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CHAPTER

46 Exile and Re-Entry: Political Theory Yesterday and Tomorrow

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Abstract

This article describes the changes in the conception of political theory. It provides a brief history of the study of political theory and considers the notable works of Robert Dahl, Leo Strauss, and George Sabine. It argues against the claim that political theorists today is too abstracted from the world in which we live and argues in defence of a reading of texts as a practice of political theory that continues as a vibrant method employed by a wide range of practitioners in the field and as one that should continue from this point on.

Keywords: political theory, Robert Dahl, Leo Strauss, George Sabine, political theorists

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1 Yesterday

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In the landmark book *A Preface to Democratic Theory* published in 1956, Robert Dahl takes the “normative” out of theory and replaces it with “empirical.” Carefully parsing Madison's *Federalist Paper* #10, Dahl turns that document primarily into a definitional, empirical, predictive piece—and finds it severely lacking for its failure to offer hypotheses that are testable (Dahl 1956, 27). Instead, Madison's supposed hypotheses are dependent on ambiguous phrases such as “the tyranny of the majority” and even “tyranny” itself. “[A]s political science rather than as ideology the Madisonian system is clearly inadequate,” Dahl concludes. The explanation of Madison's logical and empirical deficiencies, according to Dahl, lies in Madison's effort to reconcile the conflicting goals of equal rights with the guarantees of liberties for minorities—and privileged minorities at that (Dahl 1956, 31). The ambition of Dahl's book is to replace the ambiguous definitions with precise ones and to offer testable hypotheses that will transform the normative theory of Madison into a theory amenable to the emerging demands of an empirical political science.

In order to accomplish this goal, Dahl must eliminate the normative: "Why are political equality and popular sovereignty desirable? To undertake an exhaustive inquiry into these ethical questions, which demands some theory about the validation of ethical propositions, is beyond my purposes here," he admits (Dahl 1956, 45). The problem of justifying such claims has arisen especially in modern times. "Historically the case for political equality and popular sovereignty has usually been deduced from beliefs in natural rights. But the assumptions that made the idea of natural rights intellectually defensible have tended to dissolve in modern times." The defense of natural rights is dismissed as irrelevant for his endeavor because "such an argument inevitably involves a variety of assumptions that at best are difficult and at worst impossible to prove to the satisfaction of anyone of positivist or skeptical predispositions," presumably one such as himself (Dahl 1956, 45).

Not only do we lack the wherewithal to convince the skeptic of natural rights, but Madison, by articulating preferred political structures, expressed preferences that depend on predictions about the behaviors of a people within the political regime. And yet, Dahl argues, Madison has not given us the tools to test those predictions. All he has done is give us a logical system which "tells us nothing about the real world," leaving us unable to assess whether we would indeed prefer a populist to a Madisonian democracy "in the real world" (Dahl 1956, 47). This failure to address the "real world" is a concern that repeatedly motivates Dahl throughout his *Preface*. He himself explores an alternative to Madisonian democracy with a study of the theory of populist democracy, but concludes: "[T]he theory of populist democracy is not an empirical system. It consists only of logical relations among ethical postulates. It tells us nothing about the real world. From it we can predict no behavior whatsoever" (Dahl 1956, 51). The question to address is instead whether some specific proposal would lead or not lead to some specific goal without excessive cost to other goals. And in order to answer that question, "one must go outside the theory of populist democracy to empirical political science" (Dahl 1956, 52) and escape from "the counsel of perfection" and the "operationally meaningless" (Dahl 1956, 57).

With this call for a turn to the "operationally meaningful," political theory as it had previously been practiced, as the study of canonical texts of political thought, was exiled to the undistinguished category of "intellectual history" or tossed into the bin of irrelevancy. It became the unwanted and awkward family member in departments of political science, tolerated, perhaps because of sentiment, but not to be taken too seriously. Plato and Aristotle may still have surfaced on occasion, but they were innocents in a world that knew better than to accept political normativity when statistical analyses might provide the "empirical," "real world," "operationally meaningful" answers. Hobbes may have endured, he who worshipped at the altar of Galileo and geometry. And Machiavelli. He could be translated into the scientist who looked at men as they are and not as they ought to be. Machiavelli's advice to princes could be reduced to "maxims" and with his abandonment of the "oughts," he could be assimilated to a practice that was scientific. Yet, the hierarchy was clear. The present trumped the past and political science with the goal of predictions looked to the future.

And then the explosions of the 1960s and 1970s occurred, both within the academy and in the world beyond, unsettling the satisfaction with the new model of political and democratic theory, bringing the practice of political theory back into the ken of political science. It returned, though, in a quite different form than, for example, the simple effort to retell the slightly differing stories of the social contract according to Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau that had marked the earlier attention to the canonical authors.

1.1 Inside

p. 847 Within the academy, Leo Strauss and his followers did not accept politely the appropriation of political science by the empiricists and the operationally minded such as Dahl. In a dense book entitled *Essays on the Scientific Study of* ↪ *Politics* edited by Herbert Storing and appearing in 1962, vituperative language flooded the discourse of the students of Strauss who took on one sub-field of political science after another in an effort to demonstrate the shallowness of what political science had become. The volume concluded with an (in)famous salvo from Strauss himself and the battle lines between the two parts of the discipline were firmly drawn. Strauss, in his “Epilogue,” had defended the “old political science” against the new political science. The new political science studied the “sub-political” in an effort to find what was “susceptible of being analyzed.” The concern with the observable “sub-political” came at the expense, however, of “genuine wholes” such as the common good. Thus, the new practitioners dominating the discipline, for instance, had chosen to replace the public interest with the interest group (Strauss 1962, 322–3). But the greatest insult to the new political science came at the very end of his essay when Strauss wrote: “Only a great fool would call the new political science diabolical: it has no attributes peculiar to fallen angels.... Nor is it Neronian. Nevertheless one may say of it that it fiddles while Rome burns. It is excused by two facts: it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns” (Strauss 1962, 327).

The gauntlet had been thrown down by Strauss, but the challenge was never officially accepted by the profession of political science. It was instead, curiously, political theorists (not the operationally minded empiricists themselves) who picked up the gauntlet and came to the defense of political science. Gentleness had not been a treasured virtue in the attack on the new political science, nor was it practiced by those theorists who responded in kind to the book of essays with an extensive book review in the March 1963 *American Political Science Review*. While similarly critical of the “political science,” which was exiling political theory from its central perch in the study of politics, John Schaar and Sheldon Wolin attacked the set of essays in the Storing volume for its Manichean view of the world. “So many are the charges, and so grave,” they write about the essays in the Storing volume, “that the new scientists take on a stature of near-satanic grandeur: all that is lacking is a Milton to immortalize it” (Schaar and Wolin 1963, 127). More seriously, Schaar and Wolin attack the attackers of the new political science for basing at least some of their criticisms of the new political science on the atheism of the new approach to politics. The introduction of religion into the debates about the practices of the new political science threatened, they argued, the world of political philosophy; the language of orthodoxy undermined the legitimacy of their arguments and made them more threatening ↪ than the discipline they were criticizing. Their efforts would feed, Schaar and Wolin worried, an intellectual fervor that would allow for “teachers who believe that scholarly scruples may be suspended when combating evil.” The tone of the Storing volume, they claimed, was such that it would undermine the detachment necessary for “serious thinkers” in “troubling” times (Schaar and Wolin 1963, 150).

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The book and the review created a schism among political theorists who were left to squabble among themselves in their isolation from the discipline at large and to create their own Manichean divisions between Straussians and non-Straussians. Meanwhile, the discipline at large began a practice of benign neglect for their increasingly marginal sub-field, ignoring both the accusations that had been made against them and the proffered defense. The early practitioners of the behavioral movement may have written books on political theory and on the canonical authors with titles such as *History of Sovereignty since Rousseau* ¹ at the same time that they encouraged their colleagues and students to collect the statistical data that would provide the “numbers and measurements ... related to the significant hypotheses and patterns.”² Yet, the incursion of positivism into the practice of a political science eager to provide the data for political and social reform exacerbated the schism that left political theory a poor cousin in the discipline. Political theory was denigrated and shunted aside for the glory of the new methods of analysis, ones that opened up

new vistas of politics unstudied and even inaccessible before—public opinion, socialization, voting patterns.

p. 849 Although the political scientists at the dawn of the behavioral movement, such as Charles Merriam, may have looked to Aristotle as a proto-social scientist, “scour[ing] all of the countries of the world for political information to be placed at his disposal” (quoted in Karl 1974, 118), and some residual attachments may have kept Plato and Rousseau within the ken of political scientists, they paled in importance in a field that had the new quantitative ↵ techniques ready at hand to investigate the actual practice of political activities. Plato's *Republic* offers the parable of the boat where the philosopher stands at the stern of the boat gazing at the stars while the politicians vie with one another for control of the boat. The political theorist was treated like the star-gazer on Socrates' boat, of little immediate help to captain or to the sailors, worried about distant inaccessible places rather than the boat on which he or she was sailing. And mostly the stars at which the theorist gazed were the books of the great theorists of the past, texts that had long outlived their usefulness. Although the rhetoric of fiddling while Rome burned had been Strauss' way of attacking the social scientist of the 1950s and 1960s, the insult was regularly reversed and turned against the political theorists enamored of an intellectual history that had little to say to the challenges emerging in the contemporary world.

I certainly do not want to reject this study of the great texts of political theory and side with the political scientists who were so eager to cast the study of such works out of their disciplinary boundaries and, as my conclusion will emphasize, I believe political theorists have put aside too readily the practice of reading the great texts with sufficient care in order to study them as the expression of the historical contexts in which they were written,³ but during the period of the 1950s and 1960s the study of these texts (with obvious significant exceptions) did focus on reporting what was said and “getting it right.” George Sabine at that time ruled the field of political theory with his *History of Political Theory*. His 1937 volume reached the fourth revised edition in 1973. The preface to the first edition explains his agenda with the affirmation that “political theories are themselves part of politics ... produced as a normal part of the social *milieu* in which politics itself has its being” (Sabine 1937, vii). His textbook style, he tells us, builds on the presupposition that “political theory can hardly be said to be true. It contains among its elements certain judgments of fact or estimates of probability, which time proves perhaps to be objectively right or wrong ... it includes valuations and predilections, personal or collective, which distort the perception of fact, the estimate of probability” (Sabine 1937, vii). Such an understanding of the task of a history of political theory fit comfortably into the emerging vision of the discipline's direction and if one had to study political theory as a traditional part of the discipline this would be the acceptable approach.⁴ ↵ Political theory was simply the story of what *men* in the past had thought about politics—and what they thought was largely wrong or responsible for the misguided politics of the contemporary Western world.

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Wolin's *Politics and Vision* came out in 1960 as a sort of replacement for Sabine's standard recordings of past political thought, but never did manage to replace it.⁵ Indeed, the revised edition of Wolin's history has only just appeared in 2004 under a university press imprint, Princeton, not the original trade publisher aiming for the large classroom adoption of the original version. Wolin offered the original edition of the book on “a belief that [the historical approach] represents the best method for understanding the preoccupations of political philosophy and its character as an intellectual enterprise [and] ... that an historical perspective is more effective in exposing the nature of our present predicaments; if it is not the source of political wisdom, it is at least the precondition” (Wolin 1960, v).⁶ The 1950s and the 1960s in America saw the marginalization of political theory and only those scholars who explicated the arguments of the classical authors as supplements to the new science of politics like Sabine managed to flourish in its midst—or at least sell books. Strauss' essay and the entire volume in which it was included had been a shrill and readily dismissed response to that exclusion. Political ↵ theorists taking seriously the texts of those political theorists who

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had written in the past, who turned to them for engagement with the normative questions they raised, worked in isolation, exiles from the discipline that had itself originated in the study of the canonical texts.⁷

1.2 Outside

Events outside the academy, however, did not allow for a long period of benign neglect towards the theorists as the useless star-gazers only looking backwards to the greats of the past. Nor did those events allow for the self-destruction of the sub-field of political theory either through internecine fighting or through co-optation by a discipline that wanted to see “theories of politics themselves” as no more than (in Sabine's words) “part of politics” (1937, vii). The Vietnam War shook the nation in many ways and raised for students, academics, and the wider population a host of questions about legitimate political actions, about political obligation, about the justice of a war against a people seeking self-determination. The civil rights movement likewise demanded the questioning of the legitimacy of a political system that could pass laws that violated the principles of equality and humanity, a regime that enforced what were perceived as “unjust laws.” The women's movement questioned the identification of politics with the masculine, questioned the demarcation between public and private, questioned the unspoken sources of oppression that were suddenly being recognized.

What were the grounds of civil disobedience or resistance? What was the source of obligation—and to whom and what was one obliged? And what was justice anyway? Such questions were manifestly not operational. The glorious new empirical and statistical techniques developed in the effort to study politics as it was practiced “in the real world” would not help us know which practices and which laws were just, when disobedience was legitimate. Political science with its abstraction from the normative in the interest of gaining precise knowledge unaffected by philosophical and moral questions was not the resource to which one could turn when these questions suddenly crashed down upon us.

p. 852 Now it became clearer again how political theory—even a political theory that engaged with ancient texts like Plato's *Crito*, or Sophocles' *Antigone*, or Thucydides' *History*, or Hobbes' *Leviathan*—responded to the need to assess our roles in a world of turmoil. Aristotle and Rousseau were there to remind us that our humanity drew sustenance from political participation. On another level, Nietzsche was enlightening us about the challenges and demands of political judgment in a new world without God. The feminist movement and consciousness raising posed challenges to the narrow fields of academic study that unconsciously defined politics as masculine and to the academy's exclusionary policies. The central books of Plato's *Republic* that imagined gender equality in the public world of political power took on a new resonance and John Stuart Mill, it was recalled, was the author not only of *On Liberty*, but also of *On the Subjection of Women*. The demands for the broader wisdom to be gleaned from these texts resurfaced amid the worry about the limits and effects of a “pure science” that aimed at “value-neutrality.”

The normative texts so unceremoniously ignored and sometimes banished a decade and a half earlier reappeared and while the study of political theory may not have returned to its place at the center of the discipline, the doorways seemed to open again. While the exiles may not exactly have enjoyed a triumphal return, at least they were acknowledged and no one could simply dismiss with the Dahl of 1956 the questions of political theory as operationally meaningless—not even Dahl himself. Dahl in 1970, responding to the events outside the academy, acknowledged the “demand for greater democracy,” remarking that “the ideas behind this demand assert that power can be legitimate—and be considered an acceptable authority—only if it issues from fully democratic processes. By so insisting, these views compel us to reconsider the foundations of authority” (Dahl 1970, 7). Non-operationalizable concepts now demand the attention of all. No one could ignore the normative implications of one's methods, of the topics which one might choose to study, or even the sources of the funding for those studies and how such sources might influence one's findings.

1.3 Inside and Outside

p. 853 Although Leo Strauss had hurled the notorious attack against the new political science, the essay in which that attack appeared was largely an isolated adventure in his large corpus of books and articles, most of which ↪ offered close textual analyses of classical works of political theory broadly conceived.⁸ His subsequent writings did not center on the debates with the discipline within which he was institutionally embedded nor did he let the reaction to his brief engagement in this controversy dominate his intellectual energies. There were other far more pressing issues on his agenda, ones that had arisen from his own experiences not with the range of political scientists at the institutions at which he taught, but with the world-shattering traumas of mid-century Europe. He, along with Hannah Arendt and Judith Shklar, constitute what I would consider the trio of “greats” for my generation of political theorists who were trained in the mid-1960s. (My own “east coast” (Yale) training means that Sheldon Wolin—so important to those who studied at Berkeley in the 1960s—did not come onto my own radar screen until much later and initially as the author of the book review discussed above.) Apart from Strauss' epilogue, these authors largely chose *not* to embroil themselves in the disciplinary debates about the practice of political science, new or old, but sought to address the causes of the traumas and the anguish brought forth by the emergence of fascism that each of them had experienced in personal ways. They questioned the positivism of the discipline that claimed for itself the moniker of “scientific” and they did so from their background in continental philosophy, for Arendt and Strauss, especially from the perspective of the phenomenological thought that they had imbibed in their university educations in Germany.

p. 854 Their critiques were offered in the context of what they had experienced in the political worlds from which they came and with a view towards how the positivism of American political science could be understood as an intellectual parent to the horrors they themselves had observed. Each had fled the Holocaust of the Second World War and each had experienced the political atmosphere that had engendered the massive upheavals of that political and social crisis. The issues that they addressed in trying to understand those conflagrations dominated any minor disciplinary debates, except insofar as the discipline's practices could be understood as potentially complicit in the failure to resist the forces of totalitarianism. When Arendt responded to the reliance on statistics, her concerns arose from statistics' capacity to reduce the individual to a unit without individuality, a reduction that similarly characterized the effects of totalitarianism on each discrete human being. ↪ In Strauss' condemnation of political science's reduction of politics to the “sub-political” in his essay, there was the worry about the loss of a conception of the “good” of the “whole,” the loss of a standard against which the actions of a regime could be judged, the loss of our ability to identify the profound evil of the regimes that fostered fascism. By looking at the sub-political, we would no longer recognize Machiavelli as the teacher of evil (Strauss 1958), we would no longer recognize Hitler as a monster. Shklar in her defense of liberalism manifested the fear that the very principles of liberalism could turn into the dogmatism of totalitarianism and offered her version of a liberalism that might serve as the antidote to that haunting potential.

The writings of this trio and their engagement with the texts of political theory demonstrated an engagement with the “real world” that had drawn the early Dahl away from the normative political theory of the discipline. Theirs had been a “real world” that had violated all principles of humanity and nobility. In their assessment, it was not they who were the star-gazers. It was the empiricists, ignoring the world in which they lived in their efforts to reduce that world to the operational, to the object of statistical analyses. The challenge this trio confronted forced them to turn to the great texts of political theory. Looking for the sources of political chaos in the ways in which we think about politics, they found in those texts the resources they saw as necessary to prevent future conflagrations. The devastated world from which they came gave birth to the richness of their thought. It was a richness, however, that blended experience and the distance from experience that engagement with the classical texts allowed. Strauss without Plato and

Aristotle, Shklar without Rousseau and Montaigne, Arendt without St Augustine and Kant are difficult to imagine.

p. 855 The last thing one wants is to have to experience and endure the catastrophes of the mid-twentieth century again, although each generation has its own crises. For the twenty-first century, perhaps, it will be the consequences of the waning of sovereignty and the new forms of tyranny that such developments allow or genocides born of apathy. But whatever the new crises may be, the lesson learned from this trio is the passion they brought to their theorizing about politics, a passion born of the massive political challenges they confronted. Their theoretical contributions—as varied as they most certainly are—emerge from their constructive engagement with the texts of political theory. Each reads the political theorists of the past in profoundly different ways, but they do not do so as Sabine did, simply to know what was said, written, thought in the past. They do so to learn from ↪ these works as teachers of questions, perspectives, truths that we tend forget in the immediacy of our particular political moments. The trio of theorists in their engagements with the texts did not retreat into the ivory tower covered with the proverbial ivy, although that may have been precisely where they spent much of their American lives. Those towers and walls and the texts they confronted in those sanctums gave them the resources to address the enormity of what they themselves had experienced in the “real world”—not to hide from it. The texts—the stars at which they gazed—enabled them to speak to us across time and space about the immediate burdens placed on us by our political worlds.

2 Tomorrow

Self-flagellation among political theorists is an all too common practice today. We hear that political theorists are too abstracted from the world in which they live (Smith 2004; Isaac 1995;⁹ Gunnell 2000). I reject this claim. Looking back to the work and achievements of Strauss, Arendt, and Shklar, I want to defend a reading of texts as a practice of political theory that—despite all the questions floating over from literary circles concerning the status of “a text”—continues as a vibrant method employed by a wide range of practitioners in the field and as one that should continue “tomorrow.” There has certainly been a much needed explosion in what has come to be considered a legitimate text worthy of study in the moves to expand the canon not only from the limited boundaries of white European males but from the genre limits to which a Sabine or Ebenstein (1951; see footnote 4) might constrain it (see Saxonhouse 1993).

p. 856 Rogers Smith in a recent essay suggests that there may be value in asking experts on assorted canonical authors to help us “think about how persons with the assumptions and normative commitments of those authors might perceive and appraise contemporary issues.” He imagines a return to Adam Smith for insights into how someone thinking along the lines of A. Smith ↪ might assess the issues of campaign reform, but warns that such efforts require that the political theorist know Adam Smith's thought thoroughly as well as be “really informed about the empirical realities and current debates on campaign finance reform” (R. Smith 2004, 84). Such recourse to the canonical authors could, I fear, lead to assorted humorous results. Would it be helpful to think about what someone with Plato's predilections might say about stem cell research or with Thucydides' perspective about the American invasion of Iraq? Not really. Worst would be the flattening of the texts to be basically just a “perspective” or way of looking at problems, rather than the resources with which we come to address the profound challenges of modern society.

I would, in contrast, argue that grappling with Plato's theory of knowledge might enable us to discuss stem cell research with a full awareness of the normative issues that lie behind the daunting problems posed by that new line of research. Careful study of the role of the Platonic forms might enable us to understand what is involved in identifying the category of “human.” This is far more serious than just using Plato to give us a “perspective.” Or Plato's *Gorgias* forces upon a reader the need to think about the challenging issues of

technological responsibility and the consequences of the expansion of skills without a normative framework within which to assess their impact. Or, Thucydides' presentation of the causes and consequences of war forces upon us a normative engagement with acts of aggression and restraint, of the self-destructive consequences of efforts at conquering others. Thucydides wrote a work that he claimed was to be "a possession forever," not a work that would offer a "perspective." His *History* is the possession he imagined and our challenge and opportunity lies in recognizing in it the resources to understand and evaluate the activities of states today.

p. 857 The classic texts now to be understood in the broadest sense, from the plays of Aeschylus and Shakespeare to the novels of Austen and Forster to the poems of Whitman and Elliot, enable us to address our own experiences of the "real world." The texts give us the tools to analyze and reflect on that world.¹⁰ They need not remove us or isolate us from it as shown by Shklar, ↵ Strauss, and Arendt, but they will if we study them as the mere products of the times in which they were written, as a "part of politics," as offering only "perspectives." The early Dahl in his fear of the unoperationalizable normative statements wanted to replace the concerns of worth and value with the certainties of predictions. But the exclusion of the normative and the texts that guide us in the pursuit of that understanding of worth keeps us mired in a world that we cannot understand, however much we can predict. And the failure to understand portends the failure to address the threats that my trio warn us about. When the close readings of texts just repeat the same, quite general, lessons for contemporary politics over and over leading to "repetitive conclusions" (Smith 2004, 80), they do not serve that goal. But that some practitioners of the art fail to achieve the standards of a Strauss or a Shklar should not surprise us nor damn the process. It should only point to how high the standard is for those of us who want more from the practice of political science than accurate predictions. Each member of my trio in his or her distinctive way employed very different resources from the body of political theorizing, but this did not mean that their fundamental agendas of preventing the grossest crimes against humanity from recurring differed. Nor need—or indeed should—ours.

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Notes

- * The field of political theory is so vast and the current expansion draws on such a wide range of disciplines outside political science that any comprehensive account is impossible. The following is an effort to think about the form of political theory that attends in some fashion to “texts” as the resource from which to build. There is a multitude of other ways of approaching the topic of political theory that I do not address below. One of the issues the world of “political theory tomorrow” will need to confront is that of the “separate tables” that Gabriel Almond applied to the political science profession at large (1988). One question (among many) I do not address below is whether that conversation between the different orientations will ever begin again.
- 1 Charles Merriam is often seen as the founder of behavioralism. His doctoral thesis was *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* (1900) and his first book was *A History of American Political Theories* (1920), and he left such work only under the pressure of his mentor William A. Dunning to turn his attention to comparative constitutional law. Merriam had wanted to “do further studies in political theory, to become, as he had implied, the first American Tocqueville or Bryce” (Karl 1974, 46–8).
- 2 Merriam (1926, 7). In this APSA Presidential Address Merriam also comments, in his remarks on the “striking advances in research during the last twenty-one years [since APSA's founding in 1903],” noting in particular: “Political theory has been embellished by the scholarly treatises of our distinguished presidents, Dunning, Willoughby, Garner and many other fields, both historical and analytical” (Merriam 1926, 1–2).
- 3 I offer a critique of the so-called “Cambridge” School in Saxonhouse (1993).
- 4 A startling moment occurred while teaching a small graduate course in 2002: A casual reference to Sabine evoked numerous nods around the seminar table. Since I had assumed that Sabine's *History* had been buried long ago, I expressed my surprise at the wide familiarity with his work among the students in the class. The explanation lay in the number of foreign students in the class: One each from Japan, India, Argentina, and Finland, and two from Turkey. Their

teachers, having studied in US graduate schools in the 1960s and 1970s, had brought Sabine back to their respective countries.

- 5 Ebenstein of Princeton offered a text entitled *Great Political Thinkers* in 1951 which preferred the technique of including selections from the original sources rather than “commentary and critical analysis,” but he presented these selections as “providing aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment as well as intellectual challenge and stimulation” (Ebenstein 1951, ix.) This modest claim posed no threat to the political science profession and by 1960 when Wolin’s book appeared, there had already been three editions of Ebenstein’s work—no doubt to give aesthetic relief to the political scientists staring at their numbers. Much later, in 1978, the two volumes of Skinner’s *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* appeared, harking back to Sabine (probably not consciously) but with the stated agenda of “offer[ing] an outline account of the principal texts of late medieval and early modern political thought.” Skinner then lists the authors he will treat. He adds to this goal the hope of “exemplify[ing] a particular way of approaching the study and interpretation of historical texts,” but the primary goal is to offer “a more realistic picture of how political thinking in all its various forms was in fact conducted in earlier periods” and “to give us a history of political theory with a genuinely historical character” (1978, ix–xi).
- 6 Wolin is neither replicating the approach of Sabine nor foreshadowing the so-called Cambridge School and the focus on contextual intellectual history as the grounds for understanding the texts. Wolin’s historical approach entails chronology, but it is a chronology that allows for exploring the depth of analysis that each author studied offers. The ideas are the stars of his work and the insights they give surface as response to and not as caused by their own milieus. As he says, they are the preconditions of wisdom, if not wisdom itself. Such language is unimaginable in Sabine or in Skinner’s two-volume work.
- 7 Gunnell (1979, ch. 1) makes this point and discusses in greater detail some of the claims made in the above section.
- 8 Strauss, of course, vastly expanded the content of the “canon” and studied numerous authors who would never have appeared in Sabine or Ebenstein or even Wolin: Aristophanes, Xenophon, the Arabic and Jewish writers of the Middle Ages. See, for example, Strauss (1948, 1952, 1966, 1995).
- 9 The reference here includes the entire symposium with Jeffrey Isaac’s initial essay and the responses by William Connolly, Kirstie McClure, Elizabeth Kiss, Michael Gillespie, and Seyla Benhabib in the pages immediately following Isaac’s essay.
- 10 The expansion of the texts, for sure, has had a salutary effect on the field, bringing in a whole range of valuable resources that had been previously excluded by the narrow definitions of politics. Here, most recently, one can think of the success of the Politics and Literature Organized Section of the American Political Science Association or of the multi-volume project of Jewish Political Thought being shepherded by Michael Walzer and to be published by Yale. But the expansion of works has also led to a somewhat worrisome democratization of the field where *all* texts become worthy and we find thrilling best-sellers and grade B date movies sitting on the syllabi next to Plato and Hobbes. Some best-sellers deserve the critical attention of our field as do some movies (I personally wish every student were required to watch *Breaker Morant* from 1979), but separating out those texts that can become the resources from which we can build our ability to address with intelligence and surety potential political crises is a serious challenge. The choices need to be made so that we do not ignore the potentially helpful works previously unexplored from the perspective of political theory. Yet, having expanded the sphere, we are left with the difficulty of limiting it as well, of establishing an Aristotelian capacity for judgment that can guide us in identifying the criteria necessary to make the choices about which texts in the broadest sense of the word become part of the discourse as aids in our confrontations with the “real world.” Such judgments will certainly confront the next generation of political theorists who will take the model of political theorizing offered by my trio seriously.