WHAT IS "POLITICS"

GIOVANNI SARTORI
Università di Firenze

THE CONCEPT "POLITICAL SCIENCE" derives its meaning from the interplay of two variables: (1) the state of the organization of knowledge, and (2) the degree of structural differentiation within the framework of human collectivities.

With respect to the first variable, the notion of science makes little sense—or at least no precise sense—unless there exist division and specialization in the cognitive endeavor. Thus, it does not make much sense to speak of political science as long as "science" is indistinguishable from philosophy—i.e., as long as any and all *scire* defines itself as love of wisdom. The notion of science, therefore, achieves precision when scientific knowledge has been weaned from alma mater, from philosophical knowledge. Of course, science is also different from what is commonly called opinion, theory, doctrine, and ideology. But the first and most fundamental distinction is that between science and philosophy.

EDITORS' NOTE: This is part one of a two-part article. The second part will appear in a forthcoming issue of Political Theory. *This article has been reviewed by the author and translated by Professor O. Ragusa of Columbia University. It appears as a chapter of Volume 6 of the* History of Political, Economic and Social Ideas *edited by Luigi Firpo, Torino, UTET, 1972-1973.*

Political Theory, Vol. 1 No. 1, February 1973, ©1973 Sage Publications, Inc.

With respect to the second variable, the notion of politics applies to everything, and therefore to nothing in particular, as long as the realms of ethics, economics, politics, and society remain united and are not embodied in structural differentiations—that is, in structures and institutions which can be qualified as political in that they are different from those which are declared economic, religious, or social. The most difficult knot to unravel is that between the sphere of politics and the sphere of society. But the knots are many, beginning with the overlapping between the nomenclature that has its roots in Greek—the words derived from *polis*—and the nomenclature that stems from Latin.

Let us say, then, that the notion of political science varies according to what is meant by science and what is meant by politics. Thus, it is quite futile to speak about a "perennial" political science which is born with Aristotle, reborn with Machiavelli, and which matured into an autonomous discipline in the nineteenth century. Before risking a history of political science *as such*, there must be a science which is "science," and there must be a significant encounter between the idea of science and the idea of politics. Until that moment, a history of political science resolves itself, or divides itself, into a bicephalous history of the concept of science on the one hand, and of the concept of politics on the other.

This separation is necessary not only because science and politics are both variables of great variance, but also because their variations have occurred at different times and at a different speed. We are confronted, therefore, by varying combinations of different notions of science and politics. The stages or periods of political science will be all the more numerous as one pushes back the date of birth of this discipline. But even a short hostory, confined, for example, to one century, would have to be periodicized. The age of Mosca, Pareto, and Michels is for us already a far-off era. Similarly, the political science of the 1940s appears outdated when compared with that of the 1960s.

I shall *not* attempt to date the birth of the "first" political science. Rather, I will try to single out the elements of the manifold, plausible, "significant encounters" that have taken place between those methods of observing politics which can be qualified as scientific on the one hand, and, on the other, a series of characterizations of the idea of politics.[1] This part of the article deals with the latter.

THE NAME AND THE IDEA

It is customary today to make a distinction between the political and

the social or between state and society. These are, however, distinctions and contrasts which take shape in their present-day sense only in the nineteenth century. We often hear that, while in Greek thought the political encompasses the social, modern man is inclined to invert this relationship and to have the social subsume the political. But this statement contains at least three errors. First: there was no separation of the sort in Greek thought. Second: things social and "the society" are not equivalent. Third: our noun politics does not have the meaning of the Greek *politiké,* just as our political man is miles apart from Aristotle's "political animal."

If for Aristotle man was a *zoon politikón,* the subtlety that often escapes us is that this was a definition of man, not of politics. It is only because man lives in the polis and, conversely, because the polis lives in him, that he is able to realize his full human potential. Thus Aristotle's political animal expressed the Greek conception of life,[2] a conception that saw the polis as the constitutive unit and the supreme achievement of existence. Therefore, political life and the things political were not perceived by the Greeks as a part or a single aspect of life; they were its essence and totality. Conversely, the nonpolitical man was a deficient, defective being, an *ídion* (the original meaning of our word idiot). And this inadequacy stemmed precisely from his having lost—or from his never having acquired—a full symbiosis with his polis. In short, a nonpolitical man was less-than-a-man, an inferior being.

Without delving into the various implications of the Greek conception of man, what needs underscoring is that the political animal, the *polítes,* was indistinguishable from the social animal, from that being whom we call societal or sociable. Political life—living *in* and *for* the polis—was at one and the same time collective life or, more intensely, life in *koinonía,* in communion and "community." Hence, it is inaccurate to say that Aristotle thought of the social as being included within the political. The two terms were for him one and the same: neither was contained within the other, because political meant both. In fact, the word social is not Greek, but Latin, and was interpolated into Aristotle by his medieval translators and commentators.

It was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who authoritatively translated zoon politikón as "political and social animal," observing that "it is the very nature of man to live in a society of many."[3] But the matter is not as simple as that. Thus Egidius of Rome (circa 1285) translated Aristotle as saying that man is a *politicum animal et civile.*[4] At first sight, it might appear as if Thomas were clarifying Aristotle's notion, while Egidius was

simply being redundant—after all, politicum is a Greek calque for civile. However, the appearance of the two terms social and civil merits further commentary, and it would show that both Thomas and Egidius were adding to Aristotle.

It is clear that when the Greeks said polítes, the Romans said *civil.* It is just as clear that polis is translated into Latin as *civitas.* But the Romans were absorbing Greek culture at a time when their city had long since surpassed the dimensions that permitted a "political" life as understood by the Greeks. Consequently the Roman civitas is related to the Greek polis, as a diluted body politic—and this in two respects. First, the civitas is visualized as a *civilis societas,* thereby taking on a more elastic meaning which broadens its boundaries; and, second, the civitas acquires a juridical organization. The civilis societas thus becomes, in turn, equivalent to a *juris societas,* which permits the Romans to substitute the "juridical" for the "political." Cicero (106-43 B.C.) already maintained that the civitas was not just a random association of men, but that association which was founded upon a consensus concerning the law.[5] Already in Cicero's time we are near, therefore, to a civitas in which there is almost nothing of "political" in the Greek sense of the word. The juris societas is to the polis as a condition of depolitization would be to a condition of politization. The cycle is completed with Seneca. For Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.), and for the Stoic conception of the world in general, man is no longer a political animal but, on the contrary, a *sociale animale.*[6] Here we reach the antithesis of the Aristotelian conception, because the social animal of Seneca and of the Stoics is a man who has lost the polis, who withdraws from it, and who adapts himself for living—negatively more than positively—in a cosmopolis.

The ancient world concludes its cycle bequeathing to posterity not only the image of a political animal, but also the image of a social animal. Yet these two representations in no way foreshadow the disjunction between the political and the social spheres which characterize our time. The first difference is that the sociale animal does not coexist alongside the politicum animal. The two terms do not point to two facets of the same man, but to two anthropological views which are mutually exclusive and replace one another. The second difference—and the element that needs particular emphasis—is that in the discourse developed thus far politics and politization have never been perceived vertically—i.e., in an altimetric projection which associates the idea of politics with the idea of power, of command, and, in the final analysis, with a state superimposed upon society.

The point is that the vertical or hierarchic problem is largely extraneous to the discussion based on Greek nomenclature—polis, polítes, politikós, politiké, and politéia—to its Latin translation and to its medieval development. The Greek title of what we know as *The Republic* of Plato was *Politéia*—an exact translation for the world which thought in Latin, since *res publica* (republic) meant that which is public—i.e., "a common thing" and affair of the community. Res publica, Cicero noted, was *res populi*[7]—i.e., a thing of the people. Likewise, Aristotle's argument on the good city (often referred to, erroneously, as the optimal "constitution") was calculatedly rendered by its first medieval translators as *de política optima,* and successively as *de optima republica,* all terms which are connected to a horizontal discourse. This horizontal idea goes into the English common weal and commonwealth, and is rendered today by the notion of common good, public good, and general interest. For this very reason, however, we misunderstand Plato's title, just as we misunderstand the use of res publica in the entire literature from the Romans to Bodin (whose *Six Livres de la République* appeared in 1576). Having become for us a form of state (a form opposed to monarchy), our republic is placed in that vertical dimension which was absent in the ideas of politéia, res publica, and common weal.

This does not mean that we must wait until Machiavelli or Bodin to discover what I have called the vertical dimension—that is, the hierarchical structuring—a sub- and superordering—of associative life. It is quite clear that Plato did imply a verticality. But his ideal was sophocracy: the power of wisdom, not the power of power. And this was not the element received and transmitted by the Aristotelian tradition.[8] On the other hand, if Machiavelli is the first to use the word "state" in its modern sense,[9] it is clear that the perception of verticality—today transfused into the notion of politics—goes all the way back, to say the least, to the Romanistic tradition. But this idea was not expressed by Greek nomenclature, by the word politics and its derivatives. Until the seventeenth century, it was generally and variously expressed by such terms as *principatus, regnum, dominium,* and *gubernaculum*[10] (more so than by such terms as *potestas* and *imperium,* which referred to legitimate power and were used within a juridical frame of reference).

For the medieval and renaissance writers, whether they wrote in Latin, Italian, French, or English, the *cominium politicum* was not "political" in our sense but in the sense of Aristotle: it was the "ideal city" of the polítes, a res publica which served the good of the community and a *res populi* equally removed from the degenerations of democracy and of

tyranny. In fact, medieval writers used dominium politicum as the opposite of *dominium regale,* and even more as the opposite of *dominium despoticum.* This is equivalent to saying that the adjective politicum referred to the horizontal vision, while such terms as royalty, despotism, and principality expressed the vertical dimension. Thus, the best way to translate the idea of dominium politicum into modern terminology would be to say "the good society"—except that we are much more naive or optimistic in this respect than the medieval authors. We could also say that dominium politicum refers to a "stateless society." But the caution would be, here, that the society in question is both a civilis societas and a iuris societas, and not just the unqualified and unfettered society spoken of in contemporary sociology.

On the other hand, the term that symbolized more than any other the vertical focus—what we would consider the characteristically political discourse—that term is "Prince." It was no accident that *Il Principe* (1513) was the title chosen by Machiavelli. *De Regimine Principum* (circa 1260-1269) had already been the title of Thomas (as well as of Egidius of Rome), while Marsilius of Padua (circa 1280-1343) had used *principatus* or *pars principans* to indicate the functions which we today call governmental, and might have labeled the kind of government described by Machiavelli as a *principatus despoticus.*[11]

The conclusion emerging from our sweeping survey is that the complex, tortuous history if the *idea* of politics transcends at every point and in a thousand ways the *word* itself.[12] The politics of Aristotle was, at one and the same time, an anthropology, a conception of man indissolubly linked to the "space" of the polis. With the collapse of the polis, the meaning of the political is variously diluted or turned into something different. In one respect, politics became juridicized and evolved in the direction indicated by Roman thought. In another respect—on which I cannot dwell—the things political became theologized, first conforming to the Christian view of the world, then adapting to the struggle between the Papacy and the Empire, and finally reflecting the schism between Catholicism and Protestantism. In any case, the discourse of, and about, politics develops—beginning with Plato and Aristotle—as a discourse which is jointly and indissolubly ethicopolitical. The ethics in question could be naturalistic, theological, or juridical—that is, an ethics that debates the problem of the "good" in terms of what is "just," appealing to justice and just laws. The doctrine of natural law, in its successive phases and versions, summarizes quite well this amalgam of juridical and moral norms (see Passerin d'Entrèves, 1951). For these and still other reasons, there can be little

doubt that it is not until Machiavelli that politics attains a distinctive identity and "autonomy."

THE AUTONOMY OF POLITICS

When we speak of the autonomy of politics, the concept of autonomy should not be understood in an absolute but rather in a relative sense. Moreover, four theses can be posited with respect to this notion: (1) that politics is *different;* (2) that it is *independent*—i.e., that it adheres to its own laws; (3) that it is *self-sufficient*—i.e., autarchic in the sense that it is sufficient for explaining itself; (4) that it is a *first cause,* generating not only itself, but, given its causal supremacy, everything else. Strictly speaking, the last thesis is an inference that exceeds the limits of the concept of autonomy. It should also be noted that the second and third propositions often go together even if, rigorously speaking, the idea of autonomy must be distinguished from the idea of autarchy. At any rate, the preliminary thesis is the first.

To say that politics is "different" amounts to stating a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of its autonomy. Yet the rest of the argument is conditioned by this point of departure. Different from what? In what way? And to what degree?

With Machiavelli (1469-1527), politics established itself as being different from morality and religion. Here is a first, hard and fast separation. Morality and religion are indeed essential ingredients of politics, but as means to an end: they are instrumental to politics. "If a Prince wants to maintain the state, he is often forced to do evil," to act "against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion."[13] Politics is politics. But Machiavelli does not arrive at his "verità effettuale," at the actual truth of things, because he is value-free or because he takes a nonnormative stand. Let alone the fact that Machiavelli *is* animated by moral passion, he prescribes to the "new" prince the proper conduct necessary for the preservation or establishment of a state. Machiavelli's greatest originality lies in asserting—with unparalleled theoretical vigor—the existence of an *imperative* peculiar to politics. Machiavelli not only declares the difference of politics from ethics, but also arrives at a clear-cut affirmation of its autonomy: politics has its laws, laws that the statesman *must* apply.

In the above sense, therefore, it is correct to say that Machiavelli, not Aristotle,, "discovered politics." Why Machiavelli? And for what reasons?

His discovery can be hardly attributed to a "scientific" spirit (on this point, see Abbagnano, 1969; Olschki, 1969; Matteucci, 1970; generally, see Sasso, 1967, 1958). On the other hand, Machiavelli was not a philosopher—and this is a major reason why he achieved the directness of vision possessed only by those who begin, or who start again, *ex novo*. Machiavelli "uncovered" what had been covered by the philosophical tradition. Therefore to say that he was neither a philosopher nor a scientist does not detract in the least from his stature, while it goes a long way toward explaining why he succeeds in discovering politics. The point can be highlighted by comparing Machiavelli and Hobbes.

Hobbes (1588-1679) nears "pure" politics even more than Machiavelli. His prince, the *Leviathan* (1651), is the closest and direct precursor of the Big Brother of Orwell: he creates a political order by his own fiat and by his power to create words, to define them, and to impose them upon his subjects. "The first truths," writes Hobbes (1829-1845: I, 36), "were arbitrarily made by those that first of all imposed names upon things." From this, Hobbes concludes that political truths are like the arbitrary and conventional truths of geometry. If the prince of Machiavelli governs according to the rules of politics, the leviathan of Hobbes governs by creating these rules and by establishing what politics is. The world of man is infinitely manipulable, and the leviathan—the Grand Definer—is its absolute, ultimate manipulator. Actually, no one had ever propounded a politicization as extreme as that of Hobbes. He not only asserts the absolute independence and self-sufficiency of politics, but affirms a "panpoliticism" in which everything is reabsorbed in, and generated by, politics. If Machiavelli invokes "virtu," Hobbes invokes nothing. If in the pages of Machiavelli one detects a moral passion, Hobbes writes as a detached reasoner coldly intent on constructing a perfect mechanical universe of bodies in motion. If Machiavelli looks upon religion as a buttress for politics, Hobbes gives his monarch—as Comte would later—control over religion.[14]

Not only does Hobbes go beyond Machiavelli in affirming a "pure" politics that is all-pervasive and all-causing; he is also far more science-conscious. In the century or more that separates them, there had appeared Bacon (1561-1626) and Galileo (1564-1642). Moreover, Hobbes had been exposed to the method of Descartes (1596-1650), his younger but more precocious contemporary. In its own way, then, Hobbes' thought is pervaded by scientific spirit. His philosophical system is inspired by the mechanistic conception of the universe, and his method—inspired by the model of geometry—flows from the logic of mathematics. At first sight,

therefore, we may be tempted to conclude that in Hobbes there exist all the necessary elements for the existence of a "science of politics." According to the canons of Cartesian philosophy, Hobbes uses a scientific method. At the same time, he theorizes the most extreme form of autonomy of politics. If it pleases us, we could also add that Hobbes is value-free. Yet one speaks of Hobbes as being, unquestionably, a philosopher of politics, while Machiavelli is often recognized as the founding father of political science. Why is that?

The answer need not be far-fetched. The element which separates science from philosophy is not afforded by the models of geometry and mathematics. Descartes was a great mathematician, and Leibniz was even a greater one. Mathematics is a rigorous, deductive logic; whereas the sciences are not born of logical deduction but of induction, observation, and experiment.[15] Hobbes was not an observer or, better said, he was not satisfied by observation; he deduced *more geometrico,* as would, a little later, the purest example of a philosopher, Spinoza (1632-1677). Hobbes' method, then, was rigorously deductive (see Cassirer, 1911: vol. 2, ch. 3; Gargani, 1971). With this, everything is said. He did not describe and explain the real world. No one can dispute the philosophic greatness of Hobbes. But his "science" is not science. It follows that the autonomy of politics which interests us is not that formulated by Hobbes. And the fact that Hobbes is more value-free than Machiavelli is irrelevant to the matter.

In conclusion, if there is as yet no science to be found in Machiavelli, the scientific spirit of Hobbes does not constitute a significant encounter between science and politics. On the other hand, and in particular, the discovery of the autonomy of politics cannot be attributed to a scientific method.

THE DISCOVERY OF SOCIETY

Up to this point, I have highlighted only a first difference: that between politics and ethics, between Caesar and God. This is a decisive step, but, in retrospect, the simplest and the most obvious. The most difficult—so difficult that it still encumbers us—is to underpin the difference between state and society. Thus far, we have not encountered the separation between the sphere of politics and the sphere of society.[16] When did the idea of society free itself from its multiple associations, thereby positing social reality as an independent and self-sufficient reality?

"Society" is neither *demos* nor *populus.* As a concrete, operating actor,

the demos died with its "democracy"—that is, with the demise of the polis. And since the Roman republic never was a democracy, the populus of the Romans never was the demos of the Greeks (Wirszubski, 1950). After the fall of the Republic, populus became a juridical fiction and substantially remained a *fictio iuris* throughout the literature of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Roman and medieval thought in no way expressed an autonomous idea of society. Society was qualified—let it be remembered—as a civilis societas and a iuris societas. To these amalgams, medieval thought added its own strong "organicist" characterization, in such a way as to reorganize society into an articulate multiplicity of "bodies": fiefs, estates, and corporations—a tightly interwoven world regulated by the principle that each mn should live according to his status.

The breakdown of this organic, corporate network took place very slowly. It is very telling, for example, that the idea of society had no place in the sixteenth-century literature which upheld the right of resistance and rebellion against the tyrant. For the Monarchomachs, as well as for Calvin and Althusius, it was neither the people nor the society who counterposed and opposed the power of the tyrant, but individuals or specific institutions, such as a church, local assemblies, or particular magistrates. Similarly, the English Revolution was not a revolution in the name and for the sake of the rights of society. Rather, the Great Rebellion, brought back to life—that is, to concreteness—the fictio iuris of the people.

It was not by chance, in fact, that the first writer to theorize about the rights of the majority and majority rule—a rule which gives the notion of the people operational meaning and capacity—was Locke, who wrote at the end of the seventeenth century (see Kendall, 1941). Locke is also credited, to be sure, with the first formulation of the idea of society. But this idea is more appropriately attributed, I believe, to the contractualist doctrine as a whole, and especially to the distinction that it posits between *pactum subiectionis* and *pactum societatis,* between the (vertical) agreement to obey and the (horizontal) agreement to coexist. In truth, the idea of society is not an idea that is born and strengthened during revolutionary times. Rather, it is a "peaceful" idea that arises along the contractualist development of the school of natural law. It is not the revolt against the sovereign, but the "contract" with the sovereign, which is stipulated in the name of a contractor called society. Nonetheless this "allbody," this society which asserts the "social contract," still is a juridical fiction.

The truth of the matter is that the autonomy of society with respect to the state can hardly be conceived unless another, prior separation takes place—that of the economic sphere. The separation of the social sphere

from the body politic occurs through the outgrowth of economics from politics. This is the main stream. Today sociologists in search of an ancestor quote Montesquieu (1689-1755).[17] But it is more appropriate to cite Adam Smith (1723-1790), and perhaps to ascend through Smith to Hume (see Bryson, 1945; Cropsey, 1957: esp. ch. 1). It was the economists–Smith, Ricardo, and the laissez faire theorists in general–who demonstrated that social life prospers and develops when the state does not intervene, who demonstrated how social life finds its own principle of organization in the division of labor, thereby indicating that social life is largely extraneous to the state and neither regulated by its rules nor by the law. Economic laws are not juridical laws–they are the laws of the market. And the market is a spontaneous automatism, a mechanism which functions on its own. The economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries furnished, then, the tangible image of a social reality capable of self-regulation, of a society which lives and develops according to its own nature. And this is the route through which society becomes self-conscious, or, putting it less philosophically, comes to perceive its own identity.

All this is not meant to deny that Montesquieu too is a precursor of the discovery of society. But he was preceded by the inklings of Locke; and the list of the anticipators is a lengthy one, for it should include liberal constitutionalism in general. All these precursors are such, however, in an indirect and inconclusive fashion. Clearly, the more one reduces the discretion and the space of the absolute state, and the more one obtains the "limited state," the greater the space and legitimacy left for extrastate life. But political liberalism (i.e., constitutionalism) could not and did not have the shattering force of economic "liberalism" (on this distinction, see Sartori, 1965: 361-362). This is so because political liberalism wants the society to be regulated and protected by law. Just as liberalism–classic liberalism, to be sure–concerns itself with neutralizing pure politics, in an analogous way it sees a "pure" society as an exposed, unprotected, and defenseless society. The society of Montesquieu was always, in its own way, a iuris societas. The laissez faire economists did not have this problem. They had the opposite problem of breaking the bonds and fetters of medieval corporatism.

It is only in the approach of the economists, therefore, that society is all the more authentic and more it is spontaneous–that is, the freer of political interference and of legal restraints. True enough, the "spontaneous society" of the economists was only the economic society–a part, not the whole.Yet the example and the model of the economic society was

easily extendable to the society in general. The premises for the discovery of society as an autonomous reality did not exist, then, in Machiavelli, in Montesquieu, or in the Encyclopedists; they were laid down in full only at the start of the nineteenth century.[18] With the *Industrial System* of Saint Simon (1770-1825), which appears in three volumes in 1821-1822, we have the first, prophetic forecast of the industrial society of the second haf of the twentieth century. By that time, society becomes an object of an independent science, which is no longer economics, and which Comte (1798-1857) christens "sociology." And Comte does not restrict himself to the baptism of the new science of society: he also proclaims sociology the queen of all sciences. Society is perceived not only as a "social system" which is distinct, independent, and self-sufficient with respect to the political system. In the vision of Comte, it is the social system that gives birth to the political system (on the relation between society and state in general, see Barker, 1951; but especially Bendix, 1962). We thus come full circle: the pan-politicism of Hobbes is turned upside down and reversed into the pan-sociologism, or the "sociocracy," of Comte. The moment has come for drawing our nets.

THE IDENTITY OF POLITICS

Politics, as we have seen, is not simply different from ethics. It is also different from economics. Nor does politics any longer encompass the social system. In the end, the bonds between politics and law are also severed, in the sense that the political system and the juridical system fall apart. Thus denuded, politics appears different from everything else. But what is it when taken in and of itself?

Let us begin with noting a paradox. For almost two thousand years, the *word* politics—that is to say, the Greek diction—largely falls into disuse; and when we meet it again, as in the expression dominium politicum, it denotes only a small niche, a marginal, if happy, slice of the real world. We must get to Althusius—to the year 1603—to find an author of note who brings the word politics into his title: *Politica Metodice Digesta.* He is followed by Spinoza; but his *Tractatus Politicus* is only published posthumously in 1677 and hardly leaves a trace. Finally, Bossuet writes the *Politique Tirée de l'Ecriture Sainte* in 1670; but the book is published only in 1709. And the term is not met with, astoundingly enough, in any important titles of the eighteenth century.[19] Nevertheless, during two millennia, there was constant *thought* about

politics, for the paramount worldly preoccupation of most thinkers surely was to temper and regulate the domination of man over man. Rousseau went to the heart of the matter when he wrote that man is born free and is everywhere in chains. Thus Rousseau was concerned with the essence of politics, even if the word does not appear in the title of any of his works. Today, instead, the *word* is incessantly on our lips; yet we no longer know how to conceive the thing. In the contemporary world, the word is abused, while the concept suffers from an "identity crisis."[20]

One way to confront the problem is to pose the question that Aristotle did not ask: what makes a political animal different from a religious, ethical, economic, or social animal? Of course, these are ideal types. The question can be, nevertheless, very concrete—namely, whether politics, ethics, and economics can be pinned down behaviorally and in terms of tangible, observable deeds. It what way is economic behavior different from moral behavior? And what distinguishes both from political behavior? To a certain extent, the first question can be answered, but the second one leaves us at loss.

The criterion of economic behavior is benefit or utility—that is, economic action in such in that it maximizes assets, profit, material, and personal interests. At the other extreme, the criterion of ethical behavior is the good—i.e., moral action is a dutiful, disinterested, altruistic action pursuing ideal ends, not material advantages. But what is the category or the criterion of political behavior? All we can say in this respect is that it coincides with neither the moral nor the economic criteria. We do find—historically—a slackening of the call of "duty" and a growth of the temptation of "profit." Whoever studies voting behavior can well assimilate it, in the aggregate, to economic behavior. Nonetheless how can we deny the enduring presence and recurrent force, in politics, of ideals? When we examine the facts more closely, what strikes us most is the great variety of motives that steer political behavior. And this leads me to suggest that "political behavior" should not be understood literally. The expression does not point to any particular type of behavior; rather, it denotes a locus, a *site* of behavior. Expressions are sometimes very revealing. With respect to moral behavior, it makes little sense to say that it exists and manifests itself in a moral site. Of course, morality has a seat: the internal forum of our conscience. But this is hardly a discriminating element, since all behavior must be activated *in interiore hominis*. Hence, there is no behavior "in ethics" in the sense in which we speak of behavior "in politics."

As stated at the outset, in order to find our way in the differentiations

among politics, ethics, law, economics, and so forth, it is necessary to refer to the structural differentiation of human aggregations. Perhaps because of a lack of categories, perhaps for other reasons, the fact is that only the field of ethics, which is the most ancient and the most developed, escapes reference to a structural underpinning. Ethics alone escapes because, on closer view, also the discourse on economics is situated structurally. If we draw the distinction between the philosophy of economy on the one hand, and the science of economics on the other, it can be easily seen that philosophers have identified the categories of economy—the useful, the desirable, the pleasurable—by reversing the connotations of ethics, and specifically of the Kantian conception of morality. In other terms, the philosophy of economy is nothing but a branch or an offshoot of moral philosophy. The economic man is inferred *a contrario* from the moral man. If the latter lacks identity, the former cannot be identified. So far, so good. But the science of economics cannot make much headway along these premises. The utility of the economist is not the utility of the philosopher. Likewise, the interest of the economist is a far cry from the interest spoken of in moral philosophy. In particular, and above all, the "value" of the economist is a market value established by market mechanisms—i.e., a value formed by and located within that structure which we call the marketplace. Upon closer inspection, then, the behavior observed by the economist belongs to the site "economic system," which is a constellation of structures, roles, and institutions. In the final analysis, therefore, the economist escapes a crisis of identity only by making reference to those sites summed up by the phrase "in economics."

The same applies to the sociologist. What is the criterion, or category, of social or societal behavior? There is none. Or better, the sociologist answers—as do the economist and the political scientist—it is behavior "in society," or "in the social system," meaning by this that social behavior is what he observes in the institutions, structures, and roles which compose that system. Thus, the political scientist is neither better nor worse off, in identifying political behavior, than any of the other students of man. So-called political behavior is behavior that can be characterized like any other nonmoral behavior—that is, in its relation to the sites attributed to the "political system."

It appears, therefore, that the most fruitful way to confront the identity crisis of politics is *not* to ask how the behavior of political man differs from that of social or economic man. Rather, it is to ask what changes take place, structurally, in the organization and differentiation of human aggregations. If this is so, the query becomes what the denotation

of "in politics" and of "the political system" are, with respect to the social system or the economic system.

Society, said Bentham in the wake of its discovery by the free-trade exponents, is the sphere of *sponte acta,* of spontaneous actions. But society is a spontaneous reality only with respect to other constraints, only in the sense that it is not regulated by the state, and therefore only in the sense that it denotes a plane where political and other controls give way to social control. This by itself goes to show that the notions of "power" and "coercion" are not sufficient, by themselves, to characterize and circumscribe the sphere of politics. The objection that politics is not only power and coercion notwithstanding the fact is that, beyond political power, we must also make room for economic, military, religious, and various other powers. The same holds true for the notion of coercion. To political coercion we must add social, juridical, economic, and other kinds of coercion. All these powers and coercions are different, true enough. Yet their diversity cannot be detected without reference to the sites in which the various "coercive powers" become manifest. When one argues, with Max Weber, that political power is the coercive power which monopolizes the legal use of force, this definition presupposes a state apparatus equipped with sites and structures to that end. It may seem that by this route we return to the bygone identification between the political sphere and that of the state. But that is not so.

The farther we depart from the format of the polis and from the small city-state, the more human aggregations acquire, among other things, a vertical structuring. This verticality was—as we know—so foreign to the Greek idea of politics that for centuries it was expressed by Latin notations only, by such words as principatus, regnum, dominium, gubernaculum, imperium, potestas, and the like. The fact that, in the nineteenth century, all these terms cam together under the word "politics" represents, therefore, a spectacular change, and indeed inversion, of perspective. Today we attach the vertical dimension to a word which signifies—in the tradition—the horizontal one. Following this rearrangement, the political sphere is raised and restricted, in the sense of being referred to that activity of government or to the sphere of the state. However, this arrangement, which reflects fairly well the realities of the nineteenth century, collapses under the impact of the realities of the twentieth century. We must face a new fact: the democratization, or at least the "massification," of politics. The masses—hitherto estanged, excluded, or only present intermittently—enter politics, and they enter to remain.

The democratization or massification of politics entails not only its diffusion or, if you wish, its dilution, but above all, the ubiquity of politics. At this point, the horizontal dimension reenters, superadded or subtracted as it were, to the vertical one. After two thousand years of relative stability, we have in little more than a century a succession of earthquakes. It is no wonder, therefore, that the word politics currently evokes a mess. Though the state expands, political processes can no longer be contained within, or brought under, its institutions. Consequently, the concept of the state gives way to the broader and more flexible idea of the political system. To be sure, we may be as unhappy with the notion of political system as we are with the notion of state. At one end, the allegation is that the political system still fails to encompass the ubiquity and diffusion of politics. At the other end, the charge is that the notion of political system is far too broad in that it remains unbounded. Now, a system without boundaries is not, in any proper sense, a "system" (for the technical meaning, see esp. Easton 1965a, 1965b; Urbani, 1971). Moreover, this leads to a dilution of the concept of politics which comes very close to vaporizing it out of existence. There is more than a grain of truth in these opposite complaints. Yet the two objections, in that they are contrary, neutralize one another and help restore the proportions of the issue. Take the electoral process, which exemplifies well the nexus between the democratization of politics, on the one hand, and the restitution to politics of the horizontal dimension, on the other hand. Clearly, voting belongs to the horizontal plane. Nonetheless, "voting for electing" equally enters the vertical plane, for elections are a means of recruiting the personnel which goes to fill political seats in political sites.

In general, the caution is that we must avoid confusing the *resources of* power, or the *influences on* power, with *having power* (see Dahl, 1963: ch. 5); just as we must distinguish between where and how political power is *generated,* and how and where it is *exercised* (for a general overview, see Passigli, 1971). Once these distinctions are made, the difficulties of establishing the boundaries of the political system are no longer insoluble difficulties.

The diffusion of politics does not occur, however, solely at the base of the pyramid, at the level of the demos. We find it also at the apex, at the elite level. Western democracies are increasingly structured as competitive "polyarchies," reflecting a broad pluralistic dissemination (see Dahl, 1956). So far there is no problem, in that the notion of political system (with the complement of its subsystems) had the necessary elasticity to embrace a vast and varied dissemination of power. The problem is that,

amid these summits, there emerge vertical structures which are not political. This is especially the case of the "giant corporation"—a formidable economic power without property. But we must again remember that to condition or to influence political power is not the same as to wield it. However influential the giant corporations, or their trade union counterparts, it does not follow that their power is "sovereign" and that it outweighs political power. As long as a political system holds together, the binding commands *erga omnes,* directed to all, emanate only from political sites. Only political decisions—whether under the form of laws or not—can be coercively imposed upon the general citizenry. And if by collective decisions we mean the decisions which are not entrusted to single individuals, then political decisions can be defined as the "sovereign" collective decisions from which the individual is less likely to escape, because of both their spatial extension and their coercive intensity.

All in all, my feeling is that the identity crisis of politics is, first and foremost, a "crisis of placement." If we agree on a structural criterion of sorting out politics, and if we do not lose our way in overly peripheral errands—that is, in the diffuseness of politics—the term is definable and identifiable. Political decisions do deal with the most diverse matters: political economy, social policy, the politics of law, of religion, of education, and so forth. If all these decisions are essentially political, it is because they are made by personnel located in *political sites.* This is their political "nature."

CONCLUSION

There remains one fundamental objection, which concerns less the identity than the very autonomy of politics. The new science of society—sociology—tends to absorb political science, and thereby politics itself, into its own ambit. Sociological reductionism, or the sociologization of politics, is indubitably linked to the democratization of politics and finds in this link its strength as well as its limit. Its strength, because democracy is characterized by ascending vertical processes, results in a "responsive" system typically receptive to demands that come from below. Its limit, however, exists because the sociological explanation breaks down in the case of dictatorial systems, which are "extractive" precisely in that they are characterized by descending processes, by the prevalence of orders coming from above. In substance, sociological reductionism *flattens politics.* In the perspective of the sociologist, the

vertical dimension becomes a dependent variable—dependent from, and explained by, the social system and the socioeconomic structure (for a criticism, see Sartori, 1969). This levelling out of politics is plausible, as I said, in the case of responsive systems which reflect the power of the people; but it is highly implausible with respect to the political systems characterized by strong verticality. In particular, the sociologization of politics falls short of explaining the dictatorial process—that is, the political systems in which the authoritative allocation of values—as Easton puts it—can in no way be traced to ascending demands, if for no other reason than because these systems impede the autonomous formation and the free expression of the social demand.

The ultimate criticism of the autonomy of politics, however, is not the sociological one; rather, it stems from Marxian philosophy. Marx posits—qua philosopher—not only the heteronomy of politics but, more drastically, the "negation of politics." In the economicomaterialistic conception of history, politics is a superstructure not only in the sense that it reflects the forces and the forms of production, but also in the sense that it is an epiphenomenon destined to extinction. As the communist society is achieved, the state withers away and, with it, the domination of man over man. It is unnecessary to dwell on this wholesale negation of politics. If a philosophy of history is to be measured by the events it generates, then it suffices to note that the "primacy of politics" finds its major confirmation—across the world—in the states founded on the verbiage of Marx and his successors. Whoever lives in the communist world has no doubt whatsoever about the identity of politics, not does he doubt the autonomy or self-sufficiency of politics. In all these countries, it is not the social system that explains the state but, conversely, the state that explains the social system.

As can be seen, the debate about the identity and the autonomy of politics is wide open. One fact is certain: the ubiquity, the growing diffusion, of politics in the contemporary world. This development lends itself, however, to diverse interpretations. It can strengthen the thesis which reduces politics to something else, by variously subordinating it to the social system or to economic forces: the thesis which does not necessarily affirm the supremacy or primacy of politics, but which certainly asserts its autonomy. Between these two opposed interpretations, one can place our uncertain identification of politics, the difficulty of "locating" politics. This uncertainty generates, in turn, the thesis that the diffusion of politics is equivalent to a dilution, and hence leads to the eclipse of the political.

In summary, the current predicament of politics is reflected in at least

three discordant views: (1) heteronomy, or outright extinction; (2) autonomy, primacy, or outright triumph; (3) dilution, emasculation, and eclipse. These three views are related in various ways to the ubiquity of politics, reflect different placements of the things political, and, correlatively, different ways of perceiving, identifying and defining politics. If this is so, it goes to show that, before rushing headlong into the scientific treatment of politics, it is wise to pause and to ask what is being treated. It seems to me, in effect, that the difficulties encountered by the present-day science of politics are derived in no small part from the variable "politics"—i.e., from the object. Let us now turn to the difficulties inherent in the subject of the expression—that is, to the "science" side of the question.

NOTES

1. There is no history of political science approached as a set of encounters between science and politics. The relevant material can be found, on the one hand, in works of philosophy, epistemology, and methodology of science, and, on the other hand, in the history of political thought. For the latter, see note 12 below.

2. For the Greek conception of life, Jaeger (1945) remains outstanding. Despite their age and some errors, amended by subsequent historiography, see also Fustel de Coulanges (1885) and Burckhardt (1908).

3. *De Regimine Principum,* Book I, Chapter I.

4. *De Regimine Principum,* III, I, 2.

5. *De Re Publica,* I, 25.

6. *De Clementia,* I, 3.

7. *De Re Public,* VI, 13.

8. One must bear in mind that the small dimensions of the polis resulted in a network of face-to-face relationships. Magistrates and "superiors" certainly existed, but when the base of the pyramid is narrow, the apex cannot go very high. The horizontal perception of politics should be understood in this perspective and in a relative sense.

9. *The Prince,* Chapters I and III. Machiavelli also used the word "state" in its medieval sense, meaning *status,* rank, or social standing (see Chiappelli, 1952: 59-74). The modern use consolidates itself with Hobbes, who uses commonwealth and state as equivalents, and even more so with the translation of Pufendorf into French, in which Barbeyrac renders civitas as *état.*

10. Gubernaculum is characteristic of Bracton, an author of the thirteenth century particularly valued by McIlwain (see note 12) for his distinction between *gubernaculum* and *iurisdictio.* I have found no traces of the word in the Italian annotators of the time.

11. *Defensor Pacis,* Chapter XII of *Dictio Prima.*

12. There is no study that undertakes the complicated, but nevertheless rewarding, task of tracing the terminological evolution of the concept of politics.

Among the few encyclopedias that have "politics" as an entry, see the *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico,* U.T.E.T. (the voice is now in Albertini, 1963). Aside from an author-by-author search, the most helpful histories of political thought are: Carlyle and Carlyle (1903-1936); McIlwain (1937); Sabine (1961); Wolin (1960); Ullmann (1961). I am especially indebted to Wolin. Gierke (1900) merits consultation. Also very relevant are McIlwain (1958, 1939).

13. *The Prince,* Chapters XVIII and XIX.

14. Compare the humanistic interpretation of Polin (1953), which follows Strauss (1952). I follow Wolin (1960: ch. 8).

15. If we refer to physics, its first development is in terms of *pondere et mensura;* the axiomatic and mathematical phase follows much later. On this, see the second part of the essay.

16. In passing from the autonomy of politics in the Machiavellian sense to that autonomy which separates the political from the social, another dimension is involved. In the first case, we ask what is the specificity of political behavior; in the second, we take stock of a structural differentiation which calls for the delimitation of the respective boundaries. Though logically distinct, the two problems are related.

17. On the issue, see Cotta (1953) and Gentile (1967). Montesquieu was considered the precursor of sociology by Comte; a thesis subsequently developed especially by Durkheim (1953) and recently by Aron (1962: ch. 3).

18. The history of the discovery of the concept of society remains to be written. For a different interpretation centered on Rousseau, see Dahrendorf (1971). More correctly, the somewhat dated essay of Werner Sombart (1923) places the English (especially Mandeville, A. Ferguson, Adam Smith, and J. Millar) before the French.

19. "Politics" appears, in effect, in the titles of D. Hume, *Essays Moral and Political* (3 volumes, 1741-1748), and *Political Discourses* (1748-1752); but these are minor works. One can also recall Holbach, *La politique naturelle,* 1773. The marginality and evanescence of the word politics until the eighteenth century is confirmed by its derivates: the French word *police* (our "police" comes from polítes) and the expression *parti des politiques,* which was applied, after the night of St. Bartholomew, to those Catholics who deplored the massacre of the Huguenots. Still more telling is the entry "politique" in the *Encyclopédie,* which neglects all the above-mentioned authors and moves–after Machiavelli and Bodin–to Graziano and Boccalini. See in general, Hubert (1923: esp. chs. 4-5). See also Derathé (1950).

20. So much so that the entry "politics," while listed in the first *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* of 1930-1935, disappears in the new *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968). Likewise, the entry is no longer listed in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* Several recent attempts at individualization (e.g., de Jouvenel, 1963; Crick, 1962) are reviewed by Stoppino (1964), who rightly finds them unsatisfactory.

REFERENCES

ABBAGNANO, N. (1969) "Machiavelli politico." Rivista di Filosofia 60: 5-23.
ALBERTINI, M. (1963) Politica e altri saggi. Milan: Giuffré.
ARON, R. (1962) Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle. Paris: Gallimard.
BARKER, E. (1951) Principles of Social and Political Theory. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.

BENDIX, R. (1962) "Social stratification and political community," in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman (eds.) Philosophy, Politics and Society. Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell.
BRYSON, G. (1945) Man and Society: the Scottish Enquiry of the Eighteenth Century. Clifton, N.J.: Kelley.
BURCKHARDT, J. (1908) Grieschische Kulturgeschichte. Berlin and Stuttgart: W. Spemann.
CARLYLE, A. J. and R. W. CARLYLE (1903-1936) A History of Medieval Political Theory in the West. New York: Barnes & Noble.
CASSIRER, E. (1911) Das Erkentnissproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit. Berlin: B. Cassirer.
CHIAPPELLI, F. (1952) Studi sul linguaggio de Machiavelli. Florence: Le Monnier.
COTTA, S. (1953) Montesquieu e la scienza della società. Turin: Ramella.
CRICK, B. (1962) In Defense of Politics. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
CROPSEY, J. (1957) Polity and Economy: An Interpretation of the Principles of Adam Smith. The Hague: Nijhoff.
DAHL, R. A. (1963) Modern Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
--- (1956) A Preface to Democratic Theory. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
DAHRENDORF, R. (1971) "Sociologia e società industriale," in Uscire dall'utopia. Bologna: Il Mulino.
DERATHE, R. (1950) Jean Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
DURKHEIM, E. (1953) Montesquieu et Rousseau précurseurs de la sociologie. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
EASTON, D. (1965a) A Framework for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
--- (1965b) A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley.
FUSTEL DE COULANGES, N. D. (1885) La cité antique. Paris: Hachette.
GARGANI, A. (1971) Hobbes e la scienza. Turin: Einaudi.
GENTILE, F. (1967) L'Esprit classique nel pensiero di Montesquieu. Padua: Cedam.
GIERKE, O. (1900) "Das Deutsche genossenschaftsrecht," abridged in F. W. Maitland (ed.) Political Theories in the Middle Ages. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press.
HOBBES, T. (1829-1845) The English Works of Thomas Hobbes. London: Molesworth.
HUBERT, R. (1923) Les sciences sociales dans l'encyclopédie. Paris: Travaux et memoires de l'université de hille.
JAEGER, W. (1945) Paideia. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
DE JOUVENEL, B. (1963) The Pure Theory of Politics. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press.
KENDALL, W. (1941) John Locke and the Doctrine of Majority Rule. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press.
---- (1937) The Growth of Political Thought in the West. New York: Cooper Square.
McILWAIN, H. (1958) Constitutionalism: Ancient and Modern. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press.
--- (1939) Constitutionalism and the Changing World. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press.

--- (1937) The Growth of Political Thought in the West. New York: Cooper Square.
MATTEUCCI, N. (1970) "Nicolò Machiavelli politologo." Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia: 169-206.
OLSCHKI, L. (1969) "Machiavelli scienziato." Il Pensiero Politico 2: 509-535.
PASSERIN D'ENTREVES, A. (1951) Natural Law. London: Hutchinson.
PASSIGLI, S. (ed.) (1971) Potere e élites politiche. Bologna: Il Mulino.
POLIN, R. (1953) Politique et philosophie chez Thomas Hobbes. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
SABINE, G. H. (1961) A History of Political Theory. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston..
SARTORI, G. (1969) "From the sociology of politics to political sociology," in S. M. Lipset (ed.) Politics and the Social Sciences. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
--- (1965) Democratic Theory. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
SASSO, G. (1967) Studi su Machiavelli. Naples: Morano.
--- (1958) Niccolò Machiavelli. Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli studi storici.
SOMBART, W. (1923) "Die Anfänge der Soziologie," in Soziologie. Berlin: Heise.
STOPPINO, M. (1964) "Osservazioni su alcune recenti analisi della politica." Il Politico 29: 880-905.
STRAUSS, L. (1952) The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
ULLMANN, W. (1961) Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages. London: Methuen.
URBANI, G. (1971) L'analisi del sistema politico. Bologna: Il Mulino.
WIRSZUBSKI, Ch. (1950) Libertas. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press.
WOLIN, S. S. (1960) Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought. Boston: Little, Brown.