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Fraudulent Science?

The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions, by *Bernard Crick*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, 252 pp.)

The Ethics of Rhetoric by *Richard M. Weaver*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953, 234 pp.)

Scientism and Values, edited by *Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins*. (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1960, 270 pp.)

REVIEWED BY FELIX MORLEY, *Author and Educator*.

FROM different angles these three books converge to form a devastating attack on the complacency of social science teachers. It is indeed difficult to defend the merely quantitative or behavioral viewpoints in face of the documentation here presented.

The thesis of Professor Bernard Crick, an Englishman thoroughly familiar with American political thought, is that the concerted effort to make the study of our politics "scientific" has served, in the first place, to devitalize it. Under prevalent pedagogy much political teaching in this country has become at best an examination of administrative form; at worst a glorification of Gallup polling. History, and even more philosophy, have been excised from the instruction. As a result "too many books by political scientists are now addressed neither to problems nor to public ... but only to prestige and preferment" in back-scratching professional associations.

Unfortunately, Professor Crick maintains, the wandering in this blind alley has had results far worse than waste of precious academic time. Scientism, meaning a methodology of measurement not successfully adaptable to social studies, has helped to turn present-day Americans away from the tested principles on which our political system was founded; has undermined healthy tradition; has brought Constitutional government into contempt; has made the country baffled and bull-headed in the face of the Communist challenge which we ourselves have done so much to build up.

This *trahison des clercs*, it is suggested, has conditioned many Americans to accept the essence of Marxist philosophy, even as they clamor indignantly for the scalps of those who affirm that creed. Under the tutelage of scientism our dubious faith *in* material progress has led outwardly to fantastic proliferation of governmental functions and inwardly to "a strangely morbid taste for determinism." Vociferous lip service to freedom has replaced any serious reflection on its prerequisites.

The indictment is strong, and with evident desire to avoid offense Professor Crick softens it with circumlocutions that sometimes make his writing tortuous. But his sardonic emphasis on "the *American Science of Politics*" itself reveals his consistent anxiety over our "intellectually empty citizenship training" and his fear that *this* sort of college teaching may "lead the world into the greatest degradation of mediocrity imaginable."

While the author names those primarily responsible, and cites ample evidence from their writings, his case is made in sorrow rather than anger. He urges a better American understanding of "the perpetual ambiguity of politics" which places it between "two realms of knowledge that deal with different subject matters: the physical grounds of phenomena and the metaphysical grounds of belief." Without this sensitive discrimination a mere renaissance of campus conservatism will offer no real solution. "At the moment these writers (some are named) are a polemic symptom of American unrest, more than contributors to a reinterpretation of American history and political thought."

We should again realize, concludes Professor Crick, what de Tocqueville saw so clearly: that the basic and enduring problem of American political science is to reconcile "the tension between democracy and liberty," Study of our government took the wrong turn when those who teach it began to place the factual analysis of Viscount Bryce above the philosophic understanding of de Tocqueville. Our political scientist has been concentrating on essentially meaningless facts, and losing touch with real understanding, to the point where it has little relevance for us, and none at all for the outside world.

In *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, published before his untimely and much lamented death, Professor Richard M. Weaver shows similar impatience with the rigidly factual approach, noting that "nowhere in the King James Version of the Bible does the word 'fact' occur." His argument, however, is concerned only incidentally with the social studies. It is, rather, a vigorous exposition of contemporary debasement of the English language; a plea that rhetoric, including but broader than its basis of dialectic, should no longer be prostituted for irrational and unworthy aims.

This is not a well-knit book, but actually a collection of nine separate and distinctive essays, ranging from the Scopes Trial, under the Tennessee "anti-evolution" law, to an examination of Milton's "heroic prose." All, however, point up to the conclusion that pernicious nonsense is now having a field day in the United States and the chapter on "The Rhetoric of Social Science" presses the indictment home against the "conspicuously poor writing" in that area. The quoted samples of "gobbledegook" certainly justify the author's "question of whether the social scientist knows what he is talking about."

Weaver, like Crick, finds an implicit faith in "progress" defined in strictly material terms—as the misconception on which our educational, social and governmental absurdities rest. And, like the English critic, this keen American observer is deeply worried by the trend towards totalitarian thinking that is involved. It is doubtful that the average newspaper reader is any longer even startled by the implied arrogance of headlines like: "U. S. Gives OK To Atomic Weapons." As Professor Weaver aptly asks: "Who or what is this U. S.?"

He gives the answer in the closing chapter. In place of God we cling to god-terms, like freedom and democracy; react against devil-terms, like un-American or communist. These charismatic words "have a power which is not derived, but which is in some mysterious way given." They are increasingly exploited by the spokesmen of centralized government and this state-engineered charisma produces one of the most dangerous lesions of modern society."

The remaining volume in this—*Scientism and Values*—is a collection of twelve papers by as many scholars in widely differing fields. In varying manner all are critical of the pretentiousness of behavioral science. All assert, at least implicitly, that "the social scientist has no basis for his science but beliefs."

"In our proper condemnation of scientism in the study of man," says Murray N. Rothbard in one of these essays, 'we should not make the mistake of dismissing *science* as well.' Others are not so sure than even natural science, pure mathematics aside, is immune from value judgments. But the true scientist, as distinct from the practitioner of scientism, at least does not claim that his selective evidence is wholly objective.

Nobody will agree with all the sometimes contradictory conclusions drawn in these three books. But few will deny the tremendous importance of their coordinating theme: the horrible deterioration that sets in when education denies import to spiritual factors and begins to classify man as though he were a rather more complicated ant.

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