THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Christopher A. Corpora

ENTITLED: THE IDENTITY CRISIS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF: Bachelor of Arts

Rein J. Staal
Instructor in Charge

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Professor George T. Yu
The Identity Crisis in Political Science

By

Christopher A. Corpora

Thesis

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

1988
# Table of Contents

I. Introduction ...................................... 1  
II. Definitions and Connotations of Science ........ 5  
III. The Study of Politics as a Science .......... 10  
IV. The Human Element in the Study of Society .... 15  
V. Education in the Social Sciences Today ...... 18  
VI. Epilogue ........................................20
Throughout my undergraduate career, I have heard people say that the liberal arts are worthless. People say that you cannot get a job, or they say that most of what you study is meaningless. I hear these comments and wonder why do people feel this way. If what they say is true, I had certainly better change my course of study. Within the study of political science, these criticisms seem to be felt as well. The purpose of this paper is to look into this lack of respect for the liberal arts with a focus on social sciences, especially political science. In doing this, I will point to a problem within the social sciences that I feel is primarily responsible for this notion. I will refer to this problem, from here on, as an identity crisis. Throughout the paper, I will often refer to the social sciences, but in doing so this will assume a focus on political science because this is what I am primarily concerned with. However, as I thought about this problem, I realized that it cut across most of the social sciences especially hard.

My inquiry is aimed at the identity crisis that seems to happen when one refers to the study of politics or society as a science. I believe this problem is one of definition and history. In my defining of science, I have tried to capture the true broad nature of this word, and I have, in
the process, found it necessary to look deeply into the notion of knowledge.

With this definition, I chose to move into the heat of the topic, and where I feel the source of this identity crisis emanates from. This is in the historical elevation and arrival of industry and technology. It seems to me that at this point and as it all progressed, social science came at odds with itself by attempting to overly assert itself. Along with this came an affiliation with the scientific method used in the physical sciences and a disregard for philosophical inquiry. Thus the mechanization of the social sciences and isolation and stagnation of their subject - human beings.

With this perspective I attempt to look at why this conflict persists, and I attempt a hand at a remedy. It may seem that through most of this work I am generalizing. However, I do not intend to do this, and realize fully well that this problem is not universal. Yet to explain further, this problem is, for me, a very sensitive one, and should be one that all who strive to be political scientists should face. Here as I end my undergraduate career and with my desire to study further, this problem has been something that I have spent a very long time realizing and reflecting upon. I believe that this crisis is pressing enough to warrant that all who wish to study politics or any social science, should understand and recognize this epidemic.
One of the most important things that must be understood from the onset is that this is a paper on the schism in political science that has been caused by differing views on the methods and criteria that should be used to acquire meaningful knowledge. I feel that the crux of this problem can only be fully seen from this epistemic view. This is a bit of a catch-22 because the heart of the problem lies within the notion of knowledge. So, from the start, I approach this problem philosophically, and in doing so I hope to point out the misunderstanding, mishandling and misteaching that is a result of an improper understanding of knowledge.

Before we enter the body of this paper, I would like to mention that the small number of footnotes in this paper is not indicative of a lack of preparation, but rather the opposite. As I stated earlier, this is a problem that has burdened my thoughts for some time. When I began writing, I realized that I had some very definite thoughts on this subject and that they were all influenced by many years of reading and discussions with others. I decided early on to "pitch my tent" and deliver my opinion on this problem as I see it in conjunction with my readings and conversations. With this, it should be clear that this paper, from beginning to end, is a work of reflection and philosophical inquiry more so than research. However, I feel that I have been researching this problem most of my academic life by
participating in it. But in order to lend cohesion to this inquiry I relied mainly on three texts. These are as follows:

1. Max Weber's essays "Politics as a Vocation" and "Science as a Vocation"

2. Eric Voegelin's, The New Science of Politics

3. Leo Strauss' essay, "What is Political Philosophy?"

These were the three main texts, but there are many more that have influenced this work, which will be mentioned in the bibliography.
The first question that needs to be addressed is one of definition. What is science? Science, like many other words that are categorical, that is applying some thought or idea into a specific area, can be interpreted and defined strictly or liberally. When referring to something as a science one must consider this because it influences how the topic that is being categorized is received. Instead of merely rattling off a definition, it is necessary for the present inquiry to build a definition so that the reader can fully follow the train of thought at hand.

First, science cannot be defined by its topic, but must only be modified by it. For example, if one were to talk about chemical science the notions and laws of chemistry would not be the pretense for science but rather the kind of science. Within each type of science the topic requires its own modes of inquiry. These modes are specific to the topic not to science. This idea might seem elementary to some but it is a pretext that we sometimes forget as we move deeper into our topic within science.

As we look at science, it is necessary to define what sort of things it is categorizing. It would be safe to say that the science is categorizing different areas of knowledge; topical knowledge such as chemistry, physics or
politics. Here we find the strongest requirement for something to be called a science. This notion of knowledge leads us to the root of any science, which is philosophy or theory. In order to refer to something as a science it must have a theoretical foundation and conceptual models. These theories are the transportation by which knowledge is carried, and without them concepts would be stagnant and unrooted. Theory is the ground floor of any scientific model. It would be illogical and virtually impossible to look into any problem or question without first having some idea of how this question should be answered or addressed. So, thus far in our definition we can say that science is a categorical mode of topical knowledge, in which each topic has its own specific method of inquiry and cannot exist without a theoretical foundation. If there is no theory, then there can be no science. (1)

This necessity for a theoretical foundation to any scientific endeavor brings to the forefront the last stipulation of our definition. If a scientist has a theory about something, then this points to a certain state of mind. Having a theory about a question assumes that one has a preconceived notion as to what the answer could or should be. To what extent does this preclusion dictate itself in the method used to investigate the question, and how does this effect the ultimate outcome of the experiment? All people,
including scientists, have hopes for and ideas of what should be. It seems imperative to recognize this natural instinct of the human condition. Every scientist carries into his method a preconceived set of beliefs and ideas. This must necessarily be a part of the scientist's method. For instance, if one were to be looking into the problem of third world countries, one would most likely have certain ideas and attitudes already in place before direct inquiry began. (2) This would influence the way the scientist collected, investigated and interpreted the data. Here then our definition expands to the following final length:

(a) science is a categorical mode of topical knowledge, in which each topic has its own specific method of inquiry, cannot exist without a theoretical foundation, and must be aware of the influences that human normative reality plays in the inquiry.

Here it might seem that I am positing that there is no real knowledge, that it is all arbitrary and dependent on the beliefs of the scientist - in a sense that there is no fact. This could not be farther from the truth. However, this human factor is a necessary variable that must be recognized in order to understand the full force of the question at hand. This human factor is difficult to pin down, and is not always visible, but it is something that must be recognized. (3) Also, this human factor is the residue that is present after the scientist attempts to strip
away his bias in order to see the problem and experimentation more clearly. What I am speaking of is that which is a part of all human beings, to one extent or another, and is inescapable without some sort of schizophrenic condition.

It is necessary to look further at our definition of science and its reference to knowledge, in order to see the scientists more clearly. Many believe that knowledge is something that is factual and if it is not fact then it is not knowledge, and is irrelevant to the pursuit of science. (4) These people see the world as a discernable realm of properties and tendencies that can be emulated and replicated. It is these sorts of things that make up knowledge for these people. In other words, the world of knowledge is one expansive objective organism that is non-normative and unemotional. This idea could not be further from the truth, and this mistaken interpretation of knowledge as pure fact is the central germ of this crisis. To see this we must ask ourselves why do people pursue knowledge? Is it just to possess knowledge or is there some intrinsic worth or good in the acquisition of knowledge? It seems that there is an intrinsic worth that makes people hunger for reason. All people look for the "good" in their own way and those who strive for knowledge are motivated by the same urge. This human endeavor permeates our whole race. We strive for "the good" in an effort to realize our purest of potentials. The
myth of progress is firmly planted in this pot, and knowledge is the root. All of this points to the fact that if one seeks knowledge then he is seeking "the good." So from the beginning, the pursuit of knowledge is a normative action affected by emotion, desire and imagination. A scientist would not ask a question and research it if he did not feel a need for the question to be asked. This idea is best summed up by Leo Strauss:

"The very fact that we can question it [knowledge] directs us towards such a thought of the good as is no longer questionable...if men make it their explicit goal to acquire knowledge of the good life and of the good society...Philosophy as quest for wisdom is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole...Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth but quest for the truth." (5)

Here we see that knowledge is not merely fact but hope and aspiration for "the good," and although Strauss is talking about political philosophy, this point nonetheless can be applied to science as a whole. The normative reality of science is held within our concept of knowledge.
Now that we have defined science and we see that knowledge and science are affected by the human factors mentioned above, we can look deeper into the problem at hand. At this point it is necessary for us to narrow our scope to the social sciences and to political science in particular. In doing so, it is important to look at the similarities and differences that exist between the social sciences and the physical sciences.

First, these two categories of science are divided as such for a specific reason. The physical sciences mainly deal with inanimate objects and forces. These sciences are sometimes falsely referred to as the exact science because they collect data and analyze it in such a way that lends to the seeming exactness of their results. However, as one travels deeper into the higher spheres of the physical sciences, such as quantum physics, one can see that at this level the physical sciences are theoretical and non-exact. Also, this seeming exactness of the physical sciences needs to be seen as relative to the nature of the subjects it deals with. This is to say that the inanimate objects and even those which have motion are for the most part stable and this lends to the illusion that things can be known factually about them.
Along side the physical sciences come the social sciences. These deal with the human condition whose motion is perpetuated from within itself as well as from forces and tendencies acting upon itself. Historically, the social sciences have been seen as non-exact and less factual. However, much like the physical sciences, on the lower levels there is knowledge that is exact, such as basic research on human appetites.

With these interpretations of these two classifications one might be able to see how our problem at hand began. Since the Newtonian calculus and especially in the twentieth century, man has been developing new technologies as a means of betterment and as a pursuit towards higher knowledge in the physical sciences. As time went on, people started to value these technologies as they revolutionized the world and life as we knew it. These technologies were mainly developed by those in the physical sciences as they grasped for the knowledge of these tendencies and forces that could create apparati that would help and better life for mankind. During this revolution, the social sciences and questions of human society were put into a second, lower level because the work and the thinking being done in these areas was not as immediately gratifying as the fruits of the physical sciences.
Here we come to the first major tear in the social sciences. As people started gaining from the physical sciences, people within the social sciences started to think that maybe they could make the social sciences more exact and thus they could gain back the respect they had lost. Social scientists thought that maybe they should emulate the methods and attitudes of the physical sciences. Here these social scientists made their gravest mistake. The social scientists were investigators of human existence and by adopting these methods of the physical sciences they stifled their own inquiry. These methods and models of physical science were developed to study inanimate tendencies and forces not human social grouping or any aspect of the human social condition. The occurrence of this situation is mainly responsible for the beginnings of the identity crisis that we are speaking of.

It is necessary here to explain why many of these things were allowed to happen and remain today. The first, most obvious reason is that technology is a physical gratification and thus although the physical sciences are theoretical as well they are more immediately alluring. People want more and strive more for the acquisition and development of these material technologies. However, now the abuse of technology is becoming apparent. For example, note nuclear arms and the "T.V." generation. Suddenly, there
is a need for the social sciences but they cannot respond when they are called because they, too, have been duped by technology. In a very real sense, the social scientist has allowed for much of this by attempting to use the method of physical science for so long. In essence, the purpose of the social sciences has been abandoned and waylaid by the lack of theoretical foundation and method with regard to the subject. In saying this I am not suggesting that this problem has infected all social scientists but it has to a sufficient degree wounded and confused the situation. This sort of division in method has caused an identity crisis that has disorganized and undermined many parts of the social sciences.

The more subtle and devastating reason for this condition is the social scientists' lack of reflection and respect for philosophy. Here I will posit the most important point of this inquiry, and this is that before one can be a scientist, he must first be a philosopher or theorist. This is something that many social scientists have lost and must regain. This is the foundation of mankind and the social sciences are supposed to be dedicated to those pressing questions that mankind has asked of itself since the dawn of reason. We have been unnecessarily pulled down by our own leanings on technology, and have become intellectually lazy. Our theories are put together so that we can run them through our computer programs, and our data is collected and
interpreted in the same way. We seem to be overly busy with forcing this to work while forgetting our prime objective which is our foundation. I am not saying that technology is bad. I completely believe in the progress of technology. It can, and does, help the social scientist, but we should be using it rather than being used by it. Philosophy and theory are the basis for our questions. Unfortunately, we no longer read the texts of thinkers themselves, but we pick up anthologies and articles interpreting their theories. We have come to focus on something that we cannot find because the human social condition cannot be interpreted sufficiently by suing the methods of another science.
Here I would like to talk a bit more about the human factors involved in the scientific endeavor. Throughout this failing of the social sciences, we have seriously damaged the epistemology that belongs to our notion of science. We have tried to say that all knowable things are facts, and in doing so we have squelched our subject matter—that being human beings. By ignoring the normative reality of knowledge we have left the human factor unattended. By falsely striving for this factual knowledge we have lost the essence of our vocation. We cannot stand on the shallow divisions that Max Weber tries to apply in his essays on politics and science as vocations. One cannot pull the normative reality of science away from it as Weber does. The emotions, hopes and imagination of humanity are just as much part of the theories as they are of the people that these theories apply to.

One thing that lends to this misunderstanding of scientific knowledge is the objective view that many social scientists take of the world. The mistake comes from the misunderstanding of the physical sciences. Much of what is studied in the lower parts of the physical sciences is fairly objective, such as chemical reactions and gravitational forces. The social scientists have taken this
objectivity too literally without acknowledging the nature of their subjects. With a poor adaptation of this to the social we receive an objective perspective of the human condition without any recognition of the subjective elements, or the "tacit" dimension. This "tacit" side of human beings is equally important as the objective, yet too often the social scientist ignores this or worse tries to objectively prove the "tacit" side of human reason and being. Here, I am not saying that this "tacit" element is non-observable but that this knowledge is non-factual. However, there is much to gain by knowing and understanding the aspects of this area. It seems ridiculous and absurd to think that someone might think they could have a part in his computer program to answer for "tacit" variables. It might be the case that he can isolate characteristics that are "tacit" but never could he replicate these tendencies because the variable range is infinite.

It is important to give an example of this "tacit" side of the human being that must be recognized and not distorted into objectivity. Michael Polanyi talks extensively of this in his book, Personal Knowledge. He says:

"...knowledge, as I have defined it is not known in itself but is known in terms of something focally known...to this extent it is unspecifiable...It is left to the imagination to reconstruct from such experience the three dimensional picture...and to explore mentally its connections with adjoining unexposed areas around it and below it." (7)
This subjective element of human existence is what ultimately separates the physical sciences from the social sciences. This is also why it is important for the social scientist to develop methods that are sensitive to this perplexing and sometimes mysterious part of the human condition. If we are to look at the problems in human social existence thoroughly and clearly, we must understand these human factors.
At this point, I would like to turn the scope of this inquiry over to the intellectual education of today. This is the place that allows for this crisis to continue. The liberal arts, which the social sciences are a part of, were conceived with the recognition of the importance of well rounded intelligence. It is an assumed by-law that by learning about a broad body of knowledge that one could more effectively cope and interact in this constantly growing world of ours. The breadth of these studies was to give the student the tools to be a critical thinker, writer and speaker. Much of this was found in the Socratic tradition, where students were taught to dive deeply into their minds and try to work out the problems that face man daily. However, education, especially in the social sciences, has fallen short of this. Today education is based on short term memory of factual knowledge on the elementary and high school levels and in the college ranks students are given much of the same. The university student is given a spectrum of tendencies and forces within the social sciences to gauge activity and events by. The student is taught in such a way that it requires him to act like a machine, and if the student is an efficient machine then he receives a good grade. Students no longer think things out on their own.
They are no longer challenged with those primordial and perplexing questions of man, upon which all scientific knowledge was conceived. It is here that the social scientists are sealing the tomb that will imprison the minds of the future.

In looking at education today, in the social sciences, we see the closing of minds, and the cliche switch to auto-pilot that is so tempting yet so deadly. This stale stage of affairs is what allows for much of this to continue. It is imperative that the educators of today realize this and attempt to remedy this situation. If this is truly the land of the free, wouldn't it be appropriate to give students the freedom to think for themselves? This is not to say that factual knowledge is useless or even less important than "tacit" knowledge but people need to realize and interpret their own "tacit" situation. This means they must think through things rather than memorize facts that create a spectrum of measurement that limits and inhibits the bounds of knowledge. This limiting is the stifling of knowledge, itself, as well as human capabilities.
EPILOGUE

I have attempted to map out a very serious crisis that exists in political science today. This crisis is something that tears and stagnates the positive movement of this science. The science of politics is a science that tries to take facts from political situations and interpret these via the "tacit" dimension of humanity and society. It is most necessarily true that personal and societal existence is influenced by hope, emotion and imagination. To try to examine the human condition without recognition of these subjective elements would require the paralysis of the human component. In other words, life would be taken out of our study and human beings would necessarily become more objects. There are some political scientists today who believe this is correct and proper. They believe that scientific knowledge is one of fact, but this is only a part. In aligning oneself with such an epistemology, there is no hope to fully understand and investigate the political nature of mankind. Only in acknowledging both the objective and subjective parts of the political man can a scientist hope to observe and analyze man in his natural state of motion and life.

There are two main steps that the political scientist can take in order to put him back on the road to
recovery. First, philosophical inquiry needs to be reintroduced into the study of politics. This is necessary for several reasons, mostly to reintroduce the primordial questions of man in order to build firmly a theoretical understanding of man's nature. This foundation will breathe life into any political analysis within any area of politics for the mere reason that it calls us to understand more fully the nature of our subject. This reintroduction of philosophical inquiry is also important because it helps the political scientists devise a method of inquiry that answers for his own political nature as well as that of his subject.

The second change that must occur is one of the educational attitude and policies of political scientists today. Educators can no longer require their students to correlate facts with a spectrum of preordained theories. This sort of work is that of a machine. Rather, students need to realize that there are many theories that attempt to answer questions but what is of foremost importance is that they look into and know and question and analyze other theories while being critical. The student must be required to assimilate his own theories into the plethora of already established theories. They must be encouraged to develop their own method of inquiry that is consistent with the nature of man, both objectively and subjectively.
Until this identity crisis is under control, political science will be divided in such a way that it will mutually exclude itself from within. Political scientists need to reevaluate their own method and educational techniques. Without this reflection this crisis will continue. Political scientists need to remember their own human condition. They need to ask themselves those primordial questions of life that some have seemingly forgotten. Until this is done, the science of politics will be a victim of its own political and intellectual turmoil.
ENDNOTES

1. Personal Knowledge, Polanyi, Michael. These comments mainly influenced by the first two sections of this book entitled "The Art of Knowing" and "The Tacit Component."

2. Ibid. Polyani speaks at length about the creativity of the scientist and how this effects his experimentation. This is important because it hints to the normative nature of knowledge.

3. Ibid.

4. "What is Political Philosophy?", Strauss, Leo. Leo Strauss talks about opinion and knowledge in conjunction with political philosophy. He points out that this sort of knowledge is 'knowledge to the good.' This points to the normative value of knowledge. Some of Polanyi's comments lend to the basis of this point as well.

5. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

6. The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution, Jacob, Margaret. Paul Davies' book, God and the New Physics was also influential.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Descartes, Rene, *Discourse on the Method of Properly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, chapters 1, 2, 4 & 5, 1637.


Strauss, Leo, "What is Politics?," The Free Press, Glencoe, IL, 1959.
