

Association News

William H. Riker: A Brief Intellectual Biography of the President-Elect

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William H. Riker, president-elect of the Association, is a scholar of great distinction. Through his efforts an entirely new subfield in the study of politics has been nurtured to a level of maturity and respectability that ensures its survival beyond his own individual scholarly contribution. This feat of intellectual creativity, foresight, and professional leadership is one I hope to highlight as we briefly stroll through some of William Riker's intellectual history. But first some facts.

Doubts

As an undergraduate Bill Riker studied economics at DePauw University. After a World War II interruption, he went to Harvard University to study American politics with Pendleton Herring. In addition to providing a very broad education and an exposure to some of the leading lights of the day in political science, Bill Riker's Harvard experience occasioned some doubts. The case studies popularized by Herring, while clearly departures from the normative treatises and descriptive encyclopedias of the day, were nevertheless unconnected atoms drifting in an intellectual ether. At the very most, one could say that they were all loosely aligned with the views of Arthur Bentley.

Absent from the approach was a molecular structure into which atomistic case studies could be fit. Absent as well (and perhaps this amounts to the same

thing) was any basis for having confidence in what was learned; case studies could detail circumstances but could not rise above those circumstances, could not discriminate the important from the idiosyncratic and attendant, in short, could not provide explanations of regularities or causes of events.

Doubts and Ph.D. in hand, Bill Riker left Harvard in 1948 for Lawrence College. He spent fourteen years at Lawrence (interrupted on a few occasions including a one-year visit to the Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford) and rose through the ranks to full professor and chairman. During these years he devoted considerable time and effort to the normal tasks of a teaching-oriented college with exceptional results. For example, he won the Uhrig Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

In addition to the high regard he continues to hold for the intellectual tone established at Lawrence by his colleagues and by the then college president, Nathan Pusey, an event of significance for his scholarly development occurred in the mid-1950s. A biologist friend handed Bill a book he thought might be of interest—*The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern. This volume was to have a major effect on the way Bill thought about the science of politics.

Early Scholarship

This event brings me to the main purpose of this essay—the professional scholarship and accomplishment of William Riker. In his first book *Democracy in the United States* (Macmillan, 1953), Bill "endeavored to interpret our political institutions on the basis of an internally

consistent theory of the democratic ideal" (p.vi). Although much more explicitly normative than is fashionable in textbooks today, he nevertheless saw even then the importance of analytical argument. Toward the end of the preface of the first edition, he observes:

Even if some readers cannot accept my value system, which like all political theories is an unprovable given, they will, I hope, find it a worth-while exercise in the procedure of this science to follow an analysis such as this all the way through. (p.vii).

And, in his brief preface to the second edition of 1965, he notes that he has "tried to preserve completely the flavor of the argument of the first edition. This argument was, I believe, the main merit of the book and the chief ingredient of its usefulness in the classroom." However, Bill's real achievement, I believe, is that in the context of a textbook he managed to analyze American political history and institutions against a coherent set of standards. While the book was rich in the details of political history and the characteristics of political institutions, it was the argument that Bill chose to emphasize.

During the 1950s, in addition, Bill pursued his interests in the philosophy of science, American political institutions, and federalism. He also managed to find the time and inclination to write a little primer on the study of local politics (written for undergraduates and full of good ideas about how to do research on local communities) and to conduct a study of state militias (*Soldiers of the States*, Public Affairs Press, 1958).

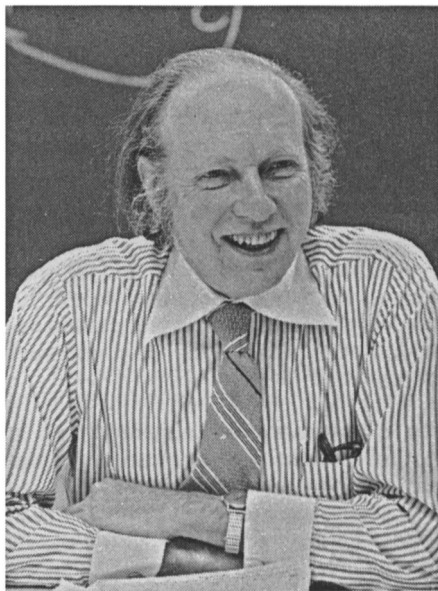
Blossoming

The 1960s were to witness the culmination of several of Bill Riker's major research projects, the move to the University of Rochester, the founding of the Public Choice Society, and the creation of an innovative program of graduate training. After a year's visit at the Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences, Bill published the book for which he is perhaps best known, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (Yale, 1962). This work firmly established his

reputation in the analytical study of politics and, together with related volumes by Kenneth Arrow, Duncan Black, James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, Anthony Downs, and Mancur Olson, launched the subfield of positive political theory.

The hints of a scientific orientation found in his textbook of a decade earlier, and in his attraction to formal arguments like those of von Neumann and Morgenstern, are stated more boldly in *The Theory*. . . :

The more general purpose of this book is to add another (putative) example (to the several that already exist) of the fact that it is or may be possible for political science to rise above the level of wisdom literature and indeed to join economics and psychology in the creation of genuine sciences of human behavior. There is considerable intellectual ferment among political scientists today owing to the fact that the traditional methods of their discipline seems to have wound up in a cul-de-sac. These traditional methods—i.e., history writing, the description of institutions, and legal analysis—have been thoroughly exploited in the last two generations and now it seems to many (including myself) that they can produce only wisdom and neither science nor



President-elect William H. Riker of the University of Rochester.

knowledge. And while wisdom is certainly useful in the affairs of men, such a result is a failure to live up to the promise in the name political *science*.

In this volume one of the first of its kind by a political scientist, Bill revealed the strategic side of political life, gave substance and precision to the notion of self-interest and instrumental behavior, and instructed all of us on how to exploit the power of mathematical reasoning without allowing it to compromise or overwhelm the rich substance that necessarily informs a "genuine science of human behavior."

During the next few years he wrote a number of papers for professional journals further elaborating the new field of positive political theory. Among the more impressive of these are a cogent analysis of the concept of 'power' (*American Political Science Review*, 1964), several seminal papers on the uses of experiments in political science to examine game-theoretic models (*American Political Science Review*, 1967, 1969, 1970), a decision-theoretic model (with Peter Ordeshook) on the calculus of voting (*American Political Science Review*, 1968), and a general political interpretation and elucidation of Arrow's important theorem on the paradox of collective choice (*Mathematical Applications in Political Science, I*, 1965).

But Bill Riker is no closet mathematician. A positive political theory that is wholly analytic and not at all synthetic is an exercise in elegantly modeling irrelevant worlds. The beauty of *The Theory . . .* is less in the formal model Bill constructed there (which after nearly 20 years, has undergone dramatic embellishments, improvements, and transformations) than in the way he used the model to characterize, explain, and understand important historical and contemporary events.

This is nowhere more apparent than in another project Bill concluded in the 1960s. Federal arrangements had long been a substantive interest of his and, in *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Maintenance* (Little-Brown, 1964), Bill provides a synthetic theory of decentralized jurisdictional institutions. In an

era in which multiple independent variables explaining large chunks of variance in some dependent measure were taken as vital signs of "science" (alas, still true today!), Bill demonstrated the power of a simple theory with a deductive structure.

Intellectual Tension

In 1962 Bill moved to the University of Rochester as its political science department's chairman, a post he has only just relinquished. In a very short time he had formulated the outline of a graduate program the main component of which was formal theory—decision theory, game theory, microeconomics, social choice theory, econometrics, and philosophy of science. Also in short order he hired some young assistant professors—Gerald Kramer, Arthur Goldberg, John Mueller, Richard Niemi—to complement Richard Fenno, Theodore Bluhm, and other distinguished scholars already on the Rochester faculty.

By 1966 when I arrived as part of the third entering class of graduate students, there was in place an innovative new program that happily married formal argument with rich substance, much as Bill Riker had in his own intellectual constitution. From my own experience, I can testify to an intellectual tension and excitement during the middle and late 1960s that permeated the environment at Rochester. Bill Riker engineered and inspired this stimulating academic ambience.

Bill was also involved in institutionalizing positive political theory in extra-curricular projects during this period. As a participant of the Social Science Research Council's Meeting on Non-Market Decision Making, together with Gordon Tullock, Mancur Olson, Anthony Downs, John Harsanyi, Duncan Black, James Coleman, and James Buchanan, he founded new journal, *Papers on Non-Market Decision Making*. Thirty-six volumes later, it is now known as *Public Choice* and its parent organization (of which Bill was an early president), the Public Choice Society, now claims nearly a thousand members internationally.

Consolidation

The 1970s were years of consolidation. The Rochester Ph.D. program was chugging along, and its students were beginning to take jobs in major departments throughout the country. Bill Riker, together with his former student Peter Ordeshook, wrote *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Prentice Hall, 1972) as an undergraduate/graduate compendium of rational theories of politics. The APSA and the regional associations began to schedule positive theory panels at their annual meetings on a regular basis.

In short, the subfield that Bill Riker had vaguely perceived back in the early 1950s had, by the 1970s, been institutionalized in graduate curricula, professional meetings, textbooks, specialized journals and societies. Rochester could now no longer claim to be the only game in town as formal theory became a part of the graduate curriculum at Yale, Michigan State, Washington University, Indiana, California Institute of Technology, Chicago, Carnegie-Mellon, Maryland, Texas, Minnesota, California (San Diego) and elsewhere (imitation is the highest form of flattery).

During this period Bill's writings began to appeal to a broader audience. This broadening accompanied a growing acceptability of the rational choice approach by students in a variety of fields. In any event, he wrote for economists, lawyers, historians, and general social and behavioral scientists, as well as for political scientists, on topics including the growth of government, railroad regulation, the political economy of zoning, the relevance of social choice theorems for jurisprudence, incentive compatible mechanisms for implementing social choices and the politics of the Constitutional Convention.

In 1980, at about the time he retired as department chairman to become Dean of Graduate Studies of the University of Rochester, he published a paper in the *APSR* around which its editor organized a symposium. That paper, "Implications from the Disequilibrium of Majority Rule for the Study of Institutions" (*American*

Political Science Review, 1980), had earlier been presented at the 1979 meeting in Moscow of the International Political Science Association and, in August 1980, served as the organizing theme for a conference on political equilibrium held in Bill's honor. The proceedings are edited by Peter Ordeshook and me as *Political Equilibrium*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

Liberalism vs. Populism

In that paper he previews a series of arguments that are more fully developed in his newest book, *Liberalism against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice* (Freeman, 1981). The arguments, in a sense, return to the themes of *Democracy in the United States*. After more than twenty-five years, however, a normatively-oriented theory about democratic ideals has been transformed into a positive theory of the possibilities of democratic institutions and the strategic opportunities of democratic citizens and politicians.

Liberalism against Populism is both an elegant synthesis of a quarter century of theorizing about the formal characteristics of the method of majority rule and a compelling resolution of a philosophical contest between the populism of Rousseau and the liberalism of Madison. It is an exemplar of the manner in which reasoned, rigorous, formal argument provides insights about an otherwise ambiguously-resolved philosophical controversy, in this case the merit of popular rule as against the acceptability of political governance. To quote from his earlier preface (for it remains apropos):

Even if some readers cannot accept my value system . . . they will, I hope, find it a worth-while exercise in the procedure of this science to follow an analysis such as this all the way through.

Willie Mays Principle

As he begins his years as president-elect, Bill Riker may be found stewing over his most recent research project, a political theory of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. It will, I predict, possess a

respect for wisdom, but it will also display a certain impatience with scholarship that aspires only to produce wisdom. In short, it will strive to be a scientific theory of politics, one that not only correlates causes with effects but also goes on to explain why the causes are necessarily connected with those effects. Expect it in time for the bicentennial celebration!

The intellectual history of the president-elect is a record of personal accomplishment that has had a substantial and significant impact on the science of politics and on many of its students. My own association with a proximity to the subject of this biography permits one final observation. Bill Riker personifies the Willie Mays Principle. A youthful Willie, unbounded in his enthusiasm for the game of baseball, is reported to have exclaimed, "And they even pay you to play!" William Riker's enthusiasm and respect for scholarship, and his capacity to transmit them to his students and colleagues, are easily recognized by those who know him. The APSA is fortunate to have him as its official representative. ■

Placement of Political Scientists, 1980-1981

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This is the eighth report on the experience of new political scientists looking for jobs. The seventh report, published in *PS*, winter 1980, presented data collected in 1978 and 1979.¹ This is a report on the last two placement classes, those for 1980 and 1981. Some of the characteristics of placement discerned in the last report persist and indicate how the profession is responding to the academic job market.

Of particular interest and concern are questions about how graduate faculty perceive the job market, evaluate current

graduate students, and consider changing graduate programs to help students secure employment. Following a 1979 placement survey, the Association posed a set of questions on these issues to Ph.D. departments in the course of conducting the 1980-81 departmental survey. Their responses are reported here along with the data on the 1980 and 1981 placement classes.

The academic job market for political science (like most disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences) will continue to be poor until the mid-1990s. The relatively current steady state in undergraduate enrollments and the projected decline in these enrollments over the next 15 years mean that most faculty positions are generated by the resignations, retirements and deaths of current faculty.¹ Since the median age of political scientists remains in the mid-30s, there will not be many retirements. (See News of the Profession article, "The Slow Gray-ing of Our Professoriate," by John C. Lane in this issue of *PS* for elaboration.)

To some extent, individual and institutions have responded to these conditions.² In the mid-1970s the supply of political scientists leveled off and since 1977, the supply has declined. Table 1 records this phenomenon, showing decreases in number of students' studying for a Ph.D. and in the number of doctorates awarded annually. Additionally, each year since 1977, around 150 political scientists have resigned from their faculty positions to take non-academic positions.³ In this same period, 18 per-

²For a thorough review of the academic job market and interpretations of its future size, see, "Academe in the Late Twentieth Century: Disharmony, Discontinuity and Development," by Stephen P. Dresch and Adair L. Waldenber, prepared for the National Endowment for the Humanities-Institute for Demographic and Economic Studies, Yale University Conference, *Toward a Better Understanding of the Humanities Labor Market: The Role of Economic Analysis and Forecasting*, Washington, D.C., November 30, 1981.

³A National Science Foundation Study of Science and engineering faculty reports that six percent of the social sciences faculty left

¹*PS*, Winter 1980, pp. 10-13.