Letters

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Donald Reich
Brooklyn, NY

On Naming the Whole

Two exchanges in the December 1990 issue of *PS* demonstrate the hazards of using the name of a whole to designate a part, or the name of a part to designate a whole. Both errors result in failures of comprehension that muddy analysis and weaken our collective ability to refine arguments.

The exchange between Thomas R. Dye and Harmon Zeigler on one side and Michael Parenti on the other exemplifies the first error. Dye and Zeigler use the term "socialism" to designate the USSR and other countries adopting the same combination of very closed one-party political system and centrally planned economy permitting little or no private ownership of economic enterprises that has characterized the Soviet system until very recently. The error is helpful to both sides: it permits Dye and Zeigler to assert that all governments calling themselves "socialist" will have external and internal security budgets and policies similar to those of the USSR; it permits Parenti to cast what could be an informative empirical debate back into ideological terms and accuse the others of being as ideologically blinded as they accuse him of being.

The terms "capitalist" and "socialist" are hotly contested, and each can be used to designate a fairly wide variety of practices. If the argument were recast in finer-grained terms, with both "capitalist" and "socialist" states divided into subtypes, we might find that subtypes have distinctive patterns of security policies. We might even find overlaps that make a simple "capitalist" versus "socialist" dichotomy misleading. Looking at parts thus seems a more productive initial step in efforts to relate regime type to security choices. Doing so would permit a fuller assessment of whether the broader dichotomy is borne out. Starting with the dichotomy will not yield as much information.

Material in one of the commentaries on Theodore Lowi's *The End of Liberalism* exemplifies the second error. Mark Petracca says in a footnote that "At the 1990 Western Political Science Association meetings, Lowi responded to a question of where he stood on the question of self-interest by conceding that 'We are a society based on greed, we simply call it the pursuit of happiness. That is the essence of liberalism.' "

A strict dichotomizing of self-interest and other-regard is problematic, but the difficulties vastly increase if the broader category of self-interest is regarded as nothing more than manifestations of greed. It might be argued that a woman's desire for a lessening of disparities in pay between male and female workers or for stronger social sanctions against rape, or a minority person's desire for a society free of adverse discrimination based on skin color do not involve "self-interest" because their attainment would so transform society that they should be classified as "other regarding." Yet for the affected individuals there is an irreducible component of self-interest involved because these changes would permit them to lead more well-rounded lives of their own as well as enjoy a better society. It seems odd to call such a form of self-interest by the name "greed."

Here, too, the error has its uses; equating all self-interest with greed performs two useful functions in debate. It not only permits sharp condemnations of certain practices that became more common in the 1980s; it also gives sharper point to critiques of all political analyses resting on methodological individualist and rational utility maximizing assumptions about human behavior. Such critique is needed but treating all forms of self-interest as greed carries great dangers. Such treatment denies the reality and validity of other forms of individuals' concern for themselves and their own prospects. Use of the highly negatively charged term "greed" for all forms of self-interest also makes it easier to advance totalizing visions of community that become vehicles for new forms of oppression rather than sustainers of self-aware and self-reflective citizens.

M. J. Peterson
University of Massachusetts

Explaining the National Labor Relations Act of 1935

A participant-observer of the events leading up to the passage of the 1935 NLRA cannot help noticing that the positions taken by the protagonists in the Goldfield-Skocpol-Finegold "controversy" (December 1990 issue of *APSR*, pp. 1297-1316) evidently continue in the 1990s much as they did in the 1930s. In the scholarly community, the opinion distribution between the respective viewpoints is probably also much the same, a minority adhering to the Goldfield position; probably the majority accepts Skocpol and Finegold's view.

Except for the difference in baseline perspective, there is remarkable empirical agreement between the adversaries. Goldfield espouses the old Marxist line that worker unrest and radical organization leaders "determine" government action, basing this upon the most abstract proposition that society and social forces control politics. Skocpol and Finegold have no patience with this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096500050617 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theory of public policy formation, insisting that more proximate factors, contextual and organizational (structural), are necessary to explain the timing of policy decisions, why one controversial alternative was chosen rather than others, and specifically rejecting the thesis that social forces and revolutionary leaders dominate the non-routine choices and controversial decisions of voters, public officials, and group leaders and interests (the 'autonomy of the state' thesis). If this ideological conflict accurately described the state-of-the-art epistemology in public policy research, the discipline would be in a bad way. F-S-G demonstrate in their colloquy, however, that they are not prisoners of this dilemma, and that they agree empirically upon a conceptual reduction of explanatory factors to a theoretically credible number.

It is with respect to this latter problem that in the writer's judgment a serious "analytical oversight" occurs between the disputants, although all three are quite aware of the variable they fail to emphasize or give causal status to. I refer to *changes in public attitudes or standards of public right and wrong in labor disputes* that differentiate the 1880s and 90s, the 1919-25 period, from the opinion climate of 1933-39. American employer resistance and legal acts of hostile warfare against employee union activity and collective bargaining over condition of employment (except in scattered industries and areas) was an established feature of American labor relations going back to the early 19th century. It was legally sanctioned by the Supreme Court in the *Adair* and *Coppage* cases in 1908 and 1923, and the patterns continued down to the great reversal in 1937 upholding the NLRA. Hard as it may be to measure, let alone conceptualize, it is necessary to postulate that public standards of right and wrong conduct in labor disputes supported the arbitrary legal rights of employers to fight unions and discriminate against unionized employees as part of the employer's control of his property and freedom of contract, at least until the experience of the 1933-35 period with Section 7(a) of the Industrial Recovery Act led to the Administration's and congressional determination that governmental intervention and restraint of employer responsibility for labor disputes was justified in two types of cases: (a) *organizational disputes,* over union membership and employee rights to bargain collectively through unions of their own choosing, and (b) *representation disputes,* over which union shall represent the majority of workers in an appropriate unit for collective bargaining. We are entitled to infer that the ensuing legal alterations of employer-employee rights and duties were based upon the Court's acceptance of presidential-congressional perception of changed public standards of right-and-wrong conduct in labor relations, at least in the two areas specified.

The concept of changeable public standards of right and wrong is no longer fashionable in public policy research as an operational variable, and this perhaps explains why F-S-G disregard them, treat them as another problem, or merge them into another contextual variable. But surely the judgments of most historians of the New Deal and labor relations experts' testimony count for something as to their reality, and that the relevant change became evident in the early and middle 1930s. Since then, public perceptions and demands have changed again at least twice, being reflected in the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and the 1959 statute regulating union benefit plans, and requiring regular reports on union organization and financial affairs. Public standards of right and wrong do not play the same role in all cases, but their variations need to be investigated whenever changes in public law and policy occur, particularly the "tidal" variety.

Avery Leiserson
Vanderbilt University

Limitation on Incumbency

The article by Robert Struble and Z. W. Jahre (*PS,* March 1991) proposing a limitation on incumbency in the House glowingly predicts all sorts of salutary effects: "Oligarchy" would be vanquished. "Careerist monopoly" would end. The quality of candidates for the House—and indirectly even the Senate—would improve. Capable members would rise to leadership "at the outset." The de facto power of the House would actually increase. New drive and enthusiasm would profoundly energize the House, and so forth.

These are dazzling promises. But as I read the article I kept wondering why George Bush, Dan Quayle, and so many other conservatives are suddenly in favor of a greater rotation of congressional office. Could it be they are interested in all the benefits imagined by Struble and Jahre? I suspect not. Some of these same conservatives, most notably President Reagan, want to abolish the 22nd Amendment which places a two-term limit on presidential incumbency.

For decades we political scientists pointed out that the congressional seniority system allowed for the undemocratic entrenchment of conservatives of both parties presiding over self-ruling committee satrapies. And for decades our criticisms were ignored. Today the seniority system isn't what it used to be but it is still operative. And for the first time, liberals and even left progressives, some of them African-Americans like John Conyers, are moving into powerful committee chairs, and now for the first time, the issue of incumbency is being targeted by conservatives and getting publicized in the national media.

Just before leaving office Reagan commented that the executive and judiciary "are fine" but Congress still remains "a problem." He meant that there still survives a liberal political formation in that branch. The same holds for the state legislatures. During the last election campaign, Bush and Quayle made a point of supporting a proposition to limit incumbency in the California state legislature, which is dominated by a relatively liberal contingent.

I suspect that's why conservatives, who dislike the 22nd Amendment and see nothing wrong with presidentially appointed, life-long federal judgeships, are suddenly so enthusiastic about rotation of *legislative* office. A more fluid rotation of office would wipe out the leaders and the seniority of the Democratic

liberals in Congress. Unlike some political scientists, Reagan, Bush, and Quayle do not treat process and performance as if existing in a social vacuum. They are keenly aware of how ongoing institutional arrangements advance or retard their political interests. They understand power because they have so much of it and have so much to protect with it.

In contrast, it is still remarkable how the scholarship of so many of our colleagues continues to reduce essence to form, studying everything except the impelling content and purpose of political interest. That's what was missing from the Struble and Jahre article; there was no consideration of the partisan political effects and interests behind rotation of office.

Michael Parenti
Washington, D.C.

Correction:

In the March 1991 *PS,* the affiliation of Armin Rosencranz, who is a member of the Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms, was listed incorrectly as San Francisco State University; his affiliation is Pacific Energy and Resources Center.

NOTICE!

Until September 1, 1991, manuscripts submitted to the *American Political Science Review* should be sent to the present managing editor, Samuel C. Patterson, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, 112 Derby Hall, Columbus, Ohio 43210-1373.

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