

Introduction and Comments

Jennifer L. Hochschild
September 18, 2003

"I think good thoughts, whilst others write good words" (Shakespeare, Sonnet 85). Such is the life of a journal editor, as well as that of a love-sick poetical genius. I can at least hope that the good words written by others and published in this issue of *Perspectives on Politics* will last—if not quite as long as Shakespeare's sonnets, then well into the future.

Sidney Verba provides grounds for my hope by beginning the issue with the perennially important question "Would the Dream of Political Equality Turn out to Be a Nightmare?" Plato and arguably Aristotle would have answered, "Yes"; centuries later, John Adams and Lord Macaulay would have concurred. Verba takes the question seriously and considers the reasons why even a democratic society might worry about having full equality. He then responds to these concerns by showing just what political equality would entail, why we should pursue it vigorously despite some real dangers, and what stands in its way. His analysis of the impediments to high-quality political equality suggests a strategy for moving closer to that ideal, even if we can never reach it.

In "Engaging Subjective Knowledge," Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph use an arcane diary, written by an Indian officer in the colonial British army more than a century ago, to lead us into another set of perennial questions—on the meaning of identity, the value of ethnography, and the evanescence of knowledge. They argue for the centrality of partial truths—"telling what I know"—in enabling researchers to come to terms with people and cultures that are ineradicably different from their own. The Rudolphs also show how the personal is political, or rather how agency constructs and is simultaneously constructed by those institutions and structures that political scientists commonly attend to. More concretely, Amar Singh's 90-volume diary provides a window into a very distinctive racial, class, and gendered hierarchy; it demonstrates the pains as well as the joys of negotiating that hierarchy from the bottom up.

In "Structures Do Not Come with an Instruction Sheet," Mark Blyth brings us back into the better-known—if not less arcane—realm of methodological and epistemological disputes in political science. He uses the old and still serviceable metaphor of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis to show why scholars adopted, and are now partly moving away from, the use of rational choice frameworks to analyze international relations and comparative politics. A starting presumption of rationality and self-interest resolved some earlier theoretical and empirical problems, he argues, but generated its own. In particular, it cannot sufficiently account for the role of ideas and values in explaining the activities of govern-

ments. A new methodological framework, more interpretive and constructive, does a better job of accounting for ideas. But it too has weaknesses that eventually will lead it to be subsumed by a new theory. And so it goes.

Our symposium in this issue of *Perspectives* revisits a classic, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward's *Poor People's Movements*. Like many in my generation, I found this book disconcerting when I encountered it in graduate school because it so contradicted everything I thought I knew about insurgent political organizing. That was its point, of course, and *PPM* retains all of its ability to disturb and galvanize in this much tamer political era. Commentaries here include careful empirical analyses of how well the arguments in *PPM* have held up, exhumations of its theoretical roots, and calls for reinvigorating its central political lessons. We hope that this symposium will not only bring new readers to this fascinating book but also inspire new studies of when and how political disruption produces more than a few newspaper headlines.

Harry Boyte offers a very different model for political transformation from Piven and Cloward in his "Perspectives" essay, "Civic Populism." He eschews disruption in favor of community organization, and he rejects the pleasures of ideological fervor while extolling what he sees as the harder but more effective virtues of pragmatic negotiation. One can move surprisingly far in the direction of significant change, Boyte argues, by organizing around the shared desires of citizens and public officials for satisfactory work, an enjoyable and safe community, and effective government agencies. Easy to say, but hard to do—and Boyte provides examples of successful community organizations that have not fallen prey to the bureaucratic sclerosis of which Piven and Cloward warn.

Stephen Macedo takes us into the heart of one institution that is supposed to promote change but instead, its critics charge, epitomizes bureaucratic sclerosis: the American public school system. He reviews four recent books by political scientists on reform efforts in schooling and finds the books to be powerful but the reforms less than fully effective. These books epitomize social scientists' recent attention to the fact that in many states and localities schools are the largest employer and schooling is the largest public expenditure—as well as the most extensive connection between most citizens and their government. But American public education is flawed; proposed fixes range from more money to more engagement through Boyte's civic populism, to tearing down the whole edifice in favor of privatization. Macedo guides us through this maze with careful attention to facts, incisive questions about the coherence of various reform

proposals, and a lively recognition that we are dealing here not merely with a big institution but with children's futures.

Perspectives continues with its usual array of book reviews across the spectrum of political science. I trust that you will find them as informative, fair, incisive, and fun to read as always.

Let me close with a request for particular kinds of "good words" for you to write while I continue to "think good thoughts." *Perspectives on*

Politics has many missions and multiple constituencies, but the editors would like to focus its publications over the next few years on two types of articles in particular. The first type responds to the old cry for relevance. We especially seek articles that use the lens of political philosophy or political

science to illuminate some aspect of an important political or policy problem, in a way that one would not glean from an article by a smart journalist or analyst of public affairs. The trick is to remember that the article will probably not appear in the journal until a year or more after initial submission, so it must be written in a way that is political but not too topical.

We especially seek articles that use the lens of political philosophy or political science to illuminate some aspect of an important political or policy problem.

The second type of article responds to the equally old cry for synthesis. Articles that bring together subfields usually thought of separately, or that import politically relevant theories from other disciplines, or that link findings derived from different approaches or parts of the world, are welcomed. For this type of article as well, much of the proof is in the pudding; with rare exceptions, articles in *Perspectives* should not just

provide a new analytic framework, but use it to show how readers can better understand or evaluate some important political phenomenon or policy issue.

This issue completes the first volume of *Perspectives on Politics*. All of us working on the journal have found the first year of publication to be as

exciting as it was exhausting; we hope that readers are thinking good thoughts about the ideas and arguments that they have read so far. The next few issues will bring articles on Oakeshott and American public policy, the new nationalism in eastern Europe, causal inference in case study research, a unified theory of institutional learning, and more.