

**THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION:  
A RALLYING CRY TO THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS OF POLITICS**

Matthew Flinders  
University of Sheffield

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Just now, amongst social scientists, there is widespread uneasiness, both intellectual and moral, about the direction their chosen studies seem to be taking. This uneasiness, as well as the unfortunate tendencies that contribute to it, is, I suppose, part of a general malaise of contemporary intellectual life. Yet perhaps the malaise is more acute among social scientists, if only because of the larger promise that has guided much earlier work in their fields, the nature of the subjects with which they deal, and the urgent need for significant work today... Not everyone shares this uneasiness, but the fact that many do not is itself a cause for further uneasiness among those who are alert to the promise and honest enough to admit the pretentious mediocrity of much current effort. It is quite frankly my hope to increase this uneasiness, to define some of its sources, to help transform it into a specific urge to realise the promise of social science, to clear the ground for new beginnings...my conception stands opposed to social science as a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by 'methodological' pretensions, which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions, or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues. These inhibitions, obscurities and trivialities have created a crisis in the social studies today without suggesting, in the least, a way out of that crisis.

C Wright Mills *The Sociological Imagination* 1959

Delusion and democracy; flying and failure; impact and insignificance; self-confidence and self-harm; fatalism and the despair: these may not be the most encouraging themes with which to begin an essay about the relevance of political science, but it is only by being honest about the failings of the discipline that we can begin to develop a more optimistic account of its value, what it provides, and its future. Political science is a drifting discipline; drifting in the sense that it has become mortally detached from the behaviour it professes to study and almost completely disconnected from the public sphere (or what some might prefer to label 'the real world'). A social science without a *social* dimension is, let us be honest, a dead science. It is in exactly this context that this essay seeks to make a very personal, polemical and urgent plea in favour of a fundamental shift in the nature of political science. That is a shift from the inward-looking and detached field of inquiry it has largely become to an outward-looking and engaged profession that serves as a social bridge between politics '*as theory*' and politics '*as practice*'. Put slightly differently, political science is a discipline desperately in search of salvation due to the very simple fact that the *master science* has become a very *dismal science*. Dismal in the sense that it has become a synonym for dreariness and incomprehensibility in which the vast majority of writing suffers from an unavoidable echo of obsolescence. It is neither important nor interesting. As such, one of the main aims of this essay is to try and understand exactly how the study of freedom and power, of war and peace, of hatred and love, of government and opposition and of revolution and compromise has been reduced to narrow and nervously guarded assemblages of data and pompous verbosity.

Let us not engage in any more grand acts of self-delusion (and self-importance) about the importance, relevance or impact of our discipline.<sup>1</sup> That battle has already been lost and as a result political science is currently engaged in a process of fundamental reflection about the historical contribution, current influence and future values of the discipline. The institutional manifestations of this sometimes bruising process include the American Political Science Association's (APSA) 'Task Force on Political Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' and the work of the International Political Science Association on the 'Development of the Discipline'. Having surveyed the available evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline Trent (2011, 197) suggests that the basic impression 'is one

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<sup>1</sup> As Jeffrey Issac, editor of *Perspectives on Politics* admitted to the *New York Times* in October 2009, 'we're kidding ourselves if we think this research typically has the obvious public benefit we claim for it... We political scientists can and should do a better job of making the public relevance of our work clearer and of doing more relevant work'.

of a discipline in search of its soul and out of touch with the real world of politics'.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of this disciplinary soul-searching is the growing realisation that a range of factors have conspired to ensure that university professors of politics generally shy away from:

1. Challenging the foundational assumptions of their discipline;
2. Undertaking theoretically-informed but also policy-relevant research that has a clear and demonstrable public benefit;
3. Focusing on specific problems with the intention of designing real-world solutions;
4. Engaging with practitioners of politics for fear of 'soiling their hands'; or
5. Writing with passion, emotion or belief that what they actually have to say matters.

Political science therefore appears to be a discipline in search of a soul. And yet the debate about relevance is in many ways little more than a disciplinary veil for the fact that political science has lost its self-confidence and has, as a result become *almost* irrelevant and undoubtedly isolated from the day-to-day life it professes to study.

Phrased in this way the search becomes not so much for the *soul* of political science but for the *heart* of political science. This diagnosis should, however, be exploited rather than bemoaned. The discipline may be in poor health, but recognition of this fact can and should be taken as a call for diagnosis and perhaps even as a sign of coming health.<sup>3</sup> It is in this more optimistic frame of mind that this essay looks beyond those perennial and prosaic debates that ask, 'Should political science be more relevant?' or 'How should political science respond to the Perestroikan challenge?' for the simple reason that these questions ultimately lead us away from the real issues that will shape the future of the discipline in the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> To even question whether political science should be more relevant, in the sense of being more visible to and engaged with the public, belies a failure to grasp the seriousness of the challenges that face the discipline. Senator Tom Coburn's ongoing attempts to make political science an ineligible discipline for National Science Foundation funding in the United States represents just one element of a global shift towards demanding that all the social sciences demonstrate their social value in an era of shrinking public finances. There are, of course, different forms of 'relevance' and a variety of audiences to whom the active social scientist might seek to be 'relevant' but these are secondary strands of a wider debate that has quite brutally exposed the marginalisation of political science. Put slightly differently, political science could achieve far more and move forward far quicker if it was rather less bewitched by its own intelligence and rather more focused on the Perestroikan *opportunity*. The debate about 'relevance' is, from the perspective of this essay, an opportunity to redefine not only the *limits* of the discipline but also the *nature* of the discipline.

To talk, however, of the *nature* of the discipline brings us back to Trent's comment that political science appears to be a discipline in search of its soul. In this context the core argument of this essay is that **if political science is to grow and flourish in the twenty-first century it urgently needs to rediscover its political imagination**. This focus on the political imagination provides the hook on which this essay hangs and provides a simple way of emphasising three disciplinary traits that have arguably been downgraded or completely lost as a result of the vaunted 'professionalization' of political science in recent decades. These are:

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<sup>2</sup> Trent, J. 2011. 'Should Political Science be more Relevant?' *European Political Science*, 10, 191-209.

<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase C Wright Mills (1962) *The Sociological Imagination*, p.132.

<sup>4</sup> Trent, J. 2011. 'Should Political Science be more Relevant?' *European Political Science*, 10, 191-209; Laitin, D. 'The Perestroikan Challenge to Political Science', *Politics & Society*, 31(1), 163-184.

- (1) a focus on the *bridging role* of political science between politics ‘as theory’ and politics ‘as practice’;
- (2) an ability to write (or speak) about the discipline in an *accessible* manner that conveys the raw dimensions of political phenomenon in terms of power, emotion, meaning, etc.; and
- (3) a willingness to demonstrate the existence of a *moral compass* that may on some occasions demand that political scientists play an active role in political debates or activities.

Many readers will not like the arguments I seek to make in this essay (indeed, I would be disappointed if they did) but to some extent my aim is to prod and provoke, and to chide and challenge in order to clear the ground for new beginnings. My intention is, quite frankly, to throw petrol on a disciplinary fire that is already alight in order to see what might rise from the ashes. It is exactly this vein that the first section examines the history of the discipline and more specifically the relationship between the evolution of democratic politics and the evolution of political science. The argument of this opening section is controversial: that political scientists may actually be, to some extent, *responsible* for the emergence of large numbers of ‘disaffected democrats’. This argument is forged upon a narrative concerning the strange depoliticisation of the discipline and its concomitant slide (or drift) towards irrelevance. Having painted a rather depressing picture of a discipline that has become isolated, detached and confused the second section focuses on the central argument of this essay by arguing in favour of the political imagination. It is exactly this quality, this sense of vocation and value, this capacity to speak to a broader audience that provides not only the key to greater disciplinary relevance in the twenty-first century but it also provides a way of reconnecting political science to its socially-engaged intellectual heritage. In order to add flesh to the bones of this argument the final section reflects upon the implications of the political imagination for the profession, in general, and new entrants to the profession, in particular.

In many ways this essay is not my own but should in fact be credited to C Wright Mills and Bernard Crick because it is their intellectual arguments about the role of the social sciences (Mills) and the role of a university professor of politics (Crick) that I have drawn upon and to some extent updated in order to craft an argument concerning the political imagination. In this context the word ‘craft’ is deployed with a certain precision to denote an approach to learning, writing and engagement that became hideously unfashionable in the second half of the twentieth century. Mills writing on ‘intellectual craftsmanship’ and Crick’s ‘A Rallying Cry to the University Professors of Politics’, that were published within a couple of years of each other, both make a strident plea for a return to a form of political science that is both painstaking in terms of standards of scholarship but also engaged in offering a connection or relationship with the wider public. It is this sense of civic duty or moral obligation, combined with a large element of intellectual curiosity and a twist of creative playfulness and wit, which combine to unleash the political imagination. In a more simple sense both Mills and Crick held on to their political imaginations – their intellectual souls – while the broader profession set out along what, with the benefit of hindsight, can be defined as a ‘road to irrelevance’.

### **I. The Road(s) to Irrelevance**

Why is it that whenever I engage in debates about the relevance and future of political science I can’t seem to stop the title of John Kennedy Toole’s novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980) from coming to mind? Could it be that political science has for some time resembled an academy of sleepwalkers who are unsure about where they have been, where they are going or why? No one could read Stefan Collini’s *The Noble Science of Politics* (1983); David Ricci’s *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1984), Raymond Seidelman’s *Disenchanted Realists* (1985), Andrew Janos’ *Politics and Paradigms* or any one of a great number of texts on the history of political science and not come away with a rather

discomforting view of a profession that appears to lurch from crisis to crisis.<sup>5</sup> Political science has never been, as Gabriel Almond succinctly noted, ‘a happy discipline’.<sup>6</sup> With this historiography and the challenges that currently face the discipline in mind it is surely unsettling to be reminded of the life of John Kennedy Toole as the initial rejection of his work by publishers led him to commit suicide at just thirty-one years of age. Some might feel that to talk of suicide in the context of political science is both unwarranted and distasteful and yet to adopt this position would be to deny the urgency of the situation and to deny the very link between politics as an academic discipline and politics as a real-world endeavour. There is, I would argue, a very real connection between the *crisis of political science* and *the crisis of democracy* and it is exactly this connection that I want to bring to the fore in this section.

I want to argue that political scientists are to some extent to blame for the decline in public confidence in democratic politics and that to some extent political science and democratic politics are entwined in a downward spiral of decline. Put slightly differently, I want to argue that the vibrancy of political science and the vibrancy of democratic political life go hand-in-hand; they exist in a form of parasitical mutual dependency. The depoliticisation of political science that occurred out of the behavioural revolution (and will be dissected below) can therefore be defined as a form of disciplinary self-harm, even suicide. Let me, for those readers who are either weary or impatient, set out the main arguments I seek to make in this section.

- (1) To focus on a connection between the health of political science and the health of democratic politics is to re-engage with a longstanding debate about the soul of the discipline.
- (2) Although the scientific-turn in political science was rhetorically and methodologically founded on the notion of depoliticisation in reality the shift towards a ‘hard’ science of politics was highly-politicised in the sense that it was imbued with a value-set that was both anti-political and anti-democratic.
- (3) If we want to understand public disaffection with democratic politics then we need to reflect on the collective failings of political science (in both a passive and active sense) in terms of failing to promote and defend democratic politics.

Samuel Huntington’s presidential address to the APSA in 1987 provides possibly the best starting point for any reflection on the discipline of political science, and certainly an expedition to (re)discover political science’s soul. At the heart of this lecture - entitled ‘One Soul at a Time: Political Science and Political Reform’ – was a belief and a commitment to the notion that political scientists are not simply concerned with the production of knowledge but that they are also concerned with demonstrating some form of social relevance.<sup>7</sup> Huntington is therefore emphasising the moral dimension of political science and in doing so he draws-upon Albert Hirschman’s beautiful adage that ‘Morality belongs [at] the center of our work; and it can get there only if the social scientists are morally alive and make themselves vulnerable to moral concerns – then they will produce morally significant works, consciously or otherwise.’<sup>8</sup> From this it followed, for Huntington, that research and writing should be judged not only on its intellectual merit but also by the contributions it made to achieving moral purposes. The impetus to ‘do good’ in the sense of promoting democratic reform, cultivating political literacy amongst the public or simply engaging in public debates in order to inject a degree of objectivity or balance was, according to Huntington, deeply embedded in political science. Political science should therefore be devoted to studying the realities of politics, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of political behaviour and importantly the capacity for humans to control and shape their future. It was for exactly this reason that Huntington’s address highlighted a correlation between the vitality

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Farr, J. 1988. ‘The History of Political Science’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 32(4).

<sup>6</sup> Almond Divided Discipline

<sup>7</sup> Huntington, S. 1988. ‘One Soul at a Time’, *American Political Science Review*, 82(1), 3-10.

<sup>8</sup> Hirschman, A. 1981. *Essays in Trespassing: Economic to Politics and Beyond*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.305

of democratic politics and the vitality of the discipline: ‘Where democracy is strong, political science is strong; where democracy is weak, political science is weak’.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century I cannot help but feel that both democracy and political science are weak and it is the relationship between both strands of this argument (i.e. the academic and the ‘real world’) that I want to bring to the fore in order to make an argument that focuses on the political imagination. I want to argue that political science’s collective failure to honour its professional responsibilities to *the public* has contributed significantly to the democratic malaise that is now the topic of such a burgeoning academic literature.<sup>10</sup> What is significant about this literature is that with only a few exceptions (discussed below) most academics are content to blame politicians, journalists, big business, bloggers – in fact, to lay the blame for the rise of what have been termed ‘disaffected democrats’ at the feet of just about anyone – without the slightest consideration of whether they might themselves have contributed to ‘why we hate politics’.<sup>11</sup> The roots of this accusation take us back not only to Huntington’s presidential address but to a focus on the link between dominant approaches to the study of politics (theories, methods, etc.) and the rise of anti-politics. More specifically I want to make a link between a disciplinary schism that emerged from the 1950s onwards and the loss of the political imagination.

In his influential Rede Lecture in 1959 C. P. Snow argued that the intellectual life of Western Society could be split into two cultures: the scientific and the humanistic.<sup>12</sup> Within political science this split manifested itself in a fundamental debate concerning whether it should and could emulate the hard sciences in terms of its theory, methods and ambition. Although this debate pre-dated the evolution of political science as a separate discipline within the social sciences it came very much to the fore in terms of its impact during the 1950s as a result of ‘the behavioural turn’. It is, however, important to understand that the behavioural revolution was itself designed to respond to concerns that political science had become increasingly irrelevant. David Easton’s arguments in *The Political System* (1953) concerning ‘the decline of modern political theory’ and the ‘malaise’ of political science, David Truman’s sweeping critique in his *Impact of the Revolution in Behavioural Science on Political Science* (1955) on the alleged failure of the discipline to keep pace with the other social sciences, and Robert Dahl’s *Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest* (1961) were each in their own ways crafted with an emphasis on the need for political science to demonstrate a more ambitious and explicit social relevance. The behavioural revolution was, at its core, symptomatic of a mood of dissatisfaction with the dominant approaches within political science (and in many ways the current Perestroika movement represents little more than a mirror-image development or counter-revolution).

From the 1950s political science became was ‘a divided discipline’ at which a set of scholars who remained committed to a more humanist and socially-engaged approach to the study of politics sat at one table, and those ‘young Turks’ who advocated a more fundamental shift towards the ‘scientific’ (or even ‘economic’) study of politics at another.<sup>13</sup> This latter approach became synonymous with a notion of ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalization’ that argued in favour of (*inter alia*): the injection of a clearer separation between academics and policy-makers; the rapid development of an esoteric language of politics; a focus on quantitative analysis and data collection; and an attempt to inject a sharp divide between ‘facts’ and ‘values’. There is, as always, a need to inject a degree of caution into claims of such magnitude and it is undoubtedly true that behavioural revolution was far less influential beyond North America and even there it was far less hegemonic than is commonly thought.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless it is impossible to deny the fact that during the second half of the twentieth

<sup>9</sup> Huntington *op cit.* p.7.

<sup>10</sup> For a review of this literature see Norris, P 2011 *Democratic Deficit*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> To adopt the title of Colin Hay’s 2007 book on political disaffection.

<sup>12</sup> Snow, C. P. 1960. *The Two Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Almond, G. 1988. ‘Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science’, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 21(4), 828-842.

<sup>14</sup> Hayward, J B Barry and Brown, A. 2003. *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Dunleavy, P Kelly, P and Moran, M. 2001. *British Political Science: Fifty Years of Political Studies*. London: Wiley Blackwell.

century political science shifted significantly in terms of its dominant theories, methods, values and aspirations. Whether this complex and multi-faceted shift was the result of ‘physics envy’ (in the 1950s and 1960s) or ‘economics envy’ (1970s and 1980s) the outcome was that deductive, game theoretic formal modelling and quantitative analysis enjoyed a privileged position in terms of research outputs and funding.<sup>15</sup>

This was, with the benefit of hindsight, the beginning of the ‘road to irrelevance’ that this section seeks to map and in this regard the work of C Wright Mills and Bernard Crick proved incredibly prophetic. It is, however, too easy to lay the blame for the contemporary ills of political science at the door of those scholars who advocated behaviouralism and later rational choice. The tragedy of political science was, as we shall see, that each and every sect in a very broad church succumbed to the temptations of ‘professionalism’ and, as a result, set out (like sleepwalkers) along one of two ‘roads to irrelevance’ that both led in the same direction.

The first ‘road to irrelevance’ is closely associated with the emergence of modern political or social *science* (as opposed to political or social *studies*) in the second-half of the twentieth century. The attempt to model the study of politics upon the natural sciences was forged upon the belief that it was not only possible but also desirable to isolate ‘facts’ from ‘values’ and through this to essentially depoliticise the study of politics. It was therefore concerned with disconnecting *the social* dimension of the study of politics, in terms of values and morality, from *the science* of political inquiry, in terms of data and knowledge. It was for exactly this reason that Mills’ used his *The Sociological Imagination* to ridicule the rise of ‘grand theory’ and ‘abstracted empiricism’ as ‘parasites living-off the classic social science tradition’.<sup>16</sup> Scholars were, in Mills argument, being corrupted by a false bureaucratic ethos that was turning them into ‘mere technicians’ at a time when the public was desperately in need of help to understand the changing times in which they lived. In *The American Science of Politics* (1958) Crick warned similarly against the potentially insulating implications of viewing the study of politics as a ‘hard’ (i.e. natural-scientific) science. To push the discipline in that direction was, he argued, to risk robbing it of its passion, its emotion and its capacity to play a broader social role. In this regard Crick’s position dovetailed with the concerns of several American scholars at the time, like Thomas Cook and Philip Moneyppenny, and was therefore less anti-American as anti-*scientism*.<sup>17</sup>

To accept the view that the behavioural-turn sought to depoliticise the study of politics in order to isolate certain facts, patterns or rules in a pseudo-scientific manner arguably risks missing the more sinister manner in which political science *actually cultivated* anti-politics. The depoliticisation of political science is therefore a myth that in many circumstances veils the imposition of a highly political set of values that about human nature and collective action that could only ever fuel distrust in politicians and public servants. This is because if the baseline assumption of political science is that human beings are interested solely in maximising their own selfish utility then the discipline can only ever breed cynicism, distrust and negativity. Rational choice theory in particular became less of a predictive science of politics or deductive method and more of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is for exactly this reason that Colin Hay argues that ‘political scientists have contributed significantly to the demonization of politics..[T]hey trained us, in effect, to be cynical. And in that respect at least, we have been excellent students’.<sup>18</sup> The point I am trying to make is that if political scientists have engaged in promoting a message about politics, if they have been influential and relevant, then it has been in promoting what I would term ‘the bad faith model of politics’.<sup>19</sup> In this model politicians are inevitably linked to squabbling, self-interest, short-termism, corruption and sleaze; they are, in short,

<sup>15</sup> See Flyvbjerg, B. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sociological Imagination* p.125.

<sup>17</sup> Cook, T. 1960. ‘The American Science of Politics’, *Journal of Politics*, 22, 338-341; Moneyppenny, P. 1960. ‘The Study of Politics’, *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 4, 83-87; Almond, G. 1988. ‘Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science’, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 21(4), 828-842 (at p.829).

<sup>18</sup> Hay, C. 2009. ‘Academic Political Science: Understanding Politics Differently’, *Political Quarterly*, 80(4), 587.

<sup>19</sup> Flinders, M. 2012. *Defending Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

not to be trusted. If politicians represent the epitome of evil then all contact and cooperation with them by academics must be avoided.

The dominant intellectual shift within political science from the 1950s and 1960s onwards was therefore a rejection in the progressive social tradition that had shaped the discipline from its inception. This is a tradition that was defined by the work of A. Lawrence Lowell, Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, Albert Bushnell Hart and Charles Beard in the United States; and in which the work of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, R. H. Tawney and Harold Laski was steeped in the UK. This was also the ‘classic tradition’ that Mills and Crick sought to defend against what they saw as the pro-market and anti-political values that were concealed beneath the claims to ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ of modern political science. With this in mind it is possible to pinpoint both the passive and active contributions of political science to the rise in political disengagement and apathy. In an active sense political science’s core values taught us that politicians and bureaucrats were not to be trusted. Indeed, arguably the most influential strand of political science in recent years has been that community of scholars who has advocated the ‘logic of discipline’ and the depoliticisation of democratic politics.<sup>20</sup> This logic, simply put, defines politicians as too easily tempted to interfere in ‘rational’ policy making due to the pressures of democratic politics and has therefore fuelled the mass transfer of functions from elected politicians to a new cadre of experts, specialists, scientists, ethicists, judges, accountants. The active ‘road to irrelevance’ is therefore tied to a normative form of anti-politics that advocates the hollowing-out of the architecture of democracy due to the ‘bad faith model of politics’.

The vast majority of political scientists, however, were not swept-up in the behavioural revolution; many retained a commitment to a pluralistic methodology and a humanistic set of values. For the most part, therefore, the culpability of most social and political scientists relates more to a sin of omission rather than to the existence of anti-political sentiment. The *passive* ‘road to irrelevance’ is therefore concerned with the evolution of a discipline in which certain activities are prioritised and incentivised far above all others. The dominant interpretation of ‘professionalism’ in the social sciences, in general, and in all facets of political science, in particular, has therefore become tied to a culture of ‘publish or perish’ in which few incentives exist for broader social engagement. The ‘tragedy of political science’ as David Ricci argued three decades ago is therefore that as the study of politics became more ‘professional’ and ‘scientific’, the weaker it became in terms of both its social relevance and accessibility and as a social force supportive of democracy and democratic values.<sup>21</sup> In a sense the social and political relevance of the study of politics simply melted away and was replaced with a malignant (and to some extent embarrassing) preoccupation with methodological masturbation, theoretical fetishism, sub-disciplinary balkanisation and the development of esoteric discourses.<sup>22</sup>

And in making such strident accusations I am by no means a lone scholar. Theda Skocpol, for example, has underlined the need for ambition, energy and fresh-thinking within the discipline and has defined the current state of the art as being defined by ‘navel gazing and talking to ourselves’. Robert Putnam has similarly highlighted the need for the discipline to reconnect and to ‘focus on things that the rest of the citizens of our country are concerned about’. The problem is, however, that the dominant scholarly tradition of political science – and I mean of the whole discipline - rejects such an emphasis and as a result, as Joseph Nye has argued, ‘the danger is that political science is moving in the direction of saying more and more about less and less’. And the fact that Nye made these comments not in an academic journal or professional magazine but in the *New York Times* illustrates the manner in which the issue of relevance has mutated from a disciplinary side-show to a very public debate.<sup>23</sup> ‘To read many political science journals is to enter an enclosed and often narcissistic world of academics writing for each other’ Peter Riddell, the former political commentator for *The Times* and currently Director of the Institute for Government, wrote in 2010 ‘It is self-referential as well as self-reverential, and often unreadable to anyone but a specialist. Real politicians seldom feature in these articles. Indeed the authors seem to feel they would be corrupted by contact with politicians. But

<sup>20</sup> See Roberts, A. 2010. *The Logic of Discipline*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Ricci, D. 1984. *The Tragedy of Political Science*. Yale: Yale University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Shapiro *Flight From Reality*

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times* 20 October 2009

politics is not, or should not be, about mathematics or neo-Marxist jargon. Some political scientists do try to bridge the gap with the world of politics. But they are a minority.<sup>24</sup>

The intellectual origins of what I have termed ‘the road to irrelevance’, or what Mills described with his typical flourish as ‘the entrance into fruitlessness’, are both complex and long-standing and to some extent this is a path that has been trodden by a range of social sciences. It is for exactly this reason that Shapiro uses the metaphor of flying to describe a common sense of disconnectedness across the social sciences, in general, and within political science, in particular. To fly is therefore to feel a heady sort of freedom and manoeuvrability, a feeling that what you write actually matters and a belief in your capacity to take risks, challenge established idioms, and reach-out to new audiences. The metaphor of flying is therefore intimately entwined with the political imagination. Too many academics have become scared of flying for fear of being ridiculed for being insufficiently specific or rigorous, or rejected by the intellectual gatekeepers who have built their careers on a specific approach to the discipline and now edit journals or chair selection panels. The tragedy of political science is therefore that it has lost its political imagination.

## II. The Political Imagination

Political science is a restless and unhappy discipline and its uneasiness is not of the body but of the soul. Will I destroy faith in the omnipotence of professors entirely if I confess that I possess a nagging self-doubt that I actually know what my discipline is any more? Will I become an outcast if I admit that the vast majority of peer-reviewed journal articles leave me down-hearted and confused? This may reflect a simple lack of intellectual capacity on my behalf but my sense is that too many academics have made an art form out of making the simple complicated; and too few have shown the genius and courage necessary to move in the opposite direction. When did you last read a piece of political science that filled you with what the Greeks called ‘entheos’ – that is a sense of inspiration, release or connection with the text? Some professors might argue that as a scholarly endeavor concerned with the pursuit of pure and detached knowledge political science should not be concerned with inspiring, releasing or connecting and if they hold this position they have surely lost their political imagination: they are dead in intellectual terms and have become little more than (naive and misguided) technicians.

If I am to make and sustain such a strong argument, however, I need to focus more clearly on this quality that I call the political imagination and to explain exactly why it matters in terms of its promise, its uses and its implications in terms of redefining the future of the discipline. The aim of this section is therefore to plunder C Wright Mill’s seminal work *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) in order to illustrate why its arguments matter more today than they did when the book was first published over half a century ago. More specifically I want to develop strands of thought that were introduced in the previous section and weave them together into a set of more explicit and robust arguments concerning bridging, accessibility and morality:

1. The task and the promise of the political imagination is to form and sustain social and political relationships [i.e. *bridging*].
2. The political imagination therefore demands that political scientists talk and write in ‘human’ [i.e. *accessibility*].
3. The political imagination is both optimistic and relevant [i.e. *morality*].

My intellectual debt to Mills is significant and my reliance upon his work may speak volumes about the inadequacy of my own political imagination. However, as attentive readers will have already noticed, whereas Mills’ focus was upon the *sociological imagination* I am concerned with cultivating

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<sup>24</sup> Riddell, P. 2010. ‘In Defence of Politicians’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63(3), 545-557.



the *political imagination*. As Mills himself admits, using these phrases interchangeably is unproblematic: 'I hope my colleagues will accept the term 'sociological imagination'. Political scientists who have read my manuscript suggest 'the political imagination'; anthropologists, 'the anthropological imagination' – and so on. The term matters less than the idea.' What mattered then was the idea that social scientists had a moral and political obligation to society at large; an obligation to help people make sense of an increasingly complex world. This was both *the promise* and *the task* of the political imagination.

### **The Task and the Promise [i.e. *bridging*]**

The central role and value of the political imagination rests in its capacity to help both the governors and the governed to understand the broader social and political milieu. It is therefore concerned not with necessarily providing simple solutions to complex problems but in helping individuals to make sense of their position in the world and the nature of the challenges that confront them in a way that forges some form of reconnection. Scholarly knowledge, from this perspective, has academic value in its own right but it also has (or should have) a social value in the sense of a meaningful relevance, demonstrable impact or simply some visibility beyond academe. It is exactly this broader visibility, and the skills (both intellectual and professional) that are necessary to achieve it, that the 'road to irrelevance' has destroyed. Let me inject a little story to burnish this point; during 2009 and 2010 I wrote and presented a series of programmes for the BBC that sought to explain both the challenges of governing in the twenty-first century and also the reasons for the rise in political apathy and disengagement amongst the public.<sup>25</sup> As part of this project I interviewed former presidents and prime ministers from all over the world, a vast number of serving politicians and senior officials, a broad sweep of social commentators, comedians, satirists, interest group representatives and journalists and – last but not least – a significant number of members of the public. My set of interview questions initially included one about the relevance of political science with the aim of gauging how relevant or visible any particular professor, book or piece of research about politics had been to the day-to-day activities of any of the interviewees. With almost perfect consistency this question received the following responses: blank bewilderment (from the public); polite embarrassment (from serving officials and politicians); and a mixture of laughter and ridicule for even asking the question (from all other social commentators). The question was quickly dropped.

Mills begins *The Sociological Imagination* with the statement that '[N]owadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps' because they exist in a period of far-reaching social, political and economic change but they lack the means and resources to understand how and why these changes affect their lives and what might be done. Fifty years later and with the benefit of hindsight Mills' 'earthquakes of change' appear almost insignificant when set against the challenges that will define the twenty-first century (resource depletion, over-population, climate change, bio-politics, economic crisis, etc.) and this is reflected in the fact that the analysis of risk and what might be termed 'the politics of crisis' have evolved to almost become self-standing disciplines in their own right. In this context Bauman's work on liquidity and Giddens' work on a 'runaway world' with their converging foci on the erosion of once solid points of social anchorage takes on added import as both a form of contextual shorthand and as a point of departure into the political imagination.<sup>26</sup> A point of departure in the sense that encourages – even forces us - to fly (to return to Shapiro's powerful metaphor).

To possess and display the political imagination is therefore to combine the very highest standards of scholarship with the ability to demonstrate why it matters in social terms. Not necessarily why it matters in the instrumental sense of having the capacity to change government policy or produce profit but why it matters in the sense of being in some way relevant to the ordinary lives of men and

<sup>25</sup> These programmes are available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b015fb6c>

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Bauman, C. 2007. *Liquid Times* Cambridge: Polity; Bauman, C. 2006. *Liquid Fears* Cambridge: Polity; Giddens, A. 2002. *Runaway World*. London: Profile.

women. Can't you see? The political imagination isn't for the market of commerce, but for the market of ideas. Those who possess the political imagination are therefore able to see the bigger picture in terms of structural transformations in society (political, economic, technological, psychological, etc.) but are then able to use this knowledge not only as a contribution to academic knowledge but as a contribution *to* society; a contribution in the sense of being able to help the public make sense of the world around them and helping them to understand their position within the broader social milieu. 'For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another...it is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two'.<sup>27</sup> In this sense the political imagination cannot promise to give individuals greater control over their lives but it does offer a form of linkage and a way of cultivating social understanding and political literacy. Put slightly differently, it enables the university professor of politics to help the individual grasp their place in the world and through this 'the indifference of publics' might be 'transformed into involvement with public issues'.<sup>28</sup>

The political imagination is therefore structured around a twin commitment to the very highest standards of scholarship (in terms of rigor, ambition and creativity) and an equally robust commitment to demonstrating the relevance of that scholarship across society. As mentioned before, the paradox of our time and the tragedy of political science is that it has honored neither of these commitments. If the content of our leading journals really does reflect the highest standards of scholarship then we are in trouble; and at the same time repeated public demands that political scientists learn to 'talk human' reflects the triumph of what Mills called 'socspeak' (i.e. opaque, indigestible syntactical and semantic sludge) over clear English.<sup>29</sup> It is this focus on the use of English that brings us to shift our attention from bridging to accessibility.

### **Political and Social Engagement [i.e. *accessibility*]**

It is my firm belief that the public do not 'hate' politics and that it is closer to the truth to suggest that the public no longer understands who makes political decisions on their behalf or why certain problems appear so intractable. A certain sense of alienation and disengagement is, to some extent, an understandable outcome of this situation but the point I am really seeking to drive home is that in recent decades political scientists have largely failed to fulfill their professional responsibility to the public. This is a professional responsibility forged around the cultivation of political literacy and public understanding. It is the use of social science to tell the public what is going on, what is likely to happen and the choices they enjoy in shaping and steering the world around them. This is a critical point. Bauman is undoubtedly correct in his assessment of 'the liquid modern world' that, like all liquids, cannot stand still and keep its shape for long.<sup>30</sup> And yet our views diverge on the implications of the passage from 'solid' to 'liquid' for the relationship between politics and fate. Bauman forgets that all liquids can be contained, channeled, diluted, bottled and that not all liquids are poisonous.

I want to return to how social and political scientists interpret the world in the next sub-section but here I simply want to focus on the issue of communication and accessibility because there is no sense in promoting the theme of bridging or linkage or emphasizing the professional obligations of university professors of politics to the public, if what flows along that bridge is incomprehensible. This is a point I have already made but its importance cannot be over-stated: there are two major hurdles the political science must clear if it is to develop a greater relevance and social impact and the first of these revolves around the issues of language, clarity and deceit. 'Any fool can make the simple complex' Albert Einstein famously suggested 'but it takes a real genius to discuss complex issues in simple terms'. If this is true then political science urgently needs more geniuses. This point, of course, takes us back to the history and 'professionalization' of the discipline but I fear I must ask of much

<sup>27</sup> *The Sociological Imagination* p.7

<sup>28</sup> *The Sociological Imagination* p.5

<sup>29</sup> This definition of 'socspeak' is taken from the 'Wobbly Sociology' blogspot.

<sup>30</sup> See Bauman, Z. 2010. *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World*. Cambridge: Polity.

modern political science whether there is actually any fire beneath the smoke? Is much of our scholarship simply confused verbiage or is there, after all, something there? The answer, I think, is: something is there, but it is buried so deep - and it demands so much in terms of translation - that *what* that germ of relevance actually *is* or *why* it matters is rarely uncovered.

Smoke without fire; topics without argument; irrelevant ponderosity; methodological introductions to methodology; theoretical introductions to theory; and neologisms aplenty. These are quite indispensable to the writing of books by men without ideas. And so is a lack of intelligibility. The ultimate web of deceit is to veil one's intellectual impotence through the use of jargon and verbiage in the hope that the reader will define their failure to penetrate the book as evidence of their own intellectual weakness, rather than the authors. The complexity of the language used to study and write about politics is, from this interpretation, rarely related to the complexity of the phenomenon or topic of analysis. In this regard Mills' translation of segments of Talcott Parson's *The Social System* (1951) into plain English provided a devastating insight into the art of abstraction. Sixty years later the direction of travel of much academic writing has been towards far greater jargon-spew, even in those sub-disciplines, like public administration, legislative studies and comparative government, that traditionally enjoyed a far closer relationship with practitioners and plain English.<sup>31</sup>

Critics of my position will undoubtedly argue that political science, as a professional discipline, will inevitably require the use of certain technical terms or phrases that are understandably not within the mainstream public vocabulary. This, again, is rarely more than a smokescreen. Technical terms will, of course, have to be used from time to time but technical does not necessarily mean difficult, and certainly does not mean jargon. Political science has become a discipline built on jargon; and if technical terms are really necessary and also clear and precise, it is not difficult to use them in the context of plain English and thus introduce them meaningfully to the reader. Critics may at this point engage in a far more sinister and hurtful form of criticism and accuse me of advocating the demotion of academic scholarship into little more than pseudo-journalism. This sideswipe will be couched upon the implicit suggestion that I am obviously unable to grasp the intellectual magnitude of their work and am therefore trying to lower the standard of political science towards my own inferior level. The curse of political science, a curse that both Mills and Crick endured, is to become identified as defined a 'mere literary man' or, worse still, to have their work defined as 'mere journalism'. Any academic who dares to write in a widely intelligible way, let alone engages with television or radio, is liable to be condemned in this manner. This reflects a rather superficial logic. Accessibility and scholarly quality do not exist in a zero-sum relationship whereby an increase in one inevitably leads to a reduction in the other.

Has nobody noticed that the most influential and enduring works of political science – from Machiavelli's *The Prince* to Crick's *Defence* – are generally short, concise and accessible? Readable does not mean superficial and those that belittle such works are really demonstrating their own lack of a political imagination. A lack of ready intelligibility rarely has anything to do with the complexity of the subject matter and very rarely anything to do with the profundity of thought at play. It has, as Mills' argued, to do almost entirely with certain confusions of the academic writer about his or her own status and their intellectual insecurity around those less conventional scholars who might dare to reveal that the Emperor has no new clothes. To define academic work that is both scholarly *and* accessible to a wide audience as 'journalistic' is akin to the academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre who understandably wish to exclude those who possess the ability to talk to both 'kings and publics'. In any case the broader pressure to tie the public funding of the social sciences to clearer outputs in terms of relevance and impact requires political science to move far beyond its historical pretensions and aversions and instead learn to diversify in terms of its research outputs. Political science needs to work not harder but smarter; smarter in the sense of recognising that the next generation of political scientists will have to master the art of *triple-writing* (a technique of writing and dissemination that cascades the outputs of any research project along a three-part process).

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Fox, C and Miller, H. 1994. *Post-Modern Public Administration*. London: Sage.

Phase 1: Research results, findings and implications are written-up into traditional academic outputs like books and articles [i.e. *Single-writing*].

Phase 2: The same research then forms the basis of a short research-note that is intended to be both accessible and of value to a range of user-groups [i.e. *Double-writing*].

Phase 3: In the final stage the research forms the focus of a number of succinct, pithy and even controversial articles for newspapers, magazines or popular websites [i.e. *Triple-writing*].

Triple writing therefore provides a way of bridging the academic and public spheres without diluting academic standards. The challenge stems from the fact that the professional incentives of the discipline still reflect the centrality of *single-writing* but that situation is slowly changing as funding, and to a lesser extent student recruitment, become linked to demonstrable impact, relevance and public visibility. The climate is therefore one that will increasingly reward those who possess the political imagination because double and triple-writing demands creativity, vision, the capacity to take risks and even a certain playfulness of mind. The real challenge of triple-writing, however, is that it requires skills and attributes – ways of looking at the world – that established political scientists have either lost or never had and that new entrants to the profession are rarely encouraged to develop at the beginning of their careers. It also demands that scholars understand the notion of intellectual craftsmanship and the need to approach their political writing in terms of it being an art *as well* as a science.<sup>32</sup> An art, that is, that can connect, inspire and which possesses *entheos* in the true sense of the term and it is for exactly this reason that the third and final argument concerning the political imagination focuses on political morality and values *vis-à-vis* political science.

### **Optimistic and Relevant [i.e. *morality*].**

In ‘Why I Write’ (1946) George Orwell suggested four great motives for writing: *sheer egotism* in the sense of a desire to ‘seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after your death, to get your own back on the grown-up who snubbed you in childhood’; *aesthetic enthusiasm* in terms of ‘a perception of beauty in the external world, in words and their right arrangement [or a] desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed’; *historical impulse* which brings with it ‘a desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity’; and finally, a *political purpose* or ‘desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples’ ideas of the kind of society that they should strive after’. In reality I expect political scientists, like most authors, are motivated by a combination of all four of these factors but in the context of this essay I want to make an argument that focuses on political purpose. More specifically I want to use this sub-section to make three very quick and inter-related claims.

1. Political science needs to dare to engage with ‘the political’ in the sense of engaging with relevant norms, values and debates in the public sphere.
2. This is quite different to suggesting that political scientists should become partisan political actors.
3. A deep cloud of depression and irrelevance has settled upon large sections of the discipline and this will only be cast off by focusing not on problems and ‘end times’ but on solutions and ‘new beginnings’.

The first argument takes us back to the ‘road(s) to irrelevance’ that was mapped out in the previous section. This suggested that political science had grown increasingly detached, isolated and irrelevant due to a disciplinary attempt to separate ‘facts’ and ‘values’. This allowed me to suggest that an attempt had been made to take ‘the politics’ out of the study of politics. Although this trend was initially interpreted as a form of depoliticisation this was quickly rejected in favor of an argument that identified the imposition of an implicitly pro-market and anti-political set of values beneath a veneer

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<sup>32</sup> I derive this thought from the work of George Orwell and particularly his essays ‘Why I Write’

of objective and value free research.<sup>33</sup> At the same time those who rejected the ontological and epistemological claims of behaviouralism are guilty of their own sins of omission in the sense that they allowed themselves to become *invisible* political actors at a time when democratic politics needed them. They were invisible because political scientists retreated into their offices and abdicated their professional (and professorial) responsibilities to the public. The vehicle of their abdication was, as Mills and Crick both stressed, an increased emphasis on cloudy obscurantism, empty ingenuity and the production of millions of words about nothing or, at best, very little. As a result, political science drifted towards irrelevance because it had very little that actually mattered to say. It had no message and it had no soul.

If a connection exists between the health of *democratic politics* and the health of *political science* it follows that the latter must have something of value to say about the former. Political scientists must play a more active and visible role in major debates about the nature of society, the distribution of scarce resources, the need for reforms or the challenges ahead. They must, in a sense, stand up and be counted as political actors. And yet many political scientists would balk from the suggestion that they possessed a moral and political obligation to society at large. Many would hide behind the shield that to make such an argument risked politicizing the profession. To raise this shield would, however, to fall into a trap that has held political science back from realizing its potential for at least fifty years.

A university professor of politics is a political actor. No research or writing is genuinely free from political bias and even idea that political science should have nothing to do with values is itself, or that it is necessary to separate ‘knowledge’ from ‘action’, is itself *a political* attitude. Gabriel Almond was undoubtedly correct when he wrote that ‘the uneasiness in the political science profession is not of the body but of soul’ but he was undoubtedly wrong when he conflated all political action and engagement as *partisan* political engagement. Arguing in favor of political scientists playing an active role in day-to-day political debates was, for Almond, the intellectual equivalent of ‘throwing in the sponge’ for a discipline that was (or should be) focused on ‘objectivity’. Moreover, anyone who challenged this position must not only be ‘anti-professionalism’ but also ‘in doubt as to whether they are scholars or politicians’.<sup>34</sup> Although such simplistic assumptions may have held sway in the twentieth century they hold little value in the twenty-first. The political imagination is not interested in big ‘P’ party politics and is concerned with defending not specific politicians, decisions or arguments but the process and values of democratic politics. It is concerned with the promotion of democratic values, with social understanding and political literacy and with the encouragement of democratic engagement.

Defending *politics* is therefore very different from defending specific *politicians* or *parties*, just as defending *the role* of politicians (an essentially invidious and painful profession) is quite different from having any obligation to defend the specific behavior of any specific politician. Almond’s arguments therefore risk conflating a number of issues that urgently need to be teased-apart. This, in turn, leaves us with a sudden sense that maybe political science does have a responsibility to its subject matter that it has largely neglected. To make this argument delivers is to place this essay firmly and finally within the contours of Bernard Cricks’s classic *Defence of Politics*.

### III. A Rallying Cry to the University Professors of Politics

This essay has made an argument of almost primitive simplicity: if political science is to grow and flourish in the twenty-first century it urgently needs to rediscover its *political imagination*. In order to make this argument previous sections have charted both the ‘road(s) to irrelevance’ and the three main elements of the political imagination (i.e. bridging, accessibility and morality). In this regard I hope to have at least provided some food for thought that may help you nourish a more positive and constructive approach to the study of politics. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to fleshing out

<sup>33</sup> Shapiro, I. 1996. *Pathologies of Rational Choice*. Yale: Yale University Press.

<sup>34</sup> p.829

these points in just a little more detail. For those too tired or too full to take any more nourishment, I thank you for your time and hope that you do not think ill of me for what I have sought to say within these pages (and let me reassure you that Herod is not in my heart). For those with the space for just a little more food for thought let me conclude this essay by seeking to engage with the scholarship of Bernard Crick as a way of driving-home my argument concerning the political imagination.

If C Wright Mills possessed the *sociological* imagination then Bernard Crick undoubtedly possessed the *political* imagination and to flow from the work of the former to the latter is to develop a certain natural currency or flow. Both men were intellectuals who were frequently sceptical of intellectuals; both were vigorous pessimists and despairing optimists; both were polemicists who engaged in political debates; both were polymaths in terms of their intellectual breadth; both were mavericks who relished in maintaining something of an ‘outsider’ (or what Mills described as ‘outlander’) status; both were radicals with conservative tendencies; and both were huge fans of George Orwell’s writing. The central element of Crick’s scholarship that really interests this essay is his views on the responsibilities of political scientists to promote the public understanding of politics. Crick’s was therefore a career that hinged upon the notions of bridging, accessibility and morality. Indeed, it was Crick’s commitment to these qualities that led directly to the introduction of compulsory citizenship education in the UK (and a knighthood for services to political studies). He therefore maintained throughout his career, a distinctive responsibility upon the academic community to bring illumination, via engagement, to the process and thinking that politics requires. So let me plunder both his values and scholarship (particularly his ‘A Rallying Cry to the University Professors of Politics’ that was published as an appendix to the second edition of his *In Defence of Politics* in 1964) in order to underscore my argument about the relationship between the health of democratic politics and the health of political science.

Could it be that political science is in poor health because it failed to nourish and sustain democratic politics in the public sphere? Surely it cannot be long before Crick’s *Defence of Politics* and Riddell’s *Defence of Politicians* are joined by a *Defence of Political Science*? It would take a braver (or more foolish) man or woman than me to try and defend political science as it has been undertaken in recent decades. As the end result would probably be both slim in form and weak in content let me use Crick’s ‘rallying cry’ and his emphasis on political understanding as a way of rediscovering the soul of the discipline. In short, let me sign-off by making thee provocative arguments.

1. Political science needs to become more *amateur* (or ‘wobbly’).
2. Political science needs to become more *optimistic*.
3. Political Science needs to become *more daring*.

The study of politics has, in recent decades, become gripped by the pathology of rampant professionalization. Indeed the mantra of almost every sub-disciplinary association or group has generally been wrapped-around a commitment to ‘greater professionalisation’. For example, Michael Freedon’s recent call for political theorists to step away from the kinds of ‘public intellectual’ stance that Crick, and others, have played, in pursuit of a more analytical approach to everyday politics can be seen as signalling a retreat from the sense of public responsibility which Crick urged upon the scholarly community.<sup>35</sup> Jeff Gill and Kenneth Meier have similarly set forth what they call a ‘methodological manifesto’ for the field of public administration and have suggested the field has ‘fallen behind related fields in terms of methodological sophistication’ and what is needed is ‘a greatly enhanced focus on empiricism and rigorous quantitative approaches’.<sup>36</sup> The concept of ‘professionalisation’ has therefore become tied to a certain idiom that arguably grates, without careful management, against the demands of the political imagination. It is an idiom that tends to promote quantification, specialisation, jargon, distance and a *faux* form of depoliticisation that leaves me with

<sup>35</sup> Freedon, M. ‘Thinking Politically and Thinking about Politics’ in D. Leopold and M. Stears (eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 196-215.

<sup>36</sup> Gill, J and Meier, K. 2000. *What Works*. Colorado: Westview Press, p.195.

the inevitable conclusion that if this *is* professionalization then political science needs a large and urgent dose of amateurism.

*Amateurism* not in a pejorative sense, however, but in the sense of returning to a proud social science tradition in which the gap between political science and political reality was less wide; amateur in the sense of a form of political writing that was widely accessible; and amateur in the sense of possibly possessing more drive, ambition and creativity than those who have been tightly schooled within a rather dry and lifeless academic tradition. It was exactly this sense of ‘flying’ (cf. Shapiro) that Crick appealed for in his ‘rallying cry’ and that Mills referred to when he defined himself as being personally and intellectually ‘wobbly’. In my interpretation to take pride in being ‘an amateur’ is to rejoice in Mills’ commitment to being ‘wobbly’ in the sense of refusing to be bound by academic or professional dogma. ‘I am a Wobbly, personally, down deep, and for good’ Mills wrote ‘I am outside the whale, and I got that way through social isolation and self-help’.<sup>37</sup> Where are those young political scientists that are willing to exist ‘outside the whale’? Where are those young scholars who exist to inject colour into what has become a very grey discipline?

To suggest that political science has become a rather grey discipline is surely beyond dispute and flows into my second concluding argument concerning *optimism*. The discipline has become not just a dismal science but also a very depressing science in the sense that it has become imbued not only with a deep pessimism but also with a focus on ‘endism’ in all its forms (‘the end of politics’, ‘end of authority’, ‘end of history’, etc.).<sup>38</sup> Although much of this literature highlights important social, economic, or political trends in the starkest of terms it does little in terms of identifying solutions or promoting confidence in the capacity of collective democratic engagement to respond. Fate and our future have acquired an unfortunate association with death, destruction, and impotence that for some reason completely overlooks the massive achievements of democratic politics during the twentieth century. A new political science for the twentieth-first century might therefore adopt a more optimistic – or, at the very least, more balanced and solution focused – account of the relationship between politics and fate. The question for political science is whether it has the strength of nerve and purpose to play a public role in explaining why politics matters, how it can and does shape peoples lives, and how democratic politics can be viewed as a counterweight to the vicissitudes of fate.

Most of all political science needs more individuals that ‘dare to be a Daniel’ and ‘dare to stand alone’. It takes great courage and conviction to stand alone and swim against the current of professional academic opinion but to some extent the political and social sciences needs characters, like Mills and Crick, who are willing to put their heads above the parapet and explain to the public why politics – and therefore *the study of* politics – matters. The twenty-first century will belong to those disciplines that are willing to respond to the world as it changes, to modernize and adapt and see the loss of once fixed reference points as an opportunity rather than a threat. The intellectual craftsman displays a commitment to understanding, challenging and changing both their discipline and the world in equal measure. The craftsman’s work must be critical and it must make a difference in the sense of holding-on to a belief that the study of politics can make a difference. It needs to dare to believe in itself. To advocate such a radical shift in the nature and scope of political science is not to promote a form of ‘punk politics’ but it is to bring this essay full circle and back to where it started and Trent’s conclusion that it remains a discipline ‘in search of its soul’. With this in mind it is a great shame that APSA’s task force on political science in the twenty-first century managed to isolate the responsibility of political scientists to help the public make sense of the world around them – ‘arguably the heart and soul of political science’ – but then proceeded to bury its head in the professional sand by focusing solely on issues *within* the profession rather than the link between the profession and the *wider world*.<sup>39</sup> The task force therefore suggest the existence of a discipline that remains adrift and that urgently needs to rediscover its political imagination.

<sup>37</sup> From *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills, introduction by Dan Wakefield (University of California Press, 2000.), pag.252.

<sup>38</sup> See Gamble, A. 2000. *Politics and Fate*, Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>39</sup> APSA. 2011. *Political Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Washington: APSA