

## “Perestroika” Lost: Why the Latest “Reform” Movement in Political Science Should Fail

Having been a political scientist since the mid-1960s, I have seen calls for disciplinary change come and go (see also Salisbury 2001). The latest “revolution” is particularly disappointing. Dubbed the “Perestroika movement,” after the *nom de plume* of the “revolt’s” conjurer (Miller 2001), supporters of this latest “protest” often make sweeping claims, couched in apocalyptic imagery. Ultimately, Perestroikans alienate some who favor disciplinary changes. Those who rail against the profession’s political irrelevance are themselves bad politicians.

Even though I applaud disciplinary changes, I do not sympathize with Perestroika’s main themes, so I let supporters’ words carry most of the freight. To make it easy to check my scholarship, I rely on sentiments expressed in *PS* since December 2000.

Perestroikans’ ire is directed at the American Political Science Association and *The American Political Science Review*. An open letter signed by 222 persons claimed a 1998 survey of APSA members “reportedly found that, in fact, a very large portion of APSA members, to say nothing of scholars who have given up on APSA, were critical of the current condition of the *APSR*” (*PS* 2000, 735).

An accompanying letter from Gregory Kasza, who has emerged as a spokesperson for the “Perestroika ‘revolt’” (Kaymak 2001), offered several ways to increase the “representativeness of APSA and its journals” (Kasza 2000a, 737). According to Kasza, “To assure the representativeness of the APSA leadership, which is the real issue behind the Perestroika protest, there should be competitive, membership-wide elections to the top posts” (737). Kasza called for “multiple candidates on the ballot” who would offer “statements of their ideas concerning political science and the Association” (737). According to Kasza, “in my view, the problem here is not just with results, it is with the organizational procedures that produced those results” (737).

Calls for more “democracy” in APSA seem unimpeachable. Many would agree with Steven Brams’s (2000) call for competitive elections in the organization. One ought to remember, however, that the same calls in the past came from persons with very definite agendas. Does the “Caucus for a New Political

Science” ring any bells (see Surkin and Wolfe 1970)?

Other supporters of Perestroika also criticize APSA. Calling himself “one of the legions of alienated members of the APSA,” Ronald Libby focused on APSA’s tendency to “deaden any scholarly interest in what is inherently an interesting field of study” (Libby 2001, 203). According to Libby, “Not only has APSA elevated mindless number-crunching to the realm of penultimate scholarship in the profession, but also tragically, it has created a reward structure that rejects any scholar who seeks to understand politics” (204). This is why Libby and “many midcareer political scientists have given up on research and writing” (204).

Libby asserted that “the most damning indictment of the profession” (204) is the paucity of political scientists serving as TV commentators on the Bush-Gore election. He noted the TV networks’ proclivity for relying on lawyers and law professors, who “hugely outnumbered” political scientists. As the spouse of a political scientist, who is also a former—successful—TV commentator, I can attest to how difficult it is for academics to develop the skills necessary to communicate effectively to a TV audience. These skills are widely employed by the legal profession’s denizens. Paul Brewer and Lee Sigelman (2002) identify the “game frame” that is ubiquitous in media coverage of politics, and note that some political scientists have mastered the argot demanded by TV newscasts.

Libby’s missive was very favorably received by a journalist, who admitted that, while in graduate training to be a political scientist, he was “no good at statistics” (Brunori 2001, 599). David Brunori implied that he did not complete the Ph.D. because “political science, at least American politics, was all about numbers” (599). In fact, “Political science has become nothing more than statistical analysis of volumes of data” (599).

Charges that political science is trivial and “out of touch with real-world concerns” are frequently made by Perestroikans, be they graduate school drop-outs (Brunori 2001), newly minted Ph.D.’s (Gunawardena-Vaughn 2000), younger faculty (Kremer 2001), or senior scholars (Werlin 2001). Critics such as Mark Kremer (2001) and Therese

Gunawardena-Vaughn (2000, 741), attribute political science’s disconnection from the “great political issues” and the “real world” to researchers’ “fixation on quantitative tools.” Some, such as Herbert Werlin (2001), lay the blame on “*APSR*’s behavioral orientation, which causes authors to present trivial findings.”

Oddly, some of the behavioral movement’s founders used essentially the same claim to justify their “revolt” against traditional political science (Dahl 1961; Easton 1953). Dissatisfaction with the “state of the discipline,” and especially with the disconnection between traditional political science and political “reality,” was a primary factor in the behavioral movement’s emergence after World War II (Somit and Tanenhaus 1967, 184). It did not take long for the same charge to be leveled against behavioralists (Bay 1965; McCoy and Playford 1967; Storing 1962). Perhaps Heinz Eulau (1969) was right; there will always be tension between “ancient” and “modern” approaches in political science.

Perestroikans wax especially eloquently when condemning *APSR*, which they believe is biased in favor of “technicism” (Kasza 2000a), more specifically “rational choice” and “statistical analysis.” Kasza (2000b) rejects then-APSA President Robert Jervis’s (2000) claim that the *Review* reflects the submissions process, and he (2001a) later disputed the *Review*’s managing editor, Ada Finifter, who has reported that *APSR*’s published articles, in terms of disciplinary subfields, roughly reflect the papers submitted to the *Review* (2000; see also Finifter 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; and Powell 1994, 1995).

Although Kasza (2001a) admits that self-selection may be a factor in the kinds of articles that appear in the *Review*, he nonetheless argues that *APSR* and the review process is biased in favor of “hard science”—viz., “rational choice theorists, formal modelers, and those who do exclusively quantitative research” (2001a, 597)—and against “soft science”—presumably everyone else in political science. Kasza calls for a separate journal—which presumably APSA members would automatically get—that would be book reviews and perhaps review essays, while divorcing receipt of *APSR* from APSA membership. He would “Let

the *APSR* fend for itself on the subscribers' market" (2000a, 737).

What kind of political science do Kasza, and presumably many Perestroikans, favor? His most detailed statement appeared in the September 2001 *PS* (Kasza 2001b). He opens by asserting that Perestroikans reject the attempt to achieve "hegemony" in political science by the "hard sciences." Kasza offers three reasons for rejecting "the hegemonic project of hard science." First, "hard science" in political science "threatens academic freedom," because "hard scientists don't realize the damage they do to young scholars." He asserts that "today's hard scientists have convinced many young people that they must sacrifice their intellectual integrity to enter this profession" (2001b, 597). Second, "normal [i.e., hard] science makes for bad science in the study of politics" (597). Here Kasza refers to Donald Green and Ian Shapiro's (1994) critique of "rational choice." Third, "hard science" "is increasingly irrelevant to the normative and practical problems of real politics" (597). He believes that moral questions "get little attention from today's hard scientists," who have pushed classical political philosophy to "the margins of the curriculum" (597). He asserts, "Although hard science ostensibly addresses empirical questions, it inevitably degenerates into an unempirical exercise" (597). This is because "hard scientists" do not appreciate human complexity—shades of the Straussians (Storing 1962)—and, instead, "turn their subjects into robots or abstractions, restricting their thoughts and actions for theoretical convenience" (597).

So far, we have seen what the Perestroikans—assuming Kasza reflects their views—are against. Now let us see what kind of political science they favor. To that end, Kasza offers seven proposals (2001b, 598–99). First, he would restore political philosophy to "a central place in political studies so that the ends of political life once again become our common focus." It is not clear what type of political philosophy Kasza has in mind, although he probably means "classical political philosophy." But, what would happen to postmodern political philosophy, which questions many, if not all, the normative values that Kasza claims to favor? Moreover, how many academics want to see "dead white European males" restored to primacy in the curriculum? Kasza's second recommendation is to include "qualitative research methods" in graduate schools' training. He does not specify how this would work. His third proposal is to "reorganize research around the study of substantive

problems," a proposal that has already raised questions (Kaymak 2001). Fourth, Kasza would "reverse the decline of policy studies," although he offers no guide to offset this genre's decline. Kasza's fifth proposal would "revamp our professional associations and journals to emphasize political substance and catholicism with respect to methods and approaches." Kasza combines this with the assertion that "we must facilitate the full participation of women, ethnic minorities, foreign scholars, and the faculty of liberal arts colleges, all of whom have special contributions to make to the ecumenism we hope to foster." (Kasza includes the groups usually favored by the politically correct, but is silent about persons from rural and working class backgrounds, who might also have something to contribute to diversity.) Proposal six is to "renew our commitment to study the politics of different parts of the world." Kasza believes that "hard science flourishes in that most parochial of areas—American politics" (597). One wonders what scholars of comparative politics who employ quantitative research methods make of this (see, e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Barnes et al. 1979; Dalton 2001; Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Norris, 1999, 2000; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978). Finally, Kasza calls for promoting interdisciplinary research, which was one goal of the behavioral movement that he claims has distorted the discipline (see Eulau 1963).

Consider two more of Kasza's assertions, and one begins to see the problems associated with the Perestroika movement. At one point, Kasza asserts, "Good political scientists need to read history so as to know the limits of theory" (2001b, 598). As someone with two degrees in history, I can hardly argue with that. But, what kind of history would Kasza have us read? The old-fashioned political history, typified by the late Richard Hofstadter (1996) or Alonzo Hamby (1992)? The quantitative history produced by Paul Kleppner (1982) or Richard Jensen (1971)? Or the newer kind of social history that focuses on "everyday life," as exemplified by David Freeman Hawke (1988) and Stephanie Grauman Wolf (1993)? It makes a big difference.

My final point about Kasza is more substantive. In connection with his call for putting some kind of political philosophy as the discipline's centerpiece (see also Kremer 2001), he writes that "it is no wonder that undergraduate enrollments have plummeted in step with the hegemony of hard science" (2001b, 598). If Kasza were more conversant with

empirical research in political science, he might know that young Americans' interest in politics has declined recently (Bennett 1997), and that first-year students lose interest in politics *before they enroll in institutions of higher education* (Bennett and Bennett 2001; Mann 1999). Young people's lessened interest in politics helps account for why they are less likely to enroll in college-level political science courses. In short, if Kasza were a better political scientist, he would know enough not to blame quantitative research for young people's declining interest in public affairs, which has set in before they could have taken any college-level class in political science.

In the first paragraph, I wrote that Perestroikans alienate some who might favor calls for changes in political science, and that they are bad politicians. On what basis can I write? Let me step forth as case in point. Bluntly put, I am a quantoid. My scholarship has been entirely quantitative. Almond and Verba's (1963, vii) call to test "classic themes in political science" with empirical data inspired me to become a quantitative political scientist. Yet, my research does not appear in the *American Political Science Review*. I long ago gave up trying to place research there. The folks in charge of the *Review* convinced me that my scholarship did not merit appearance in its pages.

Moreover, I suspect that APSA is dominated by persons from certain institutions, mostly on the east coast, but some on the west coast, with a few from elite institutions situated in "fly-over country." It would take an entirely different piece of writing to prove this. I have suspicions, but no proof. (Ironically, many who signed the "open letter" supporting "Mr. Perestroika" come from the same campuses as those they claim to oppose [*PS* 2000].)

The implication ought to be obvious. I ought to be attracted to the Perestroika "revolt." But I am not. Why? Because Kasza and other Perestroikans make it clear that types such as me are not welcome. Not only are we lumped with rational choicers and others with whom we have little, if nothing, in common, we are also stigmatized. Calling us "robots" (Kasza 2001b, 597), "statisticians," or "mathematicians" (Kremer 2001) hardly appeals to those of us who are political scientists and employ quantitative methodology.

Finally, the Perestroikans often use apocalyptic phraseology. We hear about graduate students pressured into dissertations in which they do not believe. We read about young scholars whose careers are either destroyed or stunted. But, of specifics, we hear not. Why?

Acts of the kinds of which the Perestroikans accuse their foes are unprofessional, and perhaps legally actionable. Instead of hiding behind anonymity and vague charges, if acts such as those alleged by the Perestroikans have transpired, then come forth, make specific allegations, and if there is proof, let the guilty pay the price for their unprofessional activities.

A good politician knows her/his base, and understands how to reach potential supporters. Hubris may define certain kinds of academic movements, but it does not make successful protests.

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