, general rather than particular and explanatory rather than ethical", should be the essence of the behavioral movement and also its moving spirit, said Easton [16]. Although commentators such as Edmund Ions were of the opinion that the basic driving force behind the rise and growth of behavioral movement was to develop a theory of collectivism [17], a scientific theory which was different from ideology, it was obvious, that with all its pretensions to flagellate the wrongs of behavioralism, its itinerary contained most of the leitmotifs of the movement as it developed initially.

Easton in the year 1968 during his Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association attempted to overcome statistical and physicalist obfuscations with certain 'intellectual foundation stones' for addition to behavioral political science, and this new edition came to be commonly known as 'post-behavioral revolution'. In which sense can this be termed 'revolution' is a matter of controversy among scholars since Easton himself acknowledges it simply "an extension of behavioral research necessary for coping with the unusual problems of the present epoch." The core of the behavioral philosophy such as value neutrality, value-fact dichotomy and its epistemological basis rooted in natural science, and the same reliance upon causal theory of explanation made it nothing more than an extension of the behavioral model.

5. A Critique of Behavioralism and its Later Developments

Behavioralism has been subjected to diverse vitriolic comments by scholars belonging to different schools, but these can be clubbed into two parts, namely those which concentrate on its obsession with techniques and methodology, and secondly those who condemn it from the epistemological point of view. The study of facts alone does not reveal the total structure of knowledge. Such a methodology, it was argued dissolves the subject in the acrobatics of techniques where he loses his identify. Values and facts are different but not distinct phenomena and even scholars like Bertrand Russel, Kelson and Arnold Brecht's attempt to substitute value relativism by scientific value relativism in favour of empiricist liberalism failed to dichotomize the two logically [18]. The essay "The Limitations of Behavioralism" by Mulford Sibley is representative of the major criticisms directed against it. Sibley points towards the following shortcomings in the behavioural approach:

"1. The very selection of the subjects for investigation is shaped by values which are not derivable from the investigation; 2. In the end, the concepts and values which do determine what and how one studies are related to one's judgements of the goals which one identifies with political life and to one's general "life experience"; 3. Once the investigation is launched, there are definite limits to what one can expect from behavioral studies; 4. Behaviorally oriented study will remove one from the stuff of everyday politics and cannot be related to that stuff except by means which would usually be regarded as non-behavioral; and 5. If classification, about policy-making is one objective of the

politician, behavioralism, although destined to play a significant role, is restricted in what it can be expected to do [19]."

Because of its insistence on the dichotomy between facts and values, behaviour and action fall into two separate domains of behaviorists. The former i.e. behavior has its causes in forms of stimulation, unable to furnish with the total picture of human role in a particular situation; consequently, behavioralism has been described as "over-development" of social sciences, representing "intellectual imperialism" and upturning the meaning of experience which if understood properly, is constituted of intuition as one of its basic ingredients and this is what we call action [20]. Quantification, processing and interpretation of human acts leads not only to its partial understanding but also to depersonalization of man so much bemoaned by members belonging to the Frankfurt school.

Till 1967, the term 'Behavioral Revolution' had not been used anywhere in a manner underpinning its nuances. It was in the year 1968 that David Easton in his essay published in International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences talked of 'revolution in political science', a revolution whose occurrence to him was necessitated by 'search of identity by the discipline'. It appears that application of quantitative methods to the study of political phenomena was sufficient to declare it a revolution. The question that he refused to encounter was as to why philosophy under the influence of similar positivism didn't come up with such a claim although efforts in this arena outweighed similar efforts in political science. In fact philosophy carried this tradition for a longer period till 1980 by scientific realists represented by Hacking and Chalmers [21]. Hempel also had declared that a problem, howsoever empirical cannot be, explained, it can only be generalised. In fact, positivist philosophy, an important component of Vienna Circle, continued its efforts to test the efficacy of scientific method through multiple epistemological tools and they were not obdurate to declare their theorizations as revolution. But behavioral political social science was following an isolationist path of theorization, a path of experimentation marked by hubris.

In 1968 when Easton was working on behavioral revolution, Habermas was making vitriolic attacks on scientific ways to study individual and society. Other schools of thought were also contributing significantly to analyse new modes of understanding society. Antonio Gramsci was philosophizing culture as autonomous realm distant from economics and politics and also discussing subalternity to understand power of the powerless. To Gramsci Society did not present a bipolarity of structure and superstructure. In between the two, multiple institutions were operational constitutive of civil society. Equally important was the work of other members of the Frankfurt School in America that was applying new categories to analyse growth of totalitarian regimes, and reconceptualise the intransigence of capitalism to radical modifications. Althuser was studying relationship between individual consciousness and structure, identifying epistemological breaks in Marx. As early as in 1961, Isaiah Berlin wrote:

"So long as rational curiosity exists – a desire for justification and explanation in term of motives and reasons, and not only of causes or functional correlations or statistical possibilities – political theory will not wholly perish from the earth, however many of its rivals, such as sociology, philosophical analysis. Social psychology,

political science, economic jurisprudence, semantics, may claim to have dispelled its imaginary realm ^[22]”

Behavioralism was not a revolution as to throw away the entire foundation of traditional political philosophy and that way it could never succeed. But the question posed by positivism regarding criteria of validity of knowledge continued to haunt future thinkers. Those who believed in the possibility of searching objective universal ground to validate knowledge came to be known as foundationalists and those who believed in the intrinsic capacity of beliefs and attitudes affecting validity of knowledge were known as conventionalists. Among foundationalists two schools developed one that believed in the priority of individual ethics and the other that believed in institutional practices that allowed reason to operationalise itself ethically. Habermas belonged to the second school of foundationalists. If 19th century was marked by such schools of thought as anarchism, socialism conservatism, etc. the second quarter of 20th century and its onward march invited intense debate on various kinds of liberalism. The rise of fascism, Stalinism, two world wars pushed scholars to contemplate aggressively about future of human society. Works of Albert Camus, and Hemingway depicted a world where man was faced with an enigmatic silence of the cosmos. Neither reason nor faith served the purpose that they claimed. The wait for Godot was over. Consequently rationalism was attacked by Karl Popper. Mass society, as it had come to exist, was antithetical to human dignity. There were also advocates of enhanced promotion of personal freedom for appropriate public conduct and action. Mill and Rousseau were recalled again to provide more space for further human action, an action that allowed and guaranteed participation of all.

Amidst these events behavioral political science lost its grandeur which it had arrogated to itself out of euphoria for natural science methodology to study individual behaviour. How could it do so? It could do so because no calibrated effort was made to understand hidden intricacies sometimes revealing, often times not, latent both in man and the universe. Positivism as theory-neutral observation was given a sovereign position. There are hidden structures and mechanism in both man and the universe and methods of natural science are not efficient or sufficient to capture wholly either the present or the future. No words would be more relevant as that of Robert Nisbet in understanding the limits of metaphorical enthusiasm of scientifically oriented philosophers of social truth. Says he:

"... to give new life and impetus to the realities of contemporary western society, it will not be the consequence of methodology much less of computers of mass data gathering and retrieval, or of problem definition however rigorous, or research design however aseptic. It will be the consequence, rather, of intellectual processes which the scientist share with the artist; iconic imagination, aggressive intuition, each given discipline by reason and root by reality. So, it has always been and so it is how in those contemporary intellectual areas of most intense creativity. Foremost is the passion for reality-reality not obstructed by the layers of conventionalisation, but reality, that is direct and unmediated ^[23]."

The question is why behavioral revolution dabbled in the task of dismantling traditional political science. In fact it was a consequence of the project of modernity that believed in achieving an omniscient knowledge of man and

society that will replace the Creator, discussed in traditional philosophy. Its grand project or programme is well illustrated by Huston Smith below:

"First, we shall create life. In a rudimentary way—with the giant molecules, amino acids, and viruses—we have achieved this breakthrough already.

"Second, we shall create minds. At this point some of us are likely to suspect a giant finesse, but no matter: cybernetics, univacs, analogue computers—the analogy between mind and thinking machines is being pressed to the hilt.

"Third, we shall create adjusted individuals via chemistry: tranquilizers and energizers, barbiturates and amphetamines, a complete pharmacopeia to control our moods and feelings.

"Fourth, we shall create the good society via a "behavioral engineering" a program of condition, luminal and subliminal, which through propaganda and hidden persuaders will induce man to behave in ways conducive to the commonweal.

"Fifth, we shall create religious experiences by way of the psychedelics: LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, and their kin.

"Sixth, we shall conquer death; achieve physical immortality by a combination of organ transplants and geriatrics that first arrest the ageing process then roll it back in rejuvenation ^[24]."

It was Aristotle who said, "The Intellect is truer than Science. " As behavioral political science believed only in science, the Intellect as conceived by traditional political science was hibernated. This is how the Revolution became a myth.

Discussion

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by search and application of rigorous mathematical-nomological methods in social science. Empirical value-neutrality was its quintessence. Behavioral political science with its objective of studying actual political behavior followed sociology, psychology and economics in application of natural science/mathematical models. Can we call this a revolution i.e. complete overthrow of traditional political science and subsequent launch of an enduring value-neutral political science? Surprisingly, no explicit answer is available on it even from those who played an active role in establishing it? If Robert Dahl characterised this as a 'mood' or 'orientation'. David Easton addressed it as 'intellectual revolution' on account of its dependence on technique and quantification. To Eulau it was a 'radical orientation' in the study of politics as henceforth any proposition related to political science could either be validated or falsified.

Such scientificity of knowledge posed many questions before scholars? How to differentiate between intentional and unintentional behavior? Secondly, how to draw a line of demarcation between behavior and action? What status is to be ascribed to method? If method is universal where does man stand in it? Can, man be reduced to mathematical entity which Descartes so much desired? All these questions remained unanswered by protagonists of hypothetico-deductive method. In fact, 'perennial philosophy' had designed a vision in which becoming and being were congruent and reciprocative and in which metanoia or intellectual metamorphosis of man was the pivot around which cosmology and sociology evolved but here instead of asceticism we have pure reductionism. Unity lies in being reduced not elevated.

As sovereignty of science and mathematics failed to answer fundamental questions of social life, literature depicted the predicament of the modern man in a world governed by scientific principles. Human effort to search meaning in the world pushed him to Sysphysian irony (Albert Camus). This was found to be a world in which Gregor Samsa was transformed into an enormous vermin while asleep (Franz Kafka). If Satre found impossibility of communication in contemporary society, to T.S. Eliot it was a Wasteland where man is like a 'patient etherised upon the table'.

Such morbidities prompted social scientists to move for a new project and the second step was to search meaning i.e. interpretation of man and his action through understanding of his intentions, motives and the reasons behind these. Hermeneutic-interpretive, phenomenological-existential, linguistic-analytical, critical-theoretical approaches developed in the second half of the 20th century but in the absence of 'theory' i.e. contemplation centred in one's being no meaningful solution could be discovered with reference to human predicament. Marcuse's description of one dimensionality of man and existential alienation were consequences of the birth of 'technological tendencies' in man. That life was a maligned disease and world a mad house was anticipated much earlier by Goethe who standing at the amphitheatre of modernity watched it critically.

The failure of these two mystifying notions of method and meaning pushed to further theorization and now the pivotal concept was that of culture, a culture that didn't mean unfoldment of self but a culture borne from the womb of 'practical wisdom' and not instrumental reason. Works of Michael Foucault in philosophy. Derrida in modern languages. Roland Barthes in Semiotic and Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis help overtly or covertly in formation of a society divided into three categories, namely producers of cultural goods, symbolic goods or products, and consumers of cultural goods. All these three are in one's own home. Symbolic products are received without much human mediation or touch. Alienation continues in cultural goods also. Thus, be it political science or other branches of social science, their future focus is going to be market, a market which under the pretext of serving men will like to function without men. So where will civilization go:

The hope only Of empty men

Their behavior/action of such men is likely to be a major challenge before scholars interested in shaping and saving the future. How to follow it needs penetrative discussion. Will invention of new codes for reshaping information will solve the problem of man? Archaeological knowledge of post-modernism opposed to search for origins. Can there be End without Origin or are both the same? If both are not the same, how can man encounter his essence which Heidegger so much desired?

Conclusion

Various sociological theories attempted to understand relationship between man and society primarily in two ways i.e. realism and nominalism. In the former model man was derived from the society, in the second it was vice-versa. In all other theories derived from these two man remains in the background whether as a member of class or other functional group. Consequently from 1964 onwards there is a call to bring back man in the writings of Homans, Becker

and C Wright Mills [25]. Horkheimer and Adorno found loss of man in the autotelic concept of modern science that exhorted for release of all social science from teleology of any kind in order to satisfy its obsession with causal relations only [26].

How is it that within more than three centuries we have failed to develop a coherent theory of man nature and society, salubrious in responding to our anxieties related to both ourselves and others including nature. The insight to this is provided by Lincoln Barnett [27]:

'In the evolution of scientific thought, one fact has become impressively clear: there is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself. All highroads of the intellect, all byways of theory and conjecture lead ultimately to an abyss that human ingenuity can never span. For man is enchained by the very condition of his being, his finiteness and involvement in nature. The farther he extends his horizons, the more vividly he recognizes the fact that, as the physicist Niels Bohr puts it, "we are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence". Man is thus his own greatest mystery. He does not understand the vast veiled universe into which he has been cast for the reason that he does not understand himself. He comprehends but little of his organic processes and even less of his unique capacity to perceive the world about him, to reason and to dream. Least of all does he understand his noblest and most mysterious faculty: the ability to transcend himself and perceive himself in the act of perception.'

Man's inescapable impasse is that he himself is part of the world he seeks to explore; his body and proud brain are mosaics of the same elemental particles that compose the dark, drifting clouds of interstellar space; he is, in the final analysis, merely an ephemeral conformation of the primordial space-time field. Standing midway between macrocosm and microcosm he finds barriers on every side and can perhaps but marvel, as St. Paul did nineteen hundred years ago, that "the world was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear".'

No discipline in social sciences ever thought of this nor post-modernism will like to think in their direction as subversion into science and politics through concepts of simulation and hyper reality occupies greater space in their thought.

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