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# The Moral Foundations of Public Engagement: Does Political Science, as a Discipline, have an Ethics?

*In recent years the discipline of political science has been the focus of extensive criticism from observers based both within and beyond the academy. This is reflected in a sizable number of scholars who have called for the discipline to recognise its obligations to the public, and especially to supporting active citizenship, promoting democratic participation and addressing major social challenges. This emphasis on 'making political science matter' has also been stressed beyond the academy as funders, politicians and potential research-users place ever-greater emphasis on incentivising and rewarding 'impact', 'relevance' and demonstrable 'public value'. The central argument of this article is that what has been missing from this debate is any sense of clarity around whether what is being demanded is greater engagement by political science as a discipline or greater engagement by political scientists as individuals. This raises distinctive questions about the moral foundations and professional ethics of political science which we explore not through a traditional focus on defending or sustaining liberal democracy but through a deeper and more subtle emphasis on the praxis of 'doing' political science.*

This article began as an IPSA panel discussion of Rainer Eisfeld's *Empowering Citizens, Engaging the Public: Political Science for the 21st Century* (2019), where he provocatively and passionately argues for a more politically engaged discipline to help citizens better deal with the deep social, political, and environmental issues that face the world. Engagement of one sort or another is as old as the discipline itself, starting with Aristotle's tutoring of Alexander, to various caucuses in our professional associations to deal with gender, race, diversity, and other issues. Some of our colleagues are noted public intellectuals, and many of us orient our research around issues that matter to us personally, like human rights, international development, or inequality. But Eisfeld puts this routine engagement in the vice grip of two overarching concerns that force a deeper reflection. The first is his assertion that political science as a discipline has a special role, a special calling, to serve our fellow citizens *as citizens,* that is, in their collective deliberations. The second is his alarm at current debasement of politics and of liberal democracy. The special calling is joined to a specific crisis, and the discipline has an ethical obligation to intervene and to engage.

The purpose of this article is to probe and challenge this otherwise appealing argument. What does it mean for the discipline of the political science to be more engaged? Does each card-carrying political scientist have an obligation to join the platoon, simply as a condition of membership? And most importantly, if it is the discipline that is being called upon to engage, what is it engaging *for* and *about*?

Does it have an ethical foundation for its engagement, and a unique collective good that it pursues and supports? In brief, we argue against the conventional view that the discipline (and hence, each of its members) has an obligation to engage in support of liberal democracy. As individual political scientists, we have – and should have – different political views. And as political scientists, we should be as critically objective in our assessment of liberal democracy as of any other political system. However, the *praxis* of our scholarship does have inescapable ethical foundations, and in our view this is a more solid foundation for a more measured form of engagement in public life.

## POLITICAL SCIENCE: THE LOGIC OF ENGAGEMENT

Eisfeld represents the latest – albeit arguably the most eloquent and extended - contribution to a long tradition of demands that political science be more a more publicly engaged and publicly relevant discipline. The tradition can be traced back to texts including Bernard Crick's *The American Science of Politics* (1959), and runs through works such as David Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1987) and leads to Elinor Ostrom's 1997 APSA Presidential Address, in which she claimed that political science 'suffers from a neglect of the citizen.' She argued that our research should 'help sustain democratic polities in the twenty-first century' and that 'We owe an obligation to the next generation to carry forward the best of our knowledge about how individuals solve the multiplicity of social dilemmas — large and small — that they face' (Ostrom, 1998: 18; 16). Robert Putnam, in his 2003 APSA Presidential Address, argued that political science 'must have a greater public presence,' and that one of our key responsibilities is 'our contribution to public understanding and to the vitality of democracy' (Putnam, 2003: 249). Matthew Flinders, Peter John and colleagues debated the future of political science in a 2013 special issue of *Political Studies Review*, but the debate was not about whether political science *should* be more engaged but about *how*. In their concluding, joint essay, Flinders and John urged the discipline to 'engage more visibly and coherently in political and public debate' (Flinders & John, 2013: 222). Most sweepingly, APSA's *Report of the Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century* (2011) closed with the conviction that political science has a 'rich potential…to provide ways to better attain peace, economic opportunity, human rights, participatory democracy, and, ultimately, individual fulfillment' (American Political Science Association, 2011: 59).

Note that each of these examples assumed that the *discipline* as a whole has to be more engaged – and thus by implication, the individual members of that discipline. Moreover, they also assume that the discipline will defend, support, and nurture a particular system of politics – liberal democracy.

Modern demands for engagement have various motivations. The 'international impact agenda' is attempting to re-align scholarly behaviour and rewards on the grounds that since social scientific research is in large part paid for by the public, it should show some demonstrable public benefit (see Bandola-Gill, Brans & Flinders, 2019). A second (and related) rationale is that political science in particular produces specialized knowledge about collective action, and that it therefore has an obligation to share that knowledge (this was Ostrom's view, and Eisfeld's). To withhold that knowledge would be like withholding a new vaccine that is not only needed by the society, but that has been developed with public money. Put slightly differently, if political science is – at its core – concerned with understanding the boundaries between individual endeavour and collective action through a focus on democratic governance, then its members as both academics and as citizens have an obligation to nourish that system. A final rationale combines all these but with a stronger sense of urgency. It highlights the challenge of multiple crises (environmental, economic, social, and especially political) and suggests that political science can and should play a key role in assessing risk and averting disaster.

Irrespective of the specific rationale, however, is a shared emphasis on the need for a more publicly engaged and publicly relevant discipline. While this convergence point is relatively clear, what is far less obvious is the specific focus of these entreaties – are they calling for greater engagement by the *discipline of political science* or greater engagement by *political scientists as individuals?* Is it the discipline or the person that should be engaged, and is the person engaged as a member of that discipline? Clearly, the answer to the last question is 'yes'. Eisfeld, Ostrom and Putnam and many other senior members of the discipline were calling for greater engagement not merely as citizens but as *political scientists*. Their assumption was that political scientists bring something important and distinctive to the public square; some benefit that is due to the expertise of our specific discipline. Economists and psychologists might bring something else of benefit, but ours will be a unique disciplinary contribution *as political science*. But what exactly might this contribution be and on what moral foundation or ethical framework is it based? One way of attempting to tease-apart the various strands of this question is to identify a number of engagement levels (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Engagement by political science, political scientists or citizens?**

| LEVEL | ACTIVITY | CREDIBILITY CLAIM | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Engagement by political science as a discipline | Engagement based on civic right and responsibility + expert knowledge of members + collective professional values and status | Professional association writes to relevant government minister about the focus of the rally or march. |
| 2 | Engagement by individual as political scientist | Engagement based on civic right and responsibility + expert knowledge | Political scientist speaks at or addresses rally as expert or commentator, explaining events, contributing specialized knowledge/research |
| 1 | Engagement by individual as citizen | Engagement based on civic right and responsibility | Political scientist participates as a citizen among other citizens at a rally or protest march |

The value of Table 1 is that it provides a simple heuristic that illustrates the potential engagement landscape as it relates to political science and, through this, aids understanding in relation to a number of issues. The core argument of this article is that demands for 'making political science matter' have very rarely, if ever, distinguished between levels 3 and 2. At the same time the distinction between levels 2 and 1 embraces arguments about the credible limits of political scientists, the role of public intellectuals and the emergence of academic 'punditry' (for a discussion see Blagden, 2019); even a focus on Level 2 reveals the manner in which individual political scientists do not share the same opportunities in terms of engaging with the impact agenda due to long-standing issues in relation to inequality, diversity and inclusion within the discipline. The gendered nature of impact expectations and interpretations is an issue that speaks to the moral foundations and ethics of the discipline (see Yarrow and Davies, 2018; Dunlop, 2018). It is exactly this tension between the discipline and the individual – and the assumptions that often cloak this professional fault-line - which this article seeks to expose and interrogate as part of a more critical and reflective account of what might be termed 'the emergent *politics of* political science'. The argument being that without such critical reflection the social benefits and public potential of political science risks becoming an 'obvious' or 'self-evident' truth which is captured in the following statement.

> It is obvious that X [democracy is dying, politics is in crisis, etc.] is true, therefore we need to do Y [utilise political science, design for democracy, etc.]

The implication of this assertion is that common sense dictates our understanding of the problem and the solution. The danger of self-evident truths, however – as Ostrom famously argued – is that 'the fact that something is widely believed does not make it correct' (2000: 33). We therefore seek to focus on the distinction between greater engagement by the discipline of political science, on the one hand, as opposed to by *political scientists as individuals*, on the other, in order to question much of the common-sense wisdom that currently infuses so much of the debate about the future of this field of intellectual inquiry. The aim of adopting this position is not to deny the public value of political science but simply to acknowledge the existence of a set of questions and potential pitfalls that deserve recognition if the discipline is to avoid being judged against a set of social expectations that make failure almost inevitable. Ours is a counsel of modesty, not detachment.

We approach this task in three following sections. The first focuses on political diversity and normative preferences *within* political science and how this might affect 'going public' *vis-à-vis* the discipline as a whole or as individual scholars. The second section then examines whether it is possible to identify a shared moral foundation which does (or could) offer an ethical framework that unites the discipline. The third and final section adopts a distinctive and original focus by shifting the ethical emphasis away from supporting liberal democracy and towards those values that shape and define the *praxis* of political science.

## DIVERSITY, DEMOCRACY & POLITICAL SCIENCE

Democratic politics, as Bernard Crick explained in his *Defence of Politics* (1962), is a messy business. It has to reconcile conflicting demands or, to put the point slightly differently, to distill diversity. But to what extent does political science itself embrace a diversity of viewpoints and does this matter? If invited to contribute research-based 'evidence' on a specific social challenge are we likely to get consistent recommendations from the discipline as a whole, as represented by political scientists as individuals? To some extent – perhaps surprisingly – yes. Various surveys have shown that academics, and particularly social scientists (with the partial exception of economists) have liberal and left-wing

views on politics and public policy. The classic and core reference on this is A. H. Halsey's *The Decline of Donnish Dominion* (1995) which utilised extensive surveys that were carried out in 1964, 1976 and 1989 to reveal the political orientation of academe. One recent survey of British academics found that the left-liberal could be as high as 80% (Carl 2017; see also Bailey and O'Leary, 2017). American research going back as far as 1958 has shown consistently similar results (Gross & Simmons, 2014; Ladd Jr. & Lipset, 1974; Lazarsfeld & Thielens Jr., 1958). The creation of the Heterodox Academy in 2015 represents an attempt to counteract what many professors have intepreted as a narrowing of viewpoint diversity within higher education.[1] This relative narrowness in relation to viewpoint diversity raises at least three issues concerning political science and its engagement with the public.

First, it hardly seems consistent to argue for the contribution of political science to public debate if that contribution is tilted to one side of that debate. Moreover (and secondly), to the extent that the policy recommendations coming from political science will tend to be liberal and left-wing risks creating a 'them and us' situation between the academy and significant sections of the public who hold different views. Take, for example, the issue of illegal migrants or asylum seekers on the American border with Mexico and the strong likelihood (given the available data) that a large majority of American political scientists would recommend more permissive and forgiving measures. American public opinion is more divided, with almost half saying that the United States does not have an obligation to accept refugees (even though it has become more supportive overall of the contribution of migrants to national welfare) (Pew Research Center, 2018). Brexit provides a similar example. The available evidence suggests that the majority of academics, especially in the social and political sciences, favoured remaining in the UK and those who favoured Brexit often felt ostracised from the wider academic community.[2] Is this lack of viewpoint diversity within political science problematic in terms of capacity to support or promote the innate contestation to be found within the public sphere? This question takes on added emphasis in light of the 'populist signal' (Chwalisz, 2015) and the emergence of a socio-cultural context in which experts (*qua* 'experts') are increasingly likely to be derided and dismissed as representing a self-interested elite.

There are, of course, political scientists who disagree with the dominant liberal-progressive-cosmopolitan 'tilt' and who can therefore be expected - as public intellectuals - to adopt less conventional positions (Eric Heffernan's *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*

(2018) springs to mind in the British context). This variation should, at least in theory, be obvious when we think about political scientists as individuals, but much of the debate has arguably confused the contribution of the *discipline* with the contributions of individual representatives of the discipline. Eisfeld, in his book's fourth chapter on the 21st century political scientist as public intellectual, recognizes this in a masterful case study of the arguments among a group of prominent public intellectuals debating political major issues: Samuel Huntington, Noam Chomsky, Serge Lang, Amitai Etzioni, Edward Said, Francis Fukuyama, and Benjamin Barber. The nature and tone of the debates among these figures was often combative and did little to present a unified disciplinary front. Eisfeld notes that the calls for public engagement too often have the underlying assumption 'that the new engagement will emerge – if at all - as a largely conflict-free process, accompanied by political scientists' mutual applauding and back-slapping.' His elegant, if impractical, solution is a code of conduct for public intellectuals – 'Public intellectuals should offer only clearly reasoned arguments. Their pronouncements should allow for complexity. They should identify viable alternatives.' But of course this does not entirely solve the problem, since the public will not necessarily be elevated, nor the democratic condition be improved, by political scientists arguing wildly from differing perspectives, no matter how genteel their debate. They will be oarsmen pulling in different directions.

This presents a major disciplinary dilemma with ethical and moral implications which have, as yet, rarely been acknowledged, let alone dissected in any detail. Indeed, an argument could be made that if the intention is to produce a more socially engaged *discipline* as a whole, then this is unlikely to occur through *individual political scientists* engaging as public intellectuals, marshalling their evidence and their policy recommendations by the light of their own political ideologies and convictions. Right- and left-wing positions will be reflected in those recommendations, in which case the result will not be the engagement of 'political science' as a discipline, but of political partisans who happen to be fighting under the same disciplinary banner. Is there something, then, that unites us all as political scientists, that is common to the discipline at its core, that would allow for the engagement of the *discipline*?

## THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS OR 'SOUL' OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Having surveyed the available evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline, John Trent (2011, 197) suggested that the basic impression '[was] one of a discipline in search of its soul and out of touch with the real world of politics'. But how might this notion of a disciplinary 'soul' be uncovered, developed or demonstrated? Might it offer a unifying set of moral foundations from which some broad ethical framework might be distinguished? One answer to this question is the suggestion that 'the soul' of the discipline has traditionally taken the form of a commitment to liberal democracy, its support and defence. This is demonstrated in the arguments of Ostrom and Putnam where they assert that greater engagement must be in the service of democracy, and democratic participation. For Ostrom the role of the discipline was (and *is*) to 'help sustain democratic polities', while Putnam urged a contribution to the 'vitality of democracy.' It is certainly a theme – and a passionate one – in Eisfeld's 2019 book: 'determined support for active citizenship, caring about democracy, …ought to be mandatory for 21st century political science.'

The challenge, however, is that ethical commitments to democracy can vary, they can be 'thin' or 'thick'. A 'thin' commitment is to broad principles – human freedom, autonomy, agency, participation, and justice. These principles are the foundations of any truly democratic system, and so the commitment is 'thin' in the sense that it is abstract, and something that is not specific to political science as such. A 'thick' commitment has substance. It is a commitment to specific institutions and practices. Our American colleagues – Ostrom and Putnam, but others as well – at least until recently might have been forgiven for presuming that the substance of their commitment to democracy was the commitment to the *American* model of democracy, at least in its marquee aspects: checks and balances, rule of law, constitutional support for human rights, frequent elections for a wide range of public offices, a free press and media, and so on. They can be forgiven for this unspoken assumption because of course for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the American institutions and culture of democracy had been beacons to the world, and sometimes vigorously exported as a model of good governance. For European political scientists, it is likely (judging from the reactions to Brexit, including Eisfeld's) that the substantive, 'thick' commitment is to the European Union model and its vision (not necessarily its institutions) of human rights, free movement within EU borders, subsidiarity, a highly developed welfare state, and a sort of multi-national/multi-cultural architecture of cohabitation.[3] For purposes of argument, it is possible to conflate these two models into one and simply speak of 'modern liberal-democracy'.

This model – or what we suggest as the 'soul' of political science in terms of its core commitment and intellectual heritage – has in recent years been under sustained criticism by populist parties and politicians. Eisfeld's updated version of Ostrom and Putnam is to call on political scientists to mount a strong defence of liberal-democracy against these assaults. That defence can be a 'thin' defence in terms of high-level principles, in which case it is a defence that could be mounted as much by non-academics or individuals from any discipline, and is not specific to political science. The problem with a 'thin' defence is that most populists adhere, at least rhetorically, to some of the basic principles of liberal-democracy. A 'thick' defence would be a defence of the model itself, and how it exists in practice (i.e., of *actually existing* liberal-democracy). And here political science is arguably confronted with a deeper problem, one that will demand a degree of soul-searching. In recent years the liberal-democratic model has been criticized not just by populists, but also by a number of political scientists who, while supporting its core values (i.e., a 'thin' association), have highlighted its actually existing failures and particularly its ('thicker') internal contradictions.

In other words, this is an *internal challenge*, and internal critique; a self-reflection and an expression of self-doubt and soul-searching. It's one thing for a Marxist to dismiss bourgeois democracy, or the alt-right to sneer about identity politics. It's another when Michael Ignatieff, the President and Rector of Central European University, a former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, a renowned scholar and liberal thinker in his own right, launches a 'Rethinking Open Society Project'.[4] Or when the Social Sciences Research Council (US) supports a project on the 'Anxieties of Democracy'.[5] There has been a surge of diagnoses of the fractures in the soul of the liberal order, either specific to the US or Europe, or more generally in terms of the ultimate logic of modern liberalism. A partial list would include:

- Simon Tormey (2015), *The End of Representative Politics*
- Ryszard Legutko (2016), *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*
- David Goodhart (2017), *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*
- Jan Zielonka (2018), *Counter-Revolution: Liberal Europe in Retreat*
- Patrick Deneen (2018), *Why Liberalism Failed*
- The *Anxieties of Democracy* Project by the (US) Social Sciences Research Council
- Cass Sunstein (ed.) (2018) *Can it Happen Here?*
- Steve Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018), *How Democracies Die*
- David Frum (2018), *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic*
- Yascha Mounk 2018), *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is Danger and How to Save It*

What are some of the internal contradictions of the liberal-democratic order as it has evolved in the last fifty years, and identified in some of this soul-searching? Two obvious ones are (i) rising inequality – this is due to liberal-democracy's sometimes uneasy partnership with liberal capitalism – and (ii) increasingly compromised political and electoral systems in which voters either do not care and cannot be engaged, or are engaged only as fringe and anti-liberal groups, or in which politicians are corrupted, inept or personally bizarre. In addition to these 'core contradictions', there are at least five less obvious internal contradictions that are troubling large sections of the political science community. These can be summarised as follows:

1. *Undifferentiated individualism vs. identitarian individualism*

Liberalism is often criticized for ignoring roots and localisms, striving for some sort of universal cosmopolitanism that only elites – Davos Man – is capable of achieving. But liberalism has also been a struggle for freedom, and for many, their freedom is compromised by inequalities due to their group affiliations and identities, whether it be gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Contemporary liberalism is struggling to balance its inclination to dismiss difference as irrelevant to how people live together (hence the openness to migration), and its instinct to fight for the rights of ever smaller and specific minority groups.

2. *Free speech vs. speech acts*

The hallmarks of classical liberalism were the defence of free speech, and tolerance of opposing views. There is a long running debate in that tradition of how far that could go, and what the acceptable limits are to speech, but within that tradition there was an underlying assumption that 'speech acts' represented debatable ideas and ideational debates. However, modern liberalism is very much alive to speech as symbol, to speech as sometimes the masked expression of disgusting and deeply rooted prejudices, and speech as implicated in the continued oppression of minorities. Liberal states everywhere therefore struggle now with hate speech codes, criminalization of speech, and intolerance to even the most (apparently) innocuous utterances.[6]

3. *Personal liberty vs. social context*

A traditional critique of liberalism – that unbridled personal liberty even among consenting adults, can corrode the social conventions and bonds and restraints that make a civil society (and civility) possible. This argument goes back to Burke, of course, and has been reiterated by such conservative thinkers as Roger Scruton, but also by liberal theorists like Michael Sandel. The *New York Times* magazine on February 7, 2018 had a feature entitled "What Teenagers are Learning from On-Line Porn," which had predictable and disturbing findings. Ross Douthat, in his editorial column a week later, mused about the possible option of banning (or at least somehow severely restricting access to) porn. Again, the ensuing debate was fairly predictable: firm liberal positions about the freedom to produce and consume; feminist arguments that the problem is actually a misogynist culture; and critiques of the article as being sadly heteronormative and ignoring the liberating power of porn for the LGBTQI communities.

4. *Individual freedom vs. increasing state regulation and penetration of economy and social life*

This is a point, of course, that goes back to Tocqueville's observations of the nature of liberalism in American democracy, but is something that is increasingly noted by observers of modern liberalism. Even as our personal autonomies increase (in terms of markets, the consumption of every conceivable good; in social life, the pursuit of our personal preferences as long as they do not harm others), we see a persistent and growing presence of a large, administrative, and regulatory state. One explanation (Deneen – a critic, so not within the family), is that one vector of liberalism as a system is both the erosion of intermediate associations (*pace* Tocqueville), and the use of the state increasingly to remove obstacles to autonomy and liberty, and indeed to go further and support the autonomies and freedoms of individuals through the provision of services, regulations, prohibitions against discrimination or ill-treatment, and so on. But this autonomy and freedom that people feel as consumers and as expressive artists of their personal lifestyles, is not matched with any sense of real control over the state, and so autonomy becomes empty and de-politicized.

5. *Community vs. cosmopolitanism*

The highest democratic ideal – the *polis* -- is citizens collectively and cooperatively deciding on policy. Representative democracy is a second best mechanism to achieve that, but workable. In both cases, however, there is an implied community of shared citizenship, of rights and obligations that belong to its members. That community has visible boundaries – the neighbourhood (a neighbourhood association), the city (the local government), the state (the national government). In each case, citizenship and community and boundaries align with decision-making institutions. Democracy is always a *democracy in some place*, for and by the members of that place. Our obligations are to our fellow citizens, and the normative foundation of those obligations is our shared fate, buttressed by an evolving sense of the substantive right that we all have to a good life (health, education, food, etc.). But as noted above, a logic of liberalism is its universalism, in this case a universal cosmopolitanism that urges us to consider ourselves as citizens of the world, having a shared fate with humanity, and to recognize that our obligations have no national or local bounds. The migrant crises in the US and Europe have vividly exposed this tension.

The five brief snapshots (above) offer examples of internal regime contradictions or tensions – ones identified by those who support liberalism and liberal democratic regimes. Perhaps they are not fatal, and depending on how one defines the core principles of liberal-democracy, the worst tendencies or excesses can be contained. But then we are back to the problem that political scientists with different interpretations of those core principles (supporting either one or the other of the tensions) are likely to mount different defences, and our response will not be that of a *discipline* but of well-meaning but antagonistic members of that discipline. A libertarian political scientist will defend a different substantive liberal-democratic model than will a socialist political scientist. It is entirely plausible that two well-informed and well-meaning political scientists could disagree completely on the migrant issue in Europe. A deeper problem is that, given the left-leaning ideology of most of our profession (discussed above), the model that is likely to be supported is precisely the model that has been attacked for being favoured by out-of-touch, cosmopolitan, global elites, the 'party of Davos'.

As deep a problem as this is, there is an even deeper one, articulated by Charles Lindblom over 20 years ago in his reflections on the discipline as it was in the 1940s and 1950s. We quote at length:

> One might suggest that a touch of naïveté has always marked the discipline's conception of its relation to democracy. That conception is not wholly stable; it has varied as much as the difference between skepticism regarding the very viability of democracy in mass society and affirmation of democracy as the end point of political development for the developing world. On the whole, however, I suggest that political scientists have accepted a commitment to democracy that is inconsistent with their commitment to unfettered inquiry, as well as inconsistent with commitments that some political scientists think they can make to scientific neutrality.
>
> I do not see how a social scientist can achieve a very profound intelligence about the social world unless his studies are guided by values. But since informed and thoughtful minds must be expected to disagree on values, I look askance at a discipline as uniformly committed to democracy as political science tends to be. The case against such values as democracy and liberty is not without merit, and the argument needs to be kept open indefinitely. It is therefore not the function of political science to promote or defend democracy, although it may be your function or mine to do so, just as it may be your function or mine, in a competition of ideas, to attack it. (Lindblom, 1997: 248)

As citizens, for all the reasons eloquently described in Eisfeld's book, we do have a duty to defend democratic principles and institutions. As scholars, however, Lindblom puts his finger on an uncomfortable truth – democratic principles and institutions should just as much be the subject of critical inquiry as any other governing arrangements. This raises an obvious set of questions about whether – at an intellectual level – the defence of liberal democracy can ever or should ever be interpreted as providing a moral foundation or ethical framework for the discipline which then, in turn, legitimates public engagement. A more novel and distinctive approach to this disciplinary dilemma is to focus not on 'doing politics' but on 'doing political science' when seeking to identify the shared moral foundations and ethical framework of the discipline.

## PRINCIPLES AND PRAXIS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

This article has attempted to identify a number of weaknesses in the engagement argument as it relates to political science; weaknesses that stem from the tension between asking for engagement by *political*

*science as a discipline* versus engagement by *political scientists* as individuals. Eisfeld's code of conduct notwithstanding, the engagement of our colleagues as individuals is either likely to support only one side of contemporary policy debates (broadly speaking, the left), or display an unseemly and unhelpful cacophony. If we think that the normative commitment of the *discipline* is to liberal-democracy, and hence that we have a duty to defend that system, we still come up with a possible range of defences, as well as the uncomfortable vocational contradiction that we should be prepared to criticize even that system. What, therefore, is to be done, for political science as a *discipline*? The answer to that question depends in part on how we understand and define the discipline, both in terms of its disciplinary focus (as distinct from other social sciences), and its normative position.

This is our personal view, of course, but to us the essence and beauty of our discipline – certainly what attracted us to it, and excites us every day – is that it has a unique focus on the tangled tensions and connections between notions of power, justice, and order (theoretically and empirically). Power, of course, is 'an essentially contested' (Gallie, 1956) concept with many dimensions and is, in its most brutish and comprehensive form, related to the power of the state, manifest through its monopoly of violence over its population, its protection of its borders, and its relations (benign or belligerent) with other states. That is the bread and butter of political science, and has been so since Aristotle. How state power is wielded, shaped and mobilized; how it is resisted, blunted, or absorbed; how it is used by tyrants or put to the service of citizens – all this is core to what political scientists 'do'. And, of course, power is not simply state power – it is manifest in social power, in social institutions, in the family, among men and women, in communities, between and among groups, and so political science ventures well beyond the bounds of state analysis to follow power into all its capillaries, to borrow from Foucault.

The other great vector of our discipline, it seems to us, is the understanding of justice – of the *legitimate* basis of power, of how relations in society can and should be arranged in the light of fairness. Power without justice is simply force. And so our discipline can rightly claim a long tradition of political theory and philosophy even among those thinkers who might not have thought of themselves first and foremost as political theorists. To the extent that they have reflected on the state and its legitimate foundations, they have reflected on justice. And this leads to order – how human societies can and should organize themselves, regulate their collective interests and activities, and create the conditions

for other realms of social and economic life to flourish. This was the point made by Ostrom in her appeal for engagement.

Does the discipline have a normative stance? We think it does, even if it is quite a broad one – the restraint of political and social power by considerations of justice in the service of creating political orders that permit and encourage human flourishing. We would go even further and argue that in its broad inspiration and its core principles, this translates into a preferential bias towards liberal-democratic regimes, minimally defined (e.g., city-states; broad and real participation among citizens). The Western version of this model, stemming from its Greek, Judeo-Christian heritage, is an important foundation, but many of the key principles are reflected as well in Islamic traditions of governance. The problem is that on its own this argument does not get us very far (as illustrated in the previous section), particularly if we take Lindblom's point seriously. There is one other path though, and one that we think does align with the discipline as a *discipline*, beyond whatever the values and views of its professional members.

This path focuses attention not on the (external) engagement of political science as a discipline in the promotion or defence of liberal democracy but upon the (internal) engagement of political science in promoting the values and norms that in more subtle and indirect ways serve to nourish both the intellectual and democratic ecosystem. Put slightly differently, if political science possesses a soul – in terms of a unifying normative core and social function – then it is likely to be uncovered in its *praxis*. We use *praxis* in the Aristotelian sense of embedded theories that give shape and sense to repeated actions that then accumulate into practice. One can engage in a practice or action, and even be very good at it, without fully grasping the underlying theories or concepts that give that practice its sense and its ultimate ends. For example, the *praxis* of a physician's practice is healing. A torturer is not a physician, and physicians that inflict some discomfort in their practice are not torturers. The *praxis* of political science concerns *what we do* as scholars. Our practice has to be consistent with certain norms and principles, or the practice becomes nonsensical or contradictory. Take, for example, the two core roles of a university professor of politics – teaching and research.

Within an increasingly marketised higher education environment, most political scientists are funded predominantly through teaching-related income, and a significant proportion of this income tends to

cross-subsidise research. Irrespective of the specific level – from first-year undergraduate through to supervising PhD students or mentoring post-docs - and whatever the specific pedagogical techniques deployed, teaching – if it is to be true to itself as a practice – requires us to abide by several principles. These include: *truthfulness* (someone who lies or misleads is many things, but not a good teacher); *agency* (students are encouraged to question and challenge); *inquiry* (teaching is indistinguishable from questioning, from inquiring); *autonomy* (if truth, agency and inquiry are to be respected and fulfilled, there must be some degree of intellectual and personal 'space'). A similar value-set can be identified in relation to the practice of conducting research or being a researcher. These include: *truthfulness* (research that is not ultimately searching for a valid or credible answer to a question (even through a process of falsification), is nonsensical); *evidence and logic* (empirical research is expected to be founded on evidence, other forms of inquiry require logical argument); *communication* (knowledge-creation is of little value without knowledge-mobilisation and knowledge-translation); and *openness* (most recently encapsulated in an emphasis on open-data and research integrity).

Our argument is that it is these principles – the underlying *praxis* of what we do - rather than a more generalised commitment to liberal democracy, that actually provide the moral foundations and ethical framework for our discipline as a *discipline*, common to other disciplines, but focused on the subject matter of power, justice and order. This means that when we call for public engagement of political science, we can do so deliberately *for the discipline*, and not for its members and their inevitably different stances on public policy issues. Political scientists - as teachers and scholars - must in unison defend a vocation for truth, for evidence, logical argument, free inquiry, openness, autonomy, and ultimately for human flourishing. They cannot be teachers and scholars without adhering to these principles – the foundations of their *praxis*. This may explain why opposition to social and political injustice is often sparked in universities and among professors and students, from the spring of 1968 to Tiananmen Square, and why political scientists have often been in the vanguard. Though often presented as defences of liberal-democracy, we think they actually express deeper values that infuse the educational and teaching relationship.

Bringing this discussion full circle and back to where it began, to what extent does our argument align with Eisfeld's (2019) vision for a more engaged political science that empowers citizens? We think it meets him half-way, but remains slightly more reclusive than he would like. There is nothing in what

we have outlined as the underlying ethical foundation of political science that should induce political scientists to become public intellectuals. Indeed, to the extent that our vocation is scholarship and research, we should probably stay close to the cloister, and wander over to the public square only rarely. We realize that this runs against the grain of 'knowledge mobilization' and all the pressures coming from funding agencies and within university departments to make our research 'relevant', but these pressures are sufficiently strong that they are likely to compel our attendance in the public square (now public sphere) irrespective of our personal preferences (Blagden, 2019).

Our core argument is that our societal role and position derives less from any fundamental moral commitment to liberal democracy and more from the ethical framework that underpins our work as teachers and researchers. Of course, we will be and should be engaged as citizens fighting for causes dear to us as individuals. As individuals, we may find ourselves on different sides of the barricades on these issues, and that is all to the good and to be expected. But we should never claim, in these more localized campaigns, that we are contributing something special as political scientists. In those moments, we are engaged as citizens. However, when the threats are to the principles that define our *praxis*, then indeed we can and should be engaged as political scientists, as representatives of a discipline whose *praxis* compels us to resist. To the extent that liberal-democracy as a political system aligns with the principles that define our *praxis*, of course we will defend liberal-democracy. But we have the luxury as well as the obligation as political scientists to retain some critical distance. We serve our fellow citizens as well as our discipline better that way.

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[1] See https://heterodoxacademy.org; Matthew Flinders documentary on BBC Radio 4 – *University Unchallenged* – provides a detailed account of why the issue of viewpoint diversity has emerged as an issue on campuses within and beyond the United States. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00013p7

[2] See, for example, 'I voted for Brexit – why do academic colleagues treat me like a pariah?', *The Guardian,* 15 September 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/sep/15/i-voted-for-brexit-why-do-academic-colleagues-treat-me-like-a-pariah

[3] See, for example, Morgan, J. 'EU referendum: nine out of 10 university staff back Remain', *Times Higher*, 16 June 2016. https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/european-union-referendum-nine-out-of-ten-university-staff-back-remain

[4] https://www.ceu.edu/rethinking-open-society

[5] https://www.ssrc.org/programs/view/anxieties-of-democracy/

[6] See, for example, the debate surrounding the refusal of Professor Jordan Peterson (University of Toronto) to use transgendered pronouns in the classroom. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-37875695