



Rainer Eisfeld

Political Science: Reflecting on Concepts, Demystifying Legends

With an Introduction by John Trent

Barbara Budrich Publishers



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*With an Introduction by John Trent
(Former Secretary General,
International Political Science Association)*

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Introduction

This book of essays covers many important subjects concerning the development of political science – or political studies if you prefer, as I do. They include going back to the beginnings to analyse contributions of the London School of Economics, the Hochschule für Politik in Berlin and Columbia University in the U.S.; the transition to democracy in Germany; the contributions of such leaders as Klaus von Beyme to the globalization of the discipline; and the role of technology, specialization, team work, and political philosophy and economy to the broadening of political studies.

One has to have special talents to cover such a gamut of studies. Rainer Eisfeld has them. His beginnings in economics and winning the Faculty Dissertation Award for his thesis at Frankfurt demonstrated the obligatory inter-disciplinarity and rigour required for studies of the discipline. This early promise was then molded into his position as a senior scholar by his long career at the University of Osnabrück and his leadership in the fields of pluralism and analysis of the discipline in the International Political Science Association. All of which means that he has quite a background to share with us in this his most recent collection of essays.

I have known and worked with Rainer for the past two decades. I have always been struck by two characteristics: his disciplined approach to political studies which cloaks an underlying passionate and dedicated human being.

John Trent
Chelsea, Quebec
(Canada)

Preface

This small book represents a companion volume to my 2012 collection of articles entitled *Radical Approaches to Political Science: Roads Less Traveled*, also published by Barbara Budrich. Its chapters – like those which made up the earlier work – are based on an approach to political science **informed** by a theory of participatory pluralism (my intellectual debts are to Harold J. Laski and Robert A. Dahl), and **grounded** in history (a field in which Hans Rosenberg and Norbert Elias have been my mentors). If such an approach should be frowned upon by the “mainstream” of today’s political science, that is exactly the reason why part of the earlier book’s title read *Roads Less Traveled*. The present title is more conventional – for the simple reason that I have been unable to come up with a sufficiently subversive one covering the book’s chapters. (Readers of the earlier volume may recall that *Roads Less Traveled* derived from an inspired suggestion by my Ottawa colleague and friend Leslie Pal.)

The collection comprises nine chapters, in contrast to its predecessor’s twelve. Mostly, those were also more extensive texts. My defense is that much of my research and writing of recent years has been absorbed by the “Eschenburg Controversy” – a prolonged (and often acerbic) debate revolving around the involvement, during the Nazi regime, of one of the “founding fathers” of post-1945 West German political science in the “Aryanization” of Jewish firms. (Employed by the textile industry, Theodor Eschenburg had served as cartel manager from 1933-1945.)

British academic David Childs erred when, in his obituary (*Independent*, Aug. 3, 1999), he attested Eschenburg to have “emerged from the ruins of Hitler’s Reich with an unblemished record”. Anne Rohstock (Tübingen) and I found documentary proof that Eschenburg had not merely participated, during 1938/39, by opinions and suggestions in the “Aryanization” – or the liquidation – of at least three Jewish companies in Berlin and Vienna. In 1941, he had virtually hounded a Jewish entrepreneur, with whom Denmark’s occupation by German forces had caught up after he had already been expropriated once in Berlin and emigrated to Copenhagen by 1939. Eschenburg pushed (“*ich bitte nochmals um Beschleunigung*”) the Reich Foreign Trade Agency to double-check whether the company, which the Agency had earlier

pronounced “Aryan”, was not actually Jewish. In that case, he threatened to “cut off the firm’s supply” with raw materials. Eschenburg emerged as an example of a conservative non-Nazi (*staatskonservativ*, in his own words) who, even while maintaining personal contacts with Jews, had assiduously placed himself at the service of the racist regime.¹

When I became involved in the debate, I had, since the early 1990s, on and off addressed three pertinent questions: Collaboration (by professional elites with the Nazi regime before 1945); continuity (of functional elites after 1945); and self-exculpation (of those elites through silence or lies). In the present collection, the two concluding chapters attest to that research, focusing on Wernher von Braun, presumed “Columbus of Space”, his Peenemünde team of engineers, and their involvement in the Nazi slave labor program.

For Germany’s political science “mainstream”, such historically grounded concerns figure, once again, no longer among salient issues. That point of view contrasts markedly with the attitude of the first two generations of West German political scientists, who perceived exploring the origins, instruments, and consequences of Nazism as a *sine qua non* of the discipline (names like Karl Dietrich Bracher, Ernst Fraenkel, Eugen Kogon, Franz L. Neumann, Kurt Sontheimer instantly spring to mind). Subsequently, those topics were relegated to the margins of an increasingly “actualist” (Klaus von Beyme) discipline. They become the nearly exclusive turf of contemporary historians – a process which has hardly proved to the advantage of political science.

Without exception, the chapters included here have benefited from the intellectual enrichment that proved such a rewarding experience during my six years’ service on the International Political Science Association’s Executive Committee. The same holds true, in many profound ways, for the two decades that I have now been serving, sole political scientist among committed historians, on the Board of Trustees of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Concentration Camp Memorials.

Three chapters are first publications. The others originally appeared in countries as widely apart as Canada and Poland, the United Kingdom, the Ukraine, and Germany. Once again, I remain indebted to Barbara Budrich for agreeing to assemble these dispersed writings between two covers.

And I am deeply grateful to John Trent for the personal warmth of the introduction which he contributed to the book. John’s term as IPSA Secretary General (1976-1988) is not least remembered for the 1979 World Congress in

1 See, most comprehensively, Rainer Eisfeld: “Theodor Eschenburg und der Raub jüdischer Vermögen 1938/39“ (Dokumentation), *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 62 (2014), 603-62; Anne Rohstock: „Vom Anti-Parlamentarier zum ‚kalten Arisierer‘ jüdischer Unternehmen in Europa. Theodor Eschenburg in Weimarer Republik und Drittem Reich“, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 63 (2015), 33-58; Rainer Eisfeld (ed.): *Mitgemacht. Theodor Eschenburgs Beteiligung an „Arisierungen“ im Nationalsozialismus*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2015.

Moscow and for the effort to get China into the IPSA fold. More recently, at the 2008 Montréal regional Conference and the 2009 Santiago World Congress, John Trent launched and led a debate on the relevance of political science – a debate that has continued to reverberate through the discipline and, it may safely be predicted, will not go away soon.

What Political Science May (Not) Achieve

By 2006, APSR editor Lee Sigelman (George Washington University), whose untimely death saddened the discipline three years later, saw political science as having moved, during recent decades, “in the direction of being a federation of loosely linked specialties”: Sigelman argued that sub-fields and organized sections, often with their specialized journals, had been emerging as cores around which “more and more of [the discipline’s] intellectual and organizational life has come to revolve”. That same year, IPSA – the International Political Science Association – embarked on a “linkage” policy with regard to its Research Committees, intended to mitigate the problematic consequences of excessive specialization. Serving as IPSA’s Research Committee Representative from 2006-2012, I was involved in that effort. At the end of my two terms, I tried to draw a few lessons for the discipline from recent experience in a keynote address at the joint IPSA RC 2/RC 37 Conference “Rethinking Political Development: Multifaceted Role of Elites and Transforming Leadership” (Rollins College, Florida, November 7, 2011), which subsequently was published in the IPSA Bulletin Participation.

Specialization and Teamwork: Current Challenges to the Discipline

I

During 2011, in a process I feel privileged to have been part of, the International Political Science Association’s Executive Committee agreed on the first mission statement in IPSA’s history. That mission is now posted on the IPSA website. It embodies two distinct visions: one of service to the community, and a second of organizing research with an intention of assuring the high caliber of that service. To quote from the first:

Political science...(aims) at contribut(ing) to the quality of public deliberation and decision-making...Ultimately, IPSA supports the role of political science in empowering men and women to participate more effectively in political life, whether within or beyond the states in which they live.

I am labeling that statement a “vision”, as opposed to a description, because to a large extent it jars with Giovanni Sartori’s 2004 contention, according to which political science – at least American-style, largely quantitative political science – “is going nowhere... Practice-wise, it is a largely useless science that does not supply knowledge for use”¹. In a more recent, but no less skep-

1 Sartori, Giovanni (2004): “Where is Political Science Going?”, *PS* 11, 785-786 (786).